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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 29, 2021

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

USE OF PROPS IN THE HOUSE

The Speaker: Before proceeding to orders of the day, I would like to remind members that the use of props in the House and committees to illustrate a point or promote positions is contrary to our rules and practices.

In the chamber, members express their opinions through the words they use, not through the use of props. This is true whether they have the floor or not.

[*English*]

At page 617 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, it states:

Speakers have consistently ruled that visual displays or demonstrations of any kind used by Members to illustrate their remarks or emphasize their positions are out of order. Similarly, props of any kind have always been found to be unacceptable in the Chamber.

This principle also applies to masks. Masks that members wear must not be used to deliver messages or express an opinion. They should be plain and neutral.

I thank members for their co-operation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FURTHER SUPPORT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The House resumed from November 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on very important legislation that is part of the government's agenda of supporting Canadians, which we have seen on numerous occasions over the last 18 months. Unlike the Conservative Party and at times even my New Democratic friends, we have believed it is important to provide the legislation necessary

since the beginning of the pandemic. Today, we see yet another piece of legislation that is vitally important to support Canadians through the pandemic. Contrary to what some might believe, there is still a responsibility for the government to be there for Canadians in dealing with COVID-19.

The other day the all-star critic for finance from the Conservative Party stood in this place and said nothing with regard to the legislation or whether the Conservative Party would support it. I thought the member would have given some sort of indication of whether the Conservatives could get behind this legislation. Instead, he focused on the issue of inflation. He spent a great deal of his time, as the opposition has, talking about inflation.

We are all concerned about inflation. There is no doubt about that. Having said that, the Conservative Party needs to recognize that inflation is not something that is unique to Canada, much like the pandemic. We are seeing inflation around the world. It is taking place for a number of different reasons that I will not go into detail about today. Rather, I will provide a government perspective on inflation.

We have provided the child care program through the co-operation of provinces of all political stripes. We have a program—

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Is that all you have?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: One member asks if that is all we have. It is 20-fold as much as Stephen Harper ever provided Canadians. That is an amazing comment.

The point is that we have political parties—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind members that somebody has the floor; therefore, he should be afforded the respect that he deserves and be listened to. There will be an opportunity during this round for 10 minutes of questions and comments, so I would ask members to write down their questions in case they think they may forget them. They will have an opportunity to rise in the House to ask questions or make comments.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the point is that the Canada child benefit and child care program are assisting families in a very real and tangible way.

Ten-dollar-a-day child care, and the agenda for putting that into place, is quite significant. It is going to assist families from coast to coast to coast. The majority of territories are now onside. All political stripes have recognized its value.

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I use this as an example for two reasons. First, it is going to substantially decrease the cost of child care. It is also going to ensure more people are eligible for, and able to participate in, the workforce. One only needs to look at Quebec and how well it has done in the introduction of its \$10-a-day child care program, or in investing in child care, as well as how the program has changed its workforce deployment.

I and members of the Liberal caucus believe that Canadians from coast to coast to coast will benefit by being able to enter the workforce and will see a substantial reduction in child care costs, going into hundreds of dollars every month. That is an example.

Bill C-2 would continue to provide the supports Canadians need. I believe we have been there as a government for Canadians from day one. We have demonstrated support for Canada's middle class, those aspiring to be part of it and those who are in high need.

Not that long ago, when we were elected into government, our first pieces of legislation saw tax increases for Canada's wealthiest 1%, support in the form of a tax reduction for Canada's middle class, substantial increases and reform of the Canada child benefit program, and substantial increases to the guaranteed income supplement. All of these programs have increased the disposable income of Canadians.

We understood then, as we did when the pandemic hit, that people needed to have disposable income in order to move our economy forward. To have healthy communities and a stronger economy, people needed the money to pay their mortgages and utility bills, to go out to restaurants and to purchase necessities.

When the pandemic hit and health orders at the local level were shutting down the economy, people had no choice. Two years ago one could drive down some of the busiest streets in Winnipeg and see there was minimal travel. The pandemic took its toll for a number of months, especially going into the second wave.

● (1110)

One can only imagine what would have taken place if the government did not step up and provide programs such as CERB. CERB, as a program, supported over nine million Canadians. That is an incredible percentage of the population. Our population is over 37 million, and nine million Canadians were supported by one program that was created out of nothing.

The civil service and the different stakeholders involved made sure that the program became a reality, and they did an incredible job. There is no doubt that when a program is created quickly, there is going to be some abuse of that program. I suspect that when I hear from my Conservative friends, they will highlight some of those problems today. We are very much aware of them. Are they trying to say that they do not believe we should have brought in the CERB program? Are they trying to say that those nine million Canadians are not honest people?

It is a program that was absolutely essential. It is why I highlighted the importance of disposable income. However, it was more than just people. If we did not provide that kind of support, what would the social cost of that have been? Whether it was mental ill-

ness, the loss of employment, suicides or breakups, it would have been significant. We recognized that and we stepped up to the plate.

Today, with Bill C-2, we continue to recognize that. The changes being incorporated into Bill C-2 show it is a government that continues to believe that we need to be there for Canadians.

Bill C-2 also recognizes the importance of businesses. Prepandemic, the government reduced the small business tax. Ministers listened to what small business owners had to say, and tried to assist in whatever way we could. It is one of the reasons we had record employment numbers. Stephen Harper took 10 years to create one million jobs. We did it in four years, and they are full-time jobs.

At the end of the line, we know what it takes to build a healthy economy. We demonstrated that prepandemic and we are seeing it today. We are already at prepandemic employment levels because, in good part, the Government of Canada worked with other levels of government and Canadians to make sure that we were in a good position to recover.

How were we able to do that? We came forward with programs that really made a difference, such as the wage subsidy program, so individuals could stay employed and businesses could continue to employ people.

The other day, the Bloc made reference to our arts and cultural community, which every member of the Liberal caucus truly cares about. I had the opportunity to talk with the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg. The members commented about the wage subsidy program. Chances are it would not have survived without it.

The Folk Arts Council provides a wide spectrum of heritage and arts events and performances. It is incredible. It has been around for over 50 years in Manitoba. There are dozens of pavilions every summer that participate. Amazing talent is discovered. So many people are engaged in it. It is a program that has supported arts and culture, our private sector and even non-profits. It was there because there was a need to support small businesses and people.

● (1115)

That is exactly what the wage subsidy program did. I would argue that it saved hundreds of thousands of jobs in all regions of our country.

We also recognized the need to support businesses through things like the rent subsidy program. Imagine those people who had operational businesses getting hit by the pandemic. They did not have consumers coming in or they lost out on contracts. The rent subsidy program allowed thousands of companies throughout Canada the opportunity to receive support from the government, which allowed them to keep their doors open. I would suggest it is one of the reasons why, through the government and the co-operation of many others, we were able to prevent thousands of bankruptcies all over Canada. Small businesses understood they had a government that was prepared to develop the programs that were necessary so they would be able to get themselves through this pandemic, yet the Conservatives were still saying that we were spending too much as a government. The main comment we heard from across the way is that we are wasteful.

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Are they saying they would not have provided the wage subsidy or rent subsidy programs? These are the irresponsible—

Ms. Rachael Thomas: You can't measure success on money spent. It's the difference between making Canadians' lives—you just made lives more—

• (1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Lethbridge and other members are continually interrupting the member. I would ask them to hold off. I know they are anxious to ask questions. I want to let them know that there are 48 seconds left and they will have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North has 48 seconds to wrap up.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if I ask for unanimous leave to have more time I likely would not get it, so I will not bother asking.

The point is that the Conservatives in particular, and all opposition parties, need to realize that the legislation we have before us is there to support Canadians from coast to coast to coast and to be there in a very real and tangible way. Members have a choice to support our small businesses and the people of Canada or vote against this legislation. I hope they vote in favour of it.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is good to be here bright and early on Monday morning after flying through the night to get here.

I would like to talk a bit about Bill C-2 and the member's speech. One of the things we have seen throughout the pandemic is the lack of ability to scrutinize some of these bills. The Liberals always come here saying that it is an emergency that we pass a bill immediately. We warned the government when it was bringing in bills and spending a lot of money during the pandemic to try to minimize the impacts on the labour market. Today, we see over a million vacant jobs in the country. We also see that this Parliament does not have a finance committee that can scrutinize this bill and make recommendations. When we have a fulsome debate on bills, we can bring amendments at committee and make them better so

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they do not have an impact on the job market like we have seen with some of the other bills and programs that have been brought in. Would the member not agree that by working together we would be able to make some of the best programs possible?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, whether it is in previous budgets or the throne speech of last year, the member will find that the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada have talked a great deal about investing in job training. A part of job training means working with different stakeholders, particularly the provinces. There needs to be a coordinated effort that includes post-secondary institutions and immigration, including temporary workers. It is all-encompassing.

The government is committed to a holistic approach. We have committed finances and other resources, including a great deal of time working with other stakeholders to ensure, as much as possible, that the federal government is playing a lead role in matching the jobs that are there with the people who want the jobs. I believe our track record clearly demonstrated that, prepandemic, when we had record-high employment levels.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Assistant Deputy Speaker.

Over the weekend, I was extremely pleased to participate in various cultural activities in my riding of Thérèse-De Blainville. If Bill C-2, which is before us today, is so important and urgent in order to continue to support workers, how is it that this bill makes no mention of essential government assistance for self-employed arts and culture workers?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I provided comment in regard to the issue of arts and culture. We have been there in the past; I believe we will be in the future. We recognize the importance of that industry and the contribution that arts and culture make to our society as a whole. Whether it is to our social fabric or our economic activity, we appreciate the value. We will continue to be there.

The former government House leader, who I know exceptionally well, is on top of that file. I know the member opposite also knows him quite well. I am sure we can have some peace of mind knowing that he will be at the forefront ensuring that our arts and culture sector is well taken care of.

• (1125)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the good people of Winnipeg Centre for honouring me once again with being their representative.

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The member for Winnipeg North spoke a lot about the need for disposable income. Many seniors living in poverty in this country have no disposable income, and yet the government, without notice, is cutting GIS off from thousands of seniors who benefited from the CERB and CCB, not from the government's corporate friends but from thousands of seniors living in poverty.

In my riding of Winnipeg Centre, this is resulting in seniors becoming unhoused and having food insecurity. If the member believes seniors should be treated with respect and should have what they need to live in dignity, would the member for Winnipeg North agree to immediately impose a CERB amnesty on low-income seniors?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the government has always treated seniors with respect and will continue to do so. Whether it was the substantial increase of the GIS that I made reference to, which literally lifted tens of thousands of seniors out of poverty, or the OAS and GIS increases, the one-time payments during the pandemic, or the 10% increase for those seniors aged 75 and over, virtually from day one, the government has been there for seniors and will continue to be there for seniors. Not only do we care, but we demonstrate that care by the actions we have taken.

I am very proud of the number of seniors we have lifted out of poverty because of good, sound government policy-making.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is great to be back in the House speaking and I want to thank my friend and colleague from Winnipeg North for his impassioned speech.

I listened with great interest when he was talking about the child care program that we have rolled out across the country and the benefits of that program. Sadly, I come from New Brunswick and our province has not yet accepted the deal. I watched with great interest: Alberta signed on the deal, other provinces across the country have signed on. It is a spectacular deal that ultimately will offer \$10-a-day day care and cut costs next year by 50%.

Could my friend speak very briefly on the benefits of that program and how transformational that program will be for Canadians right across the country and in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I know my friend and colleague is a powerful advocate for Saint John and that whole region. He has identified a program that would be of great benefit for not only his residents but all Canadians. I would ask those provinces that have not signed on to that agreement to act quickly. This is a program that is tangible. It can make a difference. It will substantially decrease the cost of child care and at the same time enable so many more to participate in Canada's workforce. We hear a lot about the need for more workers in Canada. This is a great program that helps deal with inflation and helps get more people into the workforce.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the question from my colleague from Peace River—Westlock who asked why this legislation, as important as it is to the well-being of Canadians, is not before the finance committee. Could he explain that to Canadians, please?

• (1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the procedure and House affairs committee needs to be able to convene in order to be able to strike the committees and this all comes in time and it is through negotiations that take place between the House leadership of the different political entities in the chamber. There is a little more to it, but the bottom line is that we all as individual members of Parliament also have a role to play.

If the member has some ideas that he would like to share, he could stand up during the throne speech or debates like this, or even write directly to the minister. The Minister of Finance always makes herself available inside the chamber. I often, sitting very close to her, see members from the opposition walk over to express their concerns and thoughts to her. She responds to members on all sides of the House, as ministers as a whole are very much interested not only in what government members have to say, but also opposition members.

I would encourage the member opposite, if he has some ideas, to share them. Hopefully we will get the finance committee up and running and it too at some point will play a role in the budgetary measures of the Government of Canada.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

I rise today to speak to Bill C-2. Specifically, I want to address the government's position when it comes to the growth and recovery of our small businesses. It is disappointing that this is my first opportunity to rise in five months to debate any legislation on economic recovery because of the shutdown of Parliament.

Despite the Prime Minister stating that the election he called this summer was the most important in decades, he took an extended vacation. It is shameful that the Liberals took two months to recall Parliament. Of course, this should not actually surprise Canadians. We cannot forget that it was the same Liberal government that prorogued Parliament just last year to escape scrutiny for its ethical scandals.

When Parliament is shut down, committees cease to exist and all ongoing work in Parliament stops. When would this legislation even be going to a committee to be studied? We have no information from the government as to when committees will be reconstituted.

Prior to the election, I was sitting on the international trade committee, which was undertaking critical studies on clean-technology exports and getting COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries. Unfortunately, reports and recommendations that were going to be made to the government simply will not happen because the election was called. That is what happens when we have a Prime Minister who puts politics before country.

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When the Prime Minister called an unnecessary \$600-million power-grab snap election, the Okanagan, where I live, had enhanced health measures and was at the height of its wildfire season, with ash falling from the sky in Kelowna—Lake Country. Simply put, in their typical fashion, the Liberals love to be in government but they loathe governing. It is because of this series of political choices that we are continually asked to rush legislation through to make up for the failures of ministers to manage their portfolios and the House's legislative agenda. We saw this with CUSMA and the Canada-UK Trade Continuity Agreement, and earlier pandemic-relief legislation. Like a bad dream, here we are again.

Deadlines have been missed and we can bet that the Liberals will try their hardest to somehow blame a slowdown of legislation on the Conservatives. However, Canadians are smarter than that. The Liberals can only try to play the same old tricks for so long before everyone gets wise to their tactics. Canadians know that right now it is the job of the Conservatives to hold the Liberals to account.

My Conservative colleagues and I want to ensure that government legislation does not have unintended consequences. We want to ask the tough questions at committees and make solid recommendations to ensure that legislation such as this is right for our constituents and for our country.

We should have been back in the House a month ago. The Conservatives were calling for this back in early October. We wanted to get back to work here. The Liberals wanted to avoid scrutiny. I had thought that this may be because they were taking the time to develop a real plan for Canadian small businesses to recover and grow, a real plan addressing real issues for my constituents, businesses and not for profits in Kelowna—Lake Country. The Conservatives have been writing to ministers and speaking publicly about real measures that will address the challenges facing small businesses across the country.

When budget 2021 was debated, I highlighted how the recovery support programs were not working for many businesses, and this legislation really is much of the same and does not address some of the most important issues facing small businesses, such as labour shortages, inflation, supply chain issues, hindering sales, tax increases and paying off or accessing debt. That is what happens when we have a government that does not listen to people and a government that puts headlines before policy.

Small businesses, especially micro-businesses, in the most devastated sectors are the ones with the least capacity to absorb pandemic-related disruptions and have been the most impacted and need us to focus on these important issues. To make a bad situation worse, businesses that have now started to slowly recover are facing labour shortages, as I mentioned, that could bring their recovery to a screeching halt.

The labour crisis is crippling industries in every sector in every region. According to RBC Economics, one-third of Canadian businesses are grappling with labour shortages and they expect labour shortages to get worse. Small businesses cannot continue to weather the COVID-19 pandemic without the federal government focusing on the real challenges they are facing, such as a slow economic recovery, labour shortages, rising costs and debt.

• (1135)

In the September 2021 report from the Business Development Bank of Canada, it states that out of a survey it conducted, 55% of entrepreneurs are struggling to hire workers they need, causing them to delay or refuse new orders; 64% say the ongoing labour shortages limit their growth; and 44% have delayed or are unable to deliver orders to clients. The government's programs simply are not working.

During the course of the pandemic, it has been reported that small businesses have also taken on nearly 170,000 dollars' worth of new debt on average. I have talked to many small business owners who have personally lent their businesses money in order for their business to survive, and this legislation would do nothing to address this potentially devastating economic issue. If the government's support programs were so successful, why are small businesses forced into higher levels of unmanageable debt?

What has become clear is that the government is failing to focus on warning signs. Its members are forgetting that it is the job of government to ensure that it creates an environment where businesses can thrive, not just survive. Reducing regulatory burdens, tackling the supply chain crisis that started before the pandemic, addressing the labour-shortage crisis through various worker visa extensions, getting people who can work back to work and halting all tax increases for businesses are just a handful of ways to focus on economic recovery. Measures like these need to be taken up urgently.

Just this past Friday, a report in *The Globe and Mail* said job vacancies have soared beyond one million. Statistics Canada says that nearly a fifth of all vacancies are in the hospitality sector. The government, in this debate, is choosing to boast about its recovery numbers, but members should try asking the average restaurant owner, hotel manager, farmer or construction company in my riding how they are seeing our job market. They cannot remember a time when they have needed to recruit so many workers just to keep the lights on.

The government will no doubt want to lay all these shortages at the feet of the global pandemic. However, the chief economist at the Business Development Bank of Canada recently pointed out that, "Even before the pandemic, employers had difficulties in recruiting."

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Without urgent attention to address this crisis, new and existing businesses will not have the ability to grow their reach, meet their orders or even keep existing employees on their payroll. Shortages mean fewer employees or owners trapped working longer hours, which only adds to our ongoing mental health crisis. According to Statistics Canada's most recent survey of business conditions, more than one in four businesses expects their profitability to decline before year's end. If the government does not take action to get people back into the workforce, there will not be the good-paying jobs out there in the private sector for them to go back to.

After almost two years of pandemic-related disruptions, rapidly rising inflation, serious supply chain issues, skyrocketing and automatically increasing taxes, costs and debt, international trade disputes where Canada continually ends up on the losing end and a labour shortage preventing our economic recovery, not to mention trying to maintain mental health, small businesses, the backbone of our local communities, are on the brink of collapse. For these entrepreneurs and organizations, "help wanted" has never rang more true. It is a cry to keep their entrepreneurial spirit alive. Unfortunately, the government has decided to pursue a course that would do nothing to address these underlying issues.

The Conservatives will continue to stand up for small businesses across this country. We will continue to advocate for real action that delivers concrete results. We are putting policies before headlines. I am fighting for small businesses because I have been a small business owner and know what it is like to have everything on the line.

● (1140)

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I too was a small business owner for many years, owning the Saint John Sea Dogs, a Quebec major junior league hockey team, and an aquaculture business. I can tell members first-hand that the constituents of Saint John—Rothesay absolutely appreciated the supports that our government delivered for small businesses. Many small businesses that came to my door were appreciative of the wage subsidy and the commercial rent support.

As the hon. member was a small business owner, which supports did we get wrong and which ones would she change?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, we are 20 months into the pandemic, and early on during the pandemic the recovery programs were absolutely needed. We were continually supporting those, and also giving recommendations on ways to amend them to support people and small businesses. Early on, there were many ways that small business owners were not eligible for programs. For example, those who dealt with a credit union were not eligible to apply for a loan. Those who did not have the right bank account were also not eligible.

We have continually made recommendations during the course of the pandemic and have been there alongside businesses. At this point, 20 months in, we are in a situation where we have, as I mentioned, a labour crisis, an inflation crisis and many other issues, and we need to focus on those as well.

Mr. Larry Brock: Madam Speaker, given what we heard last week regarding the virtual sittings and the necessity of wearing masks and everything of that nature, I find it rather odd that there

are members of the governing party who choose, for whatever reason, not to wear their masks.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the hon. member's point of order. I do want to remind members that they are to wear their mask unless they are rising to speak. It is not just members of the governing party who have forgotten to put their mask on at times, so I want to remind all members of the House to ensure they have their mask on when they are not speaking.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limouilou.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limouilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague is talking about SMEs and the difficulties that they have had throughout the pandemic and they might continue having, particularly with regard to the labour shortage.

I am going to talk about something even more specific, and that is the cultural industry. Self-employed workers were completely overlooked this time around. These include boom microphone operators, for example. Boom microphone operators are needed to do recordings and to make movies as well as reality and other television shows.

Sooner or later, these people are going to move to other sectors, which means we will lose this incredible expertise, and yet they were completely overlooked in this bill.

When she talks about SMEs, is my colleague also thinking about these essential culture workers?

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, of course, there are many types of businesses and not-for-profits. Looking back at a former debate I had over budget 2021, I spoke quite a bit about arts, culture and recreation. There are a number of arts and culture organizations that are businesses as well. I heard recently from one in my riding. They let me know how their situation was going.

It is all-inclusive, with different types of industries, whether that means arts and culture, farming or hospitality. It is the whole gamut, and everyone has been affected in different ways.

● (1145)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I too represent a lot of small businesses within my region, and I think specifically of the Campbell River Association of Tour Operators, which has been very innovative and is working hard to clean the ocean and beaches during this stressful time because of the lack of tourism. We know that the labour force has been a growing concern as we see people age and, of course, COVID has pushed a lot of things further along.

I wonder if the member is interested in seeing more investment in training so that the people who are without a job will have the training to meet the needs of the jobs that are available. Also, I wonder if the member could share her thoughts on immigration and the vast challenges we are seeing across this country in terms of getting the people we need for our labour workforce here in Canada.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the member and the people in her community who are out there cleaning up their communities. It is something that I am quite passionate about. Quite often I can be found picking up garbage in my community.

Because I have limited time, I will touch quickly on the immigration question.

We know there are huge processing delays right now. As one very specific example, a major tourism organization in my community and I wrote the minister to extend some specific visas. There are individuals here from other countries right now whose visas have expired and they are unable to work.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand up in the House of Commons and speak about any issue. Of course, this particular bill, Bill C-2, is an important one that requires a lot more study.

Targeted support sounds really good, especially for the tourism and hospitality sectors, which are some of the hardest-hit sectors in our economy. Of course, I am the member of Parliament for Parry Sound—Muskoka, and many will know that tourism is a pretty significant part of our economy. Like every other member in this House, I do not just come here and hope people hear what they need to hear. I speak to folks in my community to find out what is going on.

When it came to Bill C-2, I felt it was important to find out what those sectors are saying. What is being said in the tourism and hospitality sectors and the hardest-hit sectors? Restaurants Canada is reporting that they are desperate to find people to work. Job vacancies in Canada have surpassed one million now. Employers in high-contact industries, such as restaurants and hotels, have the highest proportion of unfilled positions, at about 14.4%. They are looking for people. They are busy. They have the business, but they cannot get people to work. It begs a question: What is really going on? When I read this I thought that I needed to speak with some folks locally in my area.

There are countless local stories in Parry Sound—Muskoka of small businesses, restaurants and hotels that are open and busy with lots of business. They could be open seven days a week, but they cannot find the staff to do it.

Jamie Blake of Blakes Memories of Muskoka in Seguin Township pays well over minimum wage. They are trying to hire a manager right now. It is a really good position that pays well. They just cannot find anybody, so they have to close two days a week. They can only be open five days a week and are missing out on a lot of business.

I spoke with Jeff Watson, who owns a couple of Tim Hortons in Gravenhurst. His stores went from being 24-hour operations to hav-

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ing reduced hours. They have hired an agency to help them find employees but have yet to receive a single application. They cannot get anywhere.

I spoke with Didier Dolivet. He is the general manager of Red Leaves Resort, a very nice resort in Minett and one of the fanciest ones in Muskoka. He said that business is great, domestic travel has gone up and Ontarians have discovered Ontario. It is great. They are travelling locally, and there is lots of business. The problem, of course, is that they cannot get staff.

Traditionally in motels, hotels and resorts, it has been a challenge really for years to find staff to work in the housekeeping department specifically, but Didier reports that housekeeping is just the start of it now. They cannot find people in every single sector of their business. As a result of the lack of staff to fill positions, such as chefs, and leadership and management positions, they are unable to maximize their occupancy because of the shortage of labour. Their inability to fully staff their resort means service levels have declined, and as a result of that, visitor satisfaction is declining. It is actually almost worse for their business right now, so they are really struggling.

The message is clear: Businesses need people to work. Should we be incentivizing people to stay home right now?

It is not just the tourism sector that has this issue. Greg Lubbe-linkhof of Cedarland Homes in Parry Sound is trying to build homes to help solve the housing crisis that exists there. Despite offering full training, exceptional wages and great benefits, they cannot find people to do the skilled trades. They are putting work off up to two years. They are turning work down because they just cannot find the people to do the work.

The BDC has reported that 40% of small and medium-sized business are struggling to find employees. Statistics Canada has indicated that job vacancies have increased in every single province. It is certainly worse in British Columbia, Atlantic Canada and Ontario, but every single province is struggling to find people.

How did we get here? I have done a little reading, and I came across a special report on the high cost of living by Philip Cross. He is with the Macdonald-Laurier Institute now. He is an impressive man. If he is listening, I would like to meet him sometime and chat with him because I think I could learn a lot from him.

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● (1150)

Philip Cross is a Munk Senior Fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Prior to joining it, he spent 36 years at Statistics Canada specializing in macroeconomics. He was appointed the chief economic analyst in 2008 and was responsible for ensuring the quality and coherency of all major economic statistics. He also wrote the “Current economic conditions” section of the Canadian Economic Observer. This guy knows what he is talking about. He is a pretty impressive guy.

What he has illustrated is that overspending by a government during the pandemic actually created significant distortions in the economy, which drove up personal savings, particularly of the wealthier in our society, and made significant distortions in labour market choices. The programs simply were not targeted enough. He writes:

Average net savings for households in the top income quintile nearly doubled, from \$12,000 to \$21,322, in the second quarter of 2020. Meanwhile, average household savings in the bottom two quintiles rose by \$2,000 each. Swollen household incomes and savings had repercussions for housing, labour markets and inflation.

The government's most striking distortion during the pandemic was to provide so much emergency income support that personal disposable incomes actually rose in a recession. Earned income fell sharply, but massive government support more than made up for the difference. The increases in incomes and savings show that much government aid was not needed, especially during the slow shift from the economy-wide stimulus to targeting specific sectors.

People had too much money. People were not working, and they had lots of money. We have heard my colleague say that too much money chasing too few goods means inflation, so now everything is more expensive. Families in Parry Sound—Muskoka are telling me that it is more expensive for them to drive to work, it is more expensive for them to put groceries on the table for their families, it is more expensive for them to heat their homes and many of them simply cannot find a home at all. We need our committees digging deeper into this.

I give the government a lot of credit. It came to the rescue very quickly and reacted to this pandemic, the uncertainty in our economy and in our world. It reacted very quickly, but it was sloppily done, and government members were almost hostile when Conservatives and other members of the opposition made suggestions to improve things and to make things more targeted. As a result, we are in a situation now in which it has overstimulated the economy. The rich have gotten richer, and the poor are getting poorer, and we are making life more difficult.

Targeted supports are important. I am not sure I trust the government to actually target them properly, which is why it is absolutely crucial for the House to get back to work and for committees to get to work and dig deeper into this to make sure we are analyzing these targeted supports. We need to make sure that money is not being wasted and that we are not overstimulating the economy unnecessarily in specific areas.

We have a lot of work to do. I am eager to get going on that work, and Canadians deserve a real plan to make their lives more affordable. Canadians need a real plan to dramatically increase the housing supply all across this country. Canadians need a real plan to responsibly reduce the government's inflation-causing spending. Canadian businesses need people to work and they need us to get to work, so let us get to work at committees.

● (1155)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague across the way referenced the fact that some of the programs that were implemented were done sloppily, but I also noticed that he talked about the fact that the government was not willing to listen to the opposition and was hostile. However, if we look back, it was actually Conservative and NDP members, if I remember correctly, who originally really pushed the government to increase the amount of the wage subsidy. That program, I would argue, was probably better because of the deliberative process in the House and the fact that the opposition was part of that. I would suggest that, on the contrary, there actually was quite a bit of collaboration.

In retrospect, is the member now saying that perhaps we gave too much through the wage subsidy? Should we have given less so that it did not create the problems that it did?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I would not suggest the wage subsidy amount was too high. It was probably just right. I am grateful the member cites at least one example when the Liberals actually did listen, which was a rare thing to see in those days.

It was finally an accurate amount, after they listened to us, but it was spread far too wide. That is what we are hearing from the experts, and this is not just me and my partisan interests. Actual experts, who are economists and know what they are talking about, are saying it was spread too far and wide.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, since I have only 30 seconds, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Montcalm for trusting me to represent them in the House for the third time. I can assure them I will do my utmost to be worthy of their trust.

Self-employed workers in the cultural sector are artisans fashioning the future of our nation. Every member of every party in the House voted in favour of the Bloc Québécois's motion to recognize the Quebec nation.

Can my Conservative colleague explain why Bill C-2 overlooks self-employed arts and culture workers?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, the simple answer is that I cannot explain it. The government has put together a package that seems to have completely ignored that sector. This is all the more reason for committees to get to work, so important points like this can be made, and we can make sure the truly hardest hit sectors are supported and helped. Certainly, the cultural sector is among the hardest hit sectors in this country.

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Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, one thing I have heard loud and clear, and it is something I have definitely heard across my riding, is that a lot of small businesses are really struggling to find people to hire. Part of the challenge is that there are not any resources to help with bridging programs, which would provide training and orientation for people who do not have the skill sets those businesses desperately require.

I am wondering if this member would support any sort of movement towards having more resources for training to support people who do not have the skills required to meet the needs of the labour force in our areas.

• (1200)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, quite simply, yes I would. Training is crucially important in our economy, and we need to be doing more of it.

There is also the issue of immigration and making sure new Canadians have access to the jobs they are fully trained to do. I will make note of the work being done in the province of Ontario right now with the minister of labour there. They are making great strides, and that is an example for the federal government to follow as well.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I begin my speech, I would like to let members know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills.

It gives me great pleasure to speak in the House again today and thank the people of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook for re-electing me for a third mandate. My objective is to continue working and advocating on behalf of all citizens in the riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, all of Nova Scotia, and of course all of Canada.

I have to say that on March 13, 2020, I remember leaving the House of Commons, taking a plane back home to Nova Scotia, and thinking Parliament would be shut down for two weeks. That two-week period was extended, as we all know, a lot further than that. Those two weeks were the beginning of a crisis as big as the Great Depression. We had challenges. It started off slowly, but we quickly realized that we were in a very difficult situation and it would take a government that would work with all members of Parliament to make sure we were there to protect all Canadians.

We were faced with three to four million people losing their jobs overnight, things being shut down, the business community being shut down and people being scared. We went through all those stages, but I have to tell members that I was proud to be a member of Parliament during those difficult times. The reason I was proud is that every night for 67 nights in a row, I and many other Liberal MPs, along with cabinet ministers and our Prime Minister, talked about what types of programs were needed. We worked with the public service, took suggestions from the opposition and started building programs that would help all Canadians.

The reason I was proud to do that daily is that I was hearing the fears and the problematic situations that Canadians faced, but every night we talked about how we would help them. I was getting 100

to 150 emails and calls per day from concerned individuals. Some had lost their jobs, some had lost their businesses and some were worried about day care centres being closed. Those were very difficult times.

However, when we are elected and representing people, we are able to contribute to help create programs. I got information from constituents saying that the help was not working for them, was not reaching as far as they needed, or was not helping their business. We then tweaked and improved as we went along. That is true representation of the people: listening to the challenges, finding solutions with them and then helping them through that process. That is why I am so happy to speak to Bill C-2. This is the next step in the transition toward a strong recovery.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

I have to say how very hard it was for Canadians who lost family members. To date, some 30,000 Canadians have lost their lives to COVID-19. It was hard for families. It was hard for seniors in long-term care homes. It was very hard for teenagers, who, as we know, really like socializing. It was hard for parents when schools closed during the crisis. It was hard for teachers, who had to change how they taught and significantly augment their ability to deliver instruction in virtual schools, which have been going on for quite some time now.

As I was saying, we lost one million jobs during the pandemic. However, if we look at where things stand today, we have recovered those million jobs. What is more, roughly one million more jobs are available now. This is a testament to the good work our government is doing and to all the MPs who contribute to ensuring a good economic recovery, prosperity and everything that goes along with it.

In Bill C-2 we see targeted investments for businesses, individuals, and organizations that faced extra challenges or are still going through an especially tough time.

I am talking about the tourism and hospitality sectors. My son owns a restaurant and it has been very tough for him. We know there are restaurants that closed, then reopened with limits on the number of customers, that are still around. As my colleagues know, hotel operators are also having a tough time. Last week Monday and Tuesday, the Delta hotel had only 6% occupancy. Imagine how tough it must be for these businesses.

We have also seen organizations suffer in the arts, culture and leisure sectors, as well as travel agencies, mostly for the lack of clients due to lockdowns. That is why we are investing more in these sectors.

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We are also investing in companies that have not been able to re-open for all sorts of reasons. These companies have specific needs. There are other organizations that may need other investments in the event of further restrictions. We will support those organizations and we will invest in businesses that continue to rehire their staff.

[*English*]

There are many investments in Bill C-2 that need to be delivered as quickly as possible, and our government is moving forward on those. I want to focus on the support for workers, because there could be, even tomorrow or next week, closures in certain regions that would see individuals losing their jobs again. They may have COVID and need to stay home, or maybe their children's school will close and they will have to stay home to support their children. There are many challenges of that nature. We need to continue to support those individuals. We will have some investments to support those families and those individuals.

In closing, I want to thank the public service, the people who worked with the government to get these programs established very quickly. It was very important. I want to thank the Speaker of the House. Throughout COVID, we were able to vote online, through our phones, to allow us to continue to do the work that is so crucial.

At the end of the day, the day care investment that our government is moving forward with is essential. As I shared earlier in my speech, one million jobs are available today, and we will be able to get more Canadians working because of the day care centres we will be investing in as we move forward.

• (1210)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand in Canada's Parliament once again to represent the good people of Battle River—Crowfoot.

I will make this question short. The member talked about the urgency to ensure that we as parliamentarians can get to work for Canadians. Would he therefore support the immediate reinstatement of committees, so that this House can actually get to work doing things like studying Bill C-2 and the many issues that were cancelled because of the Liberal Prime Minister's unnecessary election? Would he support the immediate reinstatement of parliamentary committees, so that we can in fact get to work?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question and welcome him back to the House. As he knows, we have started with strong legislation here in Bill C-2. We want to deliver supports to Canadians, those who were hit with even more difficulties throughout the pandemic. We need to get supports to them as soon as possible. This bill will allow us to do that and we are going to move on it as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, Bill C-2 does contain some good measures, particularly the support that is finally being provided to carriers that offer charter bus services. Carriers in my riding have been calling for that support from the beginning. A bus costs \$700,000, and then they need maintenance, which is also expensive. When they cannot be used, it becomes even more expensive.

The government has finally thought of charter operators, but it is still overlooking self-employed workers in the cultural sector, the boom operators and sound engineers and so on, who are already living in precarious situations, which have only gotten worse with the pandemic.

Will my colleague and his party commit to including self-employed cultural sector workers in Bill C-2?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her important question.

We have included additional supports for self-employed workers, on top of past investments. It was difficult at the outset to address all the issues involved in this particular situation. We now want to invest in art and culture, and we will certainly take care of self-employed workers to be there for them. The purpose of Bill C-2 is to ensure that everyone can get through the pandemic and recover.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to welcome my colleague back to the House. He is a fellow alumni of the class of 2015. In his speech he made mention of targeted assistance. We know that many poor seniors, such as those on the GIS, need supplemental income in order to pay the bills each month. They, like many Canadians, also lost jobs when the pandemic hit our country.

Now those seniors are in a situation where the Canada recovery benefit income is being clawed back from their GIS, meaning many of them cannot afford to make rent payments or put good quality food on the table. I have a simple question. Why, when we have this golden opportunity with Bill C-2, did the government not make any mention of targeted assistance to help the most vulnerable Canadians in this country? Will the Liberal government quickly fix this? It is an urgent problem in my riding and right across the country.

• (1215)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague as well for his work in the House since 2015. I can share with him that I have also, as the member of Parliament for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, received many calls and notes from seniors faced with the challenge of the GIS, having lost income and supports they were due to receive throughout the pandemic. It is a situation we need to deal with. I believe last week our minister said that the government was looking at how it could resolve the issue, because we want to help seniors who have had challenges with respect to the pandemic and who need the support from the GIS. We also increased the GIS by 10% back in 2016 and have committed to more increases as we move forward. However, we absolutely have to rectify the situation the member has presented.

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Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House in this 44th Parliament.

Early on in the pandemic, when the provinces first went into lockdown, a constituent reached out to me for help. She could not work because of public health lockdowns and she was worried about how she would take care of her children without an income.

When we introduced CERB and enhanced the Canada child benefit early on, it created a lifeline for her while she waited for her job to come back. At different times over these last 20 months, when cases surged and lockdowns returned, she used CERB and the CRB to keep food on the table and to provide for her kids.

We reconnected this month and I was glad to hear that she was in a much better position than she was in those early months. She had not needed government assistance for some time, but then she said something that stuck with me, “I hope your programs will still be here during the next lockdown.”

Canada is in a good place right now, but we all know that this may not be the last, and we have all seen the news of the omicron variant. Residents in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills are working day-to-day knowing that as long as this pandemic continues, as long as there are still those who are unvaccinated, another lockdown is always a possibility.

It is a privilege for me to lend my voice in support of Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19. This legislation is an important next step in our government's fight against the virus.

Throughout the pandemic we have been nimble. We have adjusted and adapted our support programs to the evolving nature of this once-in-a-lifetime crisis. We always knew that to win the fight against COVID-19 and to protect Canadians through the worst impact of this economic crisis, we needed to adapt our programs to the conditions of the moment. We have done this to ensure that they remain effective in protecting Canadians and in supporting the strong recovery as Canadians pull together to win this fight.

When the COVID-19 crisis struck, our government immediately rolled out a comprehensive range of broad-based effective measures in response to the greatest economic shock that our country had suffered since the Great Depression. We were able to deliver the Canada emergency response benefit and the wage and rent subsidies rapidly, with unprecedented speed for a program of such a size and scale.

As our communities went into lockdown, over eight million Canadians had emergency income support, and hundreds of thousands of businesses received emergency subsidies. These support programs proved to be a lifeline for workers and businesses across the country. They helped pay the rent. They helped keep food on the table. They helped to protect millions of jobs and keep hundreds of thousands of Canadian businesses going through the darkest days of the pandemic. For thousands of families in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills, that support in the early days of the pandemic meant the difference between eating or paying rent.

However, these emergency measures were always designed to be temporary, to address the broad impact of the mass lockdowns that were necessary at that time.

Today, we are in a very different stage in the fight against COVID-19. Canadians have done their part by respecting public health measures, by getting vaccinated and by contributing to one of the most successful vaccination campaigns across the world.

As a result of their efforts, we are now turning the corner in this fight. Restrictions are now carefully being eased in our communities and at our borders. Many businesses are safely reopening. Jobs are being created and employment is now back to prepandemic levels.

• (1220)

Residents in Mississauga—Erin Mills understand that getting to this point required unprecedented government spending, not just in Canada but across the world. For example, the U.S., trillions of dollars were spent to provide supports to Americans during this pandemic. They supported this extraordinary spending during the darkest days of the pandemic because they knew that every dollar spent puts food on their neighbour's table and delivered masks and sanitizers to nursing homes, which saved lives. Every cent protected a family-owned business from closing down and the workers from losing their jobs. They understood that the cost of cutting corners, of nickel-and-diming Canadians in a time of crisis, could be paid with lives. It was the right thing to do. It was the smart thing to do, economically and socially. It allowed us to save lives and prevent the sort of lasting economic damage that could have come from mass business closures and job losses.

Today, Canadians understand that the situation has evolved, and we are in a much better position. Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world. The economy is rebounding and we have blown past this Liberal government's goal of creating one million jobs. Therefore, the time has now come to adapt our income and business support measures to these improved circumstances, and Bill C-2 is precisely about that.

The legislation would effectively pivot us from the very broad-based supports that were appropriate at the height of lockdowns to more targeted measures that would provide help where it would still be needed and create jobs and growth, while prudently managing government spending.

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At the same time, Bill C-2 would move us forward on the understanding that while our recovery is strong, we are not out of the woods yet. Our recovery is uneven. The pandemic continues to affect economic activity, especially in certain sectors of the economy subject to ongoing and still necessary public health restrictions. That is why Bill C-2 contains measures that would snap into action immediately to support workers in the event of a new regional lockdown. This would include a new benefit, the Canada worker lockdown benefit, which would provide \$300 a week to workers who are directly impacted by a public health lockdown imposed to curtail the spread of COVID.

This new benefit would be strictly available to workers whose work interruption would be a direct result of a government-imposed public health lockdown. It would be available to workers who are ineligible for employment insurance as well as those who are eligible for EI, as long as they are not paid benefits through the EI program during this same period.

The Canada worker lockdown benefit would be available until May 7, 2022, with retroactive application to October 24, 2021, should there be applicable lockdown situations, and it would be accessible for the entire duration of a government-imposed public health lockdown up until May 7, 2022.

This support, however, will be for those who are doing their part to protect their fellow Canadians and support the fight against COVID. This means that under Bill C-2, individuals whose loss of income or employment is due to their refusal to adhere to a vaccine mandate would not be able to access this benefit.

Bill C-2 also contains measures that would extend eligibility to both the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit until May 7, 2022, and it would increase the maximum duration of each benefit by two additional weeks. That means that the caregiving benefit would be increased from 42 to 44 weeks, and the sickness benefit would be increased from 4 weeks to 6 weeks.

As we know, the Canada recovery caregiving benefit provides income support to employed and self-employed individuals who are unable to work because they must care for their child under 12 years of age or a family member who needs supervised care. It has delivered \$3.74 billion to 486,910 Canadians.

The Canada recovery sickness benefit provides income supports to employed and self-employed individuals who are unable to work because they are sick, or they need to self-isolate due to COVID-19 or have an underlying health condition that puts them at greater risk of getting COVID. It has already delivered over \$829 million of much-needed support to 758,670 Canadians.

The extension of these benefits is important, because we still need to protect ourselves, we need to grow and we need to ensure that those businesses that are suffering have the support from our government.

• (1225)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again, it is good to be able to ask some very important questions. I heard the member reference a number of times the

importance to get this work done, and I agree. Therefore, my question is very simple.

Does that member support the immediate reinstatement of committees, so the House can get to work for Canadians?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on his election to this Parliament.

Over the past year, I witnessed the opposition parties continuing to hinder the work and the supports that we as a Liberal government tried to hand out to Canadians.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Like an election.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, I watched them filibuster for hours and hours in the House and also in committees. We know what Canadians want and we are very committed to getting that done.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do want to remind the member for Battle River—Crowfoot that he had an opportunity to ask his question and he should be respectful when he is getting the answer. If he has any other questions and comments, then he can ask them the next time around.

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, one question is being asked over and over about a problem that could have a constructive solution. Bill C-2 is all about such proposed measures as the reinstatement of the Canada recovery benefit and a weekly \$300 benefit for workers not eligible for EI who find themselves in a lockdown.

How can we explain the different approach to the self-employed in the cultural sector, which, while not under lockdown, is practically dying because it is having so much trouble rebounding? These workers are not eligible for EI. Why have they been outright forgotten in Bill C-2?

[*English*]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on her election to the House in this 44th Parliament.

We have been quite nimble, as I mentioned in my speech. Absolutely we provided supports for individual Canadians and for small businesses, but also at the discretion of the regional recovery fund, which we instilled across the country to continue to provide that support for sectors that may not have fit in one way or another, to continue to have that hands-on approach to ensure that industries like the agriculture industry were able to sustain themselves as the country recovered economically.

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Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, as we have heard many times, a lot of seniors, including my father, receive the guaranteed income supplement and that is how they make ends meet. A lot of low-income seniors also got CERB because they lost their supplementary income. Now that member's government is clawing back their guaranteed income supplement.

Could the member inform the House what her government plans to do to ensure that those seniors have their full guaranteed income supplement and are able to make ends meet?

• (1230)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, the question of seniors is a very important one in the House and across our country. Our seniors committed their whole lives to ensuring we would do well, that our country would not only sustain itself but would also thrive. The onus is on us to provide that support.

Over the past year not only did we provide individual payments to seniors to help them see through COVID-19 and the impacts that it brought to their lives, but we also increased OAS and GIS. We not only did that financially, but we also committed to creating those long-term care standards that seniors deserve in their most vulnerable years of life. I know that work is going to continue. I look forward to working with the members opposite to ensure that happens.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, one of the areas of focus in Bill C-2 is, of course, the tourism sector. I wonder if the member has any insights as to whether there will be more. This will not be enough to support key tourist destinations. Part of the problem is that we need to think of all the ways in which COVID continues to impact tourism, particularly on inconsistent rules about whether people need certain tests to re-enter Canada from the United States. I do not know if the member has any thoughts on that.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, I am not sure if I can give a brief answer to this question. It is something that is very close to my heart. However, Bill C-2 does commit to continue to provide support. I really respect our restaurant owners and all the hoteliers in the tourism industry, understanding just how gendered that impact is within the tourism industry, and how much more support we need to provide.

I look forward to continuing to work with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands in ensuring that all of our tourism within Canada is thriving. I would love to see more Canadians going out and about to different parts of the country.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate all of my colleagues for winning their election in this 44th Parliament and making sure that we come here to discuss Canada's issues in Parliament. I am looking forward to that and more debate in the House of Commons.

First, as it is the first time I have risen in the House since the election, I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary Centre for giving me the honour of coming back here to represent their interests in the House of Commons, in the debates that we are going to have here, and make sure that we have better legislation for Canadians going forward. I also want to thank my campaign team

and my wife, in particular, who has always been my biggest supporter.

Today, we are talking about Bill C-2 and how we can try to make it better. This is about government spending, and it is one of the main things the government does. I also want to talk about inflation, especially monetary inflation, the cost-of-living increases and, of course, asset inflation.

I will start with the fiscal situation and federal government debt.

When I ran for Parliament in 2019, I decided to become a candidate because I thought Canada was overspending. We were spending our children's money, and going deeper into debt to pay for today's programming at the expense of tomorrow's taxpayers. In 2019, Canada's debt was \$721 billion. Where is it now? It is \$1.234 trillion.

I will note that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Edmonton West.

We have \$1.234 trillion in debt, which is \$500 billion more in debt than we had two years ago. The government has based this on what it wants to continue, a debt-to-GDP ratio of around 53%, which is up from 30% only a few years ago. That is a ridiculous increase, and the government plans to leave it there in its spending plans for the foreseeable future. It is as if arriving at a 53% debt-to-GDP ratio is the goal, and we just keep adding debt so the debt ratio of our country is kept high, and it is very high. This is a government that believes it does not have to make choices about where it spends taxpayers' dollars or borrows funds from future generations.

Interest rates are low, because the debt issued is held by the Bank of Canada. Interestingly, in a technocrat approach to access leverage, a Canadian Crown corporation buys the debt that it issues to the government to pay for its spending. It is a nice balance-sheet trick where the entity that is setting the market rate for issuing government debt actually participates in the market as a buyer to ensure that the debt is bought at that market rate. The end result of this is that the Bank of Canada, a funded subsidiary of the Government of Canada whose debts are guaranteed by the taxpayers of Canada, has grown its balance sheet from \$105 billion in 2020 to over \$500 billion today. Of course, it has the bonds on its balance sheet guaranteed by the taxpayers of Canada as well, but let us remember that it bought these bonds, some from bond sellers in the open market, at a rate that it set at very low.

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I will give a little background to understand this concept. Low interest rates, or “coupons” as they are sometimes called, equate to higher bond prices. The correlation is automatic. When the government is buying bonds from market participants at a low market rate that it set, it is overpaying for the bond. Eventually, rates will reset higher. Higher rates equal lower prices for the bonds on the Bank of Canada's balance sheet. What does that mean? It means that the adjustment to reducing the quantitative easing experiment in which the government is participating is going to be very expensive. We are buying high and we will need to sell lower. How much lower? Well, with an increase of \$400 billion on its balance sheet, normalization will require a loss of billions of dollars of value for the Bank of Canada per year until \$400 billion of Government of Canada debt has been sold into the market. This quantitative easing, a way for central bankers to keep public spending ratcheting higher, in any iteration, in any country, has never shown a path out. We are experimenting here without any concept of the outcome.

● (1235)

Remember that Canada's debt total is \$1.234 trillion. About 40% of that is now held by the Bank of Canada, so we, the people of Canada, have become the de facto only buyer of Canada's debt. We must add those billions in impacted losses onto Canada's fiscal deficits going forward, because they are not included in any of the fiscal plans at this time. These are the plans continuing to have a debt-to-GDP ratio above 50% for the foreseeable future. Even after the recession of 2008-09, that ratio was only 30%.

Canada is on a train to a cliff, and the conductor is not looking ahead. There is no magic money tree.

Canadians will recall the last time in our recent history when government spending grew out of control, which was from the Trudeau government deficits in the 1970s and 1980s.

With rising interest rates, payments on our national debt became the government's largest expense line item. Taxpayers were paying bondholders from around the world excessive amounts of interest. Those tens of billions of dollars per year that taxpayers contributed could not be allocated to programs like improvements in our health care system.

The final outcome of this period was the Chrétien Liberal government cutting federal funding to health care in 1996. At the time, it was Canada's second-largest budget line item after interest payments on debt. Is this foreshadowing?

Canadians still have health care, although the federal government's share has fallen from the conventional 50% to 22%. The rest has been thrust onto the backs of the provinces unilaterally. The provinces' finances have suffered ever since.

Let us think about the Liberal government's promises on spending in provincial government jurisdiction, on borrowed money. What happens to these services when the bill becomes due?

Debt ratio metrics are only relevant when we are comparing to other countries. As far as balance sheets of governments go, the measure is irrelevant. Corporations have debt-to-value ratios because it is a measure of how they can leverage their operations with cheaper tax-assisted financing and therefore earn a higher return for

their owners. That notion does not exist for governments, and no government should ever embrace the notion that a country accumulates debt it will never pay back.

It is an excuse to have future generations of Canadians pay for today's expenses, as if our children will not have their own bills to pay with their own taxes. They will be paying for decades for services we delivered today.

Let us remember that a country's debt profile is not just the federal government's debt, we need to include provincial government debt, which has skyrocketed during COVID because of the provinces' needs to increase health care funding during a health crisis. It also includes corporate debt, which has increased remarkably, and household debt.

In total, Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio rose by 80% in 2020, by far the largest increase in the world. The closest runner-up in this ratcheting metric was Japan at a 50% increase. The U.S. saw a 45% increase, the U.K. saw a 35% increase, China saw a 30% increase and Australia only saw a 12% increase. Comparably, Canada stands alone in its profligacy.

Monetary inflation leads to asset inflation, which is most exemplified by the housing market. Mortgage debt increased by \$100 billion. Canadian households are personally in debt for \$2.5 trillion, or \$64,000 per capita. Mortgage debt has increased by 22%. Single-family home prices have increased by a similar amount of 23% over the past year.

Canada now stands at the top of the most overvalued housing markets in the world. Whereas in the U.S. the increase in real disposable income slightly exceeds real home prices, in Canada housing prices have increased at a rate almost double the increase in real disposable income.

This is trouble we need to address here at this level so we understand what the future looks like for Canada's finances. We need to examine this bill closely in an actual team Canada approach.

In that respect, I am looking forward to this bill's review at the House of Commons Standing on Finance, where all members of the House of Commons will be able to provide input to ensure the bill meets the needs and expectations of Canadians.

● (1240)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been here for two years, and I have found the member to be quite articulate in his points. However, one thing that concerned me in his speech, and he talked a lot about debt and deficits, was he made almost no mention of the fact that we have just gone through a global pandemic and the fact that the government has had to intervene to make sure that Canadian businesses and individuals were supported.

It was not just Canada but across the globalized economy, countries have been intervening. Would the member suggest we not have intervened? Let us bring this back to Bill C-2, because that is what we are here to talk about right now. Does the member support this legislation? Does he think this is needed, notwithstanding his treatise on debt and deficit spending?

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I am happy to see my colleague back in the House of Commons for his debate. I hope we can continue to have this debate in the House of Commons.

There are some issues around Bill C-2 that we need to address. I would like to address them in committee, so we could get to the details on them. We do need to provide some support for some Canadians going forward to make sure we come out of this transition. We need to do so very effectively. We have overspent in many ways.

We could talk about the money that has gone out in fraudulent payments. We could talk about organized crime and its participation in the targeted programs that were delivered during COVID. We need to make sure we look at this. We also need to acknowledge the provinces and how much they have had to increase their spending to deal with the actual on-the-ground expenses of health care.

Those are things that I hope we could address very clearly in committee.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I had the privilege of attending university with the member more years ago than I care to admit. I want to welcome him back to the House. I always appreciate his thoughtful speeches.

My question concerns something that I think is most important to Canadians when we talk about the economy, and that is jobs. For Canadians, that is their economy. It is how they get their revenue, it is how they afford their expenditures. My questions are directed towards that.

First, does my hon. colleague think that the Bank of Canada should be looking at amending its mandate, which is coming up soon, to include a full-employment strategy? Second, does he not agree that, if businesses are having a hard time finding employees right now, this is a market signal that perhaps employers in those industries need to increase their wages and working conditions in order to attract more people to those jobs, in line with classic economic theory?

• (1245)

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, there are a lot of things in that question that I want to address here, one of which we call in economic theory the “Gini coefficient”. What has happened during this pandemic is an outflow of funds has gone into the richest Canadians' pockets. We could take a look at the increase in price of houses in Canada, and it has gone up by 24%. If we look at the increase in the stock market since COVID started, and it has gone up by 62%.

What percentage of Canadians actually participate in owning these assets? It is about the top quarter. The top quarter of Canadians have gotten excessively rich in this process. The bottom 75%, shall we say, a ballpark figure, have not done that well. The assets

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they have to pay for have gone up in price, and as a result there is less income equality happening in Canada. We need to address that. That has been part of the failure of COVID spending, and what we need to address in making sure we get this programming correct going forward.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the narrative of the Conservative Party in particular has been to blame the Government of Canada for all inflation ills.

However, putting that aside for the time being, I would be interested in the member's comments on the mismatch between supply and demand. There is a buildup of demand over the course of the pandemic because people had no place to go, no place to spend, and then there is now a huge demand for goods and services. That has been interrupted by supply chain problems. I would be interested in the member's thoughts as that affects inflation.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, there had been an interruption in supply and demand during the brief three-month period where there was an actual total lockdown. The adjustment to that period occurred.

We are now looking at an adjustment to continue going forward and making sure that supply and demand continues to be met. We are talking about ratcheting prices here for everyday Canadians. This is something that is going to be reflected in their cost of living. It is exactly what we are driving at here.

If their cost of living continues to increase, where does that actually spiral? It actually spirals into more inflation. It is not deflation, as the government's financial team seemed to think it was not so long ago. It is inflationary, as my party has said. The outcome of monetary policy, of course, is always going to be inflation. Loose monetary policy leads to inflation. We have escalating prices.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, as this is my first speech in the 44th Parliament, I beg the House's indulgence to allow me a few minutes to thank some folks. First of all, I want to thank the good people of Edmonton West or, as I call it, “Edmonton West Edmonton Mall”, for sending me to this place for the third time. Each time I have been elected has been as special as the first, so I thank them very much. I am very honoured to be representing them here in Ottawa.

I want to thank my fantastic family for their support, especially my beautiful wife Sasha, who has been putting up with me for 24 years now. I realize some of my colleagues have been putting up with me for six years. If they think that is bad, she has been putting up with me for four times as long, so I want to thank her for that. She has endured nine moves across the country with me from Victoria to Newfoundland, back again, and then back to the Prairies. She helped me raise, mostly on her own, two boys and several dogs.

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She has worked two nomination campaigns with me, three elections and multiple elections for other people since I started the political process when I was very young. No one can do what we do in the House without the support of their spouses, and I am certainly an example of that. Sasha, my wife, is no different from all the other spouses who are the real force behind all of us here working. I thank Sasha very much. I love her and she is beautiful. I promised her before there would be a lot more champagne after this election, and I will ensure that happens.

I also want to thank my two sons, Jensen and Parker, who have done campaigns with me since they were in grade one and two. One is now in law school and the other is in the workforce. They door-knocked for me this time, and in 2019 and 2015 as well. I thank them very much.

I want to thank all the volunteers who have helped me out through the campaign. There are too many to mention, but they know who they are. I will point out just one gentleman: Dennis, my financial agent. Dennis has a goal of keeping me out of jail while he does the books for Elections Canada, and so far so good. I thank Dennis.

I also want to thank my constituency staff. We all know we are just the figureheads and the ornaments on the car for the staff who do all the real work in our constituency offices. I want to thank Oula, who has been with me since day one. Before me, she worked with the honourable Laurie Hawn and with Peter Goldring before that. I want to thank Linda, Brandon, Santi, Ory and Surj who have joined me here in Ottawa. They make me look partially good, so I thank them for that.

We are finally back in the House and discussing Bill C-2. There are 14 or 15 people glued to their TVs or to CPAC, wondering if this is Bill C-2, what was C-1? What was the biggest thing on the government's agenda before this? Was it addressing the out-of-control inflation? Was it addressing COVID or perhaps a new variant? Was there a C-1 talking about the supply chain crisis, or perhaps talking about Abbotsford and having more resilient infrastructure? Was it about the out-of-control debt that we have, at a trillion dollars? Perhaps it was about reconciliation.

If people thought the government's priority would be one of these things, then they thought wrong because the government's priority in C-1 was to force the House back into a hybrid Parliament. In fact, there are probably more Liberals mailing it in by Zoom than are physically in the building debating today, which is a shame.

The Liberals said they had to do this for safety reasons, yet on Monday of last week when we all got together for the first time back here, it was almost a party on the floor. We had government members giving each other high fives and hugging each other. The Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were close talking, as *Seinfeld* would call it. There was no social distancing, yet that was safe. However, is it safe for working in person in the House during a debate? It is not so much. It is safe to go to Glasgow and yuk it up with 20,000 people, and sometimes 1,000 people maskless in a reception, but not safe enough to be here serving Canadians in person.

We know that this is not about safety. We know it is about hiding, covering up and a lack of accountability to Canadians. We saw it in the previous Parliament, when we were in the Zoom hybrid setting. We saw it when Wayne Easter famously turned off the power when things were getting hot for the Liberal side in committee.

● (1250)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, the member has, by his own admission, been speaking only to Bill C-1. He spent at least two or three minutes speaking to Bill C-1. Perhaps we could discuss the bill before us, which is Bill C-2, and not bills that have already been voted on.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the hon. member's intervention. I want to remind members that there is a bit of latitude during debates in the House. I want to also remind members that they are to speak to the bill before the House. They may be trying to link some of the bills, but I would make mention that the hon. member should ensure he is speaking to the bill that is before the House.

There is another point of order by the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, just to correct the record for all members, it was not Bill C-1. It was Government Business No. 1. I want people to be correct when speaking in the House for the benefit of their constituents.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the additional clarification from the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. I will remind all members that when they are debating in the House, they need to debate the bill before the House.

I am sure the hon. member for Edmonton West will bring his debate around to Bill C-2.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, it is linked. Perhaps the member opposite could stop interfering. That gentleman has been here long enough and knows the rules of the House. I beg him to stop interfering and just allow me to give my speech, like an adult.

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As I mentioned, this is about blocking accountability. We saw it at the operations committee, where ministers could not log on. Even after a year of having a hybrid Parliament, the ministers could not log on. Bureaucrats, who were there to defend the government or the estimates, were not able to sign in. We had meetings cut short because of the lack of resources. Let us be clear that it has nothing to do with safety. It is about reducing accountability.

I had asked a question on Friday about Bill C-2, and whether the new spending in four parts had gone through the Treasury Board approval process. The members opposite were not sure, but they assured me that they would probably follow the rules. I asked because new spending is required to go through the Treasury Board approval process. In parts of this bill, the Liberals might be able to say that it is a tax issue and therefore it does not have to. They may get away with that, but not all parts of it are. There is some new spending that has to go through the Treasury Board approval process. This is why I am worried. I did not get a straight answer.

If we look back at the previous Parliament and the wage subsidy of \$110 billion, famously a lot of it went to very profitable companies. We asked the president of the Treasury Board at the time, who is now the health minister, if the wage subsidy went through the Treasury Board approval process. It was \$110 billion.

Does anyone have an answer or a guess? Of course it did not.

What did we end up with? Let us look at some of the people who received some of that \$110 billion of taxpayers' money. Rogers Cable, a government-protected duopoly that received \$26 billion for a buyout of Shaw, received government handouts. Lululemon, which at the time had increased its market capitalization by \$9 billion, still got taxpayers' money. Air Canada famously got taxpayers' money through the wage subsidy and used it to help pay executive bonuses. Bell Canada, which I think is the largest of the telecoms, is another protected duopoly in a lot of markets. It received money. Telus is another one worth billions with huge profits. It increased its dividend. I know this because I am a shareholder. It was able to increase dividends at the same time as it received taxpayers' money. Nutrien is another one and, of course, what would a trip to the Liberal trough be without SNC-Lavalin and Irving also receiving money?

That is the issue. Has the new spending in Bill C-2 gone through the Treasury Board approval process properly, so that we know the taxpayers' money is getting to the businesses and people who are truly in need?

Bill C-2 is a bit of a "forward/backward" budget. The famous Allan Fotheringham, also known as Dr. Foth, used to call our old Progressive Conservative party the forward/backward party. That is similar to Bill C-2. At the same time as we have a labour crisis, we have the government offering incentives for companies to hire, but also incentives for people to stay home. We are subsidizing one and the other.

We see again that the government wants to put more money into the recovery sickness benefit and the caregiver benefit, both of which had billions set aside for them in the economic update. The government underspent by about 90%, so the money was not needed, yet here we are with \$500 million and \$300 million being put

back in. We want to see more oversight. It is not that we do not support Bill C-2, but that we want to see proper oversight and a proper plan.

The other part of the bill talks about helping at-need industries, such as hotels and restaurants. I proudly grew up working in the hotel and restaurant industry, and did so for 35 years. When I talk to hotel and restaurant owners and workers, they are not asking for another handout, please. They want bums in beds. They want bums in seats. They want people travelling again. They want to see a plan. Hotels with mortgages of \$50-, \$60- or \$70 million are not going to last forever on subsidies. Small restaurant owners are not going to last forever with subsidies. We need a plan to get the economy going. We need a plan to get people travelling again.

● (1255)

We need to address the issue of the difficulty of travellers coming into Canada with PCR testing. A three-day visit is not enough.

What we are looking for is not only a plan for the current government to get people working again, but also a plan to address our concerns with respect to its accountability and its oversight of this pandemic.

● (1300)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the brief comments the member made regarding Bill C-2. I know he spent quite a bit of time talking about and being very critical of other government subsidies, as though he did not vote in favour of them. All of the subsidies and supports that were given to Canadians, with the exception of those that came at the end of June through the last budget, were passed with the unanimous consent of the House. The member is very critical of those supports, yet he voted in favour of every one of them. Perhaps he could explain to us why he voted in favour of them if he is so critical of them.

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Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I will remind my hon. colleague from Kingston and the Islands that those votes were done on division. We also recognized at the time that urgent action was needed. Did the government provide urgent action? One of the problems was that it rolled out CERB, and the wage subsidy came later. It was so poorly put together, and there was no oversight. The government shovelled money out to its friends in big business, but ignored the small businesses. It made small businesses pay out salaries first, then claim the money back later, down the road. It was a flawed system. We had to support these people in any way possible. Obviously, the government was not going to do it, so we had to step in and help in any way we could.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a strange time in my riding, because I have never seen so many “help wanted” signs. However, those jobs are not being filled. We had recovery benefits almost a month ago, but we have not seen the corresponding return of workers to where the jobs are. That shows me there is a disconnect in how the federal government is approaching this.

Obviously, the skill sets these jobs demand are not being met by the current workforce. With the ending of these benefits, especially the Canada worker lockdown benefit, there will be very vulnerable people who are going to be without any kinds of benefits or job prospects at a time when inflation is going through the roof. Therefore, I would like to ask my colleague this. Does he see Bill C-2 as a missed opportunity, when we could have invested a lot of money in retraining to make sure these workers have the skills that many industries in my riding and across this country are now very much looking for?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, Bill C-2 is very much a missed opportunity. It does not provide the proper targeting we believe is necessary. There will be people in need who fall through the cracks.

One of the issues we have been talking about for a year and a half now is with respect to the companies that opened just before COVID happened. It is by no fault of their own. Perhaps they started building a month before the lockdown happened and required two or three months before they could open their business. We asked repeatedly in the House for help for restaurants, hotels and other businesses. Every time, a Liberal minister stood up and said that it was under consideration, or that the government was monitoring it, which was my favourite. As if a person could pay bills by the government “monitoring it”.

This bill could have been so much better. I hope the government will take this opportunity to get it to committee to improve it for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague thinks of the fact that Bill C-2 contains nothing for self-employed workers in the cultural sector, even though they are among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Does he not think that there should be something in the bill for self-employed workers in the cultural sector?

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc talks about cultural and independent workers, but this also covers a lot of other workers who could fall through the cracks. The problem with this bill, and with the government, is that it lacks a plan to get us past this.

I used to run a hotel that had one of the most successful dinner theatres in the country. These folks do not want to be on government assistance; they want to get back to work. They want to perform. There is nothing in the government's plan to accomplish that. All this plan offers is a few more dollars. We need a plan to get people into our restaurants, hotels, theatres and concert halls, and the government has not provided for any of that.

● (1305)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by advising the House that I will be sharing my time with the member for Outremont.

I will start by taking my first opportunity to speak in this House to give heartfelt thanks to the residents of Newmarket and Aurora for placing their trust in me a second time, to my team for its hard work in getting me here, and to my family for its continuous support.

It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-2, a bill that is so important to so many across this country, one that we are all lucky to call home. We are lucky for many reasons, but especially because when times get tough, Canadians step up to help one another. It would not be any different with our government.

When the pandemic first hit, we were quick to roll out a number of broad-based programs to support those who saw their livelihoods completely change. Canadians needed help, and help was delivered. 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 215,000 organizations cover their rent, mortgage and other expenses; the Canada recovery caregiving benefit has provided income support for over 400,000 employed and self-employed Canadians while they had to care for a child or a family member for COVID-related reasons; and the Canada recovery sickness benefit has supported over 700,000 Canadians unable to work because they were sick.

These are just a few examples of the essential support programs provided to Canadians during one of the toughest crises our country has ever faced, supports that kept businesses going through the worst days of the pandemic.

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While we are seeing some better days now, there are still some sectors in our economy that need support. This is why we are moving from broad-based economic supports to targeted measures. This is why we introduced Bill C-2.

The comprehensive set of programs our government introduced has evolved as the pandemic has evolved. This has allowed us to continue to provide support to Canadians who need it the most. Right now we are reaching a turning point in the fight against COVID and in our recovery, but the recovery is uneven, and as the pandemic is ongoing, public health measures that are saving lives are also restricting some economic activity. Our focus is to protect and create jobs, so we can make sure that Canada has the strongest possible recovery. With Bill C-2, we would be better able to address the challenges that certain sectors in our economy are still facing.

To support organizations that have been deeply impacted in the tourism industry since the start of the pandemic, we are introducing the tourism and hospitality recovery program. This program would provide wage and rent subsidies up to 75% to eligible businesses with current month and average 12-month revenue decline of 40%. Other businesses that have faced significant losses but do not qualify for this program may receive support through the hardest-hit business recovery program. This is a wage and rent subsidy at the rate of 50% available to eligible businesses with current month and 12-month average revenue loss of at least 50%.

Certain programs do not need a pivot, but rather an extension, so we continue to support those in need. This is why we are proposing to extend the Canada recovery caregiving benefit and the recovery sickness benefit until May 7, 2022, and to increase both by an additional two weeks. These are programs that are working and helping self-employed and employed Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We are committed to making adjustments necessary to reflect the new phase of the recovery.

Finally, we recognize the challenges that may arise from the resurgence of this virus. Bill C-2 provides support for workers and businesses who may be subject to a public health restriction that is necessary to save lives and stop the spread of the virus.

• (1310)

The local lockdown program would provide support for businesses whose local public health guidelines require them to cease activities, resulting in closures and revenue losses. This is a new, targeted benefit available to businesses at a rate of up to 75%, regardless of the sector they are in and regardless of the losses over the course of the pandemic.

Additionally, to assist those who are unable to work as a result of a lockdown, we are proposing the Canada worker lockdown benefit to provide \$300 a week in income support, retroactive from October 24, 2021, until May 7, 2022. This would be accessible for the entire duration of the lockdown and would be available to workers who are ineligible for EI or who are eligible but were not paid benefits through EI for the same period. These measures would guarantee that if a government-imposed lockdown occurs, Canadians can have full confidence that they will be supported through challenging times.

Last week, when the Deputy Prime Minister tabled this bill, I reached out to a constituent who owns a hotel. As a local business owner in one of the most impacted sectors of our economy, I wanted to get his thoughts on the bill but also on the economic supports provided by our government throughout the pandemic. When we spoke last week, I was happy to hear that he is currently experiencing a revenue rebound and no longer qualifies for certain programs, and he is happy about that as well. At the same time, he understands that a number of his industry colleagues still do need support, and he is appreciative of the supports and programs that are available to help them bounce back.

He also told me that one of the biggest challenges he is facing right now is finding staff, so I shared with him that in budget 2021 our government introduced the Canada recovery hiring program to help employers hire the workers they need to recover and to grow, with a subsidy of up to 50% of the additional eligible salary or wages. We are both pleased to see that this program will be extended until May 7, 2022, so that businesses in our community and across Canada can continue to receive the help they need to hire back workers, increase their hours and create additional jobs. This provides the certainty that businesses need to rehire and return to growth.

However, while the government programs and the recovery go hand in hand, they are only a part of the solution. We also need Canadians to join us in this fight against COVID-19 by doing what it takes to keep themselves, their loved ones and their communities safe. A few months ago, colleagues opposite speculated that Canada would not receive vaccines until 2030, yet it is still 2021 and we have had the largest vaccination campaign in our country's history and one of the most successful in the world. Thanks to the millions of Canadians who have gotten their first and second doses, businesses across this country are safely reopening, travel is slowly returning, the economy is rebounding, we have surpassed our goal of creating a million new jobs, and our employment rates are back to prepandemic levels.

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We have come a long way, but we still have some way to go and all of us have a role to play. As a government, that means adapting our income and business support measures to target support to those who continue to need it. In my opinion, as Canadians, it means supporting our local businesses, helping organizations that provide services to those in need, and getting vaccinated to keep our communities safe. I want to take this opportunity to urge those who are eligible and able but have not yet gotten their vaccines to do so as soon as possible and help us put an end to the fight against this virus once and for all.

I remind Canadians that our government has been and will continue to be there for them, to provide help where help is needed.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get on my feet and ask a question.

A few of my colleagues from both the NDP and the Conservative Party have asked members from the government what their plan is for seniors. Seniors are getting their GIS clawed back because of some of the programs the Liberals brought forward, and the government has created an inflation crisis where the cost of energy has gone up 25.5% and the cost of gasoline 41.7%, yet the government is clawing back money from our seniors when they need it the most.

Can the member please tell me how many seniors have had their GIS clawed back because of these government programs? What are the Liberals going to do to help seniors get through their inflation crisis?

• (1315)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Madam Speaker, I remind my colleague that during the pandemic, we provided some additional support programs and that those revenues were made available as the seniors needed them during that time. This has had some other implications and we are going to be reviewing those, but the solutions will be coming in the near future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, back in May 2020, the Bloc Québécois called on the government to help businesses cover their fixed costs. This led to the creation of a general-purpose rent relief program that is not at all tailored to the realities of the hospitality sector.

I wonder whether my colleague from Newmarket—Aurora would agree with me that the government should amend its restrictive rent relief program to cover more than it now does. The hospitality industry, theme parks and everyone in these sectors may not have rent to pay but they do have mortgages.

Would the member agree that the criteria should be expanded to provide more direct and targeted support to the sectors that are not currently eligible for this assistance?

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciated having the benefit of my colleague's views at the health committee and I thank him for his thoughts.

We will need to take a very targeted approach to make sure that the supports we are providing are provided to those in the greatest need. Many businesses have taken the time to set aside reserves. Many businesses have used leverage to improve their business models in terms of their rates of return. All of these things need to be considered as we go forward and as we develop the program.

I certainly appreciate the benefit of the member's input. All of these things can and will be considered.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, when the Canada recovery benefit ended in October, nearly 900,000 workers were still on it, and with 48 hours' notice they lost their benefits. My colleague talked about supporting workers and made reference to the Canada worker lock-down benefit and its retroactivity. The problem is that there are no government-mandated lockdowns in Canada, nor have there been for the last couple of months, so the retroactivity is just smoke and mirrors. No one is going to be approved for this benefit because there have been no lockdowns.

The member talks about supporting workers. However, when the economy is still in such a fragile state, why has he made these new parameters so much more restrictive at a time when the cost of living is going up across the board? People are in very precarious situations and need a hand to get through to the next year, especially during this time when the pandemic is still ongoing.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Madam Speaker, my wife and I volunteer to deliver food for the food bank, so we certainly understand the circumstances that many people are facing these days. The programs that are in place now have been a great benefit to the people who I am speaking to, and as we go forward, the targeted approach that we are planning in Bill C-2 will benefit those in the most dire need.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19. This bill will implement some significant support measures, including measures for the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic and for the workers and small businesses that have really been struggling, for example those in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

There is no denying that COVID-19 has had devastating consequences for workers and business owners in these sectors. They saw a nearly 50% drop in revenues, down from \$104.4 billion in 2019 to \$53.4 billion in 2020; in that same period, the number of jobs directly connected to the tourism industry dropped by 41%. Preliminary projections put revenues for summer 2021 at about 50% of the figures for the summer of 2019.

Despite these challenges, owners of tourism-based businesses and their employees have all proved to be tenacious and resilient, ensuring that their services will be available when the crisis is well and truly over. Many of them have said that the assistance from the federal government is the only reason why the workers in the sector are able to continue putting a roof over their heads and food on their tables. However, we know that many stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry are still struggling. I am talking about hotels, airports, travel agencies, cruise lines, theatres and restaurants, which are vital.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Restaurants make our main streets what they are, and members have heard me say this many times in the House. I have spoken directly with countless impacted restaurant operators, who tell me just how hard the last 20 months have been, how they were the first to close and often the last to reopen and how even now many of them are only partially open.

As parliamentary secretary for the Minister of Small Business in the last mandate, I represented the government on many different working groups, including the Restaurant Revival Working Group, where I worked closely with Restaurants Canada and heard first-hand from independent restaurateurs across our great country. The bill we have before us today responds directly to their plea for continued support from the federal government as we continue to fight COVID-19.

[*Translation*]

I now want to speak in concrete terms about the support that Bill C-2 will provide hard-hit sectors through two new main components.

First, the tourism and hospitality recovery program will support hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, restaurants and many other businesses by providing them with wage and rent subsidies of up to 75%. Second, the hardest-hit business recovery program will provide subsidies that could cover 50% of the costs of businesses that have faced deep and enduring losses. The government is also proposing to extend the Canada recovery hiring program until May 2022 at a new rate of 50%, with the possibility of extension if needed.

[*English*]

I find it very important to lay out some of the details of what is in the bill we are debating today because it often seems that some members in this place would like to debate something else entirely. For example, on Friday, I believe it was the member for Carleton, in his 20-minute speech on Bill C-2, mentioned inflation 33 times. That is about once every 36 seconds. How many times did he mention tourism, hospitality or small businesses? It was zero times, none at all.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I want to remind members that there will be an opportunity for questions and comments. I ask them to hold off until then.

The hon. member for Outremont.

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Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I would like to be very clear. Inflation is a very real concern and Canadians are feeling its impacts, absolutely. However, as experts have pointed out, inflation is a global phenomenon driven by rising energy prices, a global economic rebound, supply chain constraints and many other factors. Inflation is unfortunately high almost everywhere at the moment. Yes, it is 4.7% here in Canada, but it is 6.2% in the United States, 6.2% in Mexico, 4.4% in the European Union and 4.2% in the United Kingdom. The G20 average is actually well above 5%.

If the Conservatives are saying that our policies to support Canadians and small businesses through COVID-19 are directly linked to the increase in inflation, well let me debunk that argument as well. Let us compare the data on inflation pre-pandemic and now among OECD countries. Between the late 2019 period and today, the inflation rate in these 38 countries increased by an average of 2.4%. The United States, for example, saw a 3.6% increase; Spain, 3.1%; Germany, 2.4%; and New Zealand, 3.5%. In the same time frame, Canada's inflation increased by 2.1%. It is crystal clear from these figures that the choice we have made to support Canadians through the pandemic is not the cause of inflation.

Maybe inflation is not the indicator that we wish to look at. What about the deficit? The member for Carleton said, "COVID required that we spend money, but we did not need to have the biggest deficit in the G20." First, let me begin by saying that it is very good to hear the member now recognized that spending was needed at all, which is a change in tone from calling such spending "big, fat government programs" that his party does not believe in. Much more importantly, the premise of the statement is completely wrong. Canada does not have the largest deficit in the G20. No, Canada's 2020 deficit was smaller than that of the U.S. and that of United Kingdom, and the last time I checked, both of these countries were still very much a part of the G20.

The implication of the statements made by the Conservative member is that this was somehow a waste, that we have nothing to show for the deficit. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The numbers speak for themselves: \$90 billion was spent for the CERB and the CRB; \$80 billion was spent on the wage subsidy and rent subsidy; another \$10 billion was spent in the form of direct payments to seniors and low-income households; and \$17 billion was spent to support the provinces and territories through the safe restart agreement. Those four items alone account for three-quarters of the federal deficit. Which one of those programs and what part of that spending would the Conservatives have scrapped? I venture that the answer would be none, and that is why despite the rhetoric that we hear today, the members opposite voted for the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy and the CERB.

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The reality is that Canada had the fiscal room to intervene and our Liberal government did exactly that. As the IMF stated last month, “Government budget support measures during the COVID-19 pandemic have saved lives and jobs.” Not only did Canada have among the lowest COVID death rates in the western world, not only did Canada get back to prepandemic employment numbers faster than other countries, but Canada still has a AAA credit rating, Canada still has the lowest net debt in the G7 and last year, Canada actually saw its debt interest payments decrease by more than \$4 billion. The fact that we spent to support Canadians did not harm our economy. It is to the contrary.

The choice today is very clear. It is not to relitigate the COVID support measures our government put in place, though I am more than happy to do that any day of the week. No, what we are debating today is whether we will continue to support our restaurants, our hotels, our travel agents, our parks, our museums and our theatres. All of them are incredibly important and all of them are worth voting for today. I would encourage all members of the House to leave the rhetoric aside and continue to support Canadians through the pandemic.

• (1325)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I believe it was February 2020 when I asked the member, who was then the parliamentary secretary for small business, about the absence of support for new businesses that had opened their doors either just before or just after the pandemic was declared. In her answer then, she teased the listeners by saying that this was a problem the government was aware of and that we should stay tuned for an imminent solution.

That was eight or so months ago. There has been no such program and the government has not addressed this issue. I wonder if this was something that might have been better addressed through the bill before us and whether we should keep waiting for those businesses.

• (1330)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his work during the course of the last 20 or so months for small businesses. We did indeed have that conversation. I believe it was in February 2021.

Absolutely, we have increased the number of businesses that we are including in our programs. Of course, as the member opposite knows, it is important that we make sure that public money goes to businesses that can prove a loss from prepandemic times, which is not possible for new businesses.

We are continuing to look at this as a possibility in order to move forward to help these businesses. However, it is really not clear to me what the Conservative position is because they say we are spending too much but now this Conservative member wants us to spend more. Which is it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, during the campaign, and even long before that, the Bloc Québécois kept saying and is still saying that certain industries have been harder hit than others and are having a harder time recovering from

the pandemic. Aeronautics, aerospace, as well as the tourism and hospitality industries are doing well, but arts and culture is not.

I heard my colleague from Outremont speak very passionately and call on us to support this bill to help hotels, restaurants, the tourism sector and all of these other industries.

Why are artists, craftspeople and others working in the cultural sector not included in Bill C-2? Why are they being egregiously left out?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, let me clarify if I was not clear in my speech that our theatres, our festivals and arts and culture are included in Bill C-2. That is very important, and I am proud that the tourism sector includes the arts and culture sector in the bill that we are debating today.

As my colleague heard last week, the Minister of Finance announced that the government was going to table a bill for self-employed workers and independent contractors, including artists.

There are a huge number of artists in my riding, especially in Mile End and on the Plateau, and I am very proud to be able to continue supporting them.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my Liberal colleague for her speech.

Many seniors who are on the guaranteed income supplement need jobs in order to make sure they have enough to pay the bills each month. However, they, like many Canadians, lost their jobs in 2020 when the pandemic hit this country full force.

I first brought this issue to the attention of the government in August. Here we are on the eve of December, and Bill C-2 represented a perfect opportunity to give CRB amnesty to our lowest-income seniors.

I have heard the Liberals talk about working on it, but this is an urgent situation. Could my Liberal colleague please inform the House when the government will actually help these seniors? They are having to make impossible choices right now about how they are going to pay their rent and put quality food on the table.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, since I have little time left, I will be brief.

[*English*]

I believe my colleague is talking about the importance of supporting seniors, which is something we have been working on very diligently since day one. We have increased direct payments to seniors over the course of the pandemic. We are going to continue to increase, by 10%, GIS payments, and we will always be there to support our seniors, who helped build this country.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will share my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Before I begin my speech, I would like to come back to the answer the colleague from Outremont gave me a few minutes ago. I realize that theatres and cultural enterprises will be able to continue to benefit from these programs, but artists and workers are not included in Bill C-2. What is in the works is not a bill, but an assistance program, which is much more complicated to put in place and could be done much more quickly with Bill C-2. I will stop there for the time being, because we hope to have the chance to come back to it.

Since this is my first time rising in the House in this 44th Parliament, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the constituents of Drummond, who have put their trust in me a second time. It makes me feel honoured and proud, and I will prove worthy of that trust.

I also want to thank the volunteers who gave it their all, their time, energy and passion, and spent long hours working on the campaign. I am thinking of two wonderful volunteers in particular: my parents, my mother and father who are 81 years old. They gave of their time and travelled around the riding, and they were very happy to do it. I want to be young like them when I am old.

I want to thank the team in my riding office, who are so essential. I want to sincerely thank them for their support and for the excellent service they provide to the people of Drummond. I am thinking of Andrée-Anne, Marie-Christine, Marika and Jacinte. I am also thinking of my assistant Mélissa, here on the Hill, and of Alexandre, who works with us. They are invaluable, and I care about them a lot.

I will close by thanking my family and friends. I mentioned my parents earlier. My colleagues in the House are all too familiar with the effect that political life can have on a family. My children, Lily-Rose, Tom, Christophe and Alexandrine, are wonderful. I want to thank my wife, Caroline, for being in my life. A wife is completely essential in the life of a politician.

I would like to take a moment to talk about the white ribbon I am wearing this week to express my support for women as part of the campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls, which runs until December 6. This problem concerns us all, and I wear the ribbon with pride. I hope there will come a day when we no longer need to wear this kind of symbol, because such violence is unacceptable.

I also want to say a special hello to Yvette Mathieu Lafond, whom I have already talked about in the House. Last year I celebrated her 100th birthday with her. When I saw her for her 100th birthday, Ms. Mathieu Lafond and I agreed to meet up again for her 101st. We have plans to get together this Friday, and I hope to celebrate her birthday with her for many years to come.

I mentioned my family and my children earlier. My nine-year-old son Tom is very funny. When he was little and something scared him or worried him, he would close his eyes and say that it would

magically disappear that way. It was quite cute. Kids do that kind of thing. However, kids are not the only ones; the Liberals are doing the same thing.

Members will recall that is what they did with WE Charity last year. They prorogued Parliament to put an end to debate about the scandal so that it would disappear. They also did it this summer when they called the election. They thought they could get re-elected without anyone ever again talking about their missteps. By trying to win a majority, they were hoping that the opposition parties could no longer put the government's feet to the fire. The Liberals closed their eyes and hoped that it would magically disappear.

Here is the difference between the Liberals and my nine-and-a-half-year-old son. He plays soccer and is sometimes the goalkeeper. He knows that if he closes his eyes when faced with three opponents who have the ball, it might be kicked in his face, so he keeps them open, waits for his opponents and, in an effort to prevent them from scoring a goal, he faces them and stands his ground. We expect the same courage from those in charge of a G7 country.

I have to admit that I let myself be taken in somewhat this summer. When the Liberals called the election, I really believed they were doing it in the hope of wiping the slate clean, coming back quickly and taking charge of the situation. I believed they were going to deal with the urgent matters caused by the pandemic, such as the labour shortage and the recovery of affected sectors such as tourism, aerospace and culture, as quickly as possible.

● (1335)

I thought that we were going into an election campaign and that, when we came back from the election, we would sort it out without any nonsense, but that was not the case. We had been hammering away at these issues throughout the election period.

The election took place on September 20, and we waited until November 22 to return to Parliament. Five months have elapsed since our last sitting day in June. During this time when we looked the other way, did the pandemic and all its problems disappear? The answer is no.

When the election was called, a fourth wave was on its way, and here we are now again with a new variant to worry about. If Parliament had been allowed to work, we would not need to discuss Bill C-2 today, because instead we could have developed assistance programs according to need and put in place the expected assistance for artists and self-employed workers in the cultural sector. We could even have resumed work on Bill C-10 after the Senate had finished hacking it to bits.

Everyone here knows how long it takes to pass legislation and get programs up and running. We have to debate in the House and in committee, meet witnesses, conduct studies and so on.

If we had truly put the public interest ahead of political interests, we would have had a normal return to Parliament, we could have done our work as usual and brought programs up to date. We could have also brought in new programs and adapted. Unfortunately, that is not what happened, and we ended up wasting time.

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In the meantime, self-employed workers and artists in the cultural sector are saying that they are no longer getting any assistance or money, and they do not know what to do. Based on the Minister of Finance's promises, we would have expected some form of assistance for workers in the cultural sector this fall. That is not what is happening with Bill C-2.

We know that the Minister of Canadian Heritage is currently working on a program to help artists and workers in the cultural sector, who are the hardest hit. That is good, and I promised, along with the Bloc Québécois, to co-operate to ensure this happens quickly. In fact, artists and artisans in the cultural sector have not received any income or assistance for a few weeks now, and they are getting worried.

Without this pointless election and reckless belief that if they close their eyes the problems will disappear, we could have moved forward and there would have been support for everyone.

It really makes me mad. I know that while everyone here continues to receive their paycheque, skilled and essential workers in the cultural sector are looking to reinvent themselves in other industries because they no longer see any way for them to manage. Some of my friends, people with whom I worked and spoke to recently, think they will not even be able to buy a little Christmas gift for their children. Previously, these people were not working small contracts here and there; they had a good, steady income.

I have friends in the world of performing arts who are technicians. They have taken different jobs since the pandemic began and they will never return to the cultural sector. It is a tragedy, because this type of expertise is difficult to replace. It is truly sad to see that we are abandoning a category of workers and especially people who are passionate about their work.

I have a group of friends, including actors and audiovisual technicians, who decided to do something productive during the pandemic, since there was no work. They decided to get together and go shoot a documentary abroad. This was before the fourth wave. They all travelled together to Bangladesh, India and Nepal, hoping to meet ordinary people. They just wanted to chat with them, to learn more about their culture and their reality during the pandemic. They did it at their own expense and did not ask anyone for money or grants. The idea was to put their talent to good use during the crisis. Hopefully, we will get to see the results of their work at some point. The government is failing passionate individuals like these by postponing the help that could be given to them now, through programs that are not yet defined.

I support Bill C-2, because it does include some important assistance and good measures. However, workers in the cultural sector have been overlooked once again, which is really sad.

• (1340)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. From what I understand, he is working very closely with the Minister of Canadian Heritage on this program to help artists and self-employed workers in the cultural sector, and I thank him for that as well.

There was one thing that bothered me. The member said that Bill C-2 would help businesses that have been hit hard, including

those in the arts and culture sector. I hope that my colleague would agree that helping the businesses will also help the workers.

Does the member agree that when we provide assistance to businesses, we are also helping the workers and technicians he mentioned, as well as the entire arts sector?

• (1345)

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, the assistance being provided to help theatres and cultural businesses pay the rent is one thing. It does help keep the buildings in good shape and functional. Cultural businesses can also benefit from some form of assistance. However, self-employed cultural workers do not get hired by these businesses when there is no work to be had.

Last year on the heritage committee, we did a study about the impacts of the pandemic on the cultural sector. One of the things that came up most often was that in its current form, the financial assistance is not getting to the artists who need it most. That is what we are talking about.

It is all well and good to help pay the rent, but if businesses are unable to hire people to work because there is no production to put on, that achieves nothing. The money does not go anywhere, and it does not help them much.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the serious concerns in my riding is specifically around seniors, those who were working seniors receiving the guaranteed income supplement. Because they were working, they applied for the CERB when they lost their jobs, like so many other Canadians across the country.

Could the member talk about why the government seems to think that vulnerable seniors should be left in poverty, homeless and without being able to pay for the basic necessities of their life instead of creating a structure and a plan to save them during this time?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, even though my speech was more focused on culture, I am glad my colleague raised the subject of seniors.

The Bloc Québécois has always positioned itself as a strong advocate for seniors. To us, it is unacceptable that the current government has generally and systematically ignored seniors. The best example of that is how it created two classes of seniors by enhancing benefits for seniors 75 and up and doing nothing for those aged 65 to 74.

I agree. Seniors are being ignored. They deserve to be properly taken care of. Their benefits should be adjusted so they can cope with inflation and reduced buying power. The government should be doing so much more for seniors.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, on the clawback of the GIS for seniors, the impact is detrimental. I have met seniors who have now been evicted and rendered homeless, and the government still is not taking any action. Some 83,000 seniors will be impacted.

Very specifically, would the member support the call for the government to eliminate the clawback for seniors who received the CERB or the CRB during the pandemic?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I would be in favour of any measure designed to remedy unfair, inequitable treatment of seniors, regardless of their age, specifically unjust treatment resulting from the creation of two classes of seniors and the fact that only the needs of those 75 and up are being addressed.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by sincerely thanking the constituents of Thérèse-De Blainville for placing their trust in me again in the last election. I also want to thank my team, the wonder team, and my volunteers for their tremendous support during this campaign. As I say to my constituents of Thérèse-De Blainville, I am always on the go and proud to be a strong voice for them here in Ottawa.

I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-2 before us. Since the beginning of the pandemic and during the last Parliament, as the critic for employment, labour and skills development and inclusion of persons with disabilities, I have stood many times on issues that directly affect businesses, shops, overcoming this crisis, but also workers and their employment situation.

The government is telling us that Bill C-2 is essential. I agree. It is also urgent. When it comes to the urgency of the matter I feel like I have seen this film before. We are told about the urgency, but we are not upstream of the questions being asked because it is past the eleventh hour. We are behind. The situation has become urgent because the measures in place came to an end. We are being asked to hurry up and adopt new measures to ensure that there is no interruption. I feel like I already saw this scenario play out because in September 2020, Bill C-2, An Act relating to economic recovery in response to COVID-19, proposed three new economic benefits in addition—

• (1350)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize to the hon. member for interrupting, but I would like to remind members that someone is giving a speech. I would ask the members who just came into the House for question period and want to continue talking to finish their conversations outside the room. There is too much noise right now, and it is difficult to hear the hon. member.

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am trying not to lose my train of thought.

I was saying that, in 2020, a similar bill, Bill C-2, an act relating to economic recovery in response to COVID-19, also sought to ur-

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gently pass economic measures. We were being asked to take urgent action because the House had been prorogued, not just for a day or two, but for five weeks. We therefore found ourselves in a situation where the House had to rush to support businesses and workers. In that case, we did not have enough time because we had wasted time on ethics issues.

Now, in November 2021, we have before us a similar bill with the same number, Bill C-2. Once again, we are being asked to urgently pass measures. This time, it is because the Liberals called an election rather than allowing us to continue our work in the House, even though there was nothing preventing us from doing so since the opposition parties were co-operating appropriately on the issues being examined. The Liberals decided to call an election anyway, which I think was useless and irresponsible.

We also had to wait two months before the House resumed sitting. In fact—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member again, but the hon. member for Drummond is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, you just intervened on this subject a few minutes ago. I am only a few steps away from my colleague, and I am having a hard time focusing on what she is saying because of the noise. I understand that question period is coming up and people are happy to see each other again, but it would be nice if everyone could respect the member who has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think part of the issue in this case is that colleagues entering from the opposition lobby do not want to pass between you and the member who is speaking. They are waiting to take their seats before question period. As soon as the member is done, I would expect that they will all be going to their seats, as they are now.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the clarification, but when people are coming in, there is no need for them to be having discussions. The issue is that people are having discussions not only as they are coming in, but as they are sitting down. I would ask members to please be respectful. If they wish to have discussions, I would ask them to step out, have their discussions and then come back in.

• (1355)

[Translation]

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I will stay the course because this is important. There are some good measures in Bill C-2. Some are measures that the Bloc Québécois itself proposed last spring.

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After the worst of the crisis, we need to think about recovery. We need to move on to support measures that are much more targeted and much more tailored to the economic reality and the post-pandemic recovery. We must therefore focus on measures that particularly, but not exclusively, support the tourism, accommodation, food service, events and hospitality industries. I think these are good, well-targeted measures.

In addition, as my colleague from Joliette said, these are predictable measures that will allow businesses to plan ahead until May 2022. There is also the two-week extension of the Canada recovery sickness benefit and caregiving benefits. I think it is good to continue these measures in the current context.

However, some measures that are essential have not yet been considered. They were mentioned repeatedly in today's debate, and my colleague from Drummond spoke eloquently about them. I am referring to measures for the arts and culture sector.

The government will say that it intends to support this sector. The problem is that the majority of people in this sector are self-employed, no matter their line of work. We must think not just of the artists, but of all the workers in the performing arts and live arts. There are many of them.

We know that self-employed workers cannot access the regular EI system. These workers are not in a complete lockdown. However, as I was saying, they are at the end of the road in terms of work. The recovery is difficult, and they may not necessarily be getting work. Furthermore, some skilled workers have decided to switch careers, so we could be facing a labour shortage in future.

These workers still need support. They are not entitled to EI, so until yesterday, they were receiving the Canada recovery benefit. However, there is a void in Bill C-2, which contains no measures for the many workers in this sector.

There are two kinds of solutions.

The first is a solution that we are still waiting for, since the government still does not appear to have understood that all of the emergency measures were put in place for one reason: Our employment insurance system has faults and is not comprehensive enough to cover the many 21st-century workers who are self-employed or non-standard, the majority of whom are women and young people. A meaningful measure would be to reform the EI system as soon as possible. However, there is no indication in the throne speech or the government's messaging that it plans to do so.

The second solution would be to address the needs of this category of workers by including them in Bill C-2 and providing an effective assistance measure for them. It is unacceptable for the government to ignore them.

In conclusion, although the situation is urgent, we will insist on sending this bill to committee as quickly as possible, so that the committee has enough time to study it and, potentially, add measures or terms that will more specifically address the objective of the bill.

This feels like an acknowledgement. We had an election that the government claimed was to help us recover from the pandemic. In that case, we need to recover from this pandemic, and we need the

minority government to work with the opposition parties on such an important bill to ensure that the pandemic measures are the right ones.

• (1400)

I do not know if the Canadian Federation of Independent Business representatives are right or wrong, but they are already saying the 40% to 50% subsidy rates are disappointing.

That is why it makes sense to ensure we have enough time to study these measures, get the committees up and running again and really give this our all and take a good, hard look at this bill.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have five minutes for questions and comments when we get back to this after question period and Routine Proceedings.

[*English*]

I do want to remind members to please keep discussions very low as they are coming in because it is affecting the ability of members to be heard.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today is the United Nations International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. There is a series of 16 standing resolutions about Palestinian human rights at the United Nations. Over the last 10 years, Canada has dramatically altered its position and voted against most of these resolutions. We need to change this.

I call upon Canada to actively start engaging in finding a two-state solution. It can begin with the recognition of the sovereign state of Palestine. One hundred thirty-eight countries, including nine G20 countries, have already recognized the state of Palestine. I strongly urge Canada to join them and recognize the state of Palestine.

* * *

44TH PARLIAMENT

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I rise again in this, the people's House, I want to express my deepest appreciation to the good people of Tobique—Mactaquac for the opportunity to represent them.

As Canada's 44th Parliament begins, may we, as parliamentarians, commit to working together to best position Canada for what lies ahead. May we together choose to move beyond endlessly speaking of our perils and start speaking to our potential. May we together move past the politics of pandering, posturing, petulance and pettiness toward a purposeful and constructive dialogue that moves our country forward. May we embrace the strength that comes from what unites us, a unity not based on conformity, but a unity that blossoms through our diversity, including diversity of ethnicity, thought, belief and so much more.

We cannot build up our country by tearing it down. May we rediscover the key to Canada's comeback, which is our people. By believing in and standing up for our workers, farmers, entrepreneurs, seniors and youth, we will then, once again, find the path needed to get past our current challenges. May Canada forever—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Avalon.

* * *

FLOODING IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week the west coast of Newfoundland was hit with a record-breaking storm that saw nearly 200 millimetres of rain, causing extreme flooding. Many families have either been stranded or displaced due to the total washout of highways. Some are without access to food and other essentials. I want to let everyone affected know that we are thinking of them.

I want to thank our Minister of Public Safety and members of the Canadian Armed Forces for their quick response in coming to the aid of the people of western Newfoundland in their time of need. I also want to thank rescue crews and employees at Transportation and Infrastructure.

I especially wanted to thank the employees of Marine Atlantic in Argentia for their tireless work this past week, as we are trying to get the roads repaired, people back in their homes and goods back in our stores. They have stepped up to take on the heavy traffic that has been displaced from the Port aux Basques ferry terminal. I want to thank them for their dedication and for protecting our supply chain, especially at this very busy time of year.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, last week I had the privilege of participating in the Grand Economic Circle of Indigenous People and Quebec, an event put on by the AFNQL and the Government of Quebec.

I would like to thank Quebec's Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs, Ian Lafrenière, for his warm welcome.

The dozens of inspiring encounters I experienced during this major event prompt me to remind the federal government that immediate action must be taken on several fronts, including housing. Two hundred and twenty-five units are built each year in Quebec, but

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over 10,000 units are needed, and that is just over the next five years. By immediate action, I mean that the federal government must provide adequate funding for housing construction.

I can assure my colleagues that the Bloc Québécois and I will always stand with first nations and the Inuit. We are tuned in to their needs, and we are ready to work with them.

Tshinashkumitin.

* * *

● (1405)

INTERLUDE HOUSE

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House to draw attention to 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, which began on November 25, as it does every year.

I want to thank Interlude House for the tireless work it does in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. As we are well aware, COVID-19 has presented several challenges to organizations that provide services to women who are victims of violence. Despite those challenges, Interlude House has managed to continue supporting survivors through its “unsafe at home” platform, a 24-hour service for women who may be experiencing violence and abuse in the home. Women can talk or text with trained professionals at 613-801-8169 or online at www.unsafeathomepr.ca. If any of my colleagues know someone who might need help, I ask them to share that information.

To this day, one in three women will experience violence in the world. Speaking out against gender-based violence is not just up to the victims; it is up to all of us.

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[English]

ELMORE CUDANIN

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sad to inform the House, and indeed all Canadians, that Elmore Cudanin, a patriarch and leader of the Filipino community in central Ontario, passed away earlier this month.

Elmore lived in Barrie since 1973 and founded the Bayanihan Club of Simcoe County. He was a well respected and inspirational leader in our growing Filipino community, and they are saddened by the loss of this man of humility, great gentleness, wisdom and friendship. Whether he was helping newcomers or raising funds to help the Philippines after a devastating typhoon, Elmore was always there to help, inspire and motivate others.

Statements by Members

On behalf of myself, the member from Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte and Elmore’s dear friend, Brampton mayor Patrick Brown, our sincere condolences go out to Elmore’s wife of 57 years, Enoni, to his many family and friends, and to our Filipino community in central Ontario. Elmore was a proud Canadian and a proud Filipino. He will be missed.

[Member spoke in Filipino and provided the following translation:]

Rest in peace, our dear friend Elmore.

* * *

GEOFF SCOTT

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have sad news. Geoff Scott, a former MP who lived in my riding, passed away on August 5 in Mississauga Hospital after a short illness.

Geoff was a kind and loving husband, father and grandfather. He was larger than life and lived life to the fullest. Born on March 2, 1938, in Ottawa, he attended Glebe Collegiate and Carleton University, where he studied journalism. Geoff became the first journalist to report news from Ottawa and Parliament Hill, and later became president of the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery.

He was a master of political impressions, which he performed regularly with the National Press and Allied Workers’ Jazz Band. At one point, he was asked to do his impression of the Right Hon. Lester Pearson at a formal dinner in Ottawa. Afterward, Pearson came up to him and said, “Geoff, you sound more like me than I do!”

In 1978, he won a by-election in Hamilton-Wentworth, and became the Progressive Conservative MP for Hamilton-Wentworth for 15 years. He was famously expelled from China in 1992 for laying flowers for pro-democracy supporters. He remained interested in politics and worked to support the campaigns of many politicians of different political stripes. Geoff will be missed.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, November 29, is recognized by the United Nations as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

I am proud to recognize this day as the chair of the Canada-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Group, a group of nearly 50 members of Parliament and senators representing all parties, working together in a shared, non-partisan commitment to peace in the Middle East and advancing the recognition and protection of human rights for the Palestinian people. Canada recognizes the Palestinian right to self-determination and supports the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestinian state, as part of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace settlement.

On this day of solidarity, I call on Canada to do more to help the ordinary Palestinians on the ground who live their daily lives under

very difficult circumstances. We wish for a better future for all children.

* * *

● (1410)

DIYO'S ONLINE CLOSET

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to rise in the House today to highlight a grassroots initiative on Six Nations of the Grand River, known as Diyo's Online Closet. On November 12, 2010, Jewel “Gawediyo” Monture, a beautiful and innocent young girl who endured relentless bullying, died by suicide.

In an effort to honour her daughter's memory and raise awareness of the emotional and mental abuse that bullying causes, Jewel's mother, Janie Jamieson, created Diyo's Online Closet. Named after Jewel, whose nickname was Diyo, the closet was launched to provide free formal wear to underprivileged youth for special occasions, such as their graduations, a milestone that Jewel sadly did not get to celebrate.

Since its inception in 2012, and through the ongoing and generous donations of clothing, Diyo's Closet is a great success with a following of over 700 members. Janie Jamieson has chosen to use kindness to help her heal from this unimaginable tragedy and to support others.

Last week, we recognized Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week in Ontario. Today, I stand in the House to pay tribute to Jewel and ask all Canadians to join me in taking action against bullying.

* * *

MEMBER FOR MISSISSAUGA—ERIN MILLS

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House as the representative for my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills in this 44th Parliament. I am so proud of my team of volunteers and my family and friends, who have marched with me from door to door receiving support and feedback from residents. I would not be here without them, and they have my profound thanks for their faith and their dedication.

My journey in politics has been in pursuit of equality of opportunity for all Canadians, and over the past six years, we have continued to push that needle further toward progress: reducing poverty, taking action on climate change and building a resilient economy. My constituents have sent me to Ottawa for the third time with a clear mandate: to ensure affordable housing for Canadians, to be a principled champion for human rights on the world stage and to nurture a secure economy for generations to come.

I am committed; I am focused and I am ready to work to build a stronger Canada for everyone.

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have been born in a small rural community in Hastings—Lennox and Addington. However, the reality is that rural living has many challenges and the policies of the government are making them even harder.

Many people in my riding find it increasingly difficult to survive. Whether it is fuel, groceries, rent or propane, inflation is hitting everything. They should not have to decide between feeding their families a nutritious meal, putting gas in their vehicles and heating their homes.

I implore the government to focus on helping Canadians with the dramatically rising costs of everything. It is not just inflation; it is about the government's inability or unwillingness to recognize that people are hurting and need help now.

* * *

NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is facing an economic crisis and a unity crisis. It is time for government to stop dividing, stop picking winners and losers and be a unifying force.

Canada has a wealth of oil and gas. Our energy sector contributes over 10% of our nominal GDP. We should all be proud that we provide clean, environmentally responsible energy that respects human rights. We should strive for Canadian energy independence and getting ethical Canadian oil in all our refineries. It can be done if we stop pulling against each other and start working together.

One sector does not have to lose for another to win. As Canadians, we should be proud of all our industries: aerospace in Quebec, the auto sector in Ontario, fisheries in Atlantic Canada, agriculture in the Prairies and forestry in B.C.

Elsewhere around the world, people are starved for opportunity, yet Canada is still the land of opportunity. We just need to stop tearing each other down and work together to get things done.

The Conservatives are ready to unite Canada and foster pride in everything this country has to offer, so let us roll up our sleeves and get to work.

* * *

● (1415)

SKEENA STEELHEAD

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each fall, steelhead angling draws visitors from around the world to the Skeena River, supporting dozens of small businesses up and down our watershed. These are businesses like Babine Norlakes, owned by Carrie Collingwood and Billy Labonte, or the Kispiox Bear Claw Lodge, run by the Allen family. However, like so many wild salmon stocks, Skeena steelhead are in trouble. This year, only 5,300 steelhead made it up our river. That is the lowest return on record.

Pandemic border closures killed the 2020 steelhead season. This year, the B.C. government had to close a fishery because of low re-

Statements by Members

turns. Skeena steelhead tourism businesses need financial help, but even more, they need concerted efforts to rebuild steelhead stocks.

When Thompson River steelhead took a nosedive, the minister failed to act and now they are almost extinct. We cannot allow Skeena steelhead to go the same way. I hope our new fisheries minister travels soon to Skeena, sits down with those people who are affected and then acts swiftly to ensure that we do not lose our steelhead forever.

* * *

[Translation]

TROIS-RIVIÈRES CHRISTMAS TELETHON

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, an organization called Noël du Pauvre hosted its 63rd annual telethon at the beautiful J.-Antonio-Thompson hall. This year, it raised over \$735,000 to help 4,800 of the neediest families in Trois-Rivières and Mauricie.

Noël du Pauvre, which has been broadcast every year since 1959, was the first telethon in Canada and is the oldest one in North America. It was Gilles Boulet who came up with the idea of fundraising on TV. He floated his idea by Henri Audet, the then CEO of CKTM-TV in Trois-Rivières. The first telethon was broadcast from a church basement. Noël du Pauvre now has more than 2,000 volunteers and has been broadcast live since 1959.

I remember nights in early winter when my father would make us watch Noël du Pauvre, and he would tell us that everyone is rich enough to be able to give to someone poorer than themselves.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, myself and, I am sure, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, I thank Noël du Pauvre for its unwavering commitment to helping the less fortunate.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of everything is increasing. The government's printing of cash is unceasing. Too many dollars chasing too few goods makes life more expensive in our neighbourhoods. Inflation in the throne speech had only one single mention. I will try this rhyme to get the government's attention:

Oral Questions

Families from coast to coast are struggling,
The ballooning costs of everything they are barely juggling.
Business groups are looking for the government to tap the brakes on spending,

Our economic recovery is in jeopardy and the tab is never-ending.
Maybe they do not know; maybe they do not care,
For all of this, the government has no justification,
After all, to them this is "just inflation".

* * *

HANUKKAH

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of York Centre and in communities across Canada and around the world, Jewish families are celebrating the festival of lights. It is a story of resilience and triumph against oppression. This year I am reminded of the dedication of our community, which has given up so much to love and protect the vulnerable and the elderly during these challenging times.

Hanukkah teaches us never to underestimate the power of a handful of dedicated people to change the world. Inspired by faith and perseverance then and so too today, the story of Hanukkah celebrates the faith and traditions of the Jewish people over centuries, a shining light of what freedom and diversity can and should look like in our society today. Diversity is a fact in our lives here in Canada. Inclusivity is a choice we make each and every day. It is a time to spread light and hope to everyone, and to keep the *ruach*, the spirit, of Hanukkah growing candle by candle each night.

On behalf of all of my constituents, I would like to wish all members of the House and all Canadians *Chag urim sameach*. Happy Hanukkah.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are watching the price of everything go up while the Liberals have been denying that their policies would cause inflation. However, by the end of last week, the finance minister was calling inflation a “crisis”. She does not think that the Liberals are responsible for it. It is almost like she is printing money so that she never runs out of bucks to pass.

If the finance minister and the Prime Minister believe that this is a crisis, what is she prepared to do to deal with it?

● (1420)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would have Canadians believe that inflation is a made-in-Canada problem, but experts agree that this is an international challenge that all of our peer countries are facing too. In fact, last week, even the Leader of the Opposition admitted that rising inflation is “a global phenomenon”.

I therefore have a question to offer the member opposite. Who is the real voice of economic policy for the Conservatives, the Leader

of the Opposition or the deputy leader or maybe the member for Carleton?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me take the finance minister back to a meeting that she had just this Friday with Canada's most senior economist, and maybe she would want to ask them some questions and take their advice.

Most of them agreed that the government is making the inflation problem worse. In fact, BMO chief economist Doug Porter said, “I think at the margin there are some things fiscal policy can do,” which is the federal government's responsibility, “and that's basically to take the foot off the accelerator.”

What that economist was saying is that the government is contributing to the crisis, so take responsibility. What are the Liberals going to do?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote another economist I respect very much, and I think Stephen Harper respected him too because former Prime Minister Harper appointed him to be Governor of the Bank of Canada.

Stephen Poloz was asked in a weekend TV show whether he thought Canadian government spending was the cause of inflation. He was unequivocal. His answer was, “I think that's not right.”

He is right; the Conservatives are wrong.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the finance minister is saying, then, is that the government has absolutely no control and has no ability to deal with inflation in this country. That is a big F right off the start; it is a fail for the government.

I believe the chief economists and experts in this country. What is the government going to do? Will the Liberals at least admit that they are in government and should have an answer for inflation? Are they going to do anything or just throw up their hands and say, “Not our problem. Too bad everybody. Keep paying high costs because the Liberals don't care.”

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me further quote Governor Poloz, an economist respected by all Canadians. He was asked whether the support we offered at the height of the COVID recession was the right thing to do. He said, “What the stimulus did was to keep the economy from going into a deep hole in which we would have experienced persistent deflation.... Read a book or two about the Great Depression in the 1930s and realize what was averted when we went through this.”

We know we did the right thing. Let me quote the Governor and urge the Conservatives to read a book or two and understand that.

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our entrepreneurs, our job creators, are on their last legs. In April and June, I personally wrote to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship with ideas for solutions to help our businesses, which are hurting because of the severe labour shortage. It has been seven months, and nothing has been done to fix this problem.

When will the Prime Minister get to work and put forward concrete solutions to the labour shortage problem affecting every business across the country?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Those of us on this side of the House believe that immigration creates long-term jobs and prosperity. That is why we are working with the Government of Quebec. We have already kept our promises. This year, we set an unprecedented target for temporary foreign workers. This is the right approach, so we will keep going in this direction with the Government of Quebec.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister can say whatever he wants, but on the official Immigration Canada website, it says that they are behind. It says in black and white that they are now processing 2019 applications. In one month it will be 2022. Businesses need help now; they need the means to address the labour shortage problem now.

When will the government get to work and offer real solutions?

• (1425)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not just about words; it is about action. As I have said before, we have historic levels of immigration, not just in Quebec but across Canada. It is good for the economy and it is good for the long-term prosperity of our country, and we are going to continue to work closely with all the provinces, even Quebec, to follow the course.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner of the environment slammed the Liberals' record on climate change.

Since they took office, the commissioner said, and I quote, "Canada...has become the worst performer of all G7 nations". Nevertheless, the government is still subsidizing oil companies so that they can increase production, but in the hopes that they will do so in a cleaner way.

What a smart bunch. They are still trying to put out the fire with a flame-thrower. Will the government finally figure out that we need to put a cap on fossil energy?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my distinguished colleague for his question.

Oral Questions

However, I would invite him to read very carefully the report from the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, which clearly shows that his analysis pertains to the years before our government took office. The commissioner himself acknowledged that he did not look at the 100-some measures we put in place in our 2016 and 2020 action plans, namely, the \$100 billion or so that we invested in recent years.

I look forward to seeing the environment commissioner's next report, which we hope will focus on the measures that we have implemented to reduce pollution in Canada.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the only government that has increased its greenhouse gas emissions since 2015, so it is in no position to lecture anyone.

If the government's plan were as good as my colleague claims, fossil fuel companies would not be celebrating. The Canadian Association of Energy Contractors was happy to announce last Tuesday that no fewer than 1,363 new wells would be drilled in 2022. That is an increase of 25% over this year. They are literally popping the champagne, and all this comes barely two weeks after COP26.

Can the government at least warn the industry that 1,363 new wells is a very bad idea?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that we already have one of the highest carbon prices in the world. In terms of carbon pricing, we have surpassed Quebec, California and British Columbia, and we will surpass Europe in 2022.

Of all the countries in the world, especially oil- and gas-producing countries, Canada has the highest target for reducing emissions of methane, a very potent greenhouse gas. We have also decided to cap greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector, which no other oil-producing country has done so far.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no one is protected from COVID-19 until everyone is protected. The omicron variant makes this clear. For months, health experts, the WHO and New Democrats urged the government to ensure vaccines are available around the world. This is not just for equity reasons, but because it is essential to keep Canadians safe from new COVID variants. Not only did Liberals ignore this advice, but also they opposed developing countries manufacturing vaccines for their own citizens.

Will the Liberals stop defending big pharma and start protecting Canadians?

Oral Questions

● (1430)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic does not recognize borders and will be overcome only through coordinated global action. We have been very clear from the start that no one is safe until everyone is. We committed to donate the equivalent of at least 200 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to the COVAX facility by the end of 2022. We have committed over \$2.6 billion in the global COVID-19 response since February 2020 and have made an additional \$1 billion available for the International Monetary Fund in related donations.

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the emergence of a new COVID variant is a serious reminder that, as long as the virus continues to spread, it could become more dangerous. The solution is to ensure that the entire planet is vaccinated. Canada can help achieve this, but instead prefers to protect big pharma. A Canadian company is even prepared to export vaccines to Bolivia, but the government is stopping it from doing so. When will the Liberals temporarily waive COVID vaccine patents to help everyone fight the pandemic?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my hon. colleague for her important question. As members of the House know, from the beginning, we have been strong advocates for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines around the world, specifically through the COVAX system. That is why we will continue to work with our international partners to overcome potential barriers. We are also leading an initiative within the Ottawa Group to make these vaccines available to people around the world. We will continue to play a leadership role in ensuring that vaccines can reach every citizen on the planet.

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[English]

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 27-year-old José of Greely called me on Friday from his parents' basement. I see the Liberals are laughing about that. He cannot afford a home. He has a job, the same job his mother had in fact, but while her family could afford a two-acre lot and a nice property to raise the kids, he cannot even afford a condo.

He wants to know why, during COVID, while wages were down and immigration was next to zero, housing prices rose under the current Liberal minister by 22%. Can she tell José why, according to Bloomberg, Canada has the second-worst housing bubble in the world?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me talk about some of the very specific ways our government is helping Canadians with the very real challenge of affordability. A single parent with two children will receive \$13,600 from the Canada child benefit. The average family in Saskatchewan will get almost \$1,000 from the carbon price rebate. Seniors received an extra \$500 this summer. A student

will save more than \$3,000 through our plan to eliminate federal interest on student and apprentice loans.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem for José is he cannot start a family without a house and he cannot get a house because, under the current minister, housing prices are up 20%, led by increases in land prices. We cannot blame land prices on supply chains, because land does not have supply chains.

The reality is this. We have the second-biggest land mass in the world and the second-biggest housing bubble on planet earth, with only New Zealand, an island in the South Pacific, having more expensive housing. Can the minister please explain why, under her short tenure as finance minister, housing prices are up 22%?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very rich for the hon. member to talk about housing. When he was in office, his government invested just \$250 million a year on affordable housing—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the hon. minister. I am having a hard time hearing him. I am going to ask him to start from the beginning again so I can hear the whole answer.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to put our record on affordable housing against the Conservatives' record any day. They spent \$250 million a year for every year they were in office on affordable housing. In contrast, we have invested over \$27 billion as part of the national housing strategy. We intend to move forward on a housing accelerator fund, which will work with the municipalities to create more affordable housing and more housing supply. Ours is the government that introduced the first-time homebuyer incentive to enable more Canadians to have access to the dream of home ownership. Those are the facts.

● (1435)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's defence on housing is that not only are homes more expensive under the current government than they were under the previous Conservative one, but also the programming is now 100 times more expensive, so now it is more expensive for homebuyers and for taxpayers.

However, I noticed the Minister of Finance was too afraid to get up and answer a question about house-price inflation that she has caused. I was specifically asking about the 20% increase in both land prices and housing prices since she took her job. She cannot pass the buck to another minister or to another country.

When will she explain why house prices have risen so much?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad that we are spending some time today talking about the Canadian economy. As finance minister, let me point out what is the single most important economic policy in Canada today, and that, as the emergence of a new variant on Friday has reminded us, is the fight against COVID. It is not over and the single most important tool in our tool box is vaccination. Therefore, I would like to urge the Conservatives to get on board and help us end this COVID pandemic.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is why our first five questions on Friday had to do with that important issue.

There is also another important issue affecting all Canadian families, and it is especially brutal for middle-class families. That is the skyrocketing cost of living.

Prices have risen 4% on food, 6% on basic personal care items, 10% on transportation and 22% on housing.

The government has no plan for inflation. Does it realize that its policies are causing the lowest-income Canadians to pay much more and that they are being hit hard by this government's lack of authority?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken action on the cost of living for families. One of the first things it did was increase the Canada child benefit.

The government has committed to reducing the cost of day care.

[English]

We understand how important it is to make sure that we are there for families, and we are going to continue to do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Philip Cross, the former chief economic analyst at Statistics Canada, clearly outlined the situation. He stated that the government is responsible for today's inflation.

He wrote in the Financial Post: "The government is driving inflation. Governments must work to eliminate their deficits or the upward pressure on interest rates will intensify."

Instead of ignoring the problem, what will the government do?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would have Canadians believe that inflation is a made-in-Canada problem, but Canadians know that this problem exists in most countries around the world.

In fact, just last week, even the Leader of the Opposition admitted that it is a global phenomenon.

Oral Questions

I therefore have a question for the Conservative member. Who is the real voice of economic policy for the Conservative Party?

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is coming. In two years, when the Deputy Prime Minister has finished writing her book, she will be on this side of the House. She will be the one asking questions.

I would nevertheless like to remind her that inflation in Germany, Italy, England, Austria and France is much lower than what Canadian families are dealing with, because this government failed to quell inflation.

What will the government do to help all Canadian families cope with inflation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that Canadians, like the Leader of the Opposition, understand that inflation is a global phenomenon.

Here are some numbers to back that up. In October, Canada's inflation rate was 4.7%. In the United States and Mexico, it was 6.2%. In New Zealand, it was 4.9%. The G20 average was 4.6%.

Those are the numbers. Those are the facts.

* * *

• (1440)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and Montreal are grappling with a criminal gang war fuelled by cross-border arms trafficking. Solving this problem starts with the federal government tightening up border controls.

Smugglers move weapons across the border at locations that fall under multiple jurisdictions because that causes confusion among different levels of government.

The Bloc Québécois has a solution: Create a joint task force to tackle arms trafficking. It should include Quebec, provincial, federal, indigenous and U.S. police forces.

Will the government take the lead on this initiative and launch a joint task force immediately?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one life lost to gun violence is one too many. To curtail smuggling, we have made investments at the borders. The CBSA reported 16 illegal firearms cases last year. In addition, we have established a joint forum with the United States to combat gun violence. We are continuing to work with all of our partners, even the Quebec government, to combat gun violence.

Oral Questions

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, I asked the minister if he could commit to doing everything he can at the border to stem firearms trafficking. He said, “Yes, absolutely.” Those were his exact words, and I believe him.

Today, the Bloc Québécois proposed a joint task force to combat firearms trafficking. This solution has worked in the past for cigarette and drug smuggling. I will say it again: The minister committed to doing everything he can at the border to fight firearms trafficking.

My question is simple: Will the minister set up this task force?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that more needs to be done to combat gun violence, which is why we have imposed a ban on firearms and military-style weapons, and why we continue to invest in adding resources at the borders. We will continue to take concrete steps and to seek and find concrete solutions together, with my colleague.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the time for talks is behind us. Right now, gun violence is claiming lives in Montreal and terrorizing entire neighbourhoods. What the Bloc is proposing is not a working group or discussions with the U.S. or information sharing between police forces, but a joint task force with people from all the police forces working together full time in the field against gun traffickers at the borders.

Will the minister accept the Bloc Québécois's invitation and take action?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will be there to take more action. We are pleased with the Bloc Québécois's interest in taking action to prevent gun and gang-related violence in our communities. However, when we announced a significant investment in budget 2018 for our border officers and our law enforcement officers to better prevent, detect and deal with gun smuggling, the Bloc voted against it.

We announced investments for the provinces and territories, and we will continue to bring in the necessary measures.

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[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the fall of Kabul, fewer than 4,000 of our Afghan partners have arrived in Canada. Afghans were standing shoulder to shoulder with our armed forces on the ground, putting their lives on the line to help us. These partners are now desperate to flee the brutality of the Taliban.

Why does the government not care about the promises made to our allies? Could the government explain why the safety, security and resettlement of our Afghan partners is not a priority?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by standing in solidarity with those Afghans who supported the Canadian mission while we were there. That is the reason we introduced a special immigration measures program that allowed us to resettle approximately 4,000 Afghan

refugees despite the very challenging circumstances that remained on the ground as a result of the Taliban.

In addition to that, we also introduced a humanitarian resettlement program that would resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees, focusing on women, girls and targeted minorities. That is work I hope all members in the chamber will support, because it is the right thing to do.

• (1445)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Afghanistan is devastating. Religious minorities, women's rights leaders and democratic activists continue to hide, labelled as enemies of the Taliban. Afghan interpreters who stood alongside our Canadian forces and their families continue to be hunted and targeted.

After almost 120 days since Kabul fell, fewer than 4,000 refugees have been rescued, and a data breach exposed hundreds of refugee names.

When is the government going to take its responsibility seriously and evacuate those people who are in so much harm?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assure my colleague and all members in the chamber that this government is taking that responsibility seriously every day. That is why we took the challenging decision to send back our Canadian Armed Forces and why, thanks to their brave and courageous performance, we were able to evacuate approximately 4,000 despite the very challenging circumstances.

Not only that, but we will continue to deliver on our humanitarian goals, which we doubled from 20,000 to 40,000, so we can continue to provide a bright future for those who are most targeted by the Taliban.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government pats itself on the back for abandoning people who served Canada. Afghan interpreters and other persecuted religious minority groups are still receiving no support from the government.

While the Prime Minister called a selfish election and abandoned those who served Canada in Afghanistan, veterans and NGOs have stepped up and are helping refugees escape. The minister is also throwing these partners under the bus, stating that they are acting too slow.

Why would anyone want to serve Canada ever again when all the inept Liberal government will do is abandon them?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell you who this government is patting on the back. We are patting the backs of veterans who helped support our humanitarian efforts. We are patting the backs of the Canadian Armed Forces, which helped us evacuate approximately 4,000 despite the very challenging situation in Kabul. We are patting the backs of the Afghan Canadian diaspora, which has stepped up day and night, 24/7, to provide humanitarian support for the Afghan families that have already arrived in Canada.

We will continue to do that work proudly with all of them.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, Campaign 2000 released a report that showed that 40% of children in Winnipeg Centre lived in poverty. Instead of addressing high poverty rates, the government is clawing back benefits from low-income families, causing food and housing insecurity.

The Liberals did not claw back pandemic supports from rich corporations that paid out dividends and bonuses to their wealthy shareholders, so why is the government cutting CCB payments from the lowest-income families in Manitoba?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern, because it is important for this government to make sure that we are supporting those with the lowest incomes, particularly families, across the country.

We know that families in particular have been impacted by unpredictable added expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why, through the CCB, we are providing additional payments this year to help families through this difficult time. Families are receiving up to \$1,200 per child under the age of six, with the first payment of up to \$600 made last May. This will benefit about 1.6 million Canadian families and about 2.1 million children under the age of six.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Vancouver, nearly 40% of the unhoused are indigenous peoples. For the last four years, the Liberal government has claimed that it is working on a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban, rural and northern housing strategy. So far, there has been no progress and it did not even bother to mention it in the throne speech. This glaring omission is a disgrace given the urgent need and its promise of reconciliation.

It is time for the Liberals to be honest. Is a “for indigenous, by indigenous” housing strategy no longer a priority for the Prime Minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. Since we came into office, we have helped over a million families get the housing they need, but we absolutely agree that there is more work to be done. We are commit-

Oral Questions

ted to an indigenous-led, indigenous-owned urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy.

Last week's throne speech outlined our government's continued commitment to making housing more affordable by bringing in a \$4-billion housing accelerator fund, ending chronic homelessness and introducing a rent-to-own program to help renters become owners.

There is more work to be done, but a lot of progress has already been achieved as well.

* * *

● (1450)

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic, our health care workers were on the front lines to protect Canadians. That being said, as they continue to do their work, they are far too often bullied and threatened.

Can the Minister of Justice explain what measures we are taking to protect health care workers?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vimy for her question.

Before I answer it, I want to thank the health care workers. Their efforts and sacrifices are getting us through the pandemic. They should never be subjected to violence or intimidation. That is why we want to amend the Criminal Code to put in place tough consequences for these behaviours.

I look forward to the support of all members of the House in connection with Bill C-3.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to assure Canadians that negotiating a new softwood lumber agreement with the U.S. is a priority, yet just a few months ago the U.S. trade representative, Katherine Tai, was quoted in Reuters as saying, “In order to have an agreement and in order to have a negotiation, you need to have a partner. And thus far, the Canadians have not expressed interest in engaging.” Now the U.S. has announced that it will go ahead with doubling the softwood lumber duties on Canadian producers.

Why will the government not come to the table and just get the deal done?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had an opportunity to speak to the U.S. trade representative, in fact, on many occasions. Absolutely softwood lumber, the forestry sector and its workers are a priority for this government. We will always stand up for this sector. We are very disappointed at the duties and tariffs that have been levelled on us.

We are going to continue to work with the American administration, so we can defend Canada's softwood industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the relationship between the United States and Canada is one-sided. The further increase in softwood lumber tariffs will have a serious impact on Canadian jobs. Businesses are already struggling due to inflation and the pandemic. We get results or we get excuses.

When will the Prime Minister stop coming back empty-handed every time he meets with the U.S. President?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's forestry sector provides hundreds of thousands of jobs for middle-class Canadians in communities across the country. These duties are unjustified, and they will hurt workers and businesses in both our countries.

We will keep fighting for Canada's softwood lumber industry and its workers. Canada has always been a fair trading partner. I will continue to raise this issue at every opportunity.

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period last week, the hon. Minister of International Trade told the House that she raised the issue of softwood lumber with the U.S. trade representative. As we have heard previously in questions, the response from the USTR is quite different. Regardless, it sounds like Ambassador Tai is ready to negotiate.

Therefore, could the minister tell us how many actual negotiations, not photo ops, on softwood lumber have taken place since Ambassador Tai's statement in May?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know how important this is to the hon. member and to all of us.

We absolutely want an outcome that is acceptable to the Canadian industry and to the workers. We are working with the Canadian lumber industry. Its people will be the ones to provide us with the negotiating mandate on this issue. I will continue to work closely with Canada, and together we will continue to take that team Canada approach, because that is what works.

• (1455)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that is code for zero negotiations.

After six years of inaction, countless jobs lost and a doubling of tariffs in spite of a positive WTO ruling on our behalf, last week the

finance minister said that she was finally considering retaliatory tariffs against the Americans on the softwood lumber dispute issue. However, she has provided no details on what those measures would be, and we just heard that they really have not met with the Americans to do anything about it.

My question is this. As President Biden did last week when he doubled the tariffs, are Canada's softwood lumber workers correct in calling the finance minister's bluff on the fact that there are no details on retaliatory measures?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Canada's softwood lumber workers know, and indeed what workers in all sectors of the Canadian economy know, is that our government can be relied on to defend the national interest in trade disputes with the United States.

By contrast, they also know that when the going gets tough, the Conservatives believe in folding their tent. We know that because that is what the Leader of the Opposition said when it came to the 232 tariffs and when he urged us to drop our retaliation.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Aéroports de Montréal's decision to jack up user fees at Mirabel airport by 7,000% is a devastating blow to French-language flight schools. Essentially, ADM is kicking the schools out and showing francophone students the door.

Once again, a federally regulated corporation is showing little concern for the future of the French language. Will the new Minister of Official Languages reach out to ADM to ensure the ongoing availability of French-language pilot training?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for entrusting me with the official languages file, which is so important to me. Moreover, I just learned that I am the first Acadian minister to hold this office.

As a francophone who lives in an official language minority community, I am very aware of these concerns and I recognize that the French language is in decline in Canada, including in Quebec. That is why our government will move forward with its bill to modernize the Official Languages Act, which is an absolute priority for us.

Oral Questions

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while flight schools in Vancouver are only charged 20% of the full rate, Aéroports de Montréal has decided to charge the full rate for flight schools that train French-speaking pilots in my riding of Mirabel. Believe it or not, the plan is to increase the rates from \$540 to \$38,000 per aircraft. This is not just a stratospheric increase, it is also thinly disguised expropriation.

We have been through this before and we don't want to go through it again. Will the Minister of Transport personally promise to ensure the viability of French-language flight schools in Mirabel?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, French is a very important language. Our government is working on protecting French in Quebec and all across Canada. We will work with our colleagues here in the House of Commons to ensure that our Official Languages Act is upheld and reformed, and that we support all Canadians who want to work in either official language.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years we have been saying that the Liberals are all talk, no action on climate change and now we have proof.

The environment commissioner has confirmed that the government has been a total failure on reducing emissions. Canada is number one in emissions in the G7.

Is the minister proud of being number one?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would invite my hon. colleague to actually read the report from the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, which clearly shows that he did not look at the measures we have deployed since 2016 to fight climate change in Canada.

In fact, his report points out that under the Harper government there was nothing done on climate change in Canada. The commissioner acknowledges that he did not look at the hundred measures we put in place since 2016, the hundreds of billions of dollars we have invested to fight climate in this country.

• (1500)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberals are number one in the G7 on emissions and number one in this place for blaming others for their lack of action.

Now, the government has declared war on the oil and gas sector. Despite that, emissions are continuing to rise.

Liberals pick fights, make enemies and kill jobs, but still emissions do not decline, so if it is not to lower emissions, why is the government so focused on ending Canada's energy sector?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would point out to my colleague that the last inventory, Canada's greenhouse gas inventory,

actually shows that without our government action and thanks to the inheritance from the Harper government on climate change, emissions in 2030 would be 30 million tonnes higher than they would have been without our intervention. That is almost half the emissions of all of Quebec. Our plan is working and we will continue on with implementing it.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to signs posted at the industrial parks in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, they are at capacity and are now hiring. Businesses are having to cut back on production, cancel orders or, at worst, close their doors.

One solution to the labour shortage is to hire foreign workers. A quick and simple solution would be to set up dedicated teams to clear the backlog and hire more staff in the department.

Will the minister commit to immediately reducing processing times to protect our businesses and enable them to participate in the economic recovery?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

More than 21,000 skilled workers have already been admitted in 2021, and the majority of them are in Quebec. We will hit Quebec's levels and get caught up on the pandemic-related delays.

If Quebec truly wants to reduce processing times, it should address the real cause, which is the Government of Quebec's selection criteria and its economic immigration levels.

* * *

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know how important small businesses are to our Canadian economy. They are the bedrock and that is why our government was there since day one of this pandemic through the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy and the extension of the Canada emergency business account. However, as we head into Christmas, I am thinking of my retailers in Kings—Hants, small businesses, those that are on the main streets of Windsor, Wolfville and Kentville.

Can the Minister of Small Business provide an update to the House on the measures the government is supporting for small businesses, particularly retailers, as we head into the Christmas holidays?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank small businesses all across the country so much for their incredible resilience during what was a terribly difficult time. I am seeing businesses that have gone digital, businesses and entrepreneurs that have been even more entrepreneurial. We are making a \$4-billion investment to help more businesses across the country to go digital, so that wonderful main street store can offer those services and those products digitally. As we head into the holiday season, I would encourage everyone to shop local.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of living continues to rise while the Liberal government continues to spend. According to the vice-president of Scotiabank, inflation is expected to rise above 5% by the end of the year. At this rate, Canadians cannot afford to have the Liberal government continue to pour expensive gasoline on its inflationary fire. If the government does not plan to increase Canadians' wages by 5%, then what will it do to ensure my constituents can feed their families?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me quote another economist who I hold in very high regard and I know Prime Minister Harper did too because he appointed him to be Governor of the Bank of Canada. Stephen Poloz said over the weekend, "What the stimulus did was to keep the economy from going into a deep hole in which we would have experienced persistent deflation. Read a book or two about the Great Depression in the 1930s and realize what was averted when we went through this."

We know on this side of the House we did the right thing and it is time for the members opposite to admit it.

• (1505)

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the finance minister is aware that Mr. Harper has not been here for six years.

Scotiabank's Rebekah Young has warned that the Liberals' stimulus promises will drive up inflation and hurt our recovery rather than help it. Ms. Young knows what she is talking about. She used to be the director of policy development at Finance Canada.

Our Prime Minister says that he never thinks about monetary policy. Well, it is about time someone in his government did, because Canadians are hurting. When will the government provide a plan to cut costs and reduce inflation or will it continue to ignore the struggles of Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Conservatives to be honest with Canadians. Do they really believe that it was wrong to support businesses and families when COVID hit? Do they really believe that the COVID lockdowns were the time for austerity? Canadians know that supporting them during COVID was the right thing to do. They know better than to trust the Conservatives to have their backs during the crisis, but they can trust us.

SENIORS

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an elderly couple visited my office recently to explain that CPP and OAS was not enough to cover the rising cost of living caused by inflation. They are being forced to choose between food and rent, while also trying to balance medical, dental and prescription expenses. CPP and OAS are not coming close to keeping up with hyperinflation.

When will the government stop its inflationary policies that devastate the budgets of seniors?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to ask the Conservatives to be careful and thoughtful with their use of economic terminology, as 4.7% inflation is high, but it is not hyperinflation.

Also, I would like to remind the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner that the government is responsible for fiscal policy, but it is our Bank of Canada that is in charge of monetary policy. We are very concerned about our seniors and that is why our government has acted to support them.

* * *

[Translation]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick has always been a great destination for tourists from across Canada and around the world. Tourism is vital to the province's economy. Tourism alone generates over a billion dollars in revenue every year and employs more than 27,000 workers.

However, this sector, these workers, these businesses and these communities are facing unimaginable hardships because of the ongoing pandemic.

Can the hon. Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance update the House on the work that the federal government is doing to support the tourism industry in the Atlantic provinces?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Madawaska—Restigouche for his question and hard work for New Brunswickers.

Our message to tourism businesses is clear: We are there for them now and we will work together to help reopen the economy in the coming weeks and months.

Thanks to the regional relief and recovery fund, we have provided over \$225 million to businesses in Atlantic Canada, which helped to protect over 16,000 jobs and support nearly 2,500 companies. We are there for the industry and we will always be.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year and a half into this pandemic and public transit is still struggling. Without help, transit systems across Canada are going to have to cut services and lay off workers. Canadians need more transit, not less. Last week, FCM once again called for federal help for transit operations. Now is not the time for pointing fingers at provincial governments.

Will the minister renew help for public transit operations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary, the last thing we would do is point a finger at municipal or provincial partners with whom we have worked collaboratively to make historic investments in public transit. It is good for the quality of life for people who live in our cities. It is obviously good for our collective fight against climate change.

I had an excellent meeting with the board of directors of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I am committed to working with them and all Canadians to enhance access to transit right across the country.

* * *

• (1510)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development released a scathing report, reminding us that:

Canada was once a leader in the fight against climate change. However, after a series of missed opportunities, it has become the worst performer of all G7 nations since...2015.

This report revealed that the government has funded 40 projects via the \$675 million emissions reduction fund without verifiable emission reductions and two-thirds of projects going toward increasing oil and gas production.

Can the minister confirm whether this funding program will be suspended, with the remaining funds reallocated toward verifiable emission reductions going forward?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the report from the commissioner. While we agree with a number of the commissioner's observations with regard to the structuring of ongoing programming, I think it is important to remember that this particular program was intended to be a temporary COVID response measure to sustain jobs for workers and communities at a time of record low and, at times, negative energy prices, and to ensure continued action on methane pollution reduction. This program has reduced about 4.6 megatonnes of methane.

Points of Order

That being said, the worst of the pandemic is behind the oil sector with respect to profitability and cash flow. In that light, we have commenced a review of the program and—

The Speaker: That is all the time we have today.

We have a point of order from the hon. member for Abbotsford.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change responded to a question. He was not in the House physically. He was present here by virtual Parliament.

We have a rule in the House. I believe it is a rule that has been consistently applied that props are not to be used by those of us speaking in the House. Wherever he was virtually, he was in a room where hanging behind him on the wall was a bicycle. Presumably, he was trying to make a statement about his environmental cred. The point is there is a rule that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

What the minister has done is blatantly use a prop because he is now doing it from the safety of some other room: perhaps his office or his basement. I would ask the Speaker to rule on this. I believe it is an abuse of the traditions of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House dumbfounded. Only a Conservative could see a bicycle as a partisan symbol.

The Speaker: I am not sure that was a point of order.

I just want to take this opportunity to remind the hon. members that what is a prop is really perception by everyone who is watching. What I am asking all members, whether in the House or appearing virtually, is to make the background as neutral as possible.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister wanted to show us that he could not be in the House in person because his bicycle had a flat tire?

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: That is not a point of order either.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1515)

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy).

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

* * *

SOIL CONSERVATION

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-203, An Act respecting soil conservation and soil health.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud, not only as the member of Parliament for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, but also as the NDP's critic for agriculture and agri-food, to introduce this private member's bill.

Healthy soils are the foundation of sustainable food production, enhanced biodiversity and cleaner air and water. Healthy soils are also key to our fight against climate change, as good agricultural practices can unlock soils' huge carbon sequestration potential. The bill I am introducing today sets up a national strategy to promote efforts across Canada to conserve and improve the health of our soils.

The strategy would help maintain, enhance and rebuild the capacity of soils to produce food and fuel for years to come. It would encourage farmers and other land users with research, education, training and knowledge transfer in best practices. The bill would also recommend the establishment of a national advocate for soil health, and would formally recognize both World Soil Day on December 5 and National Soil Conservation Week during the third week of April each year.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for seconding this bill, and I invite all of my colleagues to join me in making this strategy a reality for our hard-working Canadian farmers.

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

* * *

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

ASSISTANT DEPUTY SPEAKER

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose for the ratification of the House a candidate for the position of Assistant Deputy Speaker and Assistant Deputy Chair of committees of the whole.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mrs. Mendès for the position of Assistant Deputy Speaker and Assistant Deputy Chair of committees of the whole.

[English]

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PETITIONS

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this place to present a petition from constituents concerned about threats to pollinators, not just in Canada but globally.

We know from research around the world that neonicotinoid insecticides are dangerous to pollinators: bees, and honeybees in particular. The action taken by the European Commission has been a full ban of these pesticides.

The petitioners ask that the same protection be afforded to our pollinators in Canada, and that we follow Europe's lead.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of Canadians to present this petition.

The petitioners are calling on the Parliament of Canada to enshrine in the Criminal Code the protection of conscience for physicians and health care workers from coercion or intimidation to provide or refer for assisted suicide or euthanasia.

• (1520)

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope you will give me just a couple of seconds to first thank the good voters of Calgary Rocky Ridge for returning me to this place where I could table this petition, as well as my campaign volunteers, my team and of course my family who I thank very much for supporting me.

The petition I have today is signed by a number of Canadians who draw attention to a refugee crisis in North Central Nigeria. They draw comparisons to past crises where the Government of Canada has resettled large numbers of displaced people from conflict.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to establish an accelerated resettlement program to help with these refugees.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be able to present petitions in the House that are important to Canadians.

The particular petition that I have to present today is on behalf of numerous Canadians who call on the Parliament of Canada to enshrine in the Criminal Code the protection of conscience for physicians and health care workers from coercion or intimidation to provide or refer for assisted suicide or euthanasia. This is something I have heard from many Canadians, including health care professionals, who see these protections as absolutely essential for the functioning of a free and democratic society.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people who signed this petition note that around the world the deadliest words are, “It’s a girl.” The CBC has even exposed that here in Canada fetal ultrasounds are used to determine the sex of an unborn child, and then the child is aborted if it is a girl.

The petitioners highlight that over 200 million girls are missing from the world because of this gendercide, and are calling for members of Parliament to condemn this discrimination against women and girls through ongoing sex-selective abortion.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to pass legislation that would put an end to this horrible practice.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FURTHER SUPPORT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time this afternoon with my hon. colleague, the member for Saint John—Rothesay.

It is a privilege for me to rise today to speak to extending the government's support for businesses and individuals.

Before I speak to the content of Bill C-2, I want to highlight all of the work that the government has done throughout the pandemic to help individuals and businesses deal with the worst consequences of COVID-19.

Government Orders

Our government supported Canadians, with programs including the Canada emergency response benefit, which provided support to nine million Canadians, and the Canada emergency wage subsidy, which provided support to hundreds of thousands of employees and protected millions of jobs. Our economy has recovered the jobs lost during the pandemic and our situation is much better than it would have been if the government had not intervened.

[English]

I want to take a moment to address the government's decision to take a more targeted approach. I suspect that I will be asked by some colleagues, at the end of my 10-minute speech, why the government is choosing now to move in a different direction—

The Deputy Speaker: I think there is a problem with interpretation. Let us wait.

• (1525)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, while we are making sure that everything is working properly, I would like to commend my colleague on his impeccable French. I congratulate and thank him.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I will look to my French colleagues to make sure that interpretation is working.

[Translation]

Is everything working now?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the interpretation is still not working.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the English to French or French to English?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It is the English to French.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I will speak in English and hope that members will hear the French interpretation.

[Translation]

The problem is now fixed.

[English]

I will let the hon. member for Kings—Hants back up a little and start where he left off.

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, I did not think that the trouble with interpretation would be with my English, but here we are.

I want to take a moment, for my colleague who had trouble with interpretation, to talk about the government's decision to use a more targeted approach. I would say to my colleagues that we are truly at a different time here today than we were at the height of the pandemic.

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I want to take us back to March 13, 2020. It seems to be that infamous day in history when we were all put on airplanes to go back home, and we thought that maybe the pandemic would only last a couple of weeks. However, of course, it has been much more severe than that, and the government certainly took measures, whether it was the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy, the emergency business loan or the individual benefits through the Canada emergency response benefit.

Vaccination is now at a much higher rate. As I mentioned in my speech, we have returned the roughly one million jobs that we had lost at the height of the pandemic. In fact, many of the conversations here today seem to be about making sure that we have enough people to help drive our economy forward, and I share that sentiment.

For colleagues who might have some concerns about the benefits that are being wound down, I think this is extremely important and I want to give one example. After the election, my fiancée and I had the opportunity to travel to Newfoundland and Labrador for a short vacation, just to spend some time together. We were in Port aux Basques, where the ferry comes from North Sydney to Newfoundland, and I went into the local Circle K. At the time, they were offering a \$500 bonus for a \$15-an-hour cashier position. For some of my colleagues who are asking why we are cutting back the Canada emergency response benefit, or the CRB at the time, it is because we are at a point now where the pandemic is not necessarily an impediment to finding employment in the economy. I certainly applaud where the government is going with this legislation and the direction of being much more targeted in the days ahead.

There are those who are concerned about income supports, because I heard, as I sat here this morning, people talking about disposable income, particularly for vulnerable Canadians. Whether it is the members of the NDP caucus or others in the opposition who are concerned, I want to direct them to a couple of things.

One is the guaranteed income supplement. In the last Parliament, from 2015 to 2019, we increased the guaranteed income supplement by 10%. It was a historic investment that brought a quarter of a million seniors out of poverty. We are pledging to increase that by \$500. We pledged that during the election, and that is something we will be working toward here in the 44th Parliament.

Another is old age security. We have already delivered on that, with a 10% increase for seniors who are 75 and up.

However, there is one I really want to hammer in. If members are worried about income supports, let us all collectively in the House work toward the Canada workers benefit, something that rewards individuals who are working in lower-income positions. The government has pledged to increase it. I invite all members of the House, on this side and otherwise, to help push and move that forward, because that is going to be very important.

I also want to take an opportunity to talk about the position of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. As I look over to the screens that are here, I know some of our colleagues are participating virtually. When I was sitting at home at the height of the pandemic, I would hear a Conservative member in one breath say that the government was spending too much, the government was running major deficits

and we have to be very concerned about debt. Honestly, as a member of Parliament I think the conversations about deficits and debt are very important and real. However, in the very next breath, the next member up for the Conservative Party would say that the government was not doing enough for small businesses and individuals. It is that inconsistency that I have trouble with. There are big-tent parties here in the House, and I know not every parliamentarian is going to always see eye to eye on everything. However, we need to make sure that we have a consistent conversation.

Our government has taken an approach. If we are criticized for doing too much, I would rather be in that position since we supported Canadians and small businesses through the pandemic. The economic repercussions of doing less were far too grave.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-2 basically consists of four program categories. First, there is the tourism and hospitality recovery program, which would provide certain tourism and hospitality businesses, such as hotels, tour operators, travel agencies and restaurants, with subsidies at a rate of up to 75%.

Second, the hardest-hit business recovery program would provide other businesses that have sustained heavy losses with subsidies at a rate of up to 50%.

Third, the local lockdown program would provide businesses affected by temporary local lockdowns with subsidies at a rate of up to 75%.

Lastly, the Canada worker lockdown benefit is specifically targeted to individuals affected by provincial public health restrictions.

[*English*]

I want to conclude by saying that I truly believe the measures the government is putting forward are measured. We have been there at the height of the pandemic to spend the money necessary to protect Canadian businesses and individuals.

The government is now recognizing that we are in a different place in the pandemic. Employment opportunities are available, but we still want to be mindful of the COVID situation, no doubt. We see in the news today the variants and challenges that are persisting, so we are not though this yet, but we are trying to be much more targeted in our approach of supporting Canadians who need it because of lockdown measures during COVID-19 and the businesses that remain challenged as a result.

I think the government is being prudent in its approach. We are making sure we are there, but we are making sure we are targeted and being mindful of our fiscal position and the need to protect it as we move forward in the days ahead. With that, I look forward to questions.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and once again ask some questions of my colleague from Kings—Hants. We worked together on the agriculture committee, and we see eye to eye every now and then.

He keeps bringing to the floor of the assembly this conversation and debate about the Conservatives saying one thing and then doing another: on one hand talking about spending more and on the other hand talking about spending less. This is not completely true. What we have done as the Conservatives is put forward areas where we should be spending. We do not disagree with the Liberals. We think they can spend money very well. What we disagree with is the priorities.

Does my hon. friend think it is fair for the GIS to be clawed back from seniors because they went on programs the government pushed them to go on? How many seniors are receiving less money from the GIS in his riding because of the government's policy decisions?

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member opposite for his re-election in Regina—Lewvan. I quite enjoyed the opportunity to work with him on the agriculture committee, and I quite enjoy our back-and-forth.

The member opposite mentioned priorities, and when I think about how this government approached them, it was about making sure that Canadians who needed help at the height of the pandemic were taken care of. I know that single mothers who were on the Canada child benefit before the pandemic were supported because of our government measures. I have talked to individuals throughout the pandemic, including business owners, seniors and folks all around, who said we were there for them. At the end of the day, that is what we will continue to do.

The issue around the clawback of the guaranteed income supplement has been raised. I know that other members have talked about this as well. It is something I am happy to take back to the conversations I have with my colleagues on this side of the House.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to congratulate you on your appointment. You have a voice that carries, and everyone can hear you all the way at the back of the House. I think that, even without a microphone, you could make yourself heard and maintain order in the House. Congratulations.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance stated her firm intention to help the sectors most affected by the pandemic. Tourism is obviously one of them, as is the cultural sector. However, Bill C-2 contains nothing on the cultural sector. We were promised a program that would help artists and self-employed workers in the cultural sector. Once Bill C-2 is passed, help will be available to the hardest-hit sectors.

Here is my question: Can we tell artists and self-employed workers in the cultural sector when this help will be available to them?

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague opposite for his question.

First, Bill C-2 definitely covers tourism businesses and businesses hit hard by the pandemic. In addition, our election platform contained a specific promise for craftspeople and the cultural sector. I

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am confident that the Minister of Canadian Heritage will create a measure for craftspeople and the cultural sector.

I apologize for my French.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member should never apologize for the quality of his French, since he is really making an effort.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague across the way spoke about the measured approach that his government has taken. I want to ask him about that measured approach. Why has the government cut off 83,000 seniors from GIS after choosing not to exclude CERB and CRB payments from its definition of “income” for GIS purposes, yet at the same time, the government has chosen to not claw back pandemic supports from the rich corporations that paid out dividends and bonuses to their wealthy shareholders? This is a callous move by the government, which is resulting in seniors ending up unhoused and food insecure.

Will the government immediately change this callous decision to ensure that seniors remain housed and fed in this country?

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, where we would differ is the sense that we left seniors behind. She mentioned the fact that we were there for seniors at the height of the pandemic. Whether it has been through the CERB, the increase in old age security or the increase in the guaranteed income supplement, we have been there for seniors.

Obviously there is a challenge in that some of the income received has put some seniors over that particular threshold. This is an issue that has been raised in the House, and as I have said to my other colleagues, I am happy to work inside the government benches to see what we can do to support seniors in the days ahead.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here speaking today in the 44th Parliament. It is wonderful to be here from my riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

Before I start, I certainly want to acknowledge my wonderful constituents, the people of Saint John—Rothesay, who voted me in for a third term. I want to thank my campaign team of Warren Coombs, Kevin Collins, Maghnus Ryan, Jody Wheaton, Leah Logan and, last but not least, the rock of my office, Jeanette Arseneault, who worked so hard to have me re-elected.

I want to thank everybody who campaigned in my riding, including the Leader of the Opposition. He was in my riding not only once, but twice. I thank him for coming. It certainly was great to see him there as well.

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We all remember those days in March 2020. We did not know what was going to happen to any of us, our ridings or our country. We were sent home. I believe I was sent home on March 13, not knowing if it was going to be for a week, a month, et cetera. We all know what we faced as a government and as a country, and how we had to stand up against a once-in-a-generation pandemic.

I was worried. I was worried for my riding. I was worried for the small businesses and my constituents. We went to bat as a government. We went to bat and delivered programs that helped Canadians. Whether it was the CERB, the CEBA, the wage subsidy, rent support, business loans or the like, we were there for Canadians.

I listened today to members across the House literally insinuating that our programs were too generous, that we gave too much to Canadians, that the programs benefited too many people. Let me say this: If they were to have sat in my office, they would have had to take the calls from my constituents, small businesses, and the tourism and hospitality sectors, which we will get to in a minute, that needed our support. Yes, I agree with my friend and colleague from Kings—Hants that the Conservatives have said that we did too much, and the next day they said that we spent too much, and that our programs benefited one thing, but did not target another.

We were literally delivering programs. We were writing the book and turning the pages before the ink was dry. I am proud of what we did. I am proud that our government delivered and supported Canadians. Sure, the Conservatives can laugh across the House about us offering support for Canadians. That is fine. They can laugh about that, but I am proud. I am proud that we were there for small businesses and constituents when they needed us the most.

Yes, all of us, on both sides of the aisle, have faced tough times over the last 20 months. It has not been easy for anybody. Across the country, many businesses have had to close, some temporarily, others permanently. The majority experienced reduced revenues even when they were open. In my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, and across the country, this has translated into many people losing their jobs or having their hours reduced. That is why, when the crisis hit, we rolled out a wide range of programs.

We faced one of the greatest economic challenges this country has faced since the Great Depression. I have been here since 2015. I know my friends across the House paint themselves as the fiscal experts, the ones who know about the economy and economics. Before 2015, the former government oversaw one of the greatest economic downturns since the Great Depression.

• (1540)

The government from across the aisle ran deficit after deficit. We all know what happened in 2014-15 when, with a little juggling of the books, selling of some stocks and pulling back of benefits, it showed a balanced budget for once, so we take no lessons from its members with respect to balancing anything. We take no lessons from them with respect to their economic stewardship.

We believe in investing in Canadians. We believe in a government that invests in projects like the wonderful infrastructure projects in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, such as Port Saint John and other projects. That is not wasteful spending. It is invest-

ing. We are not going to grow the economy through regressive policies, trickle down economics or cutbacks. It simply does not work.

We were here as a government to continue to invest. Canada's COVID-19 economic response included job protections, liquidity and income support through the suite of recovery benefits. These programs have been key in bridging Canadians and businesses through tough times and stabilizing the economy. These programs meant people could stay home if they needed to be safe.

After the initial creation of the Canada emergency response benefit, which supported over eight million Canadians for the duration of its availability, the government transitioned the support to a suite of new temporary benefits for individuals: the CRB, or as we know it, the Canada recovery benefit; the Canada caregiver benefit; and the Canada recovery sickness benefit.

It was a pivot. These new temporary benefits provided income support to millions of Canadians. We heard across the House that it was too much, that we were helping people too much. No, we supported people in their time of need, and Canadians will not forget that.

We need to transition again, so I want to talk about new programs that will be and should be our last pivot to fight COVID and be there for Canadians. I want to talk about the Canada worker lockdown benefit. This proposed new measure was first announced on October 21 and is part of the legislation we are debating today.

To ensure workers continue to have support and that no one is left behind, this benefit would provide \$300 a week in income support to eligible workers, should they be unable to work due to a regional lockdown, until May 7, 2022, with retroactive application to October 24, 2021, if required.

It would continue to offer support to those who still need it, in case the pandemic requires further public health lockdowns in any part of the country, including workers who are both eligible and ineligible for employment insurance. The benefit would apply in any region of the country that has been designated by the government for the duration of the lockdown. Temporary lockdowns may still be necessary to continue our fight against COVID, and we need to be there for Canadians.

I am proud to stand here with my government, which has had the backs of Canadians since March of 2020. It is easy to cherry-pick and criticize that we should have done this or we could have done that, but in the end, from the calls that come into my constituency office of Saint John—Rothesay, I can tell the House that Canadians are proud of what we did and are appreciative of what we did as a government. They know rhetoric versus actually getting things done. We got things done for Canadians, and I am proud to be there for them.

• (1545)

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have worked with the hon. member from New Brunswick in the past on committee. I found him extremely reasonable when working and trying to resolve situations.

With his stature in the party, one of the things he would understand is that we have had a long delay in getting back in the House and then an even much longer delay in getting the committees back. We need to get this to committee to get it through and get the work done.

In his party would he, as we are doing with our party, try to get the government to move ahead with the finance committee so this can get there and we can get the necessary work done? I know at committee we do work well.

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely understand that committees need to get moving and study this, but I also take exception to the fact that we cannot get work done now. We are back. I sat here last week and watched a debate go on for days about whether a virtual House of Commons was effective. Members know that we can get work done. I got work done in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay over the last year and a half. I was effective. I delivered on projects. I continued to advocate. I sat at committees.

I would agree with the member opposite that we do need to get to work. I am happy to be back here. We will do the proper work needed to ensure these programs are implemented.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know the Speaker in the House this morning mentioned that no props were allowed in the House of Commons. The member for Bow River is currently wearing an “I love oil and gas” button and I assume that would be considered a prop. I wonder if the Speaker could rule on this.

• (1550)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, it is worth contributing to this point of order. This member has been reprimanded about this by the Speaker not once, not twice but probably three times. I am pretty sure it is to the point that he is now purposely wearing this prop so he can be called out on a point of order repeatedly and that brings attention to the fact that he is doing it.

I encourage you to talk to the Speaker to figure out a way for this to be resolved permanently with this member, so we do not continually have to bring up this point of order.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that I know how distasteful those members find the oil and gas sector of our country and that they would rather depend on foreign oil, the pin says, “I love Canada”. It says nothing about oil and gas.

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The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Bow River on this point of order.

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, as to what the member is bringing up, it has “I love Canada” and nothing else on it. Is that a problem? That is all it says on this button.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank everybody for those interventions.

I think we all try our best not to cause disruption in the chamber. The idea of wearing some kind of button or slogan is always a challenge in the House of Commons. I believe the member has been warned a couple of times on what pins might be worn or not worn in the House of Commons. I will take that under advisement and move forward.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Liberal Party mentioned earlier that the old age security benefit was for seniors aged 75 and over, but I think it is more pertinent to talk about seniors aged 65 and over.

I want to come back to what he said. We had an unnecessary election that delayed the introduction of new programs. That is very clear and, as a result, our discussions and our work in the House on the new programs have also been delayed.

It is also important to remember that self-employed workers do not currently have access to EI. Bill C-2 does not provide any financial support to self-employed workers in this area. We are extremely disappointed.

We are also worried about self-employed workers because they might have to change jobs this winter, and the stakes will be higher then.

What does the government want to do? Does it want to do something to improve Bill C-2?

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Speaker, our government was there to help to workers, self-employed workers, artists, small business owners and tourism operators. Our government delivered programs that basically touched almost everybody in Canada in one way, shape or form. Whether it was the wage subsidy, rent support or a CEBA loan, there were all kinds of opportunities, even through the RRRF regionally.

Again, I am immensely proud of the programs that my government delivered to support Canadians. We had the backs of Canadians and we will always have their backs.

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• (1555)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really glad that my colleague brought up some of the history with respect to previous Conservative governments. In fact, his information is extremely accurate. Of all the budgets that were brought in by Brian Mulroney and Stephen Harper, only two of them did not run a deficit. One was on the heels of Paul Martin's surplus and the other was in 2015, like he noted, when the Conservatives slashed Veterans Affairs and sold off shares of GM at bargain prices in order to balance the budget to go into an election.

Could the member shed some light on why the Conservatives seem to think they are so incredible when it comes to the economy when history does not support it?

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Speaker, it absolutely baffles me that the party opposite holds itself up as a steward of the economy. It does not have the record to show that, it does not have any results and it ran deficit after deficit. Actually, two former Bank of Canada governors, who were appointed by that government, do not agree with its economic policies. We should think about that.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here. I will be splitting my time with the member for St. Albert—Edmonton. He has always got such incredibly intelligent debate and I always look forward to his words.

I am so thrilled to be back in the House. I very much thank the people of Calgary Midnapore for returning me to the chamber with the highest percentile of votes in Calgary, the highest percentile of votes in any major centre and what I am most proud of, the greatest number of votes for any woman in Canada. It is an honour to be back in the House.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my team, which was so incredible throughout the election. I would like to thank my campaign manager, Mr. Justin Gotfried, the son of Richard Gotfried, the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek. I would also like to thank Katie Cook who was my communications point person and my sister Holly Schramm who served as my official agent, keeping me in line and out of trouble with those books. I would also like to thank all the incredible volunteers. I would like to thank my parents Keith and Angie Schramm, who are still my constituents to this day, and my very good friends who I grew up with in Calgary Midnapore who put out signs and raised money for me, Joanna Shaw Morin and Caroline Baynes. Of course, I cannot go without thanking the loves of my life, my husband James Kusie and my beautiful son Edward Kusie who supported me in this journey back to the House of Commons. I thank them and I love them.

Again, I thank so much the people of Calgary Midnapore.

Here we are again in the House debating legislation on new benefits. As the member across the aisle indicated, yes, we on this side of the House were very collaborative and certainly went along with the government's requests for funds and for programs, because we care about Canadians. We are compassionate individuals and we knew that was what Canadians needed at that time.

I will give a brief history of all the times we went along with the legislation despite concerns because we knew that was what Canadians needed at that time.

Let us go back to March 13, 2020, when Bill C-12, an act to amend the Financial Administration Act, was presented; one billion dollars in funding for approval. We did not put up a fuss on this side. In fact, it received royal assent the very same day.

Let us go forward a little further into time. On March 24, 2020, we had Bill C-13, an act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19. As the shadow minister for families and social development at that time, it was legislation to fix the shortcomings that the government missed at the time it created the original legislation, but, once again, we did not put up a fuss on this side of the House. We recognized that was what Canadians needed at that time. That bill also received approval from the House that day and royal assent the very next day.

On April 11, 2020, there was a second act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19, Bill C-14, which was CEWS, and we know there were certainly a lot of faults with that at the beginning, as well as the CERB. It received royal assent the very same day. Again, I am just pointing out the collaboration this side of the House had always provided the government in getting Canadians the benefits they need.

Here we are again today, being asked to approve Bill C-2, but we are in a different time. We are heading out of the pandemic. I recognize we have the omicron variant, and I hope no fifth wave, but Canadians want to move forward into the future.

Therefore, I have a message for the government today, and it is that you do not get a blank cheque.

It is time to move our economy from benefits to jobs, and I am very proud to say that as the new shadow minister for employment future workforce development and disability inclusion. We currently have one million job openings, with a 16.4% jump from August to September alone. That is incredible.

• (1600)

One-fifth of those are in the hospitality sector. Other major vacancies occur in these critical health care sectors, including nurses and psychiatric nurses. We have heard in the House about the crisis in the trucking industry, how the average age of truckers is near retirement age and how there are just no new workers coming forward to take these positions. In fact, over one-third of employers have indicated that they have limited their growth in general as a result of not being able to find employees.

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This affects every region and so many sectors. I said this when I made my request for an emergency debate on Friday to have a discussion about the shortage of workers in the country. It affects Quebec, the manufacturing sector in Ontario and of course the tourism sector in my home province of Alberta. For this reason again, I say again to the members opposite, “You don't get a blank cheque.”

I would like to move on to something that is very uncomfortable to talk about, and that is the fraud that we have seen with these programs. In fact, FINTRAC reported that there were organized criminals who knowingly and actively defrauded the government with both CERB and CEBA programs, that social media was used to recruit people, and in fact that stolen identifications were used in an effort to get these funds. There was the use of prepaid cards to prevent a paper trail, so they were very smart about this. They knew what they were doing, unfortunately for the government.

In addition, there were individuals who received these funds while not even living in Canada and in fact living in jurisdictions of concern, countries that posed a higher money-laundering or terrorist financing risk. From the start of 2020 until October 31, 30,095 suspicious transaction reports were registered for COVID-related benefits. That is over 30,000. Sadly, 30,000 of those also dealt with human trafficking and drugs, two issues on which the government has failed, but prosecutions are unlikely. Why? In July 2020, the Canadian Revenue Agency advised the House of Commons finance committee that the program had been targeted by organized crime and that Canada does not prioritize the investigation and prosecution of financial criminals. In fact, in the past decade alone, Canada has secured fewer than, wait for it, fewer than 50 laundering convictions. The government is not taking organized crime seriously. Again, for that reason, “You don't get a blank cheque.”

Finally, we in this country need to get a grip on inflation. Canada is among the top 10 countries with the highest inflation rates in the G20. Canada has the second-highest inflation rate in the G7, second only to the United States, which I know the government thought it would get along better with, since the Liberals still talk about the previous president all the time. Rates are predicted to reach 4.9% this month, a three-decade high, and are expected to stay there well into 2022.

Some provinces, including Prince Edward Island, are experiencing rates as high as 6.3%, and unfortunately it is low-income Canadians who spend one-third on shelter and 15% on food and higher energy prices. We cannot control the pandemic, but we can control spending. There was \$74 billion on the CRB and there will be \$8 billion for Bill C-2 if it passes. We should investigate the fraud. We should evaluate this further. Perhaps we should bring it to the finance committee if the Liberals are willing to strike the finance committee up again, but my final message to them is this: “You don't get a blank cheque.”

• (1605)

The Deputy Speaker: I know the usage of “you” as through me. I understand I am not writing a blank cheque and I cannot respond on behalf of the government either.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you better not be giving out any blank cheques, because the member certainly has been directing those questions through you.

I watched the member's speech both earlier in the House as well as from the government lobby. I know the member across the way is very passionate, but I do not think she does a whole lot to advance her cause in a credible way.

I want to say a couple of things on the blank cheque piece. We are in a minority Parliament. We were in a minority in the 43rd Parliament. The government had no blank cheques. We worked with parliamentarians of all stripes to be able to pass legislation here. We had to work with members from all sides. I presume the member opposite actually voted against some of the support measures.

Let us talk about Bill C-2, because that is why we are here today. Does the member support Bill C-2 and the measures that are going to support the Canadian businesses that are still impacted, yes or no?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I think it is very apparent that the government wanted a blank cheque from the very beginning. Fortunately, it was the member for Carleton who was able to recognize it at the time and make those amendments so that Canadians were not on the line for that.

As well, I will say this. We outlined four incidents at the very beginning of the pandemic where we collaborated and acted with compassion, because we care about Canadians and our citizens. We have compassion, but we also have that oversight. I think Canadians really value and appreciate that we definitely will not provide blank cheques, but will always do what is necessary for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are studying a bill on providing support to certain sectors of the economy. I think that is entirely appropriate.

At the height of the pandemic, we saw the limitations of our health care system. The government keeps saying that we have to take care of our health care system, but falls short on taking meaningful action to do so. I would like the government to stop invoking health like an incantation.

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What needs to happen is an increase in health transfers. The federal government promised a long time ago to cover 50% of health care costs in Canada; it now covers only 23%. However, when we ask the Prime Minister to keep his promise, he tells us we are asking for a blank cheque, the term our Conservative colleague used several times. It seems like the government is the one asking us for blank cheques and refusing to do what it promised, namely increase and maintain a 50% contribution to health care.

The provinces are calling for an increased contribution for health care from the federal government, which is absolutely necessary during a pandemic, since we have seen the limitations of our health care system. What does our colleague think of the Prime Minister's claim that this is akin to asking for a blank cheque?

• (1610)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I think we can see that, much like the Liberals, the Bloc Québécois wants to live in the past. We, the Conservatives, are living in the now. We can see that with the question we heard from our Quebec caucus of the Conservative Party this week. It had to do with a very important issue for Quebec and for the members of the Conservative caucus, namely, the labour shortage. We, the Conservatives, are thinking about the future, and the Bloc Québécois is thinking about the past. I think it is important for the Bloc Québécois to think about the future like the Quebec caucus of the Conservative Party.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see you in that chair.

It is really an honour to rise in the House for the first time in the 44th Parliament.

Before I speak to Bill C-2 and this government's out-of-control spending, let me take this opportunity to thank the residents of St. Albert—Edmonton for placing their trust and confidence in me for the third time. It is a great honour, indeed it is the highest honour of my life and a great privilege to serve in this place. With that honour and that privilege come many important responsibilities that I take with the utmost seriousness.

While it is not possible to thank all those who helped me through the campaign, because there were so many, I want to acknowledge and thank my campaign manager, Jeff Wedman, for his leadership. Most importantly, I want to thank my parents, Tom and Rita Cooper, who worked harder than just about anyone on my campaign. Without their steadfast support, I could not have done it, and so I thank them.

On to the substance of Bill C-2, it is legislation that proposes to spend billions and billions of dollars. This is billions and billions on top of this Liberal government's \$635-billion spending spree in 2020, and billions and billions on top of the \$101 billion of additional spending provided for in last spring's budget. With this blizzard of spending, it is difficult to keep track of it all. It begs the question: Where is all this money coming from? Simply put, this government is spending money it does not have. What it is doing in an unprecedented fashion is printing money.

To put this in some context, when this government delivered an historic \$354-billion deficit, the largest deficit in Canadian history,

the Bank of Canada bought 80% of the government's debt. Over the past year, we have seen a massive increase in the supply of money, a 23% increase. This is unprecedented in modern times. Indeed, we would have to go back to the early 1970s, 50 years ago, to match the increase in the supply of money.

Now, in the face of historic deficits and the doubling of the national debt in less than two years as a result of this barrage of Liberal spending, the approach of this government is to say, "There's no issue. We can turn on the taps and keep the tap going without consequence."

During the spring of 2020, I served on the finance committee when this government started to turn on the tap in a big way. I vividly recall my good friend, the member for Carleton, warning the government that all this spending would soon lead to inflation. I vividly recall ministers on the other side of the House dismissing out of hand the warnings of the member for Carleton, notwithstanding that his concerns, his warnings, were grounded upon empirical economic science, and notwithstanding that those concerns were grounded upon economic history. "Oh no," they said, "Forget inflation. Let us talk about deflation."

• (1615)

They said the rules did not apply to them, that it was 2020 and those were old rules. They said interest rates were low and that now was the time to spend and double and triple down.

Fast-forward a year and a half and, surprise, surprise, the member for Carleton was right and the government was wrong, because we have seen record levels of inflation. It was 4.7% in October. What does 4.7% mean? It is well more than double the Bank of Canada target of 2%, but even more worrying is that it is some 40% above the upper range of the Bank of Canada's control range of 3%. It is not as if this is an aberration. It is not as if this is a one-off. We have seen, for the past seven months, inflation above 3%, again above the upper end of the Bank of Canada's control range of 3% and well above the Bank of Canada's target of 2%.

Recently, we heard the Prime Minister say that he does not think about monetary policy. It is quite shocking on some level for him to say that. Why is it that the Prime Minister would not be thinking about monetary policy? Is he kidding? However, to give the Prime Minister some credit, it might be the first time in his life that he actually told the truth, because if there is one thing that Canadians have learned about the Prime Minister over the past six years it is that he does not think much about anything other than himself.

Consistent with the fact that the Prime Minister does not think much about anything, literally in the next breath, after he said he does not think about monetary policy, he said that he thinks about families. Here is a news flash for the Prime Minister: If there is any group of Canadians who are thinking about inflation, it is hard-working everyday families, because it is they who are paying the brunt of the Prime Minister's inflation tax. Thanks to the Prime Minister, for everyday working Canadians, prices are rising while wages are declining. Indeed, right now inflation is growing at two and a half times the rate of wages.

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The cost of living is getting more expensive. The cost of essentials is going through the roof. We are talking about a 30% increase for gasoline and double-digit increases for essential food products. We have the third-highest level of food inflation in the G7. For home heating, there is a double-digit increase. I know that does not mean much to the Prime Minister, but for everyday Canadians working hard to put food on the table and to pay their rent or mortgage it is a big deal, especially at a time when 40% of Canadians are \$200 away from insolvency.

If the Prime Minister really does think about families and he really does care about families, it is long past due that he starts to think about monetary policy and starts to think about inflation and his disastrous policies. He should not only think about this, but come back to the House with a plan to get spending under control, to tamp down inflation and to restore sound monetary policy.

● (1620)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to what the member said, and he said that thanks to the Prime Minister, inflation is where it is. Suddenly, the Conservatives have now come to the conclusion that the Prime Minister of Canada is capable of altering the inflation rate throughout the world. The member says that inflation in Canada is among the highest when it is actually well below the average of the developed countries, the OECD countries, in the world.

Can the member please explain how the Prime Minister was able to affect global inflation in the way he did?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect to my friend, the member for Kingston and the Islands, under the Prime Minister's watch, our inflation is the second highest in the G7. I would submit that is hardly a record to be proud of. I would further note that the member's finance minister has now belatedly admitted that we have an inflation crisis.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend you not only for recognizing the riding of Laurentides—Labelle but also for your appointment.

Some excellent points have been raised with regard to Bill C-2, which seeks to provide assistance to businesses and individuals. However, as has already been mentioned, we are very disappointed that there is nothing in the bill to help self-employed workers.

Does my colleague think that we could improve this bill to ensure that artists can get the help they need? Most of them are low-income.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are going to study the bill carefully and identify where there are gaps.

The member is quite right when she speaks of the cultural sector, which has been uniquely hurt as a result of COVID. I think it speaks to a broader problem. We have seen a government that has spent a firehose of money, in many cases giving it to people and sectors that did not need it, all the while leaving behind some of the hardest-hit sectors. It speaks to why the government has really

missed the mark. For the longest time, we did not need an economy-wide stimulus program; what we needed was a targeted sector-by-sector approach.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and welcome him back to the House. We are both alumni from the class of 2015.

I want to acknowledge inflation. In the last election, affordability issues were top of mind for so many voters in Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, but we have a situation where when the CRB ended, there were still nearly 900,000 workers accessing that program. In my riding, despite the fact that this program ended over a month ago, we still have many “help wanted” signs, so there is a disconnect here. I am very concerned when we start talking about cutting back these kinds of programs, because they are usually built on the backs of Canadians who can least afford to live. That is why I came to Ottawa. I pledged to make sure that millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share so that the working Canadians in this country are not bearing the brunt of costs.

I am wondering if my colleague can expand on this. What will we do for those very vulnerable workers who are still unable to find appropriate work and are being left in a very precarious position by the ending of these support programs?

● (1625)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I think my friend, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, raises a valid point. We need to do our part to ensure that those who are vulnerable, unable to work or marginalized have the supports and are not hung out to dry. More broadly speaking, what we have to return to is a pay-cheque economy by reopening the economy and getting it moving again. Unfortunately, under the government's watch we are badly lagging behind other G7 countries.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate you and the people of West Nova for your re-election. We appreciate the important role that the Speaker plays in our parliamentary system.

As this is my first speech in the House in the 44th Parliament, I would like to thank the people of Whitby, who have put their trust in me to be a strong, rational voice for them in the House, and I do stress rational. Their trust and support is not something I ever take for granted, and I will seek to do my very best every day to move our country forward in a way that brings value to them and their lives. Whether it be advocating for specific projects like a geothermal district energy solution to help us get to net zero, a community building with 500 units of net-zero housing, a Whitby sports complex or a skilled trades innovation centre, I am working to make a tangible difference in our community. I am committed to being a conduit for them to give input in the legislative process, as we have done throughout the pandemic so far.

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I will also try to provide strategic leadership on how we create a stronger local innovation ecosystem and build affordable housing and enhance our two downtowns. Whitby is very fortunate to have Brooklin and Whitby as downtowns in our community, so we have two downtowns to build.

I will always seek to be a strong, reliable and responsive MP who is a source creative solutions, and I seek to enhance the work that our government is doing. I thank Whitby again for its support and thank residents for being actively engaged with my office and team on a regular basis. Their input makes me a better MP.

Also, I would like to take a moment to thank the two most important women in my life, who make it possible for me to be here and whose effort and support mean the world to me. They are my wife Suze and my daughter Alexis. I love them both beyond words and appreciate all the sacrifices they have made and continue to make so that I may do the very important work the people of Whitby have elected me to do. Knowing they are both on my team makes all the difference.

I also should take this opportunity to quickly and emphatically thank all the many dedicated volunteers in Whitby who supported me in my campaign. Their dedication to civic engagement is a source of inspiration for me every day, so I thank them very much for all their support.

On the topic at hand, we know that throughout the pandemic the waves of COVID-19 have caused immeasurable hardship and countless challenges for the average small business owners. Whether they run an established business or a recent start-up, or they have a family-run business or are self-employed, their business is their livelihood. They have put countless hours and blood, sweat and tears into starting and growing their business.

As a small business owner myself for over 12 years, who gave advice and provided hands-on support to help entrepreneurs start new businesses, I have first-hand knowledge of the many challenges businesses face in the best of times. I have helped many business owners manage and scale their businesses. However, operating a business over the last 20 months has been like no period I can remember. No one had experience running a business through a global pandemic. There was no road map. However, I have been regularly checking in with local businesses in my riding throughout this time and listening deeply.

We all need to acknowledge what entrepreneurs, business owners and sole proprietors have experienced and endured over the past 20 months. It is bordering on almost unbearable, frankly. These times have been tougher than ever and filled with uncertainty, frustration, anxiety and disappointment because of the worst public health crisis in 100 years and the necessary health restrictions put in place to protect people's health and safety.

I want to acknowledge that all those business owners have been through an emotional roller coaster. I want to let all business owners out there know, especially in Whitby, that I have been listening and I feel their stress.

That said, our government has done its utmost to ensure that business owners were consulted across Canada throughout the pandemic and that we offered broad-based and inclusive supports to

the greatest number of businesses. Programs were designed in a way targeted to meet the needs of those businesses, and they were modified over and over again until they essentially filled all the gaps that were initially discovered.

● (1630)

As everyone can appreciate, our government rolled out these broad programs in record time, providing pandemic-related financial support to hundreds of thousands of businesses across Canada.

In Whitby alone, we had 4,100 businesses avail themselves of the CEBA loan, for example. The combination of worker benefits such as CERB, and later CRB, and the business supports such as the wage subsidy, rent subsidy and the \$40,000 to \$60,000 partially forgivable, zero-interest business loans provided a life raft to these businesses. They enabled these business owners to weather probably one of the most turbulent times in their lives.

These programs and others insulated the Canadian economy from the worst economic scarring that surely would have resulted from widespread business closures if our government had not stepped up and shouldered the burden so that Canadian families and businesses would not have to.

The recovery period would have been significantly extended and the trough of economic decline would have been much more painful, as the Great Depression was, had our government not acted quickly and provided the extensive programs that brought financial support to Canadians. We need to remember that \$8 out of every \$10 in pandemic supports came from the federal government. Yes, our government did the heavy lifting.

Things have now changed. We are entering a new chapter of the pandemic story line as the COVID-19 virus has gone through successive waves. At this point our case numbers are relatively low, although recent numbers are going up in our province, which I admit is very concerning. Vaccination rates are high. The general public has become accustomed to masking and social distancing, and we have gone back to many of the activities that we were once asked to give up for the sake of our collective health and safety. Let us remember our vaccination rate is one of the highest in the world, and we have just recently had the welcome news of vaccines being approved for children between the ages of five and 11 years old. This is a huge contribution to the fight against COVID-19.

We have also seen one million jobs recovered that were lost due to the pandemic. Canada has had one of the most robust recoveries so far and is primed for growth. We just have to compare Canada with our southern neighbours and we will see that Canada's job recovery has far surpassed the U.S., at 100% compared with 81%.

Our government predicted a long time ago that the rise in public expenditure for COVID-19 financial supports would be sizable in order to ensure a strong, robust and speedy recovery. It was also predictable that as the pandemic conditions changed for the better, eventually these broad-based programs would no longer be necessary and would gradually be dialed back or stopped and replaced with more targeted measures. This is exactly what we are seeing with Bill C-2.

Out of prudence and fiscal responsibility, our government realizes that there is no longer widespread support for broad-based programs and they are no longer necessary. What was once necessary in the minds of the public is no longer necessarily justified. The legislation has been proposed. Bill C-2 aims to provide more targeted supports for several categories of businesses that are still struggling, including hospitality and tourism, and other industries that have been the hardest hit, while building in flexibility to provide support in circumstances where regional surges in COVID-19 case numbers necessitate further lockdowns and make businesses vulnerable again.

Bill C-2 aims to extend the Canada recovery hiring program until May 7, 2022, for eligible businesses with current revenue losses above 10%, and to increase the subsidy rate to 50%. Bill C-2 also aims to create important essential programs: The tourism and hospitality recovery program will continue to provide wage and rent subsidies at a rate of up to 75% to businesses operating in tourism and hospitality. These include hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, restaurants, pubs, food trucks, coffee shops, hotels, motels, cottages, bed and breakfasts, youth hostels, live performances, exhibits, museums, zoos, nature parks and dinner cruises. The list goes on. I can tell members that in my community we really need these supports.

Bill C-2 is going to help the hardest-hit industries get through the rest of this pandemic. Their revenues are not expected to return until at least six months from now. I urge all members of the House to support the safe and speedy passage of Bill C-2.

● (1635)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the consequence of the Liberals' high-taxing, big-spending record-deficits agenda is the highest inflation in Canada in 18 years, and skyrocketing costs for everything for all Canadians.

Everyone here supports targeted emergency funds for vulnerable people and vulnerable businesses. However, why do the Liberals not also have a plan for the future to get the budget under control, to stop printing money and to cut taxes and red tape so that all Canadians and small businesses can thrive?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, we know that countries around the world are experiencing inflation, some more and some less.

We know that Canada is being affected by global supply chain interruptions, and the shortage of supply of some items means the demand is outpacing the supply, hence the increased prices. Supply-side shocks also mean that there are added costs to getting products to market, again putting an upward pressure on prices. We also know that former Bank of Canada governor Stephen Poloz has

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said that government spending and stimulus are not to blame for increased inflation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on getting re-elected in your riding and for being appointed to the Chair.

The government told us that these support measures needed to be passed urgently, and it is true. My colleague, in turn, has said that he is going to be a rational voice in this Parliament.

I would therefore like to ask him to explain to me in a rational manner why his government took so long to introduce or renew support measures for our fellow citizens by calling a seemingly useless and costly election.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, in this case, our government has returned to the House with a stronger minority government and a new mandate for many of the things our government and Canadians are seeking in terms of progress.

Contrary to the member opposite, I do not believe the election was entirely unnecessary.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech, and he mentioned that we are getting to a point where we are transitioning. We have heard a lot of conversations, particularly from opposition members today, about deficits and debt that seem to neglect the fact that we just went through a global pandemic.

From where I sit in this place, it seems that the government is making a natural transition in that things have changed in the economy and people are getting back out. Would the member be able to weigh in on whether he thinks it is a prudent next step to wind down some of these benefits we had at the height of the pandemic?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, I agree that our government has recognized that at this point in the pandemic we have transitioned to a new chapter. The Deputy Prime Minister said it best when she said it seemed like the darkest days of this pandemic are over. I cross my fingers and hope that this is true. Obviously pandemics are unpredictable.

In terms of getting our economy back on track, that is exactly what we are trying to do. From taking a very broad-based approach, we are now narrowing that approach significantly to really focus on the areas of our economy that we anticipate are going to need continued benefits in order to recover.

● (1640)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member was speaking earlier about transitioning, but Bill C-2 does not have a transition for hotels, restaurants, or the arts and culture industries. It is just more subsidies.

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Where is the government plan to get tourism going again, to get people into our restaurants, to get people into our theatres and into our concert halls? These companies and organizations cannot just live on handouts from the government every once in a while. We need to get back to business.

Where is the government's plan for that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, in fact the program that we are talking about in Bill C-2 is called the tourism and hospitality recovery program. It targets all tourism and hospitality businesses to ensure they can still access the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy. It targets them in order to help them continue to recover. We recognize that because of the structure of their industry and how they have been uniquely impacted by COVID-19, the businesses are going to need those supports for many months to come.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, The Economy; the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Forestry Industry.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the voters of Port Moody—Coquitlam, Anmore and Belcarra have bestowed their faith in me to work on their behalf in the House. I am grateful for their trust and I am here to serve them.

I stand on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. The Port Moody—Coquitlam riding is on the unceded traditional territory of the Coast Salish Tsleil-Waututh. I extend my gratitude to the volunteers and activists who knocked on doors this election in the wind, rain and heat during a pandemic, who made phone calls, built signs and delivered them and stepped up to tell family, friends and neighbours that better is possible. I also stand in gratitude to those volunteers in 2019 who laid the groundwork that led to me standing here today and to those in my family who are by my side every moment.

I am here to tell the stories from the doorsteps. There has been too much loss and too many struggles. One story stands out. A mother, who had been intubated from October to December, lost her businesses and 60% of her lung capacity. She said the hardest part of her COVID journey was those weeks she had to spend alone in a hospital bed with no human touch, no visits from her children or family and no one to put a straw to her lips when she was too weak to do it herself.

COVID has been hard on everyone. On a doorstep, I met a high school graduate who asked me if he would be able to find a good-paying job when he graduates from university. I met a deejay who lost his income and his rental home twice due to the commoditization of housing, and I met an education assistant approaching retirement who was worried her next home would be a tent: The home she lives in is being scooped up by developers, and she cannot afford one of the new luxury condos that will take its place.

I stand for affordable housing. Too much housing stock has been redeveloped into luxury condos, and the federal government has not invested enough to keep and build co-operative and non-market housing. The most vulnerable are being displaced. It is getting harder every day for people to stay in my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam. Rapid and robust investment in stable, affordable hous-

ing is critical to ensure we can all live, play and work in the communities we call home.

I stand for youth who are inheriting a future of uncertainty. Please know that they are scared of what the future will look like for them. Youth will no longer accept words and intentions. They want action on climate, and they want it now. During this year of heat domes, fires and floods in B.C., youth have taken to lying down in the streets of Vancouver to try to get across to us the urgency of their asks.

I stand for people living with disabilities. People living on provincial and federal disability payments were already struggling before the pandemic, and it has gotten worse. I have friends in Port Moody—Coquitlam who have not been able to go out into society for almost two years because of the risk to their immune systems. For vulnerable people living on such limited incomes, the costs of the necessary PPE alone have caused hardship. At the NDP's urging in the last Parliament, the government announced COVID-19 financial support for seniors, students, workers and businesses, but Canadians living with disabilities have consistently been left behind.

There is a lot of work to do. In the spirit of collaboration and cooperation, we can work together in the House to build a better Canada for all and repair the eroded safety nets that keep food on the table and people in their homes. That work includes enhancements to Bill C-2.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

When the government cut assistance for nearly 900,000 Canadians and decided to claw back the guaranteed income supplement from seniors and the Canada child benefit from parents, these people winded up with less money to pay for the essentials, like food.

[*English*]

These cuts have come at a time of increasing prices because of inflation, rising gas prices and supply chain issues locally, nationally and globally. According to Canada's Food Price Report, a family's annual food expenditures are expected to rise by \$695 this year. These increases will be the heaviest for those who can least afford them.

Throughout this pandemic, in Port Moody—Coquitlam, families have already relied on the generosity of committed volunteers from organizations like the Immigrant Link Centre Society, the People's Pantry, Tri-Cities Moms Group and the SHARE Food Bank.

Let me share some alarming statistics from Food Banks Canada's HungerCount 2021 report: food bank use increased by more than 20% across Canada since the start of the pandemic; 9% of those who are accessing food banks are seniors and the rate of increase of this group is far outpacing other age groups; and 18% of those accessing food banks are single-parent households. Single-parent households need to feed their children.

When we factor in the cuts to CRB and the clawbacks to the GIS and CCB, the only options for too many people will be to seek help from already stretched food bank charities, rather than have the financial assurance the government promised to them during the recent election. The government promised to support people for as long as they needed. That promise must be kept.

What workers need now is the extension of the Canada recovery benefit to \$500 per week, as long as they need it, to ensure that no child, worker, senior, or person goes without food. As part of an enhanced bill, in Bill C-2, 10 days of paid sick leave needs to be extended to all workers. This is essential for every worker in Canada as long as COVID is with us.

Let me share a story of a young worker in my riding who had to make the impossible choice to go to work sick or not be able to pay their rent. They had done everything right to keep themselves safe from COVID, but they were infected by someone in their own household. Entire households are impacted when one of the working adults is unable to bring home a paycheque.

If we want to stop the spread in our community, we must make it possible for all workers to stay home for 10 days, without risking loss of income.

In closing, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. The fourth wave is still hitting hard. We do not know what the impacts of new variants such as omicron will bring, but right now we know it is not the time to cut supports. Too many Canadians still need the government to help them stay healthy and to make ends meet.

• (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, listening to the member's comments, I am going to draw the conclusion that the NDP will not be supporting Bill C-2. I would find that most unfortunate because it continues to provide Canadians and businesses real, tangible support through the pandemic. We have had a number of members make reference to seniors, who we have fully supported throughout this pandemic, and we will continue to do so.

The member and her caucus seem to be of the opinion that under all circumstances, without any exceptions, there should be no clawbacks to any federal program. Is that a fair assessment, or could she provide some examples?

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Speaker, I stand here as a member who is happy to know that many people received the help they needed with the push for \$500 a week on the CERB when it first came out, but right now there are people who are still suffering. Even in my own community they are out every day, every weekend, fully on the weekend, getting food to people who cannot pay the bills right now and cannot get food on the table.

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In my words and in my comments today, I talked of enhancements to Bill C-2. I talked about these gaps that are missing and, most certainly, it has to do with the need for \$500 a week for families who are still trying to feed their family.

Also, we cannot send workers to work if they are sick. We need these 10 days of paid sick leave for all workers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her very moving speech.

Earlier we heard about how urgent these actions and programs are. There are some people who were not eligible for certain programs, which is unfortunate. Urgent action was needed, but the government decided that an election was more urgent.

We could have adopted measures this fall to support people with serious illnesses and self-employed workers who do not get any financial assistance, as my colleague pointed out.

What does my colleague think about improving Bill C-2 to help self-employed cultural workers, which is something the Bloc Québécois is calling for? Does she agree with that?

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear on this side of the House that we need to be helping people right now, and we are supporting the measures that work for people.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for North Island—Powell River, who I see is wearing blue today. We have a big tent party, and my good friend is welcome to come over. The water is great.

I listened to the member's speech, and I appreciated it. However, one thing that I did not hear much about was on the number of businesses that are looking for workers. Across the country, particularly in northern Alberta, there is a massive shortage of labour. One of the things that we warned the government about when it was bringing in its emergency programs was to be careful to ensure that it was not disrupting the labour market. We have seen the labour market disruptions now. How does the member think we can fix these labour market disruptions?

• (1655)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Speaker, I want to relay the stories out my very own community around workers who are not feeling safe to go to work.

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As a mother in my community, I talk to a lot of mothers, and many did not have the opportunity to have their children vaccinated, but they had to go to work in environments where they could potentially be at risk of COVID-19. At this point in time, we need to get as many people vaccinated as possible so that everybody can be safe at work.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations again. It is always interesting to see different people sitting in the chair, and I think your French is very good. I am probably learning and picking up a few words from you as you proceed.

This is my first opportunity to stand in the 44th Parliament. I am not sure if this is my ninth time or my 10th time here, but it has been quite a few times. I have to thank the people of Humber River—Black Creek.

I have a very interesting riding. I am next to Etobicoke North and just up from York Centre, which are all ridings that have tremendous challenges. A lot of new immigrants who come to Toronto and region end up in these particular communities, so naturally, their needs are enormous. There are new immigrants trying to settle and so on, and then along came the pandemic. We really had our hands full trying to deal with all of that.

Before I go too far, I must do what my other colleagues have done and thank my husband of many years. I am not going to say how many years that is either, but it is many years. Sam is the one who loves politics in the family, much more than me, and he is very engaged in everything that goes on here in the House and in the community. Then I have my daughters, Cathy and Deanna; my son, Saverio; and my sign chairman, my wonderful son-in-law, Graziano. Without him, it would have been really difficult to get through this year.

While we are here, spending the amount of time we spend here in the House, we have to rely on our constituency staff because that is where it all happens. We can make policies, do all kinds of things, yell at each other and all of that, but the real work happens in our constituency offices.

I have been blessed over many years to have had fabulous staff, dedicated people. My staff are Amy, Albert, Juan, Abby, Mitch, Patrick and of course, my dear friend Mary Anne, who was a campaign manager for me in my very first election in 1989 for city council, and she is still there with us. Without having those kind of people around, I do not believe I would have been here the amount of years I have been. Everyone is committed, and I want to sincerely thank all of them for their commitment, not just to me, but to the people of Humber River—Black Creek. This is about caring for people who live in Humber River—Black Creek, recognizing their needs are enormous and looking to see what we can do for them.

Some of the volunteers who came out in this past election are Lena Muto, Lucia Catania, Mr. Tran, Alicia, James, Grant, Syam and Nero. The list could go on, but I tried to pull out just a few to give an example of the diversity of the volunteers who came out in the riding.

The pandemic hit, and like everywhere else across the country, the ridings were devastated. I never thought in our lifetime that we

would end up having to deal with a pandemic, and many people did not understand half of what was going on, but the community mobilized very, very quickly. We had people delivering food. Wherever we found out that there was a family in distress, we made a point of getting to them, communing with them and supplying them with food or even toilet paper. Whatever they needed, we tried to find it to help them out.

When our government started with the various programs, it was an absolute life saver for thousands and thousands of people who live in Humber River—Black Creek who needed the support. They had no way to pay their rent, and with the rent subsidy program, they were able to get their rent paid. With the CERB, they were able to help get bills paid and put food on the table.

I am immensely grateful to our government for what it did and for those programs, and they went all the way across the country. It does not matter what party someone is in or anything else. The people needed help, and we all worked together to make sure that help was going to be given to them in various different programs.

There were many phone calls that we would have with the ministers, and questions for them where we identified a particular problem in an industry, or this group or that group, and immediately a program would be created. We know this is not always easy.

● (1700)

Government does not turn on a dime, but with respect to the pandemic it had to turn on not only a dime, but a penny, because it had to create programs to get money out there to help people, such as seniors, children, families and many other people.

The Humber River Hospital mobilized, along with the Black Creek Community Health Centre, to try to reach the people who were reluctant to get vaccines. We had a very high proportion of people who did not want to get vaccinated. Between the Humber River Hospital and the Black Creek Community Health Centre, they literally went to the lobbies of apartment buildings, educated the residents as to why it was important to get vaccinated and would then administer the vaccines. That happened a lot to try to get our numbers up into a higher rate.

Of course, we also had the school issue, with children in schools and those who were home. The TDSB and the Catholic board were able to get iPads for many of the children to be able to work from home and also paid for the Internet in order to be able to educate the children. I have to say that the work the school trustee for the Catholic Toronto District School Board, Ida Li Preti, and the public school board trustee, Chris Mammoliti, did was unbelievable to try to protect families and children as much as possible. In fact, last weekend and this week, there are 12 schools that are open and providing vaccines, which was organized between the two school boards to make sure those children are getting vaccinated. However, in all of those lineups on the weekend, there were a lot of parents and other people who were not vaccinated either. It was not just children in those lineups, so we are continuing to push to make sure we are educating people to understand the importance of vaccines.

I need to recognize the Jamaican Canadian Association, the Belka Enrichment Centre, the Jane and Finch Boys and Girls Clubs, the Afri-Can FoodBasket and Kitchen24 as examples of organizations that helped to deliver food and hot meals to many of the people who were struggling in the riding.

I will move on to Bill C-2 and the small businesses that still need help. I am very pleased to see Bill C-2. It is so important. I will tell the House about Islington Travel Agencies on Islington Avenue. I believe it has been there for 35 years. It is owned by a sole proprietor who is a woman. She used to have six people working for her. She has been trying to carry the business forward by herself. She gets some help, but she owns the building, so it creates other problems with respect to some of these different programs.

I believe Bill C-2 will really target the tourism and travel industry. When we talk about what we have to do to get through this pandemic and get over it, and unfortunately it looks like we are heading for another challenging issue, we need to give people the confidence that they can travel, go to restaurants or go out and feel safe, but wear their mask if necessary. Unfortunately, I see far too many restaurants with very few people in them. People are still very intimidated regarding any exposure they might have. Dolcini's is another business that without the help of the government would no longer be in business today. It used to provide beautiful sweets to the major hotels and banquet halls in the city. Once those businesses were no longer functioning, it no longer had a business to serve. It has managed, little by little, with the help of the government, to be able to move forward.

All of these different companies are so grateful, as am I, for what the government has done. I hope we can pass Bill C-2, get it to the finance committee and ask the questions that are necessary to make it better and stronger. From here, I hope we will move into the economic recovery that we all want to see.

• (1705)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to my colleague on her 10th or 11th time here. She gave a wonderful, very heartfelt speech. I thank her for spending so much time at the beginning of her speech talking about her constituents and those in need. I compliment all my colleagues on both the Liberal side and this side for having the class to not interrupt her or call for a point of order on relevance.

Government Orders

I want to ask my colleague this. When will we see a plan from the government to move forward on some of these issues that she spoke about with respect to getting people back into restaurants and travellers back into Canada? The hotels, restaurants and businesses in her community cannot survive for six months, 12 months or forever during a pandemic on just handouts and subsidies from the government.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's comments. Whenever he gets up, it is always interesting. We never know quite what he is going to say.

Let me speak to the importance of getting Bill C-2 through, as the next piece of the pandemic recovery, so that we can then be focusing on the financial economy, the economic plan that I know is being worked on. We will bring it forward so that we can help people. However, I think we have to give people the confidence that they can go out to restaurants, maintain their six-foot distance or book travel for this coming summer. That is what is going to help people, if we can start getting people out into the business community, to move forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I represent Trois-Rivières, a riding that essentially built its renaissance on the culture and events sector. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the government has helped events operators and performance halls, but abandoned the artists. I want to know when the government is going to do something to truly help artists, who are suffering.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, that is certainly another area of our communities that has been suffering immensely, as has been the travel industry. Prior to the election, there were various bills that were passed that were specifically there to help the cultural centres, knowing how much they were suffering. The boost to that is government help, but it is also us participating, buying tickets and going to concerts, safely. We have to get ourselves out of the situation where we are staying back.

We can look at the buses and how few people are on buses going in to work, because people are staying home, because they are still scared. We need to give people confidence to go out, participate, be careful and buy tickets for upcoming concerts.

Government Orders

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way spoke a lot about the generosity of the riding she represents. Certainly, the riding of Winnipeg Centre is rich with generosity, always lending a hand to each other when in need. However, families and seniors should not have to rely on food banks to eat. The government has callously made clawbacks to seniors' GIS payments and families' CCB as a result of its choice to not exclude the CERB and CRB payments from the definition of income.

Do the member across the way and her government not agree that this decision needs to be rescinded to ensure that families and seniors do not end up unhoused and food insecure?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I have to acknowledge the previous minister of seniors and the amount of work the minister did in order to get additional support systems to all of the seniors across the country. The extra \$1,500 and the additional increase to the GIS all happened while we were going through this pandemic, and I have to applaud the great work of the minister to make that happen. We do not want our seniors going to food banks and we do not want them suffering, so we are trying to make sure they get as much help as possible. A variety of issues are having a negative impact. I believe they are being looked at to see if we can find some way to solve them, because we all care about the seniors of this country.

• (1710)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this House today. Once again, I thank the voters of North Okanagan—Shuswap for trusting me to represent them here in Parliament.

As I open, I must also recognize the individuals and organizations in British Columbia and beyond who stepped up and continue to mobilize in support of British Columbians during wildfires and flooding this year. While all British Columbians have been affected by these disasters, some have lost everything except hope and perseverance. Across British Columbia, including the North Okanagan—Shuswap, recoveries and rebuilding are under way. We have strong spirits and we will continue to rebuild together as a province. I certainly hope the federal government will be a partner in that recovery.

It is an honour to rise to speak to Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged our nation for the past 20 months. Canadians are continuing to reel from the impacts of COVID-19. Some of the impacts have been evident for months, others are becoming apparent just now. Early impacts included business closures, job losses, social isolation, families not able to get together and more. Now we are witnessing mounting inflation and rising costs of living that are affecting all Canadians, including those most vulnerable.

When we take stock of the many layers of crisis and instability facing Canadians today, there is a thread of commonality woven into each layer: the absence of prevention. I hope that all members can agree that a primary responsibility of the Government of Canada is to take responsible and reasonable steps to ensure collective security and to prevent crises.

Twenty months ago the pandemic's first wave was mounting and the government failed to deliver enough action to protect Canada. It failed to prevent all the crises that COVID-19 has inflicted on Canadians. The government was slow to close borders and shut down flights from hot spots where the pandemic was burning through populations. The government failed to initiate vaccine deals with the right vendors early on, because it chased a doomed partnership with Beijing, down a rabbit hole.

Then there was the government's erratic communications that sowed uncertainty and division around health guidelines and risks of the pandemic. All these instances represented failures because they were missed opportunities to prevent dangers from taking hold and proliferating across our nation and throughout our society.

Then, a year and a half after the pandemic started, and which had claimed tens of thousands of lives, the Prime Minister called an election that only he and his Liberal caucus wanted. It was not because an election would fight the pandemic or help Canadians, but because they saw an opportunity to win more power. At the exact time that Canadians needed their federal government to be laser-focused on working for Canadians, the Liberal government elected to serve its own narrow political interests.

After the pointless election was over, the Liberal government delayed the return of Parliament for nine weeks. Now that Parliament has finally resumed, we are once again debating legislation that is a necessity due to the government's inability to prevent harm. Today we are assessing Bill C-2, a bill that proposes business and personal income supports announced by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister on October 21, 2021.

The bill represents a move away from broad-based support to more targeted programs, a move that Conservatives have previously called for because it is important to focus resources on the specific needs they are meant to meet. While Conservatives supported getting help out to those who needed it early in the pandemic when businesses had to close and travel was restricted, the mismanagement of funds since then has led, and is leading, to headaches and hardship for many others.

• (1715)

My office has received many calls from seniors who were provided benefits in error and are now seeing their GIS payments clawed back. These seniors are unable to afford rent and groceries, because the government failed to provide clarity on eligibility and taxation implications as programs rushed out the door. These situations could have been prevented.

I have also been contacted by businesses from every sector, from food service to professional offices, that have been unable to fill job vacancies because too many are finding it easier to stay home on relief benefits.

One of the most impacted sectors I have heard from is the food production and processing sector, the people who provide food on Canadian dinner plates.

I see orchards in my riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap with thousands of pounds of apples hanging frozen and withering on the trees because the orchardist could not find pickers to hire.

I have heard from meat processors that are running 30% to 40% short on staff and are unable to process food for Canadian dinner tables because they cannot fill shifts. This is food that is not grown or not processed that will never reach the dinner tables where Canadians need it. All this lost food and increasing cost of processing what does get processed will be adding to the already high inflation rates Canadians are paying as a result of the current government's money management policies, or I should say lack of money management policies.

It was our illustrious Prime Minister who in the middle of the election when asked about the rising cost of living stated, "you'll forgive me if I don't think about monetary policy." Because the Prime Minister and his cabinet have not been thinking about monetary policy, Canadians are now having to do much more of that thinking just to make ends meet. Groceries, home heating costs, repairs and maintenance are all costing Canadians more because of the lack of attention by the Liberal government on money management. Those same seniors who are having their GIS payments clawed back are facing higher costs of living, adding to the unbearable stress they are already experiencing.

How does all of this relate to Bill C-2? The bill before us has been introduced because the Liberal government has failed to lead the country and its citizens out of the pandemic. Individuals and businesses are still needing assistance because previous relief programs and measures have failed to target where they were needed and have left businesses unable to rebuild.

As I conclude, I want to thank all the individuals and businesses in North Okanagan—Shuswap for their perseverance through this challenging time that we have all faced. I recently had the opportunity to attend the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce business excellence awards program, where businesses were recognized for the ingenuity and creativity in their operations, such as expanded patios, new delivery systems, improved online information and ordering systems, all to provide their customers with the services they needed in the safest and most efficient ways possible.

We as legislators in the House must strive to find the same ingenuity in the legislation we introduce and debate to provide the programs and services that Canadians need the most. We as Conservatives will continue to review Bill C-2 to see if it will provide what Canadians need in the most efficient way possible.

Government Orders

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I had the honour of sitting beside you for two years. We do not applaud the same speakers, but we had a very good rapport, and I have fond memories of that.

I would also like to congratulate the member for his very interesting speech, during which he raised a point about seniors who received financial assistance during the pandemic through the CERB.

That assistance was added to their income, prompting the government to cut the amounts they were getting through the guaranteed income supplement. Some of those people were working one day a week or were self-employed and could earn up to \$5,000 before their GIS was reduced. During the pandemic, since everything was closed and no one could work, government guidelines should have allowed these seniors to receive up to \$5,000 in assistance from the CERB before their GIS was cut. This would have been a big help to people who were previously receiving \$5,000, \$6,000, \$7,000 or \$8,000 in GIS payments.

Moreover, even if these people had received too much money, we could have been more humane by spreading the recovery of the overpayment over two or three years instead of one year. This would have allowed some people to survive, as some lost their entire GIS benefit for working one or two days before receiving the CERB.

Does my colleague not agree that the government should adopt this solution?

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his concern for seniors. As I mentioned in my intervention, it depended on how seniors applied for the program. For some it was counted as taxable income and others it was not. The ones where it was considered as taxable income are now seeing their GIS payments clawed back.

We have had constituents in tears on the phone because they cannot afford their rent, or their groceries or their medications. They do not know how they are going to move forward because of the poor rollout of the programs and the poor explanation given to the individuals. Those people are asking for compassion.

I hope as Bill C-2 rolls out and we get a better look at it that there is more consideration for those negative effects that can happen if the bill is not drafted properly.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at times, the Conservatives can be very confusing on whether they support the legislation or they do not support it. Depending on the member who speaks, we often get the sense that the Conservatives do not support the monies that the government spent to provide support to Canadians through a wide spectrum of programs. Then there are other members who seem to feel that we should have been spending more money in different areas. This legislation, Bill C-2, is all about the extension and providing supports for Canadians during the pandemic and going forward.

Could the member clearly give some indication, if not for the Conservative Party, how he will be voting on the legislation?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg North for his very often speaking points in the House.

We have supported these programs as they were rolled out to ensure that the people who needed the support the most got that support, but we were not supportive of large corporations paying out executive bonuses. We were not in support of frauds, people receiving benefits who were not entitled to them. We certainly were not in favour of seniors being impacted in their GIS payments for at least a year, sometimes two years down the road, because of the way the government failed to roll out the program.

That is why we are going to take a much closer look at the bill to see if amendments are needed to ensure it serves the people as efficiently and properly as possible.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we continue, I would like to make sure everyone is wearing a mask.

[*English*]

Members should ensure they have their masks on if they are not speaking.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last time I got up to speak, I do not think you had yet been appointed as Deputy Speaker. Your predecessor, who was also a member of the Conservative Party, was an excellent Speaker and I have no doubt that you are already on your way to following in his footsteps in that regard. Congratulations on your new role and I look forward to working with you in the months and years to come.

We are talking today about this very important legislation, Bill C-2. It is a bill that would continue to provide necessary supports for businesses and individuals, in particular the hardest hit. This is part of a phase-out program. It is part of moving toward getting back to normal in terms of our economic activity, but it is still extremely necessary.

Before I go down the road of talking about why the bill is so important, I want to go back to a number of things I have heard from the opposite side of the House today. The last speaker, in particular, mentioned it, but a number of other Conservatives have as well, which is the rollout of the initial programs back to March of 2020

and those that followed. I believe I am quoting the previous speaker correctly when he said that it was a poor rollout.

Let us go back to March of 2020 for a second and consider exactly what was going on. The world was in confusion and chaos not knowing exactly what was in front of us, not knowing how long it was going to last, not knowing how people were going to be supported and yet our incredible public service was able to put programs together and get them out in lightning speed, when we think about it. I have said this many times in the House before that it only took four weeks to go from the World Health Organization declaring a global pandemic to getting money into the bank accounts of 5.4 million Canadians.

When we talk about the rollout, it is important to reflect on the fact that there was a lot of confusion. Perfection was not the goal back then. The goal was to help as many people as possible and then deal with the imperfections later on. I will be the first to admit, as I did in a previous question, that a lot of those imperfections that were identified and addressed came through deliberations and discussions with the other parties and debate in the House.

That is why, in my opinion, all members of the House supported those measures through unanimous consent motions at times. For those who do not know, a unanimous consent motion basically means everybody agrees without debate and we move on. That is how we were passing a lot of those measures back then.

For members of the House to be hypercritical of the rollout and of the measures that were put in place is absolutely confusing when they participated in these unanimous consent motions. Nonetheless, here we are.

Let us talk about Bill C-2 in particular. This is about helping businesses that are still struggling. As we know, a lot of businesses are not struggling anymore, but many are.

There are three main components or programs in the bill.

The first is the tourism and hospitality recovery program. As we know, a lot of tourism operators are still struggling, and this is one of the most affected industries by this pandemic. We know we need to continue to deliver supports. A lot of these businesses are seasonal by nature, so as we push toward getting through this pandemic, they may have lost a significant chunk of income or revenue stream in the season that just passed, being the season that a lot of people travel. That is why ensuring the subsidy of 75% of wages can continue is extremely important. There are a number of criteria. Not all tourism sectors are included. Some are hit harder, so the program is designed in a way to be reflective of the actual need.

Government Orders

• (1730)

The next one is the hardest-hit business recovery program, and this is to help those businesses that have been hit the hardest by this pandemic. I think of a good friend of mine. He is an audio engineer. When we go to conventions with several thousand people, we go into a ballroom and we often see all the lighting and sound equipment that is set up. There is a lot of work that goes into that, and an audio engineer is somebody who will go in and assess a room to determine exactly what is required to put a production on. My friend, in the beginning of March 2020, had nine months' work ahead of him. He is a contractor who contracts out his services. In a matter of 48 hours, he went to no work at all. Every single contract that he had lined up for the next eight to nine months had been cancelled, all at once.

In this particular sector, we see a lot of people coming together, with people moving around like at conventions, which are unlike a hockey game, where people are stationary for the majority of the time they are there. What makes it worse for these sectors is that they are going to come back the latest. They are the ones that are taking the longest to come back online. This particular sector, when we think about it, was hit immediately, right at the beginning, and is going to be one of the very last to come back online. That is what we are talking about when we talk about the hardest-hit business recovery program. This is about providing subsidies to make sure eligible organizations can continue to get through the rest of this pandemic.

Finally, there is the local lockdown program. This one is probably, in my opinion, the most important. What we have seen through the pandemic, at least as I have been able to observe in Ontario, is that putting in the hands of the local or regional health units the power to implement lockdowns from time to time really gives an opportunity to spread out the need for various different tools at various different times. While one region might have a lockdown and another one does not, it gives those localized areas that have really been affected the opportunity to have different supports in the event that they are going to be locked down. Therefore, this is a program that is extremely important in terms of continuing to provide a wage subsidy and various other supports.

The only other thing I wanted to touch on is with respect to the discussion that has been going on today around inflation. We heard it a lot during question period. We heard it a lot from the opposition in terms of questions in this debate. It is important to point out that despite the rhetoric in everything we are hearing, we have to look at this in a global perspective. I find it quite hilarious that the Conservatives, who have for so long criticized this Prime Minister and this government for not being able to accomplish anything, have now suddenly given them credit for being able to control global inflation, as though the Prime Minister and this government can now set global inflation.

Let us look at what is actually going on in the world. Let us look at the OECD countries. These are the developed countries that we do all our trading with. These are the countries that are quite often in the same boat as we are. We are well below the OECD average for inflation right now. Let us look at our neighbouring partner, with which we do the most trade, the United States. It is almost a full two points higher than Canada in terms of inflation. Although

we must treat inflation extremely seriously and we must be very careful with the tools and with what we are doing right now, it is germane to at least recognize that it is not a problem that has been created by this Prime Minister and this government. It is indeed a global problem that is going to have to be addressed through various different policies from various different governments throughout the world.

• (1735)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will ask a very simple question in the context that we are more than two months behind what should have been the regular sitting calendar of this place. Many, many weeks' worth of legislative work was delayed, stopped and interrupted by the Prime Minister, who called an election on which, let us just say, he misrepresented himself in previous statements until the point where we have now learned that he received polling information that he could divide Canadians on controversial issues.

Does the member support an expedited reinstatement of committees, so that we can get to work studying legislation like this for the benefit of Canadians?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I think the election was a lesson for everybody in the House, in particular for the Conservative Party. I sat in the House for five months, and I witnessed firsthand the obstructionary tactics that were being used to delay everything. It did not matter what the piece of legislation was. The Conservatives just wanted to delay everything.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It is called doing our jobs.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If this election has taught us anything, and if the Conservatives are able to be self-reflective and to think of what this election taught them, it should have taught them that the electorate has put them back in the same position to be the opposition—

Mr. Damien Kurek: To do our job.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen:—and that they should use that opportunity to try to genuinely make things better. That does not mean making personal attacks and trying to demean every single individual in the government. It means actually working collaboratively for policy to be better for all Canadians.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Battle River—Crowfoot one more time that he should allow members who have the floor to speak. If he has questions and comments, he can do that, and he should also have his mask on at all times, unless he is getting up to speak.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, “once a technician, always a technician”: that is our motto. I was an on-set technician for 19 years, so I understand the story about the audio engineer that the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands shared with us.

Government Orders

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage did a study on the challenges that the pandemic was causing for the cultural sector and came to the conclusion that money from the assistance measures was not reaching the artists and technicians.

There is currently a question that no member of this government seems capable of answering. There were problems, and emergency measures had to be put in place quickly. No one from the party in power is able to justify the decision to call an election while Canadians were suffering and needed help.

This government that told us that putting these assistance measures in place was urgent is the same one that called an election for absolutely no reason.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I do not know about the report. I am not on the committee. I have not read it, but I will say that there has been a lot of activity with respect to film and culture in my riding. Actually, in the former Kingston penitentiary, which is a federal building, at least three or four different series have been filmed, including *Mayor of Kingstown*. They are being featured right now, as we speak.

There is actually a lot going on, although I appreciate the fact that the member knows more about this than I do, seeing as he has had the time to go through that report.

The only other thing I will say is that, yes, the election was important in my opinion. I sat here and watched how the opposition tried to prevent anything from getting through, so I think the electorate has had the opportunity to give everybody direction and to tell us to go back and continue to function in the way we are and make meaningful policies for Canadians.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member stated that some businesses are not struggling anymore. Some businesses never did. Throughout this pandemic there were businesses that made outsized profits, pandemic profits. For those businesses, is the government open to additional taxation on a portion of these outsized profits to pay for COVID supports for people?

• (1740)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on being elected to this place.

I cannot speak on behalf of the government. I am not the government, so I cannot tell her what it will be bringing forward in the future, but I would agree with her that there are various different businesses that were not affected at all, some that were less affected, some that were affected and have recovered, and some that are still struggling in the extreme right now and that need to continue to get supports. That is what this bill is all about.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I rise to continue debate over Bill C-2, the government's inaugural post-election spending bill, targeted to support businesses and those impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns. This \$7.4-billion piece of legislation may seem like a drop in the bucket compared to the spending that was approved in the last Parliament, but we know our nation's finances are increasingly in precarious shape.

As we seek to navigate our way out of this pandemic, the responsibility we have as parliamentarians to do our due diligence is vital to our recovery. There are many examples from the previous Parliament on why it is so essential to do our due diligence and ensure that this and other spending bills are providing targeted support to precisely the sectors that need it the most.

The fact is that in the last Parliament, billions of dollars in taxpayer funds were needlessly directed to otherwise profitable businesses in the form of wage subsidies and other subsidies. In fact, even in 2020, with the carnage of the COVID-19 lockdowns from March onward, the TSX, the Toronto Stock Exchange, was still able to post a modest gain of over 2%.

In 2021 alone, year to date, with wage subsidies and other subsidies in place, the TSX has grown by over 20%, dwarfing the 10-year annual return of around 6%. It is abundantly clear that the fiscal stimulus, provided by the Liberal government through taxpayer resources and debt-financed by those taxpayers, and the unprecedented amount of quantitative easing by our central bank, have significantly propped up the returns of Canada's biggest businesses.

These same factors have also led to a massive rise in inflation that is unrivalled in most of the developed world. The price of housing in some parts of Canada has skyrocketed to all-time highs, with prices in Ontario jumping between 20% to 35% this year alone. It is no wonder so many people in my generation, the millennial generation, and following generations will have to wait years longer than previous generations to own our very first home, if we ever can.

Those millennials who are fortunate enough to be able to purchase their first home are often doing so through generous gifts from their parents or grandparents. Otherwise, they are often leveraging themselves to the hilt, sometimes by 20 times, just to afford a modest townhome in the suburbs. We know this is unsustainable. We know interest rates are going to increase, making the cost of servicing that massive mortgage debt for young families more and more unaffordable.

As well, we know the government, while trying to get families into their first overpriced home, will do nothing or little to avert or mitigate the carnage we will see when mortgage rates reset over the next few years.

If the increasing price of housing was not bad enough, the increases to other essentials for families due to inflation and flawed government policies will also contribute to major economic problems for Canadian families. The prices of inputs into agricultural production are growing fast. The prices of fertilizer and fuel, the cost of drying grain due to carbon taxes, clean fuel standards and now inflation threaten to make all food products less affordable for families.

The price of a pound of bacon is up over 20% since January 2020, and that is just one example from hundreds where food prices are going up. Consumers are getting big cost increases, while the government, the central bank and the big producers pass along the costs.

Sadly, many of the farmers I know and have the honour of representing, especially the cattle ranchers, are not benefiting from these cost increases. While beef at the grocery store may be up 20% since the beginning of 2020, the price of a head of beef cattle has gone up by only 2.7% since 2017. It is not the farmers who are getting rich off the government's inflation.

• (1745)

Across Canada, we also see that there are over a million job vacancies. This labour shortage affects all regions of Canada and it persists in all sectors of the economy. Supporting Canadians in need was the right thing to do, and it always will be. That is why the Conservatives supported help for Canadians who were prevented from working because of the COVID-19 lockdowns.

However, we cannot continue to support people to not work while our economy is open and there is a nationwide labour shortage. The hospitality and food service industries are experiencing an all-time high in job vacancies, with over 89,000 vacancies. In manufacturing and construction, there are over 60,000 job vacancies. In the retail sector, we are seeing 84,000 unfilled jobs. How will this bill address those vacancies?

The Business Development Bank of Canada has reported that 64% of Canadian businesses say that labour shortages are limiting their growth. These labour shortages are severely impacting the ability of Canadian businesses to recover from COVID-19. As a result, our economic recovery in Canada is stalling. I see nothing in Bill C-2 that would address or alleviate these rampant job vacancies across the country.

Getting back to the specifics of Bill C-2, it is positive that the government is taking a more targeted approach to pandemic stimulus. I have been calling for that in the House for the past year. It is critical that the industries that are the most impacted, like tourism, hospitality and travel, get the resources they need so we can ensure job creation, retention and a strong economic rebound.

That being said, I am deeply concerned that the government is seeking to fast-track this legislation before the House of Commons has even convened its finance committee to undertake a review of it. I like that one of the Liberals who spoke earlier did admit that the programs were not perfect, but given how flawed some of the pandemic spending is, we have seen that negative consequences have been created. Should the government not be welcoming strong oversight from opposition parties to ensure the strongest possible legislation?

Here are a few examples of how previous pandemic spending was flawed.

I had constituents reach out to me who needed to access the CERB. They were seniors who are not used to using a computer. Instead of accessing their benefits through the Canada Revenue Agency portal, they felt prey to a third party group that promised to

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process their benefits for them. In fact, the Competition Bureau of Canada is investigating one such firm for suspected deceptive false and misleading practices that saw Canadians lose out on 8% to 10% of their entitled benefits.

These constituents, when accessing the website of this third party, believed that they were being assisted in accessing benefits directly from the government. The reality was that they were accessing these benefits through a deceptively designed website that charged significant fees for their services. Those who did not want to pay those fees were subject to an aggressive collections campaign that threatened to ruin their credit scores.

Why did the government design this legislation to allow unscrupulous businesses to benefit on the backs of unaware Canadians? Why is it that when I raised my concerns with the minister, I was told that it was not illegal?

We have heard multiple times already that prisoners, suspected fraudsters and members of organized crime have accessed pandemic benefits, and there is no plan from the government to recoup those monies. Canadians are furious that this happened, and they want a full accounting of those funds and a plan to ensure that this abuse does not happen again. So far I do not see that with this legislation.

It is therefore critical that we bring the finance committee back into session so that we can thoroughly examine the bill. Enough is enough. The trust that opposition parties gave to the government in the last Parliament to fast-track legislation for pandemic benefits has been abused. This is unacceptable and it demonstrates the need for a thorough study by the finance committee before moving forward and passing this bill. Once we are assured that this due diligence has been done, we can move expeditiously to ensure that Canadians who need their benefits can get them. I know many in the hospitality industry and in the independent travel agents sector who desperately do need support to keep their businesses alive until we can get through the pandemic.

In closing, we have seen how well-intentioned spending designed to help Canadians who are in need can be misused or used by those who do not really need it. It is critically important that we get the finance committee in order so that we could thoroughly study this bill to ensure that spending goes where it is needed and it does not contribute to the further rising inflation that we see in this country.

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• (1750)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the past it was somewhat clear that Conservatives recognized there was a need for the government to step up to the plate. It might not have been unanimous within their caucus, but at least a good number of them felt it was important to bring forward the programs we brought forward. When we create programs, I think it is fair to say that there will be some flaws in them, and we do what we can to fix them, but the principle behind the need for the programs was there.

Does the member feel the principle of this legislation, which is to continue to support businesses and people across Canada, is still needed? Does he support that? Would he at least indicate his personal support for seeing this and vote in favour of it?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, there is a lot of uncertainty in the world today. We have had a new variant of the COVID-19 virus, the omicron variant, come up, which is now public knowledge. We do not know what the next few months will bring.

In principle, I would say that there may be a need for further pandemic benefits to support businesses if we do see a strong resurgence of this virus. However, what I am not willing to do is give this government, as my colleague previous said, a blank cheque when, by its own admission, although the principle may have been good, their programs were not perfect. It is our job as members of the opposition to call out the government when it is not doing its job 100% right and to ensure that there are alternative solutions so we can get this legislation right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, earlier my hon. colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean mentioned the study done by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage last year. The study looked at the impact of the pandemic on the cultural sector and noted something, nearly a year ago, about organizations representing the cultural community. It found that support from government programs at that time was not reaching artists.

We were hoping that Bill C-2 would provide some concrete evidence that the message being sent by the cultural sector had been heard, specifically in the form of direct assistance to artists and technicians.

My question is for my Conservative colleagues. What would they have done to provide immediate, concrete support to the cultural sector?

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, we all respect and treasure the artists in our country. I know that members of the Bloc Québécois particularly cherish their Québécois cultural sector, and I think all Canadians cherish the very unique, strong and beautiful cultural sector of Quebec. That is why it is important that these artists were able to access benefits at a time when we were not having concerts or opportunities for new artists to emerge or perform at local venues. There were benefits to support those artists, and I think that was appropriate.

However, as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I certainly hope we are coming out on the other side of this, it is impor-

tant that the economy is open so we can get these artists back into the public forum. They need to increase their digital and physical presence to get the exposure they desperately need to survive and thrive. We absolutely want to see those sorts of economic and cultural reopenings to support our artists.

• (1755)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned housing, and I think I speak for every member in the House when I say that it is the dream of every Canadian, and their right really, to have access to affordable, appropriate, secure housing. If there is any issue that speaks to a failure of public policy at all three levels of government, it is the fact that in this country we have a housing crisis. This did not happen this morning. This has taken years and, in some cases, a few decades to develop.

I am wondering what my hon. colleague thinks of the impact of foreign capital has as a destabilizing factor on residential real estate and whether or not his party has any recommendations as to how they might curb that destabilizing impact on residential real estate markets.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question, and I am well aware that he comes from one of those real estate markets in our country that has been the most impacted by foreign investment.

In a lot of places in the country foreign investment has been a blessing, but we have seen the terrible, negative consequences when we have so much foreign investment, speculative foreign investment, lead to rapid price increases that price out folks who live and work and want to raise their families in this country. They cannot even afford a decent place to live. In the last election, the Conservatives put forward a very strong plan to ensure that we could support families while also cracking down on speculative practices that are making homes unaffordable for Canadian families.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be here today to speak to Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19. Our government is moving into the next phase of the recovery, with more targeted support for Canadians, as our economy continues to reopen. The benefits outlined in this bill are and will continue to be essential for Canadians who will be impacted by the pandemic in the months to come.

I do not think any of us in this room could have imagined the immense cost that the COVID-19 virus was going to take on the world when we left the Hill for the weekend and headed home to our constituencies on March 13, 2020. However, here we are about 20 months later continuing to find new ways to respond to the individual and collective toll that the virus has taken on us all.

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In the midst of all this hardship and heartbreak, we have also seen incredible resilience and innovation. We have seen health care workers, first responders, service providers and government employees work through continually evolving situations for months to take care of patients, provide essential services and ensure that our country was able to continue to function. We saw the creation, clinical trials, approval and distribution of multiple vaccines for COVID-19.

I heard from many Surrey Centre constituents who expressed how important the previous round of pandemic benefits were for them. I would like to extend my extreme gratitude to all those constituents and stakeholders who have provided very important feedback to us throughout the last year and a half, as well as to the government officials, who have listened to that feedback to make our pandemic supports stronger to support more individuals and businesses.

As we continue to see the evolution of the pandemic, we will continue to adapt our approach to address it. That is what our government is doing with Bill C-2. Our strategy to support Canadians is evolving with the situation, and we are now shifting our focus from blanket support measures to a more targeted approach. By taking a more targeted approach, we will reduce our spending on COVID support while continuing to support those who have been hit hardest by the health and economic impacts of the virus.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the proposed support and extension of support in this bill for individuals and businesses. They will be essential to Canadians as we move forward through pandemic recovery.

The bill proposes extending some existing COVID support benefits, including the Canada recovery hiring program; the Canada recovery sickness benefit, which has given income support to employed and self-employed individuals who are unable to work because they are sick or need to self-isolate because of COVID-19; and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit, which has given income support to individuals who are unable to work because they must care for a child or family member who needs supervised care. This applies if their school or care facility is closed or unavailable to them because of COVID-19, or if they are sick, self-isolating or at risk of serious health complications because of COVID-19. These three benefits will be extended until May of next year when this legislation is passed. This bill also proposes the creation of new benefits, including the Canada worker lockdown benefit, a measure that will support workers who are unable to work because of a government-imposed public health lockdown; the tourism and hospitality recovery program; and the hardest-hit business recovery program.

We all know that the tourism and hospitality industry, in particular, has been extremely hard hit by the pandemic. With most of the world shutting their doors to non-residents in the early months of the pandemic, the tourism industry faced a sharp decline. Canadian cities and towns across the country rely heavily on the tourism industry to support their local economies. According to Statistics Canada, in March 2020, Canada saw a nearly 55% decrease in international arrivals. With travel and movement restrictions across the country, hotels were at less than 20% occupancy levels. Restau-

rants and bars were also hard hit during this time, when real GDP dropped by 39.5%.

I met with many constituents and local stakeholders to hear about their concerns, especially restaurant, hotel and banquet hall owners and operators in Surrey. The hotels, restaurants and banquet halls in my riding were particularly hard hit by the lockdown, with local lockdown restrictions forcing many establishments to close their doors completely for a few months, which meant cancelling weddings and other events, and requiring them to switch their service operations to provide takeout and delivery options. Similarly, restaurants had to shut down dining rooms and have takeout only, therefore having to let go of the servers and staff who normally worked there.

• (1800)

Surrey's hotels, like the Civic Hotel, rely on business travel, most of which had come to a virtual halt. That made it very difficult for them to survive. Surrey has a large banquet and wedding industry that was also hard hit due to severe restrictions on the size of weddings. Therefore, many venues and vendors were completely shut down, leaving hundreds out of jobs.

Things have begun to look up for these industries. In the second quarter of 2021, there was an increase of employment generated by the tourism industry with 453,200 jobs added. This time also saw an increase in tourism spending in Canada by over \$10.6 billion. We may not have the international travellers coming and going as we are accustomed to, but Canadians have been stepping up and increasing local travel within the country.

With winter coming, though, we know that many businesses and workers will need support as tourism winds down for the season. I am confident that the travel and tourism industry will come back after these hard times. They have shown their resilience and the support offered through these proposed benefits will help this industry through the end of the pandemic.

Our government is committed to working with our international partners to ensure that countries around the world have fair and equitable access to vaccines. As we continue to see the rates of vaccination increase, we will be able to continue to reopen our beautiful country to the world once again, with the knowledge that our families, friends and neighbours will be protected.

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We know that winter will most likely bring more challenging times related to the pandemic in different regions across the country. I am very pleased to see that this bill addresses the possibility of local lockdowns, with the Canada workers lockdown benefit. Anticipating these events now will ensure that Canadians have the support they need to get through these challenging times, whether it be to support an ill relative, care for their children or ensure that they can continue to put food on the table should they become ill and need to take a few days off work.

Our health care providers have done a phenomenal job of getting Canadians vaccinated well ahead of our original schedule. We now have 76.3% of the population who have received the full dose of vaccines and the numbers continue to grow.

As vaccine manufacturers continue their clinical trials for younger children and with the approval of the Pfizer vaccine for children ages five to 11 by Health Canada, we are well on our way to ensuring that all Canadians who are able to receive the vaccine have access. As we continue to move through the changing circumstances of this pandemic, our government will continue to be there for Canadians and Canadian businesses.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, we welcome the fact that the tourism and hospitality sectors were included in Bill C-2. However, the bill does not currently cover upstream industries in the supply chains of those sectors, such as aircraft or bus manufacturers, or those that manufacture goods for the tourism and hospitality sectors.

My question is this: Do you think that the list currently included in Bill C-2 is exhaustive?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the hon. member to direct her questions and comments to the Chair, not directly to another member.

The hon. member for Surrey Centre.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, that was a great question from my colleague across the aisle.

Bill C-2 covers all of the industries that are hard hit. It is based on the economic hit that the industry has had and whether it has reached the threshold. Those that are hard hit will receive the wage subsidy, as required, and we know that the tourism and hospitality sector have been the hardest hit currently and the slowest to recover, due to the travel restrictions. I think that those industries and those pilots will benefit from it. The larger industry, as a whole, has been provided assistance and those in smaller industries will also get the assistance they need.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things that we have seen headlines about is that there are over a million job opportunities open for Canadians and employers are unable to fill those positions.

Does the hon. member not recognize that their own programs they put in place have impacted the labour market? What does he think this bill does to fix those things?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, our government has created over one million new jobs well ahead of schedule. In fact, the economy is turning on so many cylinders that we have a vacancy of almost 750,000 to one million jobs. That is a good and healthy sign, but we must resolve that a lot of that is because many of the immigrants that we would bring to the country have been unable to come due to travel restrictions. We are a resilient country. We will work very hard to ensure that they come.

If the member opposite is alluding to the fact that people do not want to work, that is a false perception of Canadians. Canadians want to work, Canadians are working and they are working their butts off.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are talking about government supports, but would my colleague not agree that these government supports are a back up, but not as strong a back up as we would get if we could get people vaccinated. The fourth wave is a pandemic of the unvaccinated. To see more people in the restaurants, to see more people comfortable being in the opposition lobby would likely be a lot stronger if we got the vaccination rate up to the levels where people were convinced and were satisfied that they would be safe no matter where they were.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my member of Parliament who is representing me in my riding and my neighbouring riding, which I represent.

The faster we vaccinate and the quicker we encourage others to get vaccinated, the country will be a much safer place, and leadership starts right here in the chamber. Those who are still trying to decide whether they should be vaccinated should show leadership so the residents of their ridings also participate in that. Some on the benches opposite are having a challenging time convincing their own colleagues to get vaccinated.

Those who are vaccinated should encourage those who are not vaccinated to get vaccinated so our country can get back on its feet and we can become more resilient, control the spread and help those health care workers who are really struggling. They are working overtime and non-stop in the ICU, which they would not be doing if people were participating in the vaccination program.

• (1810)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, I like to call where I come from the promised land. We have the honey capital of Canada and 7,500 dairy animals, so it is literally flowing with milk and honey.

I want to start by thanking my team back home. Starting on the home front, I thank my wife for putting up with me and delivering a baby smack dab in the middle of the election. I told my campaign manager that the due date was the third, so I would just book that day off and we should be good to go. Right on schedule little Claire showed up, so I took the day off. I was there for a little while, but she did come on the due date, which was like winning the lottery, so we were pretty excited about that. Claire is doing well and her mother is doing well, for sure.

I want to thank my children. They came out door-knocking with me. Nothing is better than a bunch of little kids coming along to do the door-knocking. They run a lot faster than I do, and they get pretty good at finding the doorbells and making friends with all the puppy dogs everywhere we go. I think there is an average of one dog per house where I come from, so I met a lot of nice puppies along the way, no doubt.

I also want to thank our volunteer sign guys who put on over 7,000 kilometres putting up signs in northern Alberta. It is a few days' ordeal to put up signs where I come from, so I want to thank John and Richard and Stan. They really did a good job.

I want to thank our door-knocking team and Liam in particular. One of the things that I was going to get to later on in my speech is that with all the job opportunities out there I have been harassing Liam that he has to go and get a job. He just told me that he has finally landed a job. While he was a great asset to my team, door-knocking every day for us, it turns out now that he has a job. I hope that he can now put all that door-knocking experience to use in his job, although I am not exactly sure where it is.

I want to thank my extended family and my sister in particular, who goes above and beyond in keeping everything organized, and her husband as well. They do a great job.

I want to thank my campaign manager, Josh. He is all the way from Calgary, though we do not hold that against him. We cheer for different hockey teams, but we are good friends, nonetheless, and he delivered the win again in northern Alberta. Congratulations to Josh, and thanks.

I also want to take this moment to congratulate the elected senators in Alberta. Bang, bang: Right after each other, we ended up having two elections simultaneously. The municipal elections were happening during the federal election, so we had those together. It was great to see that the Conservatives on the ballot took the number one, two and three spots here in Alberta. I look forward to the senators' rapid appointment so we can get some representation for Alberta in the Senate as we go forward. I note that Senator Scott Tannas is still there, but I am looking forward to the rapid appointment of two new senators representing Alberta.

Bill C-2 is the bill in front of us. I want to talk a bit about what should be in this bill and what is missing from it.

During the last few months, I went for dinner at Brothers Diner in Whitecourt. It is a great little place and has a 1950s retro feel. When I am sitting in there, I feel like I have stepped back in time, but I wish that all the 1950s cars with the big wings were parked outside there, with the high-rise tails and the round cars. A lot of them were aviation-inspired, so while they were not the fastest or

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the best-handling cars in the world, they were some of the coolest-looking. If I say "Cadillac Eldorado", people are probably thinking "1950s car".

It was my first time ever being in that little diner, and I was chatting with the waitress. I said, "I was here last night and the place was shut down. I was here at about 7:30." She said, "Oh sorry, we close at 4." I said, "This is a diner, and diners do not typically close at 4." She said, "We only have three waitresses, and when none of us are available the restaurant is closed." It was a Tuesday afternoon, and she said they close at 4 on Tuesdays.

● (1815)

That was the situation in northern Alberta. There are just not enough workers to keep the restaurants open, never mind having people come to the restaurants. Folks who started new restaurants during the pandemic were concerned about how this was going to go and they said they have the customers but do not have the employees. We see temporary foreign workers being brought in during the time of a pandemic to staff the restaurants in the area.

One of the other things that the bill does not correct as well is the following. I am thinking about folks who started a Dairy Queen in my riding in January 2020. The owners are unable to collect some of these benefits because their business was started in January 2020. The decision to start a new Dairy Queen did not come overnight, so the decision was made months, maybe years, in advance. A large amount of money was laid out, yet they had no revenues until January 2020, so they did not have a revenue drop from 2019 to 2020. They had no revenue in 2019; they were busy building the building. The grand opening was January 2020. That was one of the things I was hoping we would see fixed in the bill. We did not see that.

The other thing is around getting the pipelines built, supporting oil and gas in northern Alberta, supporting the industry that is the largest percentage of GDP in this country. I was looking forward to having support for that in the bill, to talk about how we can get people back to work and make sure people feel safe, but also make sure the pipelines are defended and promoted in this country.

President Joe Biden in the United States wrote a letter to OPEC asking them if they could increase production by 500,000 barrels a day so that they could reduce the cost of fuel in the United States. The Keystone XL pipeline would deliver about that many barrels a day of oil if it were operating. The president could knock on our door and could approve Keystone XL and could be getting ethically sourced oil from northern Alberta supplied to the United States. He did not do this. Then he said he would lower the price of fuel by using up some of the reserves in the United States. The reserves are 1% of 1% of their annual consumption of fuel, so that is going to make a short blip and really is not going to solve the problem.

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Between Line 5 and Keystone XL, we see that the bill says nothing about what the plans are for ensuring that the oil patch can continue to operate and get its product to market. We do not see anything like that. The oil patch is also looking for workers. I talked to my friend, Murray, in Slave Lake. He runs an oil field service company and he said he thinks he is going to have to bring in temporary foreign workers to work in the oil patch, starting at \$55 an hour. That is the challenge he is facing. He has to bring in presumably Mexican oil field workers because he cannot get workers from northern Alberta.

This is a tragedy. We have people from across the country who have traditionally worked in northern Alberta, but are unaware that the oil patch is up and running again and who are making a calculation between government subsidies and paycheques and deciding that the government subsidy is a better deal.

We warned the Liberals not to mess with the labour market with their subsidies, however, they did not listen to us. They say no, no, hurry up and pass this legislation. We said we will not stand in the way of it, but it would be good to scrutinize this and send to committee to ensure the best ideas come through and that there is no impact to the labour market as we go forward with this \$7-billion bill.

• (1820)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to ask a number of Conservative colleagues across the way what their personal intentions might be with respect to Bill C-2. I would be very much interested in the member's insights as to whether he would see fit to personally support the principles of the bill, recognizing the pandemic is not over, that we still need to be there for Canadians in a very real and tangible way. That is what this bill would do, whether it is supports for business or for people. Could we expect to see the member personally voting in favour of the bill in principle going to committee stage, given the comments he has just made?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, we continue to look to the Liberals to give us some assurances that they will be pursuing the fraud that has occurred. We have seen where prisoners have received some of these benefits. Organized crime has been involved. However, we still have no assurances from the Liberals that they will be pursuing any of that.

We are also looking for the committees to get fired up so the bill can have the due scrutiny it needs. There we can bring forward amendments to make these programs better, so in future no fraud will occur or it will not have the impacts on the labour market that some of the other benefits that were put forward by the Liberals had. Some might say that these were bugs in the system. Some would also argue that these might have been features of the system. We want to ensure we build programs that help the Canadians who need it and ensure we can get Canadians back to work, so paycheques, not subsidies, pay Canadians.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, while the member was giving his speech, I could relate as our ridings touch one another. There definitely are some concerns that are very similar, specifically when it comes to the questions around workforce and labour challenges. Perhaps he could go into a little more detail regarding some of what he is hear-

ing in his riding. I have been hearing a lot of concerns from business owners in my riding. They say they simply cannot find workers for many of these jobs, and some of them are well-paying jobs. Could he further expand on those?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake on her election and her new baby Owen. The Conservative caucus has been productive. I also want to congratulate the member for Carleton. I believe he and his wife had a baby during the election as well. It was an exciting time for all of us.

I want to highlight the lack of truck drivers for the big semi-trucks in northern Alberta. We increasingly have a shortage of truck drivers. One area in particular is trying to get them across the border. Many of these trucks are bringing in goods from around the world. Ports like the Port of Vancouver have shut down and we need to bring those containers in from the United States. Although, we are able to build the trucks and buy them, we are often unable to get drivers. It is a key area of concern.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot from the Liberals asking us to hurry up and get the bill through. I would ask my colleague what he thinks about the pressure to push it through immediately after they waited two full months to bring Parliament back.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, that is precisely it. We are to hurry up and get this done, yet we had a \$600 million election that we did not need. We could have been here debating the issues that face Canadians. Parliament could have returned immediately after the election, given the fact there was not a lot of change in the number of seats around here. Therefore, it seems very rich to me that the Liberals would ask us to hurry up after they caused dramatic delays in this place.

• (1825)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, as this is the first opportunity I have had to speak at any considerable length in this House, I would ask the indulgence of my colleagues for a couple of minutes. I have some words of appreciation that I really must put on the record.

First, I have to thank the wonderful people of Vancouver Kingsway for doing me the honour of giving me the privilege of representing them for the fifth time. It is truly the deepest honour one could have, to be put in service to others, and I deeply appreciate the faith and trust they have placed in me. I will work hard to represent everybody in my riding.

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Second, I would like to thank my entire campaign team. There are some key people who played pivotal roles in this election. One was my campaign manager, Ryan Hurley, who is just a sensational person. He led my campaign at a time of great personal difficulty, with his father being terminally ill. One thing we all know about politics is that we can get involved in the issues and the policies, but we are all human beings, and we have personal lives. I want to extend my deepest appreciation and sympathies to him and his family, as he lost his father the morning of election day.

I would like to thank my official agent, Joel DeYoung, who, as has been said by other people in the House, does not only a very extensive job but also keeps us out of prison, which is one of the most important things an official agent has to do. It takes a lot of work.

I do not know if many Canadians know that our campaigns are really run by volunteer power. These are people who donate untold hours and untold skills, with no pay, so that our democracy can keep running. Joel has done that through several elections. I am deeply appreciative to him and his partner, Michelle.

Finally, I would like to thank Carrie Burcic, our office manager, who kept us all organized, which is not easy. As we all know, during a campaign we have many hundreds of people volunteering and there is a lot going on every day.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers who worked on our campaign, whether it was for an hour on election day or for many, many days. Once again, our democracy is powered by the volunteer efforts of ordinary citizens who have taken an interest in their country, and who come to donate their time, skills, talents and passions to all parties represented in the House. I am blessed with a particularly talented and committed group of volunteers in Vancouver Kingsway.

I need to thank my family. I think we all know that no one gets elected to any position at any level in this country without the support and, frankly, the sacrifice of their family. I have to thank my partner, Sheryl Palm, who has been an outstanding campaign partner and who is far wiser, has far better political judgment and is far more popular than I am in Vancouver Kingsway. I hear lots of support for that statement on all sides of the House.

I thank my children, Jaime, Jordan and Cerys. I think we all know that our children play very interesting roles in our lives because they do not get agency. They do not get to make any decisions or give any speeches, but they have to suffer, sometimes the fame, sometimes the infamy, which we all go through. It puts a lot of pressure on our children. I want to give a shout-out to not only my children but also the children of everybody in the House.

I have to thank my sisters, Cheryl and Dyan, who have always been extraordinarily supportive, and my nephew Devon Golchin.

Finally, I want to thank my granddaughter, Sophia Linssen. She is my only grandchild, and it is her future for which I work. She is 11 years old, and she has decades in front of her. I think quite frequently that the decisions we make today in this chamber will impact not only our country but also future generations, for decades and decades to come. We would all do well to remember that when we are deliberating on the issues of the day.

• (1830)

I have to thank the best sign crew in the country, which is in Vancouver Kingsway. People say that whoever comes into Vancouver Kingsway during a federal election will be blinded by orange, and that is what happened. Sandy, Leo, Wally, Max and Renato are the best and I want to thank them.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to rise in this 44th Parliament, I want to thank the residents of Fort McMurray—Cold Lake for their support in this election. This was not my first election, as I previously had the honour of serving in the provincial legislature, in both the ridings of Fort McMurray-Conklin and Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. However, this was a very unique election for me and for our riding. It is such an immense honour to be able to serve the people of Fort McMurray—Cold Lake as their elected representative.

Quite frankly, I would not be here today if it were not for the support of my campaign team, my amazing friends and family and, most importantly, my husband. My husband Niall stepped up in a way that very few husbands step up. He is taking care of our son Eoghan as we speak, because I had our baby in the middle of the election campaign. Unlike the member for Peace River—Westlock, who could take a day off after having a baby, it turned out that I needed to take a couple of days off from knocking on doors after having my child. My husband was there to make sure that the baby was well taken care of, and for that I am very grateful.

I love northeastern Alberta. It is where I was born and raised. It is truly spectacular and I welcome everyone to come and visit. Between the lakes and forests, we have just about everything one could ask for.

During the election, I had the opportunity to talk directly with a number of constituents in my riding, and one of the big things they shared with me was their increasing fears around the rising costs of just about everything, whether it is gas, groceries or heating bills. The impacts of inflation were really starting to be noticeable during the election, and people were sharing stories with me about how they had cut the amount of meat they were feeding their families. They were not cutting meat because they wanted to, but because they simply could not afford it. They told me stories of how they were going to the food bank and requesting hampers because, quite frankly, they could not afford to feed their families. Unfortunately, because of the government's reckless spending, our inflation has been increasing steadily month over month and they could not make ends meet.

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The answer I got from the minister on this was that there was perhaps going to be a promise of child care sometime in the future. This is spectacular for the families that might be struggling sometime in the future, but it does not address the real concerns of the families that are struggling to make ends meeting today. There are so many families all across this country that are struggling because gas, groceries and even diapers are more expensive now because of the Liberals' reckless spending. I really hope the government realizes that these kinds of things are terrifying to families, especially brand new families. I look forward to an answer.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as this is my first time rising to address the 44th Parliament, I wish to thank the people of Burlington for electing me for a third term. It is a privilege to be here in Ottawa representing them and advocating for our community. It is also an honour, as the new Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, to be working on behalf of the people of Burlington and families from coast to coast to coast.

I want to congratulate the member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake on her election. As someone who recalls bringing a very tiny baby into the House, it is nice to have another mom in Parliament. I am looking forward to working with her to deliver for families across the country.

The Government of Canada has made a clear commitment to support families with young children now and after the pandemic. Through budget 2021 we invested up to \$30 billion over five years, with up to \$9.2 billion in permanent funding as of 2025-2026, to make this promise a reality.

We are committed to working collaboratively in partnership with the provinces and territories to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. Most importantly, we are committed to building a system that gives all young families access to high quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care.

We have signed bilateral agreements with nine provinces and territories that will cut child care costs for children under five by 50% next year. Alberta is bringing in this policy as of January 1, 2022. That is pretty immediate action for families in our country. Saskatchewan has already implemented its 50% reduction in fees, retroactive to July 2021. I call that progress.

This is the first step in parents across the country having access to high quality early learning and child care for an average of \$10 a day within the next five years. As the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said, it is good feminist economic policy. It is also smart economic policy. This is what Canadians expect of us, and it is why we are working hard to conclude negotiations with the four remaining provinces and territories as soon as possible.

In keeping with the co-developed and endorsed indigenous early learning and child care framework, we have also made it a priority to work collaboratively with first nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation to ensure indigenous children will have access to affordable, high quality and culturally appropriate early learning and child care.

There is more. We also continue to support Canadian families with the Canada child benefit.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

In July 2016, the government introduced the Canada child benefit in order to better support low- and middle-income families. The benefit is simple, generous and targeted, which means that about nine out of 10 families are benefiting more from it than from previous child benefit programs.

In addition, to ensure that this benefit continues to help families in the long term, the government began indexing it in July 2018, in order to reflect the cost of living, an annual indexing that continues to this day.

The Canada child benefit has already played an important role in reducing child poverty. Since it was introduced in 2017, some 435,000 children have been lifted out of poverty.

[*English*]

These combined measures will help Canadian families continue to put food on the table even with challenges such as inflation at play.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Madam Speaker, one of the things that I also heard at the doors of my constituents were concerns over the radical eco agenda of the Liberal government. They were quite concerned that in the previous Parliament there was a minister who, before being elected, spent his entire life trying to shut down the main economic driver of my riding: the oil sands. Now that person is the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

It is terrifying that we have a government that is so blatantly attacking the livelihoods of people in my riding and people all across this country by not allowing them to get to work. This is something that is of serious concern and that I hope to see the government fix.

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Speaker, I think it is really important to recognize how important the climate emergency is. We are seeing right now in British Columbia the devastating impact of the floods. We saw, over the course of the summer, the absolutely terrifying wildfires.

As the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, I recognize that fighting climate change is something we need to do so that our kids will continue to grow into a hospitable world.

I also appreciate that we need to take care of families and we need to ensure that everyone, no matter which industry they are working in, has a quality, good-paying job that will help to put food on the table and enable their children to grow and have the opportunities they deserve. That is exactly what our government will do.

• (1840)

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, the news last week that the Americans were doubling duties on softwood lumber for Canadian producers is yet another blow to B.C.'s economy.

The communities I represent continue to be hammered by either natural disasters or now a failed trade policy. We simply cannot seem to catch a break.

B.C. is the largest Canadian exporter of softwood lumber to the U.S., and our forestry industry supports 100,000 direct and indirect jobs in the province. Sadly, we have already seen employment evaporate. In 2019, West Fraser closed the Chasm lumber mill, which had employed constituents in my riding. An industry member from Vancouver Island shared with my office that the coupling of the announcement this week with the province's Bill 28, the Forest Amendment Act, is going to be extremely hard on companies and on people. The impact of Bill 28 alone is projected to cause the loss of 18,000 jobs.

Existing employment is now even more at risk during a time we simply just cannot afford. A manager in the industry characterized the duty increase as incredibly challenging, but survivable if it was the only hurdle producers were facing. When combined with the province's harvest deferrals and the reallocation of tenures, all of which are happening at the same time, many companies just do not seem to feel they stand a chance. There is no way to pivot that quickly or spread the economic loss over a number of years.

Another stakeholder similarly shared that, for local lumber manufacturers in B.C. already dealing with soaring log prices due to the significant summertime fires, recent flooding and escalating supply chain challenges, the doubling of the softwood lumber duty comes as a gut punch that puts thousands of jobs and the future of the local industry at risk.

The BC Lumber Trade Council has stated that these unfair duties hurt not only B.C. businesses and workers but also U.S. consumers looking to repair, remodel and build new homes. As U.S. producers remain unable to meet the domestic demand, these duties are a threat to North American post-pandemic recovery on both sides of the border.

What concrete actions is the government going to take to make sure the Biden administration reverses course? The international trade minister is on record saying that the government was pursuing litigation under the new North American trade deal between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, and at the World Trade Organization.

I sincerely hope the hon. member is able to outline here today the litigation measures the government is taking, the timeline for when they will be complete and the results she is seeking to achieve. My constituents in the industry and across my province require quick action and certainty.

Continued flooding and mudslides in Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon only compound the difficulties faced by the people I represent. Additional evacuation orders and alerts were issued last night and this morning in Abbotsford, Mission, Hope and Merritt, com-

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munities within and neighbouring my riding. Just before I came to the House I was looking on my Twitter account at DriveBC, and the Jackass Summit, the top of Highway 1 when driving through the historic Fraser Canyon, is completely washed out. It is like the highway was never there. These events are going to have really, really big impacts on my constituents.

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me begin by saying how pleased I am to have the opportunity to stand up again to speak on this very important issue. Before I do, I did not have the opportunity yet in this House to thank the people of Markham—Thornhill for electing me and placing their vote of confidence in me. I continue to be humbled to serve as their member of Parliament.

Just like my colleague, the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, I too take this issue very seriously. Canada's forestry sector is of great importance to our communities, as well as to our economy, and this is why our government has announced \$867 million in investment to support affected workers, introduce loan guarantee programs, reduce the risk of job losses, support affected communities, stabilize operations, diversify markets and promote innovation in the sector.

Let me state unequivocally that the duties the United States has imposed on Canadian softwood lumber are completely unwarranted and unfair. More than that, they are harmful to all the Canadian workers in communities across the country for which the softwood lumber industry is an economic anchor. The recent doubling of the duties announced by the United States Department of Commerce is extremely disappointing and unjustified.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

We can be proud of our softwood lumber industry, and the government is vigorously defending its interests.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the United States has slapped duties on Canadian softwood lumber. We have been through this before, and each time, the independent dispute settlement panels ruled that Canada was a fair trading partner.

[*English*]

Canada is actively pursuing legal challenges against U.S. duties under chapter 19 of NAFTA, chapter 10 of CUSMA and before the WTO. Let me remind members that the WTO panel ruling on Canada's challenge of U.S. duties on softwood lumber found overwhelmingly in Canada's favour in August 2020. We are confident that this will continue to be the case.

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Canadian softwood lumber is a priority for the federal government. While we will continue to defend our industries, interests and litigation until these duties are removed, we are also raising this issue with the United States at every opportunity. The Prime Minister raised it with President Biden earlier this month, Minister Joly raised it with her U.S. counterpart Secretary Blinken and I have raised it on many occasions with Ambassador Tai and Secretary Raimondo.

[*Translation*]

These duties are unjustified and harm both our countries. We will continue our efforts until we reach an agreement that supports the Canadian industry and its workers.

[*English*]

The United States relies on high-quality Canadian lumber. Adding these unjustified duties merely harms their own consumers and home builders at a time when housing affordability is already a significant concern for many.

I have worked directly with industry. I have convened meetings with industry representatives from across the country and just last week spoke directly with leaders of the sector. I will continue to work hand in hand with our partners to ensure that our approach and any solutions we pursue are informed by the needs of our forestry sector and the workers whose jobs it supports.

We remain ready to discuss terms that will be in the best interests of our country. However, I will make one thing clear: We will not accept just any deal. We will continue to work closely with the provinces and territories, industry, indigenous partners and others to determine the best approach and to stand up for our forestry sector.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the hon. member not to mention the first or last name of ministers or members of the House. Please be mindful.

The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I will mention to the hon. member that reaching a deal is very important for British Columbia. When you move forward in the coming weeks and months, there should be a degree of transparency that lets industry know that the government is on their side and that you are giving a clear timeline about the actions you are taking when you are taking them.

The economic loss is felt. The job losses are real in British Columbia, and all of my constituents and all British Columbians are asking for a degree of transparency. At the end of the day, we know you cannot control what the Biden administration does, but it is incumbent upon your government to reach a softwood lumber deal to give industry the certainty we are looking for.

Finally, to all the voters in Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon and to my campaign team, I have not said this enough: You guys are awesome. Thank you for putting your trust in me once again. I want to honour that every day. One of the first campaign commitments I ever made was to stand up for the forestry sector.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address all questions and comments through the Chair.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Mary Ng: Madam Speaker, softwood lumber is a priority for the government. I continue to work and speak with industry, and they know that we are standing by them.

We of course, as I said, are actively challenging the unfair U.S. duties under NAFTA and CUSMA and before the WTO. This is also in close dialogue with industry. We are also raising this issue with U.S. interlocutors, which includes our openness to an agreement that will bring the predictability and stability that our industry needs for its continued success.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

We will only accept an agreement that is in Canada's best interests.

[*English*]

We will continue to work with our partners across the country to defend this important sector.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

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