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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, December 3, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Labour, Lib.) moved that Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

[*English*]

He said: Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people as Canada's new Minister of Labour to present a bill that is focused on workers and their safety.

[*Translation*]

The reality is that the safety of many workers across Canada was undermined during the pandemic. I am sure everyone agrees. However, Canadians deserve to feel safe in their workplaces.

[*English*]

No one should have to choose between staying at home when they are sick and being able to afford rent and groceries. It is clear the pandemic has exposed the gaps in our social safety net, and the time has come to close the gap on paid sick leave.

What exactly is this gap? The Canada Labour Code currently provides employees in federally regulated industries with several unpaid leaves related to personal illness or injury, as well as three days of paid personal leave that could be used to treat an illness or injury. However, if we look at the year 2019, Canadian workers took an average of 8.5 days of leave for illness and issues related to a disability. It has become very clear that three days is just not enough.

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

With Bill C-3, we are taking measures to ensure that Canadians who work in federally regulated industries have access to the paid sick leave they are entitled to.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada is introducing legislation that would amend the Canada Labour Code to provide 10 days of paid sick leave per year to workers in the federally regulated private sector. The impact of this could be huge.

There are approximately 18,500 employers in federally regulated industries. That includes federal Crown corporations and certain activities on first nations reserves. Together, they employ nearly a million Canadians. The vast majority of them, some 87%, are working in medium-sized to large firms, that is, companies with 100 employees or more.

[*Translation*]

The federally regulated sector comprises workplaces in a broad range of industries, including interprovincial, air, rail, land and marine transportation, pipelines, banking services, and postal and courier services. These are industries that people rely on every day.

[*English*]

Life during the pandemic has been stressful for so many people right across Canada. I think of my fellow Newfoundlanders who were worried about food and other goods because of the fear that the island supply chain could be cut off. Sometimes it was due to weather, but other times it was due to the terminals in Port aux Basques and North Sydney being closed after already being on limited capacity because of COVID.

[*Translation*]

These industries must survive and grow. They depend on workers, so we have to support those workers.

[*English*]

The bill before us today not only allows workers in these vital industries to stay home to rest when they are sick, but also prevents the spread of illnesses in their workplaces. More specifically, Bill C-3 would amend part III of the Canada Labour Code to make two changes.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

First, in each calendar year, employees would earn one day of paid leave per month of continuous employment, up to a maximum of 10 days in a calendar year.

[English]

The second change is to avoid duplicating paid leave provisions relating to illness or injury under the Canada Labour Code. These two changes would impact more than 580,000 employees in the federally regulated private sector who do not currently have access to at least 10 days of paid sick leave. Sixty-three per cent of federally regulated workers do not have access to 10 paid sick days.

Increased paid sick leave would support employees by protecting them in three ways.

[Translation]

First, paid sick leave would protect workers' income. Workers would not have to choose between staying home to get well and earning a paycheque.

Second, it would protect their jobs.

Third, it would protect their health. Additional sick leave would enable them to recover at home, which would in turn protect others in the workplace.

[English]

To sum up, we are taking action to give workers and employers the concrete support they need to keep their workplaces safe. Paid sick leave will help us curb the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses in workplaces right across the country, and it is an important step toward finishing the fight against that virus and ending the global pandemic.

[Translation]

In addition to enabling workers to focus on their health and limit the spread of disease, paid sick leave would also protect our economy.

- (1010)

[English]

However, the benefits do not end there. Research indicates that not having access to paid sick leave is associated with high employee turnover. That is on top of increasing an employee's need for health care resources over the long term. These outcomes impose economic costs on individuals, employers, families and the government.

[Translation]

Studies have shown that paid sick leave is financially beneficial to employers and the public health system.

[English]

For these reasons, it is clear that the bill before us today should move forward. Paid sick days for federally regulated workers was part of the Liberal platform in the last election. We committed to introducing this piece of legislation within our first 100 days as a government. Today we have made good on that promise.

[Translation]

Introducing 10 days of paid sick leave is just step one of our plan.

[English]

We want to see paid sick leave implemented across the country in all sectors. To do that, we need to work with the provinces and territories to take an approach that benefits Canadian workers from coast to coast to coast, because 58% of workers across the country currently do not have access to any paid sick leave.

This brings me to the other aspect of the Government of Canada's commitment. In addition to the measures I mentioned earlier, the Government of Canada will meet with the provinces and territories to discuss a plan to legislate sick leave across the country. Of course, this would be done while respecting jurisdiction and keeping the unique needs of small business owners top of mind.

Today, not every province and territory has paid sick leave provisions. In fact, only Prince Edward Island and Quebec currently have permanent requirements for employers to provide paid sick leave. That being said, British Columbia has recently finished consultations on creating regulations to define a minimum entitlement to five paid sick leave days for personal illness or injury.

It varies from one place to another. For example, back home in Newfoundland and Labrador, there are seven unpaid days of leave for sickness or family responsibilities, and that is after 30 continuous days of employment with the same employer. However, right across the Cabot Strait, in Nova Scotia, workers are entitled to three unpaid days of leave because of the sickness of a child, parent or family member, or for medical, dental or other similar appointments during working hours.

[Translation]

The number of days and the terms are very different depending on where one lives, but it should not be that way. Provisions governing paid sick days directly related to COVID-19 also differ significantly depending on where one lives.

[English]

During the pandemic, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Yukon introduced temporary paid leave provisions for reasons related to COVID-19 and employer rebate programs to offset the cost of the leave. The number of days eligible for reimbursement and the maximum amount available for reimbursement varies in each of the jurisdictions. These programs require employers to pay regular wages to their employees during the leave period but also to apply for reimbursement to the provincial or territorial government afterward. As the economy continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic, some of the provincial programs have already expired, while others are set to expire at the end of this year.

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Again, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the issue of paid sick leave to light. As we move through these challenging times, we have a responsibility to make sure that all Canadians have access to paid sick leave. This is essential to Canada's economic recovery and will help reduce the spread of the virus.

The government is well aware that the changes proposed today would have an impact on the provinces and territories and on employers, especially smaller businesses. Consultation with the provinces and territories is essential, especially when it comes to the unique needs of small business owners and to local realities.

As we move forward with these changes, federally regulated employers and employees as well as other relevant organizations will continue to be valuable partners. They will have the opportunity to share their views on how we should move forward together to implement the proposed changes and what considerations need to be taken into account. With important legislation such as Bill C-3 before us today, the Government of Canada collaborates closely with partners because they know the realities on the ground better than we do.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada is working hard to build back better and bring us out of the COVID-19 crisis. Ensuring that Canadians have access to paid sick leave is an important step in Canada's economic recovery and reducing the spread of the virus.

• (1015)

[*English*]

Paid sick leave can help to stop the spread of illness in workplaces across the country. We are taking action to give workers the support they need to help keep themselves and their workplaces safe and healthy. Bill C-3 can help us do that.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, this bill is about workers and their safety. As has been the case with workers' issues throughout Canada's history, no one has been as effective or shone a clearer light on the importance of this topic than organized labour and Canada's unions. I want to specifically thank these groups, whether they be provincial labour federations, individual members of a local, or national leaders themselves, for the work they have done to make this idea a reality.

Hard-working Canadians across the country are counting on us to make these necessary and important changes. Let us do this for them.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, as this is the first time I am rising in the House, I want to thank the citizens of Chatham-Kent—Leamington for allowing me the honour and privilege to represent them. I also want to thank my family, my EDA and all the volunteers for their support.

I certainly agree with the minister that the pandemic has exposed a number of weaknesses in our social security systems. However, why are we a year and a half into the pandemic before we see this form of legislation?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, we are here now and we are doing it. When the pandemic hit, the government acted very quickly and decisively through a lot of temporary programs, most

notably the CERB, which went directly to people to give them the supports they needed directly when they needed them.

As the hon. member pointed out, the pandemic did point out some significant gaps in the social safety net. One of them, of course, was the fact that 58% of workers in this country do not have any paid sick leave. These are people who are capable of carrying the virus, bringing it to their workplaces, propagating it and endangering others. It is just as much a problem for them as it is for anybody who has paid sick leave. It does not matter; the virus does not discriminate. It is therefore incredibly important that we close that gap and that we do it now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech. The Bloc Québécois, on the whole, supports this bill.

I would like to point out to the House that, once again, Quebec has taken the lead on introducing this kind of legislation, including banning demonstrations in front of facilities that provide medical treatment. Still, I am glad the federal government is following Quebec's lead.

I do, however, have some concerns about protecting the rights of unionized workers. As everyone knows, the right to strike in Quebec is protected by anti-scab legislation that does not exist elsewhere in Canada. This bill is perhaps a bit vague when it comes to health care employees' right to protest.

I would like some clarification from the minister on this. Will there be specific details regarding the right of unionized workers to take part in protests?

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, we worked very closely with justice officials to make sure that we incorporated and protected union members' right to strike and to demonstrate. Members will note that the legislation as drafted specifically refers to intimidation and obstruction of health care workers. That is where we define that line.

It is incredibly important that we get that balance right. What this bill does, on that note, is give law enforcement members the tools they need so that there will be no hesitation. They can do what they need to make sure that health care workers get the support they need, are not intimidated and are not obstructed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister of Labour for his speech. I also want to thank him for the content of this bill.

Government Orders

The NDP obviously welcomes this type of bill, since the idea came from the NDP. In 2020, the leader of the NDP asked the Liberal government 22 times to bring in 10-day paid sick leave. He was told no at the time.

The Liberals finally saw the light. Unfortunately, this comes as we are in the midst of the fourth wave. We have lost 18 months, and that has jeopardized the health and safety of health care workers.

It is all well and good that this measure is being brought in today, but, in the midst of a pandemic, why were the Liberals so slow to realize that this is a health issue not just for workers, but also for the entire population and society?

• (1020)

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, what can I say? Being in the light is a marvellous thing. Here we are, in the light together. We do not have to go toward the light. I am just saying we are basking in it. The important thing, I think, is that we are here now and we are doing it. We do not have to get into past history. I do not think we need to conjure any of that up. Most of mine is well known.

I would say that the pandemic exposed these gaps. We put in place some temporary measures that we knew were very important at the beginning of this. The supports went directly to workers. We knew at the beginning we had to act fast, and we did act fast. Now we have an opportunity, as we are finishing this fight against COVID-19 and as we recognize there may be other threats on the horizon, to make permanent the necessary changes to the social safety net and to make sure those gaps are closed.

This legislation today is an important part of that effort.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to thank my riding for the opportunity to represent them again and for the incredible support I had during the campaign. I am grateful to be able to ask the minister a question today, specifically on this bill.

We know that COVID has been hard on so many people and businesses, and he would know best, I think. My riding would like to know this. Will this impact subcontractors and contractors who are hired to work on behalf of the government in different areas that are independent? They need to prepare, as they have faced the challenges of COVID as well and are trying to get back their feet.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, this will all be brought to bear within the consultations that will take place as we move forward and develop a national action plan with provinces and territories, with a particular note on small business owners. There are, as I have pointed out, some 15,000 employers within federal jurisdiction, so it is incredibly important that we are sensitive to their needs. They have borne incredible expense and anxiety over the course of the pandemic. Making sure we get that right is incredibly important. That will all be borne out as we flesh out a national action plan that also, importantly, respects the jurisdictions of provinces and territories.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to capitalize on the good minister's basking in the light.

We have heard much conversation in the House about collaboration. I have to share with members that our labour critic, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, and of course our entire caucus has been calling on this government to improve the bill by ensuring that workers do not have to wait 11 months for 10 paid sick days, and ensuring that workers have access to the first day of sick leave after a continuous period of employment of at least 60 days. This is with the goal of not unduly delaying access to the first day of sick leave.

There are many ways in which we can improve the bill before us, and I am hopeful that the good minister, in basking in the light, will work with the NDP caucus to close the gaps in the very porous first draft of this legislation.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, did the hon. member say “porous first draft”? I think the light is dimming.

We have had good conversations with members in the House. We are having a constructive debate today, and I look forward to continuing these conversations as we move this bill forward.

One thing that is clear is that everyone I have spoken to and everyone I have heard from has agreed that we have to get moving on this. That means getting this bill passed. Paid sick leave is a part of what I think will help us finish the fight against the pandemic and prepare us for our needs ahead.

• (1025)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a beautiful place that I come from.

Today is a very important day. As my colleagues have noted, we have been calling for this. Our leader has raised it in the House of Commons over 22 times. The NDP knows full well that people are going to work sick and are not getting the coverage they need.

My colleague for Hamilton Centre just articulated that changes to the bill are needed. We have heard from many medical associations and employers about the requirement for a medical certificate from people who may have contracted COVID-19. The concern is that the power of requiring a medical certificate, regardless of the number of days, is going to be a barrier. This is something they are raising.

Does the minister not believe that this requirement may decrease the demand for leave and increase the possible transmission of COVID-19, especially now that we are in a fourth wave and new variants are imposed upon us?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Speaker, I would simply say that getting the balance right between employers and employees, making sure that this is constructive, making sure that we do not spread the virus, and making sure that workers who suffer symptoms do not hesitate to stay home and not go to the workplace is something we will continue to strive and to work for.

Government Orders

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, may I request unanimous consent to split my time this morning?

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

Hearing no dissent, please proceed.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that and the generosity of all my colleagues here. I will be splitting my time with the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

I always appreciate the opportunity to stand in the House and speak to the important issues of the day. This is quite clearly an important issue. I congratulate the minister on presenting this and fulfilling a campaign promise.

Of course, we are a little concerned. This is something that other members in the House have already raised. This is something that we have been calling on for some time, and it has been promised for a while. Of course, had we not had an election that was not necessary, and if our committees had been up and running, we could have been doing an awful lot more. In fact, the minister in his press conference pointed out that it may not really have that big of an impact: Most federally regulated private-sector companies, which are among the biggest companies in the country, already have incredibly generous programs to support their workers if they need paid sick leave. Collective agreements already cover an awful lot of these programs.

This is a bill that covers two very different areas. I will be focusing specifically on the labour portion of it. The other issue, of course, is that we are not entirely sure how many workers this will cover, but we are looking forward to seeing more details. We recognize as well that this is an opening toward discussing this further with the provinces and with many more businesses. It is important to keep in mind, as those negotiations begin and as the federal government starts speaking with provinces, the caution that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has expressed. That is:

CFIB urges the federal government and provincial governments to exercise extreme caution when imposing new costs on small businesses at a time when a majority are still not back to normal sales or out from under their COVID-related debt. Small businesses are already facing a significant increase in employer contributions to CPP on January 1, 2022, carbon tax increases in several provinces, as well as other increases in the cost of doing business, including supplies, shipping, and insurance.

Additionally, many businesses may be cut off from accessing any COVID relief due to higher thresholds to access the new wage and rent subsidy programs.

As these negotiations begin, it is important that we keep that in mind. It is important to support workers, but it is also important to remember that small businesses are struggling.

I will say at the outset that Conservatives are generally supportive of this. We believe it is important to support workers, but we also point out that if we had not had an unnecessary election and we had our committees up and running, we could be doing an awful lot more to support workers in Canada.

In fact, during that unnecessary election, Conservatives talked an awful lot about supporting workers in Canada. We talked about a construction mobility tax credit that would allow workers to subtract up to \$4,000 per year in temporary relocation expenses from

taxable income. It would make it easier for Canadian workers to go where the work is.

Workers often have to leave their homes and families to take on temporary contracts in other parts of the country. Those costs can be significant, averaging around \$3,500 for relocation. In some parts of Canada, often in rural and northern regions, they are struggling to find skilled workers and tradespeople, so we want to accelerate the investment and infrastructure that will create jobs and build a more productive and more connected Canada. To do that, we need to help workers get to where they are needed most. We could have been talking about that, of course, in committee.

We also felt that it was important to talk about making sure that infrastructure spending benefits Canadian workers by requiring that equipment and materials for federally funded infrastructure projects be purchased from Canadian companies, or from those countries with which we have agreed to mutually allow our workers to supply each other's infrastructure projects. We could have been talking about that if we had our committees up and running, and making sure that we were protecting Canadian workers that way.

● (1030)

We also could have been talking about another idea that Conservatives had in the election campaign, which was to support union training programs and apprenticeships, and to expand access to them. There is a desperate need in this country for skilled tradespeople, and it is a bright future for young people. We have talked about ensuring workers have the training they need for the jobs of today and, of course, tomorrow by supporting union and similar training programs and encouraging employers to invest in their workers.

We would have proposed, and we will propose if we get into committee, to double the apprenticeship job creation tax credit for up to three years to help create more places for apprentices. We talked about investing \$250 million over two years to create the Canadian job training fund, which is another really great idea. If committees were up and running, we could be talking about it.

Government Orders

We talked as well about apprenticeship programs and training delivery agents, such as unions, post-secondary institutions and community organizations, that would give laid-off workers immediate access to training. These programs could reach out to traditionally under-represented groups. This could help tourism and hospitality workers who have been hit hard by the recession. It could support the talent needs of small businesses and help workers get the training they need, focusing on areas where there are shortages of skilled workers.

We also talked about creating the working Canadian training loan to provide low-interest loans of up to \$10,000 to people who want to upgrade their skills, which would empower workers to determine what training they need, rather than having a government body tell them, which is another fantastic idea from the Conservative Party that we could be talking about right now if committees were up and running.

In addition, we talked about making sure that workers have a voice at the table. We proposed giving workers a seat at the table by requiring federally regulated employers with over 1,000 employees, or over \$100 million in annual revenue, to include worker representation on their boards of directors, an innovative idea that we could be talking about right now in committee.

Conservatives have lots of great ideas, and we are eager to get to work. We are supportive of what the minister has proposed here today, and we are eager to see it happen, but perhaps one of the most important things we could do right now is to add some minor amendments to the bill to capture a private member's bill from the previous Parliament brought to us by the MP for Calgary Shepard.

It was an act to amend the Canada Labour Code on bereavement leave. Specifically, it would have provided three days of paid bereavement leave and two days of unpaid bereavement leave for parents who have lost a child under the age of 18 or a dependent child with disabilities over the age of 18, and for women who experienced a stillbirth from five days to eight weeks. It is not natural for a parent to bury a child, and Conservatives feel it is appropriate for the government to adopt this motion, perhaps including it in this bill to make sure parents have the support and time they need to heal from a tragic situation like this.

• (1035)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have to say it is a relief to finally hear that the Conservatives are on side for paid sick leave, because throughout the pandemic I asked the Conservatives repeatedly if they would support paid sick leave, and they flat out would not respond. People were going to work sick, making a choice between paying rent and buying food or going to work and possibly infecting their co-workers. The mental health stress was compounded on people who were going to work. The impact on businesses, organizations and government agencies has been tremendous.

New Democrats are glad the Liberals are finally seeing the light a year and a half into the pandemic, but my concern is why it has taken so long for the Conservatives to stand up for workers' health. I really do appreciate the member talking about bereavement leave because we support that. There was a great HUMA report on bereavement, and we fully support the recommendations of that re-

port, which even goes further than what the member is calling for, because no parent should be forced to go to work right after losing a child. Parents should have the time to deal with it.

Again, why has it taken the Conservatives so long to stand up for the health of workers? Why have they been encouraging them to go to work sick or making a choice of paying their rent?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I feel like we are not basking in the glow of warmth and love.

The Conservatives have always believed in supporting workers and making sure they do not have to make the choice between putting food on the table and going to work sick.

I am pleased we are here today. It sounds like we are all singing from the hymn book and working together. Maybe we should just continue to do that and move forward.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, today I heard the word "compassion" come up a lot in my Conservative colleague's speech. He talked about it when he was addressing the issue of leave for parents who have lost a child. If we are talking about compassion, if it is hard for a parent to accept the loss of a child, would a cancer patient not also need better support to recover? Can the member say a few words about that?

The Bloc Québécois intends to raise the issue of extending leave for serious illness from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in memory of Émilie Sansfaçon.

Out of compassion, should a person who is suffering not be entitled to more weeks of leave to recover from their illness?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's question is one that is very much worthy of discussion and consideration, which is all the more reason why we need to get committees up and running, so we can discuss these important issues.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what a pleasure it is to hear a pragmatic voice because we really do need more pragmatic voices in the Commons. The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka is an excellent example of one.

I wanted to come back to the question of bereavement leave. The member for Edmonton Riverbend, in the last Parliament, brought forward a bill to increase compassionate care leave. We all came together and increased bereavement leave from five days to 10 days for all family members, including caregivers, so that would include if one were to lose a child.

Can the member please expand on what it is he is now suggesting? Is he suggesting an additional three days beyond the 10 days for parents who lose children, or is he solely talking about people who lose a child in utero?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I am not exactly certain if I can give much more detail than I have right now. I appreciate the member's kind comments, but they may come to an end since I cannot give him much more of an answer than that.

I will just say it is very important for us to be in committee working on these issues and having these pragmatic discussions about what would be supportive of workers and families.

• (1040)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, hallelujah, we heard here today this hon. member from the Conservatives say the word “union” perhaps more times than he did in all the days of the last session of Parliament combined. I am more than willing, as is the entire NDP caucus, to continue down that line. He brought up specifically a bill that was first introduced by Chris Charlton and then my colleague Scott Duvall on the construction mobility tax credit.

What other possible worker-friendly and union-friendly policies could this member present to us today that we might find some common ground on?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the opportunity to list off many more, but I have run out of time. I am happy to sit down with the hon. member and go through it in great detail. Maybe I can convince him to support all of our wonderful proposals to support workers and families.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, congratulations on your appointment.

It is amazing. I am not sure what is breaking out in this place. Maybe we truly are basking in the light, or our love and affection is breaking out. I heard the Conservatives say “union”, which I will say again, and I heard the NDP use the religious refrain “hallelujah”, so hallelujah to that.

This is my first opportunity to rise in this wonderful House. I want to thank the wonderful people of Northumberland—Peterborough South for once again putting their faith in me. I was first elected back in 2019, and it has truly been a privilege and the honour of a lifetime. I must say, the second election may have given me even more pride and more reason to celebrate, as people had had the opportunity to judge what the Conservative Party had been doing, and they quadrupled my margin. It is a great testament to the work the official opposition is doing, and I greatly appreciate it.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the wonderful volunteers on my campaign. I know it is the same for many members across this place. We had volunteers who knocked on thousands of doors. They came out, talked to people, supported people and gave their time. It is truly the volunteers of our country, political and otherwise, who are the fabric of our great nation. I thank all my volunteers and volunteers in general.

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Finally, I want to thank my wonderful son, James; my wonderful daughter, Margaret; and my very patient wife, Natasha. We all say that our spouses, our partners, must be among the most patient people in the world.

To the people of Northumberland—Peterborough South, I am so happy to be back, and I am ready to fight a bit, even though that is not what is going on here today. We are ready to collaborate like crazy here today.

Let us get into the substance of Bill C-3. It is really two pieces of legislation crammed into one bill. One part amends the Canada Labour Code and the other amends the Criminal Code. I will start by talking about the amendments to the Criminal Code. There are two relatively short changes to the legislation, with two primary goals. One is to allow patients to go to any type of hospital or facility free of intimidation or obstruction. The other is to allow medical professionals to get to their places of work so they can do the great work of savings lives.

I would like to pause there for a second and thank all of our wonderful health care professionals. I am blessed by having many in my direct family. I saw first-hand as they went to work throughout the pandemic. While many of us were able to use Zoom or work from the safety of our homes, our frontline workers had to work in the hospitals, health care facilities and long-term care facilities, day after day, facing COVID-19 and the threat of infection, not just for them, but also for their families.

Something that has probably not been reported on as much, but having health care professionals in my family, I have seen it first-hand, is the effect of having to wear that PPE for 12 hours a day, day after day. Many health care professionals work shifts that are over 12 hours, sometimes in not the greatest conditions, all while facing COVID-19. We certainly owe all of our frontline workers and health care workers a great debt of gratitude. For these folks who are going in and literally saving lives, I think it only makes sense that they have free, clear and safe passage to their places of work.

However, when we get into the legislation, I really am looking forward to working in committee. I believe this legislation will pass and make it to committee. It is absolutely critical that we get there and get down to legislation.

I would like to say a bit about this legislation. This is absolutely clear, as we have already heard the members of the New Democratic Party discuss it, and I was here in the House and heard them bring this up over and over again. I do not mean to break the spirit of non-partisan basking in the light, but if we had not gone to the unnecessary election, we would have been sitting in the House. By the time committees start, we will have not sat for eight months.

Government Orders

• (1045)

During that time, we could have done some great things. Instead of that \$600 million going toward quadrupling my margin, which I appreciate, although it probably was not worth that \$600 million, we could have used it for paid sick leave. We could have used it to build new hospitals. We could have used that money to help provinces fund new schools. I look forward to getting to work and getting the bill to committee.

Although the election was in September, we will not have committees until February. We have to do a better job of managing that. We are here to help. In a non-partisan way, I am reaching my hand out to the minister. Let us get to committee as quickly as we can. We need to have the democratic process working. The House is among the greatest in our country and I celebrate it.

When we talk about our health care workers, there is no doubt we need to give them safe passage. However, that should not only apply to our health care workers, it should be all workers across all sectors and in all areas of our country. No worker should ever fear going to work, fear being intimidated or being impeded in some way. We need to ensure that all workers feel safe at all times. Whether it is a doctor going into surgery to save someone's life or someone working on a critical piece of infrastructure that keeps our energy flowing across the great country, all workers should be safe all the time.

One of the things I look forward to discussing at committee and hearing expert testimony on is the right to peaceful protests. I would respectfully say that people should have the right to express their feelings and to protest. It is our democratic right to be able to express our concerns, our fears and even our anger at times, although we have to be careful. However, there is a fine line. When people feel intimidated, their right to freedom of expression stops. I would agree with the minister on that. I want to hear more on that discussion at committee. We need to weigh both the right to freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest. However, that right ends should any violence or threat of violence be used, which has no place in Canada, regardless of one's place of work.

I will talk a bit about paid sick leave. Times are getting so much tougher for Canadian workers across our great land. We have a 4.7% inflation rate. The cost of nearly everything is going up, and 53% of Canadians are within \$200 of insolvency. Many are giving up the dream of home ownership because of the price of everything. We need to get back to making our country more affordable. Certainly, people should not have to put their lives at risk to feed their families. We need to make life easier and more affordable, as well as ensure they are safe.

I would also like to hear a discussion at committee on how we can ensure that Canadian businesses remain competitive at all times. Of course, it is Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs that drive many of Canada's great employment opportunities. Quite frankly, we need more union jobs in the country. We can do that by ensuring Canadian businesses remain competitive and innovative, with the help of the government, while maintaining the safety of our workers.

The bill is definitely a bit disjointed as it contains two very separate pieces of legislation, the protection of our health professionals

and the addition of sick leave, but it gives me an opportunity to talk about how Canada can connect on everything. We need to collaborate and work together.

I have very much enjoyed basking in the sunlight today, which is the fourth time I have brought that up. I firmly believe that whether people are working on the oil rigs of Alberta, in the fields in Northumberland—Peterborough South or as fishers in the Bay of Fundy, all work is good work. We should collaborate on opportunities, work together for the collective good and celebrate our achievements together.

• (1050)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comment of my hon. colleague about working together.

My concern in part of the bill is the issue of securing safe places for our medical frontline workers. This past week in my region, we lost a wonderful small-town doctor, who gave up her practice after years because of online harassment from anti-vaxxers. This is a huge loss for us. We had young mothers who were going to vaccine clinics in North Bay being shouted at and called murderers. These things have never happened in the north before, but they were being targeted.

What does my hon. colleague think about the need to have legislation in place to protect frontline workers, to protect families and teachers and those who do the work of vaccinating our children?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I am sorry to hear the news about the doctor who gave up her practice.

In general, we need a tone of collaboration and we need to extend to people something that seems to be getting more and more foreign to our culture, which is grace. We need to have more kindness, we need to come together and collaborate, not just in politics but otherwise. We can disagree without being disagreeable.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it was great to hear from the member opposite about the need to protect all workers, but specifically our health care workers and frontline workers in the health field.

Beyond legislation, what can we do to better protect those health care workers? I hear about it all the time from people working in my community in the health care field that they feel very threatened by some of the anti-vaccine rhetoric. How can we work not only within his party but also within our communities to ensure we create a safer environment that goes beyond simply the laws, and disagreeing without being disagreeable?

Government Orders

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, there is nothing wrong with going into the battlefield of ideas and bringing the best ideas, and even having heated arguments. However, that is no reason for us to ever disrespect each other, never a reason to show that we do not love one another.

We live in the greatest country together. We will work at this together and we will continue to be the greatest country in the world, because we have the best people in the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and I more or less agree with what he said about committee work, for example. This morning is a bit unusual compared to most days in the House, in that everyone seems to be happy to work together. It is nice, and everything feels rosy this morning. I am very happy and this should be how it always is. I agree with my colleague that this is what happens in committees.

However, it was kind of alarming to hear him say that committees would not be sitting before February. I agree that this does not make sense. When does he think the committees should start up? What is the Conservatives' position on this? Does he think that our Liberal friends could get to work more quickly? Everyone is nice, good and kind, but it is unfortunate that bills are not advancing right now and nothing is going on.

• (1055)

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, we want to get to work. *Je travaille.*

Yes, we absolutely want to get to work. Let us get this done. Let us get the negotiations over. Let us get to committee. Let us help the people of Canada.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I really need to strike while the iron is hot. My good friend from Northumberland—Peterborough South made the bold statement from the Conservative side that we needed more union jobs in Canada, and I could not agree more.

Will the hon. member rise in the House today and join the New Democratic caucus in supporting sectoral bargaining to ensure that more Canadians across the country can have access to well-paying union jobs?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: For a second there, Madam Speaker, I thought he was asking me to cross the floor. While I do respect the members over there, I am completely happy in the Conservative Party where we will, when we form government, get more union jobs in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, before I get into my remarks, I would seek the unanimous consent of the House to share my time with the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques have the consent of the House?

Hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Speaker, I rise today in the House to debate Bill C-3, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code, with my esteemed colleagues.

I would first like to share something with you. In all honesty, today I feel rather excited to again participate in a legislative debate. Indeed, this is the first time in this new Parliament that I have had the opportunity to actively participate in this exercise that is so crucial to the public and democratic life of Quebec and Canada.

Five months have passed since I last participated in a debate. During those five months, we were hurtled into an election campaign, which yielded virtually the same result, almost to the seat. During those five months, we were unable to pass bills that would improve our constituents' quality of life in the midst of a pandemic.

Did the government not think that there were more important things to do in order to support those in need, including the most vulnerable of our society?

My colleagues and I thought that, after those five months, the Liberals would have come up with substantive, strong, straightforward legislative proposals. Unfortunately, the one thing we learned from last week's throne speech is that it is half-baked, inconsistent and lacking in substance.

The bill currently before us is more of the same sad thing. It once again demonstrates this government's modus operandi, which involves a lot of rhetoric mixed in with smoke and mirrors. When the smoke finally clears, we see that the bill is mostly a watered down shell.

Bill C-3 proposes two measures for the price of one, which, I might add, have nothing in common but the name of the bill. On one hand, the government is seeking to amend the Criminal Code to impose harsher sentences on those who intimidate health care workers and their patients and on those who interfere with access to a health care facility to prevent people from obtaining services.

It is a worthy goal, but here again, I have to point out that Ottawa is lagging behind Quebec. In September, Quebec's National Assembly legislated stiff fines for people who protest vaccination near schools and health facilities.

Still, better late than never. With this Criminal Code amendment, Ottawa will give prosecutors the tools to charge people who interfere with health care services.

Statements by Members

We have been trapped in the worst public health crisis of the past century for almost two years now, and our health care system is more vulnerable than ever, so we have to do whatever it takes to protect it. Our health care workers have been holding down the fort throughout this trying time, and we, as a society, must keep them safe.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member will have six and a half minutes to complete his speech when we resume debate after question period.

We will now proceed to Statements by Members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to recognize International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and some of the incredible organizations in my riding of Kitchener Centre that are working to enable people with disabilities to live with independence and dignity.

KidsAbility empowers children and youth with special needs to realize their full potential. KW Habilitation works with our community to inspire abilities to enrich the lives of children, youth, adults and families.

The list goes on and on, and includes Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region, KW AccessAbility, Adults in Motion, Christian Horizons, Bridges to Belonging, Independent Living Waterloo Region, Community Support Connections and the Social Development Centre.

These organizations, fuelled by their wonderful clients, volunteers, donors and staff, are serving with compassion and improving lives every day. However, we must do more to create an inclusive country for everyone.

I am proud to be sponsoring my first petition with the leadership of Disability Without Poverty calling to fast-track—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Saint John—Rothesay.

* * *

SAINT JOHN—ROTHESAY

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in this House today, humbled and privileged to be returned for a third term. I want to thank the people of Saint John—Rothesay for their amazing support and for giving me such a strong mandate.

As we all know, we cannot get here alone. I want to thank my family, my beautiful wife, Denise and my sons, Christian and Connor. I want to thank my campaign team, led by Kevin Collins and Warren Coombs. I want to thank those who campaigned in my riding, even the Leader of the Opposition who campaigned not once

but twice in my riding. I want to thank everybody who helped me return.

I was elected to come here, collaborate and advocate for the riding of Saint John—Rothesay. I am here to deliver critical funding for projects like port phase II, the Coverdale Centre for Women, transitional housing. I was elected to come to Ottawa to fight for my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, and to get to work. I am going to do just that.

* * *

CLIFFS OF FUNDY UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, Nova Scotia is the most beautiful province in Canada.

I am fortunate to represent the riding of Cumberland—Colchester and visit natural sites, such as the Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark. There are five UNESCO sites in Canada, and the Cliffs of Fundy is the only one in Nova Scotia to be bestowed this honour.

Within this park are highlights such as the highest tides in the world, the Not Since Moses run along the beach floor, and Ottawa House By-the-Sea Museum, which was the summer residence of Sir Charles Tupper.

This majestic park stretches 165 kilometres across the north shore of the Bay of Fundy, spanning 77 communities from Lower Truro to Apple River. Tourists from around the world visit the park's captivating and unique scenery and adventurist activities.

I would like to take this moment to congratulate the executive director of the Geopark, Beth Peterkin for being awarded the annual Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award celebrating the power, strength and diversity of vibrant communities across Cumberland—Colchester.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment.

I am pleased to stand in the House today on behalf of all of my constituents. Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill and the greater York Region area is composed of delicate interconnected natural ecosystems.

The provincial government is proposing to construct two highways in York Region. Highway 413 would run through Vaughan, Caledon, Brampton and Halton Hills, to meet the Highway 401 and 407 interchange. The Bradford bypass would cut through the Holland Marsh to connect Highways 400 and 404.

Statements by Members

Each of these projects comes with profoundly negative environmental consequences, such as running through the pristine green-belt and fertile farmlands, raising emission levels, degrading the water quality in Lake Simcoe and undoubtedly leading to increased development in the green spaces surrounding them.

I stand here today to draw attention to the adverse impacts on the environment these projects would cause and to the opposition raised by several first nations that would be affected thereby. Nearly 10,000—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

* * *

• (1105)

ALL-WEATHER ROAD SYSTEM

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, the climate emergency is here. Indigenous and northern communities are already paying the price.

Eighteen first nations and northern communities in our region depend on the ice roads for survival. For a few weeks a year, thousands of indigenous peoples depend on temporary ice roads we call winter roads to bring in fuel, building supplies, water trucks, equipment, bulk food, what they need to survive. These first nations have severe housing crises and a shockingly high cost of living.

Ice roads are a lifeline, but they are disappearing. A warming and unpredictable climate means shorter seasons, and this year is even worse. Communities like the east-side first nations need all-weather roads now. This was in the works under an NDP provincial government, but the Conservatives cancelled, and the federal Liberals could not care less.

This can no longer pass. It is a matter of life and death. It is time the federal government worked with first nations to build an all-weather road system. It is time the federal government gets serious about climate change and stands with indigenous communities—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUYING LOCAL IN MADAWASKA—RESTIGOUCHE

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the entrepreneurs in Madawaska—Restigouche are passionate people who show their innovative spirit on a daily basis.

[*English*]

In addition, they have shown resilience and creativity since the pandemic. Our local businesses were able to stand out, making a difference in our communities, and we are very proud of them.

[*Translation*]

The businesses that have endured during this time of economic uncertainty continue to employ our neighbours, friends and loved

ones. They continue to offer us their goods and services with the usual warm welcome we have come to expect.

The best way to show our appreciation is to buy local, to do our Christmas shopping at our local businesses this holiday season. This will help support the economic vitality of all of our communities.

[*English*]

When we buy local, the economic spinoff goes further than the business itself.

I encourage people of Madawaska—Restigouche to discover or rediscover what our local businesses have to offer.

[*Translation*]

Buy local.

* * *

[*English*]

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, Riley's Bakery has been an institution and a must-stop spot in downtown Cornwall for over a century. For the past 32 years, Robin and Ana Curran have worked tirelessly to grow its legacy as an anchor along Pitt Street.

When we talk about the pride we as Canadians have, and the hard work and dedication of small businesses in Canada, the Currans are a quintessential example. The couple had no money left after they bought the bakery back in 1989. They worked so hard to grow the business. They did not take vacation for the first 10 years, and they lived in a small apartment above Riley's as they raised their young daughter.

Recently, the Currans announced their retirement and sale of the business to the next generation. They deserve a long and happy retirement.

On behalf of grateful customers, neighbouring businesses and friends in Cornwall, we thank Robin and Ana. We wish these great Canadians all the best in their next chapter of life.

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COQUITLAM—PORT COQUITLAM COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I rise for the first time in this Parliament, I want to thank the residents of Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam for putting their trust in me to represent our community once again.

Statements by Members

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight Haley Hodgson, author of “O CANADA, How We Vote”, a children's book about the Canadian electoral process. This fantastic book showcases our Canadian diversity and encourages discussions with young people about equality, democracy and equity.

Haley is also one of my 2021 Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam Community Champions award recipients. The award recognizes unsung heroes such as Haley in our community.

I encourage everyone to read this great book with the little ones in their lives.

I thank Haley for all that she does to build and better our community.

* * *

HUGH WATT

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is indeed a privilege today to rise in the House to pay tribute to the life of Hugh Watt, a committed family man, town councillor, businessman, great mentor and a loyal friend to many.

Hugh moved to the town of La Ronge in 1977 and became a pillar of the community. Whether it was his involvement with his beloved Junior A Ice Wolves, his role as town councillor or his involvement in many community initiatives, Hugh brought a zest for life that influenced everyone he met. When confronted with a problem about which others would say, “We can't do this”, his response was always, “We can do this. We will get it done”, and he got it done.

This week Matt Klassen was elected to fill Hugh's seat on council. He texted me to say what an honour it was for him to take Hugh's seat. He shared the responsibility he feels and his desire to serve with the utmost of respect.

I ask all members to join me today in recognizing the life and the legacy of Mr. Hugh Watt.

* * *

- (1110)

NEW HORIZONS FOR SENIORS

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak about the new horizons for seniors program.

Seniors have been especially impacted by isolation and loneliness throughout the pandemic. The new horizons for seniors program has contributed much-needed support to community organizations that have helped seniors to stay connected, healthy and active during the pandemic.

I would like to highlight a few examples in my riding. There are organizations in Don Valley North, like the Xile Nianhua Senior Centre, the Armenian Community Centre and the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario. They have helped seniors to learn and use technology to stay connected at home; offered virtual exercise classes to keep seniors active and socially involved; and hosted on-line painting workshops.

For anyone who wishes to apply, applications for funding close on December 21. I encourage all eligible community organizations to apply for this wonderful program.

* * *

[Translation]

ARGENTEUIL—LA PETITE-NATION

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your role today. I also want to take a moment today to extend my sincere thanks to the people of my riding, Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, for placing their trust in me for a third time. I thank my family, my friends, our volunteers, and my children for supporting me since 2015.

I am proud to represent our beautiful riding and to contribute to its advancement in collaboration with the municipal officials in the four RCMs in my riding, with my colleagues in the Quebec government, and with the entrepreneurs and citizens of my riding. I am committed to continuing the work that we started together in 2015 with a wonderful, experienced and diverse team.

I thank Danielle, Jean, Timmy and our newest recruit Martin, who just joined the team.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, 18 months ago I congratulated the former member of Parliament for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo as she gained a new resident, Brynnley Lisette Huby, my granddaughter. Today I wish to congratulate the new member of Parliament for the same riding for the same reason. Brynnley's sister, Hannah Laurelin Huby, was born yesterday to parents Adam and Carina. All are healthy, and I thank God for her safe arrival.

I also, 18 months ago, questioned the Minister of Finance as to the level of debt my first granddaughter, Brynnley, was to inherit and asked this question before the massive overspending of the past 18 months. Today, Hannah, her parents and all Canadians are facing rising monthly inflation rates and a housing affordability crisis. I implore the government to address our country's financial mess.

Many of us began our business careers amid the rampant inflation and the interest rates that rose dramatically during the early 1980s. Surely, this is not the future we wish for our children and grandchildren. Let us fix it.

LOBSTER INDUSTRY

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Madam Speaker, the lobster season in southwest Nova Scotia, Canada's most lucrative fishing season, opened on Wednesday morning.

Fishermen set out on the harsh North Atlantic in the early hours to set their traps, with great anticipation of what the new season may bring, while families at home pray for the safe return of their loved ones. The work is gruelling and dangerous. Howling winds, frigid temperatures and unpredictable waves at sea create working conditions that many of us could only imagine.

In coastal communities along the South Shore, the lobster industry is the main economic driver. Families depend on a thriving lobster season to pay the bills and to put food on the table. I hope everyone in the House will join me in wishing all the fishermen in LFAs 33 and 34 a safe, successful and prosperous lobster-fishing season.

* * *

COVID-19 VACCINES

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, COVID-19 has been devastating. Getting people vaccinated continues to be our best line of defence against this deadly virus. However, while wealthy countries have enough doses, most lower-income countries cannot protect their frontline workers, their elderly or their most vulnerable. This means countless unnecessary deaths, but it also means variants like omicron arise.

Vaccine inequity impacts us all. We must waive patents, so vaccines can be produced around the world, but this vital measure, called the TRIPS waiver, has been continually blocked or delayed by wealthy countries like Canada. This is not only morally reprehensible; it is unbelievably short-sighted. It means more variants. It puts us all at risk. I call on the government to openly support the TRIPS waiver, to stop protecting big pharma and to start protecting human health.

* * *

• (1115)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, today the world is marking the International Day of Disabled Persons. The theme for this day is always equity, accessibility and inclusion. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to commend the many contributions of persons with disabilities to Quebec society, despite the very real obstacles in their way.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability. Their talents and bright minds deserve the best efforts of governments, businesses and organizations in ensuring that people with disabilities can achieve their full potential. On this day, we should reflect on what we can do collectively in Quebec and abroad to ensure greater equality of opportunity. This is a time to reflect on the prejudice that still exists.

Statements by Members

For us as legislators, it is an opportunity to ask ourselves whether we are doing enough to consider the impact of our public policies on persons living with a disability. It is an opportunity to commend our family members, our friends, our colleagues and our constituents, because they are the ones we are talking about today.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a special day for wonderful people in our lives who carry an extra burden and through whom we can experience and see the innate worth and dignity of their lives.

I think of Shailynn, who despite her wheelchair and SMA diagnosis is an advocate, podcaster, YouTuber and, judging from her Instagram, a beach bum too. I think of Calgary mom, Janelle, and her daughter, Ryah, who was born with Trisomy 13 like my late daughter, Lucy-Rose. Ryah is a fighter, having defied the odds many times over. I think of my oldest daughter, Jolie, who despite her dyslexia is working through her 14-volume *Dork Diaries* set with gusto.

If we focus on someone's disability, we will overlook their abilities, their beauty and their uniqueness. They and all Canadians with disabilities can count on my colleagues and me to fight for them each and every day. Conservatives are the voice of Canadians left behind by the Liberal government.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and to celebrate the strength, resilience and important contributions of persons with disabilities.

I am proud that we are creating Canada's first disability inclusion action plan, which includes the Canada disability benefit, a robust employment strategy, and improved processes for eligibility in disability programs. Engagement on this plan with the disability community and with provinces and territories is ongoing.

In the spirit of "nothing without us", let us work together to realize an inclusive recovery and a more equitable society for all.

Oral Questions

I invite all Canadians to celebrate this day by highlighting the incredible contributions of persons with disabilities in their communities. These are people like my good friend, Erin Callon, in Kitchener—Conestoga, whose smile is infectious. Together we can build a truly inclusive and accessible Canada.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Speaker, Conservatives have repeatedly warned the government its reckless spending would fuel inflation. It said it would not, yet here we are. The cost of everything has gone up.

When will the government take real action to help Canadian families who are struggling to afford the most basic things, like groceries?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to see you today in this session, and I want to congratulate you.

I am very happy, and I hope there are a lot of questions about the economy today, because we have very good news to share with Canadians who are watching at home today. Thanks to the hard work of Canadians, in November Canada added 154,000 jobs, which is five times more than some had forecasted, to our economy. Our plan is working; our economy is growing.

• (1120)

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Speaker, as they say, small businesses are the backbone of an economy, and we need to help them thrive to help get our economy back on track. However, because of Liberal inflation, labour shortages and rising shipping costs, many businesses are struggling just to stay open.

Why does the government continue to ignore the needs of Canadian small businesses?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we all appreciate and understand in this House that small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy, and that is why, during this pandemic, as members will recall, this government was there to support them every step of the way.

One thing we said to small businesses is that we have their backs as long as it takes to make sure we get through this pandemic together. We will continue to support them.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Speaker, just this morning analysis from National Bank Financial revealed that, for the first time in decades, private sector investment in Canada has actually shrunk. Canadian factories are currently operating with the lowest capital stock in 35 years.

The Liberals have made it harder to open and operate a business in Canada. When are they going to realize the “Justinflation” economy is slowly destroying Canadian jobs?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very, very happy to talk about the economy this morning, because I have other good news. In fact, 106% of jobs have been recovered since the pandemic. This is astonishing, and it is thanks to Canadian workers and Canadian businesses. That compares to 83% south of our border.

We will continue to invest in workers. We will continue to invest in our economy. One thing Canadians watching at home understand is that our plan is working.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, over the past six years, and in particular in more recent months and years, the Liberal government has been spending a lot of money, printing a lot of money, and borrowing a lot of money. As a result, Canada is now dealing with 4.7% inflation, the worst inflation crisis we have seen since 2003. Canadian families are the ones footing the bill, given that the cost of living keeps rising under this Liberal government.

Could the government commit to doing one very simple and very responsible thing and control its spending?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent. He knows that I truly respect him, and I am happy that he has given me the opportunity today to share some good news with the House and with Canadians.

As a result of Canadians' hard work, Canada added 154,000 jobs in November, which is five times higher than what had been forecast for our economy. Canadians can clearly see that our plan is working, because our economy is growing.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I invite my colleague to go to a food bank and repeat what he said about everything going very well. No, families are suffering more and paying more, and that is the reality for all Canadian families.

In my riding, the charitable organization Amélie et Frédérick has noticed a large increase of 25% in requests for food hampers. That is the true face of Canada's inflation. This morning, André Larose, the executive director of Amélie et Frédérick, said, “Yesterday's donors are today's beneficiaries”.

Is the government prepared to help—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I understand because earlier this year, I myself helped distribute food hampers to families in need.

If there is one thing that Canadians will remember about our government, it is that when Canada went through a pandemic, we were there to support them. We were there for families, we were there for workers and we were there for businesses.

The best thing to do, and this is the advice I am giving the member opposite, is to support Bill C-2, which will continue to help Canadian families and workers.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, for eight months, the government hid information about why two scientists were fired from Canada's highest-security virus research centre. For eight months, the government refused to hand over documents about what could have been espionage on behalf of China.

Now it has relented and is offering to hand the documents over to the opposition parties, but only under tightly controlled conditions. The government House leader says this is a good faith effort. Does that mean it was acting in bad faith for eight months?

• (1125)

[*English*]

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the balance between ensuring the House has access to all documents and ensuring that national security interests are protected is absolutely paramount to this government. That is why we suggested that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians be used, so that members of Parliament could have access to all documents in an unrestricted way.

Opposition parties said that was not enough, and we are willing to go further. We are suggesting the model that was used for Afghan detainees in 2010 as the way to proceed. I look forward to—

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, of course people have questions.

Scientists who appear to be connected to the Chinese regime and had access to top-secret information had to be fired. Instead of being transparent and explaining why, the Prime Minister accused the opposition of being racist. Then he took the Speaker of the House to court to prevent the release of documents the House demanded. Imagine the Montreal Canadiens suing a referee to prevent him from enforcing the rules.

Does the government realize that secrecy only fuels speculation?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is absolutely clear that

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members have access to all of the information. However, it is essential to have a system in which members can securely verify that information so that national security interests are protected.

It is indeed possible to see all of the information, but we need a system that protects our national security.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, another day, another dark chapter of gun violence in Montreal. Another person was killed in Anjou last night. This is the 32nd homicide. Close to 60 weapons destined for the streets of Montreal were seized at the border.

There are still too many guns on the streets. People have had enough, and so have border officers. We need more resources to protect the children in our neighbourhoods. Enough is enough.

Will the minister commit today to taking real action to stop the flow of illegal weapons across our borders?

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

One life lost to gun violence is one too many. We have taken important steps to address gun violence. We have made significant investments to improve investigative capabilities, and we have set up a working group with the United States. I will be speaking with my Quebec counterpart later today.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, health experts have told us that if countries like Canada do not work urgently to get vaccines to the world's most vulnerable populations, dangerous variants like omicron will continue to develop. The global impacts will be dire. More people will die and the COVID-19 nightmare will continue. Canadians want to get back to normal, but that will not happen unless everyone everywhere has access to the vaccine.

The Liberal government is moving way too slowly. Will the government scale up production, waive patent restrictions and make sure vaccines—

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

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her advocacy on this very important issue. It is precisely why, from the very beginning, Canada stepped up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is precisely why we helped found, support and co-chair the COVAX AMC group. It is exactly why we have donated millions of vaccines to the developing world. We understand that until we end this pandemic everywhere, we do not end it anywhere.

*Oral Questions***SMALL BUSINESS**

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, small businesses have struggled through an enormously challenging year. On December 31, they will be ready to toast a more prosperous and brighter new year. However, who will be knocking on their doors when the clock strikes midnight? It will be the Liberal tax collector. The New Year's hangover this year will be the CPP increase.

After such a difficult 2021, why are the Liberals increasing CPP taxes on businesses?

• (1130)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to be rising in the House again today.

I think the member is misleading in her question. In fact, this is not an increase. This is not a tax. We will make sure we will be there. What Canadians understand is that we have been true to them and have been with them every step of the way during this pandemic, and we will continue to be there for small and medium-sized businesses.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government says the January 1 payroll tax hikes are necessary, but a payroll tax needs a payroll to tax. Statistics Canada's most recent survey of business conditions says that one in four businesses expects their profitability to be down by the end of the year. There have been many times this year when more businesses have closed than opened.

Is the government not concerned that a higher tax in this country's current economic conditions could cause further small businesses to fold?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the question because it gives me a chance to explain something to the House and to Canadians who are watching at home this morning. One thing that Canadians and small businesses across this nation will remember is that we have been with them every step of the way through this pandemic, both at the start and during the pandemic, and we will continue.

I have one piece of free advice for the Conservatives. If they are genuine in wanting to help small businesses in Canada, why do they not support Bill C-2 instead of voting against it like they did yesterday?

* * *

SENIORS

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, elder abuse manifests itself in many forms. Financial, emotional, mental and physical abuse is rampant against Canadian seniors and it is only increasing. In the last Parliament, the House unanimously agreed to Motion No. 203. Among other things, this Conservative-led initiative called for legislation to combat seniors fraud. This was over two years ago.

When will the government take meaningful action and introduce legislation to protect Canadian seniors?

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, elder abuse, in all its forms, is totally unacceptable. This issue is extremely important to our government and it is an issue we all take very seriously.

We are working on initiatives to combat seniors abuse, including strengthening the law, creating a national definition and having better data collection. This builds on the work we are already doing with the National Seniors Council, with projects such as the New Horizons for Seniors program, to help raise awareness around seniors abuse.

I hope the hon. member and indeed all members of the House apply for the call for proposals for the New Horizons for Seniors program. The deadline is December 21.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week I rose in this place to ask the government when it was going to rectify its GIS clawback that is currently crippling vulnerable seniors. The Deputy Prime Minister, in the process of deflecting the question, touted a one-time payment of \$500 as some sort of compensation. Our seniors are losing up to nine times that amount because of this clawback.

I will ask this again. When will the government show compassion and step up? Our seniors need it and they deserve it.

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we all know how challenging this pandemic has been on seniors. Every single step of the way, this government has been there to support seniors, especially the most vulnerable, by strengthening their GIS. We moved very quickly to provide immediate and direct financial support to seniors.

When it comes to the CERB and GIS, we are aware of the issue. I can assure the hon. member that we are working on this issue to find the right solution to support those affected. As always, we will be there for our seniors.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday, U.S. countervailing duties on softwood lumber doubled.

Yesterday evening, I spoke with representatives from the Quebec Forest Industry Council, and they are extremely concerned for these companies, which create 140,000 jobs in Quebec.

These companies' money is being gobbled up by duties instead of being invested in our economy. Many of them are local family businesses, such as D&G Forest Products in Sainte-Aurélie, Bois Daaquam in Saint-Just-de-Bretenières and Scierie Lemay in Sainte-Marie.

What does the Prime Minister intend to do to convince the U.S. President to reverse his decision?

• (1135)

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

I am from the Mauricie region, and I am very familiar with the forestry industry and companies like Rétabec and Résolute. My riding is even home to the Ecole forestière in La Tuque.

If there is one thing that the Canadians watching at home this morning need to know, it is that the Minister of International Trade is in Washington today to defend the interests of forestry workers.

If there is one thing Canadians know, it is that we will always be there to defend the interests of the forestry industry and its workers and to work with—

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are being hit hard by inflation. Owning a home is out of reach for many Canadians. The U.S. countervailing duties on softwood lumber will only make matters worse.

If interest rates rise, which is entirely possible, we will have a perfect storm. It will be brutal.

The Prime Minister needs to get his act together, take leadership on this issue and get that decision reversed. When and how will he do that?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one thing that Canadians know for sure is that we on this side of the House know how to stand up for the interests of Canadian businesses and industries.

We demonstrated this when duties were imposed on the steel and aluminum industry, for example.

In addition, as I just mentioned while running out of breath, the Minister of International Trade is in Washington at this very moment, standing up for the interests of forestry workers and defending the interests of the industry. That is what we are doing today, and that is what we will continue to do.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it has happened again. Gun violence has hit Montreal yet again.

Yesterday, a 20-year-old man lost his life when he was struck by bullets. A 17-year-old teenager was also injured. It happened in the middle of the street in a residential neighbourhood at 7:15 p.m.

Oral Questions

Montreal families are scared. They are scared of losing their young people, of being hit by stray bullets, of ending up in the wrong place at the wrong time, even in their own home.

The minister knows he has a duty to do something about this, but does he understand the urgency of the matter?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we agree on the importance of having cross-border working groups. That is why they have been around since 2002, in the form of integrated border enforcement teams.

Just this week, more than 60 firearms were seized through a partnership between the RCMP, the Sûreté du Québec and the Montreal police.

We have to do everything we can to ensure that our children, families and everyone can stay safe.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it was Montreal's 32nd homicide of 2021, and there is one more month to go.

I applaud the seizure of guns last week, but more must be done. I applaud the fact that the minister is willing to attend the summit organized by the mayor of Montreal, which will be held in late January, but he needs to act more quickly.

The Government of Quebec is set to announce an additional \$46 million for the prevention of violence. There is a sense that action is urgently needed, but Ottawa is not quite there.

What will the minister do today to prove that he understands how urgent this is?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are focusing on stopping the movement of firearms across our border and ending the senseless violence in our communities.

During the election campaign, we promised to invest at least \$1 billion to help the provinces and municipalities ban handguns in their jurisdictions.

As I have already said, I will be having a virtual meeting with my Quebec counterpart to find concrete solutions on the ground.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, in times of doubt and uncertainty, Canadians can rely on one thing from the government: more confusion.

Yesterday, the U.S. announced new travel restrictions for Canadians. On our side, the minister announced new testing measures for all travellers coming here. He did not say who would administer the tests, he did not say where travellers would have to isolate, he did not say when these measures would begin and he did not tell airports or airlines.

I have a few simple questions for the minister: Who, what, where, when and how will Canadians get details on this new plan?

Oral Questions

● (1140)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy for the opportunity to answer this question.

Before I respond, however, and since this is my first opportunity to do so, I would like to quickly acknowledge the new cohort of pages, of whom we are already very proud. The member for Hull—Aylmer and I were once pages, many years ago. We know how challenging it can be to manage work and school. We thank them in advance for everything that they will be doing.

As for the question, as always, all of our decisions are based on science and on keeping Canadians healthy and safe.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week, the Liberal government announced stricter border measures to combat the omicron variant, as the Conservative opposition was calling for.

A week later, it has become clear that there is a huge gap between what the Minister of Health said and what is actually happening on the ground. There was no consultation with airports and very little with the provinces. It has been a week, and everything is a total disaster.

Does the Minister of Health realize that public health measures are not something he can make up as he goes?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am obviously pleased to take the first question from my colleague, the Conservative critic, regarding health and safety.

I want to quickly say three things. The first is that this is all based on science. The second is that, with regard to any confusion, I am sorry to say that, just a few days ago, my colleague was asking for us to stop all testing at the border. Third, it would be interesting to know how many Conservative members have still not received one of the 61 million doses of the vaccine that have been administered across Canada.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was hoping the minister would not add to the confusion.

Canadians are stranded in South Africa. They are desperately trying to get assistance from the government. They are having to jump through hoops just to find an affordable PCR test or a safe flight back home. Their calls for action have gone unanswered by the government, and it is scrambling to provide them clear guidance.

Does the minister have a plan to help bring these stranded Canadians home, or are they just going to keep sending those calls to voice mail?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am again very pleased to say a bit more on that.

We are delighted to work very well and very constructively with airports across Canada and with public health officials. I am also pleased to remind every Canadian that the best way to protect ourselves is by following public health measures and being vaccinated.

Talking about calls to action, what about the actions of Conservative MPs who have not yet been able to benefit from the 61 million doses already administered to Canadians?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us talk about the government's foot-dragging. Everyone knows that, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Liberal government was slow to take action at the border and with regard to vaccines. Even today, nobody seems to know who will be administering screening tests to the passengers arriving at our airports.

On Wednesday, the health minister said that of course that will take time to implement. He actually said that. Here we are, 20 months later, and the Liberals still have not learned a thing. They do not understand that time is of the essence in preventing a fifth wave. Why are the Liberals so slow to take action?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am so happy to answer that question because, a few months ago, my colleague and his colleague from Calgary Nose Hill said Canadians would have to wait until 2030 to get vaccinated and would be the last people in the world to get vaccinated.

I am delighted to remind my colleagues that we are leading the pack. How long will it be before all the Conservative members get vaccinated? Maybe 2030?

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*[English]***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government has failed to meet even one-tenth of the commitment of protecting Afghan refugees. The Liberals' continued insistence on layers of red tape has left tens of thousands of Afghans fleeing the Taliban unable to get to safety. With each passing day, Afghan collaborators, human rights advocates, judges, women and girls face heightened risks.

Will the Liberals simplify documentation requirements; waive the need for refugee status determination, as was done for the Syrian refugee initiative; grant temporary resident permits for those in need; and increase staffing for processing?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my colleague for her advocacy on addressing the humanitarian crisis situation in Afghanistan.

Of course we express solidarity with all who remain there, and we are working day and night to continue to bring Afghan refugees to Canada. In fact, I am pleased to inform the chamber that just yesterday, we welcomed an additional 243 Afghan refugees in Canada. This is not to say that there is not more work to do. This government will do that work in partnership with everyone, including Canadians who wish to see us fulfill that goal.

* * *

• (1145)

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, this week a PBO report showed that women are still not being paid equally in Canada and many will not see pay equity until 2029. That is eight years from now. Remember when the Prime Minister said gender equity was important because it was 2015? Six years later, women are still waiting for pay equity because of the Liberal government's failure to act. Incremental justice is unacceptable.

When will the Liberals correct course so women get pay equity?

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to let the NDP critic know that we have women's backs and have had women's backs. We have seen the gaps in equity in real time. We knew that we had to act, and we did. We provided \$100 million to shelter organizations because we knew that women were at risk. Women fleeing intimate violence were at risk, and that was what we did. When it comes to gender-based violence, \$3.8 billion is going toward that. We have women's backs and will. I look forward to meeting—

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

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, over the course of the pandemic, the economies of the prairie provinces, including my home province of Manitoba, have been some of the hardest hit. Because of the strong advocacy of our Manitoba caucus, a new regional development agency specific to the Prairies was announced by our government.

Could the Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada please update the House on how PrairiesCan has supported businesses throughout our fight against COVID-19?

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada and Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me first congratulate the member on his re-election and the fine work that he has done, both in the city of Winnipeg and on the Prairies.

As noted by the member, PrairiesCan was created over the summer to address the unique needs of the Prairies and focus on local priorities. Through this pandemic, PrairiesCan has provided more than \$461 million of new money, supporting close to 7,000 businesses on the Prairies. Additionally, through budget 2021, we have announced \$360 million of new money to support businesses and workers on the ground. PrairiesCan will—

Oral Questions

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, Russia's foreign minister has just told our foreign affairs minister that the nightmare of military confrontation is returning. The Prime Minister has reportedly told Ukraine's president that Canada will use every single tool possible to deter Russia. With 115,000 soldiers and thousands of tanks and armoured vehicles at Ukraine's border, CDS Eyre said Canada would offer no CAF support.

I ask the minister again, as I did yesterday, who is in charge and how will Canada defend democratic Ukraine?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, since 2015, under Operation Unifier, Canada has been steadfast in its support of Ukraine with troops on the ground undertaking training exercises day in and day out. We stand with our Ukrainian partners, as well as with our NATO allies, in terms of presenting a united front against unwarranted Russian aggression. We will continue to work on a multilateral basis to uphold the international rules-based order, peace and democracy.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Madam Speaker, just last year the government said there was no path to net zero without nuclear, but when it comes to nuclear energy and SMRs the new environment minister is hiding, both virtually and in reality.

I would like to congratulate Ontario for selecting GE Hitachi as the design partner for SMRs. I would like to know if the new Minister of Environment will continue hiding from nuclear energy, or will he take the opportunity today to congratulate Ontario?

• (1150)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government has developed an ambitious climate plan. It is one of the world's most detailed and concrete plans. In the transition toward a net-zero future, we must consider all non-emitting technologies, including wind, solar, hydro and yes, nuclear energy.

Oral Questions

It is certainly an important part of the mix right now in this country, and we have been supporting the development and the assessment of small modular reactors. I had a very good conversation with my counterpart in Ontario, and I did indeed congratulate him on an important step forward in the development of this technology.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, in a joint announcement with the Government of Quebec on August 6, the government pledged to reconsider its immigration regulations, especially with respect to temporary foreign workers. Businesses will now be allowed to increase the number of temporary foreign workers from 10% to 20%.

Businesses in my riding are tired of waiting for the government, which has dithered for exactly four months now. Will they finally do their job once and for all? Will that be implemented on Monday, December 6, after a four-month delay, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The federal government is working closely with the Government of Quebec, which has the power to make its own decisions about immigration targets. As for the percentage of temporary foreign workers, a pilot project is currently under way.

We will keep working with our Quebec counterparts, and we will do what needs to be done to ensure Quebec gets the immigration it needs.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the price of everything is rising under the inflationary policies of the Liberal government, and few have been harder hit than Canadian farmers.

The prices of fuel and drying grain have skyrocketed because of this escalating Liberal carbon tax. Now the Liberals are proposing a whopping 30% decrease in fertilizer emissions. We know the impact on farmers and families will be devastating: less food production and higher prices on the grocery shelves.

Why is the Liberal government deliberately undermining the food security of Canadian families?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadian farmers are important stewards of the land. Yes, we have set a national target for emission reduction from fertilizer. The western producers conducted an informal survey about the 30% target, and they said, “We asked a dozen soil nutrition experts, including 10 retail, independent and federal government agronomists, who weighed in on this issue. Most agreed that Ottawa’s emission reduction goal was achievable and does not require making do with less fertilizer.”

[Translation]

SENIORS

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has been pushing the government since the summer to stop unfairly reducing the guaranteed income supplement paid to working seniors who were entitled to CERB. We were told that the minister is working on a solution, but that is taking far too long. The GIS is for poorest seniors. Every month, Ottawa is taking away hundreds of dollars from people who cannot afford to just put everything on a credit card until the feds get their act together. These people are making sacrifices and making increasingly difficult choices month after month.

When will the minister do something about it?

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from the very beginning our government’s priority has been to support seniors, especially those most vulnerable. That is why we worked extremely hard to strengthen income security for seniors, including their GIS.

We created benefits such as CERB to help people at the height of the pandemic. We know it is having an impact on some of our most vulnerable now, and I can assure the hon. member we are actively working on a solution to ensure we fight for those most vulnerable. We are always going to be there to support those most vulnerable seniors.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister told me on Wednesday that the minister was working on a solution to this injustice. That is great, but, today, seniors have a right to demand that the minister explain to them directly what concrete solutions she is supposedly working on. It should be simple. We just need to ensure that CERB is considered employment income for GIS purposes. Seniors must be able to request a reassessment of benefits based on their current income.

Will the minister confirm that that is what she is working on now? When will she finally come up with a solution?

• (1155)

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, we are working to find the right solution to support seniors affected by the GIS and changes due to the pandemic benefits, but let me remind the hon. member of a number of things that we have done to help seniors. We have increased support, through OAS, for those 75 and above. We have strengthened GIS for vulnerable, single seniors. We provided one-time payments during the pandemic to help seniors afford the things that they needed.

We have an ambitious agenda for seniors, and we will always support seniors.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Mexico, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Argentina, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Ukraine and New Zealand, which is a country that the finance minister said is very much like Canada, all have the same thing in common: They have increased interest rates as a result of inflation.

What is the plan to protect Canadians when interest rates inevitably rise in Canada, or is it just interest?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is quite a pleasure to see you again this morning.

I am happy to see that my hon. colleague wants to talk about geography. Let me mention a few countries: the United States, Mexico, Germany, the eurozone and New Zealand. What do they have in common? More inflation than Canada. The member will know that the latest inflation number for Canada was 4.7%.

What Canadians understand at home is that we have a plan to grow this economy, and that our plan is working.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada's new PPE manufacturing industry is already in a state of crisis. These patriotic innovators answered the government's call to help Canadians when PPE supply was short and badly needed at the start of the pandemic. Despite the Prime Minister promising to buy made-in-Canada PPE, all I can find in the Parliamentary precinct are masks that are made in China.

When will the Liberal government start supporting Canadian PPE innovators and manufacturers, and stop breaking its promises?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am rising for the first time in the House for the 44th Parliament. I want to thank the good people of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas for electing me. It truly is an honour.

With respect to the member's question, we know that Canadian businesses have pivoted. They have retooled, and we have support-

Oral Questions

ed them every step of the way. We are in a position now where we are not short on PPE. Why? It is because Canadian businesses stepped up and our procurement efforts have supported those businesses. We are going to continue to do that.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, when the Prime Minister called the unnecessary, unneeded election, federal development applications were put on hold. Three months after the election, these applications are still on hold.

When will these applicants hear from the government?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is a very important question. The members know that on this side of the House we have been there for small businesses and that we have been there for businesses throughout the pandemic.

I take this question very seriously. If the hon. member has a case in point, we would be happy to look at it on this side of the House and provide a response.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Madam Speaker, sadly, last night, Montreal was once again witness to a shooting that took the life of a young man and injured another.

It is imperative to our government that we take every measure at our disposal to stem the flow of guns that are illegally diverted through theft, fake purchases or smuggling at the border. On that, I would ask the Minister of Public Safety to inform the House of the measures being taken to vigorously combat gun trafficking in Canada and Quebec.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our thoughts are with the residents of Montreal, who have faced gun violence far too often, including last night.

This past week, nearly 60 illegal firearms were seized at the border, thanks to a massive undertaking between the RCMP and several partners, including the Sûreté du Québec and the Montréal police. We have to do everything in our power to ensure the safety of our communities.

As I was saying earlier today, I will be having a virtual meeting with my Quebec counterpart.

Oral Questions

● (1200)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government must take our official languages seriously. This week the commissioner tabled a report indicating that francophone immigration is seriously falling behind. He said, “It is time to do more and do better.”

Why not kill two birds with one stone and welcome foreign francophone workers to solve the labour shortage problem and increase the number of French-speaking citizens?

I am therefore asking the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to establish more effective administrative measures to immediately address the labour shortage and at the same time increase the presence of French speakers in Canada.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government recognizes that it has a responsibility to protect and promote the French language, not just outside Quebec, but also within Quebec.

A key element in the protection and promotion of the French language is encouraging francophone immigration in all regions of our country. As we promised in our platform, we will move forward with creating an ambitious national strategy to foster francophone immigration outside Quebec while continuing to support French language training for immigrants to Quebec.

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[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are over 4,400 natural gas wells throughout southwestern Ontario, a number of which are in my riding, including the community of Wheatley that was rocked by a natural gas leak explosion this past summer.

On August 17, the Ontario Petroleum Institute and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Finance, seeking to collaborate on the development of a program for Ontario's orphan wells.

Will the government commit to working on this critical issue in southwestern Ontario?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, certainly the issue of orphan wells and the environmental liabilities that they represent is a significant issue for all Canadians. As members know, we introduced a program focused primarily on the western provinces during a time of great financial crisis.

Typically the issue of the regulation of oil and gas producing companies and the environmental liabilities associated with that are addressed at provincial jurisdiction, but we are always happy to engage in a conversation with our counterparts in provinces and territories when they raise concerns.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Speaker, in its race to the moral high ground, the CBC has blindsided Canadians by appointing itself Canada's word monitor. It recently brainstormed a list of 18 words that should never be uttered. I wonder if it was a really slow news day for the taxpayer-funded public broadcaster.

Dictating a list of words is actually no substitute at all for the real work needed to end aggression.

Does the Minister of Canadian Heritage actually think it is the job of the CBC to think for Canadians?

[Translation]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He knows full well that the CBC is an independent corporation and makes its own decisions. At the same time, we know how badly the Conservatives want to make cuts to the CBC. They have said so many times in the past, which is a concern for our national broadcaster.

I wonder if they still intend to make such draconian cuts to our national broadcaster or if they plan on supporting the CBC in future.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 90% of Canadian seafood goes through small craft harbours and Canada's fish harvesters depend on these facilities to support their livelihoods. In my riding, the Harbour Authority of Portugal Cove/St. Philips is the centre of community life and an industry hub for fishing, trade, shipping and other marine sectors.

Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans please provide an update to the House on what our government is doing to support small craft harbours?

● (1205)

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new member for St. John's East on her election and thank her for the hospitality she showed me when I visited Atlantic Canada just weeks after my appointment, including to the harbour of Portugal Cove-St. Philips where I met with the authority members in her riding.

Small craft harbours, of course, play an integral role in many of our communities and their economies. Our government recognizes their importance. That is why, through budget 2021, we invested \$300 million to repair and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

*Routine Proceedings***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the environment minister announced that he had blown yet another deadline in dealing with the climate crisis. God help our planet. It is no wonder the government is now at the bottom of the G20 when it comes to renewables, right down there with Russia and Saudi Arabia.

While Joe Biden has committed to an energy transformation that is tied to well-paying union jobs, the Prime Minister is tied to targets he keeps missing.

Where is this plan to invest in the diversification, using the skill and training of energy workers, so that no region is left behind? The clock is ticking.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, Canada has developed a climate plan that is perhaps one of the most detailed and comprehensive in the world. I would invite him to actually read the document.

Canada also, I would remind him, has one of the cleanest grids in the world as it exists today. More than 80% of Canada's power comes from non-emitting sources, the vast majority of it from renewables, which is one of the highest levels of renewable production anywhere in the world.

However, we certainly understand that more needs to be done. We will be bringing forward an enhanced reduction plan associated with our commitments under the net-zero legislation, and we will be working to ensure there is economic prosperity—

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During Oral Questions, the member for Kelowna—Lake Country, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Technology, said the following in response to my colleague's question:

[*English*]

“I think the member is misleading in her question.”

[*Translation*]

All members here, and especially the minister, know that we cannot accuse or suspect a member of misleading the House.

The minister is an honourable man, so I encourage him to act with the dignity befitting his position, especially since he spent the entire question period sitting in the Deputy Prime Minister's chair.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the point made by the opposition House leader.

I apologize if my colleague was offended by what I said. That was not my intention.

[*English*]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I hope you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That today, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and in the spirit of “Nothing without us”, the House reaffirm its commitment to continue to work to identify, remove, and prevent barriers that still exist and increase the opportunities available to persons with disabilities.

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

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

Hearing no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1210)

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, with thanks to my colleague from Port Moody—Coquitlam, on this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, there have been consultations among the parties and if you seek it, I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following important motion: That given that 50% of the homeless and half the people who rely on food banks in Canada are Canadians with disabilities, the House call on the government to put into place, without delay, a guaranteed livable basic income for Canadians with disabilities.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

PETITIONS

FARMERS' MARKETS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to table a petition from constituents from the Comox Valley, Courtenay, Cumberland and Royston.

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The petitioners cite that farmers' markets are a key tool for a COVID-19 recovery as small business incubators, domestic food system resilience and security builders, local economy community builders and farmers' market coupon programs are a key support for new and existing market development and their provincial associations.

Farmers' market nutrition coupon programs help create food security and resiliency by giving vulnerable people access to healthy, locally grown foods and dietary education, while positively impacting the physical and mental health of participants by increasing the amount and diversity of the fruits and vegetables they consume.

The petitioners therefore call on the Government of Canada to initiate a national matching program for all provincial farmers' market nutrition coupon programs across Canada that would match those provinces already contributing to their farmers' market nutrition coupon programs and encourage the provinces that do not have such a program to implement one by offering matching funding.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind hon. members that when presenting petitions to please try to shorten their introduction.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to resume my speech after that fast-paced question period.

As I was saying, we have been trapped in the worst public health crisis of the past century for almost two years now, and our health care system is more vulnerable than ever, so we have to do whatever it takes to protect it. Our health care workers have been holding down the fort throughout this trying time, and we as a society must keep them safe. That is why the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-3, introduced by the government.

That said, there is a very real potential pitfall that will have to be addressed at some point in the legislative process. The proposed amendments must not violate health care workers' rights to peaceful protest and freedom of expression. These fundamental rights are necessary in a healthy democracy and must not be openly violated.

Once again, the public can count on the Bloc Québécois to ask the right questions to help Parliament clarify its intentions and to propose any necessary amendments.

The bill seeks to amend the Canada Labour Code to guarantee that every federally regulated employee gets a minimum of 10 paid sick days a year. As a loyal defender of all workers, the Bloc Québécois agrees with this proposal. No one, but no one, should have to go to work sick because they cannot afford to stay home. No one should be forced to make the impossible choice between taking the time to heal and putting food on the table.

What is more, this pandemic we are going through has shown us another, equally convincing argument. Collectively, we are better off when our infected colleagues do not come in to work. That is how we can stop a virus like COVID-19 or the flu from spreading and prevent unfortunate outbreaks. It is good for workers, it is good for businesses, it is good for everyone.

However, it is important to be realistic about what this bill the Liberals are introducing can really do to transform the labour market in Quebec and Canada. I will explain by considering the entire labour market.

Federally regulated businesses, such as those in the banking, telecommunications and airline industries, employ only a tiny fraction of the workers in this country, only 6%, to be exact. Of that fraction, we have to subtract all the workers whose employment conditions are governed by collective agreements comparable to or more generous than the one proposed in Bill C-3. In the end, the bill does not amount to much. It is just another well-crafted PR stunt by this government.

That being said, I personally believe that any improvement in the employment conditions of any workers ultimately represents a win for all workers. That is why the Bloc Québécois will support this bill.

In closing, the Liberals have returned to Parliament more than two months after calling an unnecessary election. After delivering such an uninspiring throne speech, they are now proposing a two-pronged bill that seeks to make minor changes to the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code.

The fact that this bill was one of the first ones introduced by this government in the new session eloquently demonstrates that the Liberals are more interested in ticking off election promises than in advancing meaningful legislation, and that they still do not have a clear strategic vision to offer this Parliament, much less a concrete social blueprint for achieving that vision.

In spite of all this, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-3 so that it can move forward, because, as a wise man once said, nobody can be against apple pie.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that opposition members are coming forward and speaking positively of the legislation, indicating that they would be supporting it. I appreciate the value in that.

This is something that was raised during the last federal election. The Prime Minister made a commitment to it, as the member referenced. Given the very nature of what we have witnessed over the last number of months, the legislation not only sends a positive message but really has some teeth and will make a difference, particularly by highlighting just how important our health care workers have been throughout this process.

Could the member provide his thoughts in regard to why he believes it would be of value to see the legislation pass before the House rises?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, if this bill was so important to the government, why did the government not introduce it earlier, and why did it not bring Parliament back more quickly rather than waiting over 60 days?

Yes, this bill is important because it is a step forward and provides protection for health care workers and support for those who do not have access to paid sick days. As I mentioned, no one can be against apple pie, but again, if something is urgent, then it is better to take action than to dawdle.

• (1220)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The protection and advancement of workers' rights are central policy issues for the NDP. Throughout the pandemic and 2020, we pushed the Liberal government to give people paid sick leave. Of course, we are talking about employees under federal jurisdiction, which does not include everyone. The Liberals were not interested. They told us no or put it off until later. They finally woke up during the election campaign and, 18 months after the start of the pandemic, they are admitting that this was a good idea and are now suddenly in a hurry to do something about it.

Why does my hon. colleague think that the Liberals have finally realized that paid sick leave does not just benefit individuals, but also constitutes a public health measure?

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question.

My colleague knows that the Bloc Québécois has a tradition of supporting workers' rights and that it is also a steadfast ally of unions.

It is hard to explain why the government took so long to propose this bill. We can see that it wanted to put on a dog-and-pony show by making this election promise. Now it is bringing forward this bill, but we still do not understand why.

I am thinking of other bills that the government introduced in the last Parliament that are also very important, in particular the infa-

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mous Bill C-10 and the bill on the modernization of official languages. It is difficult to explain or justify the inexplicable.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my eloquent colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for his very interesting speech.

He said that no one can be against apple pie or the importance of protecting workers while we are still grappling with this pandemic and do not want anyone to infect others. Let us not forget that the purpose of these 10 days of paid leave is to ensure the safety of the individual, but also to protect others.

My colleague also addressed the Speech from the Throne. With respect to workers' rights, the Bloc Québécois notes that this speech makes no mention of the EI reform it has been calling for for months. This issue is being championed by my wonderful colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville. In 2021, it is more urgent than ever to conduct a major reform of EI in order to further protect workers' rights.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Shefford for the question.

As I mentioned earlier, it is impossible to explain the inexplicable.

Currently, someone fighting an illness is entitled to less EI sickness benefits than someone who simply loses their job in the ordinary way. A person who loses their job is eligible for more than 15 weeks of benefits, and that is already enshrined in law.

The Liberals have said that they are aware of this issue and have promised to increase sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. We are hoping for a consensus on this here in the House, because people who are sick are not getting the support they need to heal or to return to the workforce.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my esteemed colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for his speech.

We are here today to talk about Bill C-3, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code. We are at second reading of this bill, which was introduced by our colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Bill C-3 proposes harsher sentences for people who intimidate health care workers or their patients or who block access to a hospital or clinic in order to impede people from obtaining health services.

The bill also proposes forcing federally regulated employers to grant their employees up to 10 days of sick leave.

Government Orders

Bill C-3 is good for Quebec, so the Bloc Québécois supports it. The amendments proposed today are in keeping with the legitimate demands of major unions and will greatly benefit employees. As my colleague said, whether it be yesterday, today or tomorrow, the Bloc Québécois has and always will side with workers in Quebec and across Canada.

At the same time, our party has already spoken out many times against the anti-vaccine protests that took place near hospitals and clinics during the election campaign.

The Bloc Québécois is opposed to all forms of intimidation, violence or interference directed at health care workers or anyone seeking care or a vaccine. Bill C-3 will give police and prosecutors more tools to prosecute offenders who directly or indirectly attack health care workers or patients seeking care.

As it stands, Bill C-3 contains eight clauses amending two acts, namely the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code. One of the clauses would add intimidation of health care workers to the invasion of privacy offences. Another proposes imprisonment for up to 10 years for anyone attempting to impede the delivery of health care by provoking a state of fear in a patient, professional or support person.

One paragraph prohibits intentionally obstructing or interfering with access to a place at which health services are provided, such as a hospital or clinic. That is one of the things we will have to examine in detail, because we do not want to interfere with health care workers' right to protest.

Another clause states that committing an offence to impede a health care worker in the performance of their duties could be considered an aggravating factor. In short, it is a good piece of legislation, but it really makes few substantive changes.

For one thing, the offences that Bill C-3 would add to the Criminal Code already exist, because it is already a criminal offence to block access to a hospital. It was not a lack of legal authority that was required to enforce this provision of the Criminal Code, but rather a lack of political will.

In short, the amendments proposed by Bill C-3 provide a few more tools to prosecutors and the police, and that is a very good thing.

Although the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-3, we have to admit that it is more of a PR stunt, as my colleague mentioned earlier, intended to fulfill the Liberals' election promise, than a truly constructive piece of legislation.

It is also important to note that Quebec acted on this matter some time ago. In September, the National Assembly of Quebec passed a bill providing for very stiff fines for anyone protesting against vaccination within 50 metres of a school or health care site. These fines range from \$6,000 for a first offence to \$12,000 for subsequent offences.

• (1225)

On a different note, the bill before us would amend the Canada Labour Code to add 10 days of paid sick leave for all workers.

According to Employment and Social Development Canada, the Canada Labour Code covers 955,000 employees working for about 18,000 companies. Of that number, roughly 63% of all federally regulated private sector employees had access to fewer than 10 days of paid sick leave, so this will be highly beneficial.

The Canada Labour Code currently provides for 17 weeks of unpaid sick leave, but only 5 days of paid sick leave. It is worth noting that this provision led to a number of regrettable situations during the pandemic. Many employees kept going to work sick, even with COVID-19, instead of staying home, so that they would not miss out on pay. This decision undoubtedly helped the virus spread, with tragic consequences, as we know. Other people became infected, and some died.

That said, many employees are covered by collective agreements that already guarantee them sick leave. Bill C-3 will obviously not change anything for them. Furthermore, there will be little impact on the lives of Quebec workers, since Quebec currently offers more paid sick leave than anywhere else in Canada.

In addition, it is quite surprising that the bill is trying to accomplish two things at the same time. No matter what the Liberals claim, there is nothing in Bill C-3 that connects these two aspects of the legislation. They are packaging one uncontroversial topic that most people agree with, sick leave, with a rather complex amendment to the Criminal Code.

I think it is likely that the Liberals and the NDP will want to get this bill passed the easy way, like we did with Bill C-4, which would ban conversion therapy. However, we are talking about an amendment to the Criminal Code, which requires a serious, in-depth study. This bill would have implications for freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. I sincerely believe that we must not cut the parliamentary process short on a topic like this. We are hearing from the other side that they want to fast-track Bill C-3. If someone objects, will they be accused of stonewalling?

Whether the Liberal and NDP members like it or not, the Bloc Québécois will be sure to ask the relevant questions in the House to ensure that the legislators can clarify their intentions as to the amendments to the Criminal Code. We want to make sure that they do not encroach upon health care workers' right to protest.

As usual, we will propose amendments to the bill, as needed, to improve it. The Bloc Québécois is always in favour of new, innovative ideas, and we will continue in that direction.

Despite the fact that this bill smacks of cynicism and will have a relatively minimal impact, it does contain some elements that will benefit Quebec workers, especially health care staff.

With that in mind, of course the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-3.

• (1230)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I found it a little strange that he would imply that the NDP would not want the Bloc Québécois to ask relevant questions about the bill. On the contrary, we will welcome such questions—as long as they are relevant, of course. I still think we are moving in the right direction.

I am sure it will come as no surprise to my colleagues that protecting the right to strike, to be able to protest and to form a picket line when the situation warrants it, is extremely important to us in the NDP.

Is the Bloc Québécois prepared to work with the NDP to ensure that Bill C-3 protects health care workers from hostile protesters who try to intimidate them, as well as the right of those same health care workers to exert pressure in their labour relations?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Speaker, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois always agree when it comes to workers' rights. We believe that workers should always enjoy or be able to enjoy a consistent level of well-being. That is why we will vote in favour of Bill C-3—as will the NDP, I am sure.

My colleague brought up a sensitive topic about where the line is drawn and how far is too far. I completely agree. Debate is not the time for us to set legitimate boundaries.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the Bloc Québécois member about an amendment he mentioned.

An amendment proposed by my colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka could be included in Bill C-3, either now at second reading or in committee. During the previous Parliament, I introduced Bill C-307, which would amend the Canada Labour Code to include a six-week bereavement leave for parents who lose a child under the age of 18 and five days of paid and unpaid leave for women who lose an unborn child.

Would the Bloc Québécois be prepared to support this type of amendment?

• (1235)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Speaker, that is a very simple question.

Members know our position, which is that we always want to make progress on that front for workers. The Bloc Québécois fully supports examining and analyzing all of that, as it has a major impact. People do not choose to be sick and take leave. We are open to this.

As my colleagues know, we made similar proposals with regard to EI sickness benefits and specifically proposed 50 weeks of leave

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for serious illnesses. It is now time to continue with our discussions.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech.

A little earlier, other parliamentarians alluded to how slow the federal government is to act. The election was held 62 days ago, and parliamentary committees will not sit before the end of January 2022. We support the bill, and we hope it will move forward quickly, but Quebec has already passed legislation on this.

I would like my colleague to comment on how things generally work and how we could work better if there were only one government in Quebec.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Speaker, my colleague answered his own question. It would be much easier for a sovereign Quebec, because there would be just one level of government.

As to the government being slow, I am hyperactive, so watching bills drag on when we could easily adopt them or skip to the next step is something I find supremely frustrating.

I have felt that way for two years and a bit—since my first election two and a half years ago, to be precise. The amount of time wasted in this process is incredible. If the government wanted to, it could move things along.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is my first speech in this 44th Parliament. As many of my colleagues have done, I want to take a moment to extend my sincere thanks to the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for the confidence they have placed in me to represent them in this institution and to be their voice in the House. It truly is an immense honour to do so for a fourth time. I never thought I would last this long in this Parliament, but I will continue to serve with passion, drive and enthusiasm, to represent the progressive values and principles of the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

The House is debating Bill C-3 today, and I must say that my NDP colleagues and I are extremely pleased to be able to rise in this place and discuss one of the two issues in the bill: the proposal to provide 10 days of paid sick leave for federally regulated workers.

Why are we so happy about this? It is because the NDP has been asking for it for two years, from the start of the pandemic. We are now in the midst of the fourth wave, and it seems like it will never end. There may be a fifth wave, based on what we are seeing in Europe and Africa with the omicron variant.

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The NDP has been insisting for at least 18 months that we must give workers 10 days of paid sick leave. In 2020, the leader of the NDP spoke about this 22 times in the House. He asked the Liberals 22 times when this was coming and why they were not taking action, and he reminded them that this change was needed in order to protect people, institutions and our communities. However, the government only kicked the can down the road. It remained evasive, saying that this measure was not needed and that it was doing something else.

Then, in the middle of an election campaign this fall, the Liberals decided that the NDP had had a good idea and that they would act on it. After dragging their feet all through 2020 and 2021, after calling a pointless and costly election, and after waiting two months to recall the House, the Liberals threw together this bill at the last minute and now want to push it through.

The 10 days of sick leave is a protection for workers that the NDP has been calling for for a long time. The Liberals were a bit late to the game, but they finally saw the light, had a road to Damascus moment, had a revelation. This is a good thing and a victory for the NDP, which has been calling for this for months, for nearly two years.

I would still like to take a minute or two to talk about the context of this pandemic. Let us go back to March 2020. I remember that time very clearly. We were hearing about what was happening in Wuhan, China, where it all started. Then, we watched as the virus spread like wildfire around the entire planet.

At one point, the governments decided to shut everything down because things had become too dangerous. People were told not to go to work if they did not have to. They were told not to go out, not to see anyone, and to stay at home because it was too risky. They were told to wear masks and wash their hands. The economy was put on pause, something that has never happened before and I hope will never happen again.

I live near Saint-Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. I no longer heard any cars going by, but I could hear birds singing, which never happens on that street. That shows how society just shut down all of a sudden and became paralyzed.

• (1240)

Sick people who had a cough or a fever but did not want to miss a day of work had to make an impossible choice if they did not have sick leave. I am referring to people who were allowed to go to work because they had essential jobs in the supply chain, the food sector or health care.

That had a major impact on everyone, on families. It was definitely a collective trauma. I hope we are past it now. I hope that we are heading in the right direction and that, together, we will be able to move on to the next step.

In a crisis, people die. People suffer. Thousands of people died. Tens of thousands of people were infected, and thousands overcame the disease. However, some people will experience serious, long-lasting effects for the rest of their lives. This shows how society was and continues to be shaken to its very foundation.

This crisis was revealing. I want to talk about two different aspects of it.

The first is the fragility of our health care system. We are very proud of our accessible, universal public health care system, but we have noted some major shortcomings. For example, our long-term care homes were not ready. The working conditions of health care workers were sometimes not good enough to convince employees to continue working and to come to work. We saw how ill-prepared and ill-equipped we were.

We did not learn any lessons from the SARS epidemic in 2003. The recommendations made at the time were not implemented. We therefore found ourselves with no vaccines and no gloves, masks or personal protective equipment. We saw how vulnerable that left us. Our health care system was undermined. I hope that we have learned from this pandemic, so that we will be able to deal with the next one. Let us be clear. We are trying to get out of this pandemic as quickly as possible, but in the years to come, there will inevitably be another one. That is why it is so unfortunate that, under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, we lost all our national vaccine production capacity. The NDP has proposed creating a Crown corporation, if necessary. That way, if the private sector is not interested, we will at least have the collective public capacity to produce vaccines to treat people.

Our health care system was fragile. There were problems with working conditions, staffing and preparedness. We have collectively been dropping the ball for years.

The second aspect is our social safety net. Earlier, I spoke about the holes in the health care system. The holes in our social safety net are more like abysses or craters. We quickly realized that the current EI system was leaving many people with nothing when businesses closed, people were asked to stay home, jobs were lost and things were falling apart.

The EI system already excluded 60% of workers. This means that of all the workers who pay EI premiums, more than half do not have access to benefits when they lose their job. That is unbelievable. It is pretty much the dream of any private insurer that does not want to pay. EI is a public tool that we collectively implemented in order to help people who lose their jobs and fall on hard times. However, it is just not working.

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As I explained earlier, it was even worse with the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. People who contributed to EI were not able to access it, and on top of that, others who did not contribute, such as contract workers, self-employed workers and freelancers, had nothing. That is why the NDP demanded that the government provide direct assistance to offset the gaps in this deeply flawed program. We demanded that the Liberal government increase the Canada emergency response benefit from \$1,000 to \$2,000 a month, so that people could safely pay their rent and grocery bills. What the Liberals had originally proposed was not enough. We then wanted to expand the benefit to people who might still have been getting a small contract or a couple of hours of work here and there, so that it would cover freelancers and self-employed workers, who had been excluded from CERB. We made it so that people could work and earn up to \$1,000 while receiving CERB. We also took action to help students, who had been completely forgotten.

• (1245)

We saw that our social safety net was not good enough and that many people did not have sick leave. I want to emphasize this, because, in the context of a pandemic, sick days are a solution to a public health problem. Sick leave is a social benefit. It benefits the worker. Workers benefit personally from being able to stay home and rest instead of going to work sick, and it is better that way. Everyone wants that.

If someone unfortunately does not have access to paid sick leave and they cannot afford to take a day or two off work because their budget is too tight and they have bills to pay, they are sometimes faced with an impossible choice. They have to choose between buying groceries and staying home to take care of themselves. If they choose to stay home to rest, they might not be able to pay their rent at the end of the month.

It is not just that person's health at stake, but the health of everyone, because we are in the midst of a pandemic. If that person has symptoms of COVID-19, if they are coughing or have a fever and they go to work anyway, they might spread the virus to the other people in their workplace.

Personal sick leave therefore becomes a tool and a collective method of self-defence. This is a public health issue. Sick leave lets people make rational decisions and protect others, including their family, neighbours, community and co-workers.

While I deplore the fact that the Liberals dragged their feet and took so long to come up with this concrete proposal, I am pleased to see that we can take a leadership role, take a step in the right direction and perhaps encourage some other provinces to adopt similar mechanisms, so that all workers can eventually be protected.

Let us talk about those mechanisms. We see room for improvement. Bill C-3 can be improved. I would even say that it must be improved. That is why it is really important that there be a parliamentary committee that studies the bill one day where we will be able to discuss, debate and propose amendments.

In this version of the bill, people have to work one calendar month to be entitled to one sick day. After five months, they will be entitled to five sick days, and so on.

I see two problems with that. The first is the notion of calendar months. For example, someone hired on February 6 would not get their first paid sick day until April. That person will not have worked every day in February, so they have to wait until they have worked the whole month of March to get their first paid sick day, which they can put in their leave bank. That means they would have to wait six or seven weeks to get that first paid sick day. Why not go with a certain number of days worked consecutively, regardless of the hiring date or start date? Why not base it on an actual month and not make people wait six or seven weeks? I think that is the first thing we need to fix.

The second thing that needs fixing is the bank of 10 days of sick leave. It was people in the health care sector who talked to us about it, including representatives I met with this week from an organization called the Decent Work and Health Network. They are concerned that a new employee has to wait until they bank enough days of sick leave before they can stay home sick. It can take a while to accumulate enough days. According to a U.S. study these representatives cited, it takes at least six days of sick leave for the leave to become truly accessible. That is when the person can really take them, or even dares to take them. It was reported that people with at least six days of sick leave banked take sick leave more than people who have banked only a day or two.

We need to explore the possibility of having a minimum number of days available from the start, before the banking process begins to reach 10 days of sick leave. I think that is something the parliamentary committee could do.

We are talking about technicalities, but they can make a big difference in people's lives. When people get sick, one day is rarely enough. The Decent Work and Health Network also talks about a survey that found that the median duration of leave for influenza is four days. If someone has only a day or two of leave banked, it may not be enough.

• (1250)

With regard to the mechanisms, I would also like to talk about how the employer is allowed to ask the employee to provide a medical certificate for a day of paid leave. For just one day of leave, the employer could require the employee to consult a physician in order to obtain a medical certificate justifying the absence. I believe that it is important to show good faith and to trust employees. Allowing this type of mechanism implies a presumption that abuse and fraud will take place. Is a doctor's note needed for just one day of leave, as opposed to four or five?

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We need to ask ourselves this question because this mechanism could be a barrier. A person who suffers from gastroenteritis and who cannot go to work for a day could be asked for a medical certificate two weeks later. This complicates things. Not only will they have to take one day of leave, but they will have to make a doctor's appointment two weeks later to ask for a medical certificate.

That will clog up the health care system. The doctor we met with who was part of the group I mentioned told us that he had better things to do than sign papers for someone who took one or two sick days. His job is to treat people who are sick right now, not to prove, after the fact, that someone was previously sick. Furthermore, this group did a survey and found that the requirement to provide a medical certificate for taking a sick day was an impediment for 82% of workers. That is a lot.

This requirement outweighs the benefits of paid sick leave. It may seem silly, but the NDP believes that we cannot ignore that this is an obstacle for 80% of workers. This is something we need to take into account.

I want to move on from talking about the first part of the bill to the second part of Bill C-3, which would amend the Criminal Code. Under Bill C-3, threatening or intimidating health care workers or impeding them from entering their places of work, such as hospitals and clinics, would become aggravating factors. The bill would allow for harsher punishments to combat these forms of intimidation.

Unfortunately, over the past two years and especially in the past year, some very aggressive people who are against science, public health and vaccines have acted in a disgraceful manner. They intimidated and threatened health professionals who were going to hospitals to take care of our parents, grandparents, children and neighbours. It is mind-boggling. The NDP agrees that we need to implement a measure to address that issue. We said during the election campaign that we needed to take steps to protect health professionals. This is a major problem, and we cannot let people intimidate and threaten the workers who take care of us. That does not make any sense. We need to take steps to protect them, so this change to the Criminal Code is a good thing.

That being said, we must not infringe on these same workers' right to use pressure tactics when they are on strike as part of a collective bargaining process, for example. I think we need to take that into account and be very vigilant. In any case, the NDP will stay vigilant, in order to preserve the right to picket and strike as part of a labour dispute.

The NDP stands up for workers. We want to stand up for them so that they do not have rocks thrown at them by anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists. However, we also want to protect workers' rights so that when they are on strike because of a labour dispute, they can express themselves, demonstrate and make their demands and the reason for the labour dispute known.

That aspect is very important to the NDP. We agree with the principle of the bill, but we must be sure not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We need to ensure that the right to picket and the right to demonstrate are protected in the event of a labour dispute or strike. For the NDP, this will be very important to see.

I thank the members for their attention, and I am ready to take questions.

● (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am wondering if the member can pick up on the point that when the national government brings forward good initiatives and ideas, it often has a positive impact in the different provincial and territorial jurisdictions. When we talk about the 10 days of paid sick leave, let there be no doubt that the bigger pool of workers is not under federal jurisdiction, so by taking up an initiative such as this, Ottawa is setting the stage for the provinces to start to follow suit. I would like to get his thoughts on that issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, that is a good question, and I thank my colleague for asking it.

For starters, I would just say that it is true now, and it was even more true 18 months ago. My colleague is right, but I do not know why his party did not think of this before, especially when we firmly insisted that the change be made.

The premise of his comment is absolutely right. Only 10% of Canadian workers are federally regulated, which means that the vast majority of workers are governed by provincial labour laws and codes. My Bloc colleagues pointed this out earlier, and Quebec certainly does have an excellent system, although there is room for improvement.

Nonetheless, I think the federal government has to show leadership. This affects hundreds of thousands of workers, and access to these sick days will really, truly help them. Yes, we are raising the bar even higher, because we want to see progress and better working conditions. I am glad the government is finally getting that.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the conversation that was held here in regard to protecting our infrastructure, and of course it is important. I, as well, support people protesting. It is their right to be able to voice themselves, and of course that applies as well to our doctors and nurses.

What does the member think about the fact that we have laws in our Criminal Code regarding blocking key infrastructure? In the past, we have had that circumstance of blocked rail lines. Does he see that the government failed to act when we have laws that are available to protect Canadian citizens in the midst of protests that may get out of hand?

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[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, it is true that we need to protect health care workers. We completely agree on that. We have to maintain a balance between freedom of expression and freedom to protest.

Recognizing the aggravating factors of a situation is something that has been done in the past, including when the Criminal Code was changed to better protect bus drivers who were victims of a growing number of recurring assaults for years. The NDP worked on that file at the time and we still support that cause today.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions is asking that attacks on health care staff and professionals be considered an aggravating factor. In 2019, this union told us that 60% of nurses had been victims of violence, harassment or assault in their workplace. To better protect them, we need to improve their working conditions and schedules, of course, but we also have to ensure that they are not assaulted on their way to the hospital or the clinic where they work. The proposals we are looking at today are intended to do just that.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie talked about the importance of supporting certain workers during the ongoing pandemic. My thoughts are with the workers in the cultural sector, who will continue to struggle for a long time to come because we are not out of this crisis yet.

The Liberals are good at dragging their feet and throwing the ball in someone else's court, like the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Finance are doing when it comes to Bill C-2. Will someone consider helping our cultural sector workers?

Is my colleague prepared to work with the Bloc Québécois in committee to advance the file of workers in the cultural sector by proposing measures in Bill C-2 specifically adapted to their needs?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Shefford for her important question. The cultural sector is definitely among the hardest-hit sectors in recent years. I can attest to that, and it is certainly the case in my colleague's region as well.

The cultural sector of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie was vibrant, full of life and truly dynamic. Those people have suffered a lot but, unfortunately, they have been forgotten by the Liberal government during the pandemic. This government has done very little other than come up with band-aid solutions at the last minute.

Whether it is about improving employment insurance, giving direct assistance or providing a guaranteed minimum income to workers in the cultural sector, I would be pleased to work hard and collaborate for the betterment of artists and artisans.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who, as our labour critic, has been incredible in raising the alarm around the issue of contract flipping. One of the concerns we have about this bill is that it raises questions about the entitlement to sick days for workers subject to contract flipping.

Would the hon. member care to comment on how, in principle, workers doing essentially the same work despite a possible change

in employer should have their work standards and sick leave entitlements preserved?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the deputy critic for labour in the NDP caucus, for this important question.

We do have concerns about this. Over the years, we have seen this issue at airports, for example. There is a void in the Canada Labour Code and when a contractor or subcontractor moves to another company, the collective agreement no longer applies. People lose their rights and their pay scales. They have to start all over again. One of the rare situations where we have seen working conditions decline in the past ten years involves this type of contract for contractors and subcontractors working at airports. We do not want the same thing to happen to the sick leave of federally regulated employees.

My colleague is absolutely right, we must protect their rights. We must clearly establish that in cases where people who are working in the health care sector for a contractor have accumulated a certain number of sick days, this bank of sick days must be transferable to the new employment contract with a new employer, so that it does not roll back to zero every time.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, in British Columbia, the NDP government has already introduced a five-day sick leave regime. Obviously, the federal one is 10 days.

I would like to ask the member whether he believes the B.C. NDP's five days is too low, or the federal one is too generous.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I think there is a consensus that 10 days of sick leave is ideal. According to the Decent Work and Health Network, six to nine days of sick leave is ideal, so that employees feel comfortable and able to take them, especially considering that it often takes three or four days to recover from the flu or gastroenteritis, for example.

Earlier, we talked about leadership and the role the federal government must play in raising the bar and encouraging the provinces to do more and to work towards improving working conditions for everyone. That is our job, and we in the NDP are proud to do it here in the House.

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Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech was such an honour to hear, but also it is such an honour for me to get to work with this member, who has worked so hard for working people across this country. He spoke about how the New Democrats have said 22 times in the House that we need 10 sick days for people.

Can I ask the member why he thinks it has taken the Liberals so long to come through with that legislation?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona for her question and for the excellent work she has been doing for two years now. She now has a new mandate and I congratulate her on her re-election.

That is a very important and troubling question. We have known for six months, for a year, even for a year and a half, about the realities of the pandemic and the dangers of going to work while sick. Even though the NDP has been urging the government to do this for workers, for our public health and public safety, it took all of this time, a pointless election and a new Parliament for the Liberals to introduce Bill C-3.

I think that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will just continue with one of the most recent questions, as I thought it was of interest. The member just made reference to five days and 10 days. The idea of paid sick leave for workers is something that is important to all of us, and we recognize that. In fact, the member might make reference to the number of asks by the leader of the New Democrats, but he should remember that in 2019, the government actually instituted the three-day paid sick leave for workers. As it was pointed out, B.C. has seen to bring it up to five days.

One of the things the Prime Minister has consistently talked about over the last number of months, and probably from the beginning, is that we can try to learn things through the pandemic. That is why we are seeing before us the legislation that we have today. I will get into that in more detail shortly.

I wanted to start off by underlining what I think is a very important point. Everyone, whether they are a health care provider or a health care client, should feel safe when going into a health care facility. That is one of the two motivators for all of us to get behind this legislation and pass it through.

I am quite encouraged. To say it up front, in the last few days we have seen a great deal of optimism on the floor of the House of Commons. The other day, we passed the conversion therapy bill unanimously through second reading, committee stage and third reading. That could not have been done without the support of every member inside the House of Commons.

Yesterday, Bill C-2 got to the committee stage. Members recognized that it was important, because it continues to provide the supports Canadians need. This includes for small businesses, individuals and the communities we all serve. It was great to see the debate collapse and Bill C-2 go through.

This morning we have another wonderful debate taking place. From what I have heard thus far, we have had Conservatives, the Bloc and New Democrats talk positively about the legislation, believing this is the type of legislation that it would appear everyone can get behind. I can appreciate there are members who have some ideas in terms of amendments, and we will wait and see what kinds of amendments surface. I suspect there might even be some amendments today. Members are waiting for the bill to get to committee, where they will propose the amendments.

Having been a parliamentarian for a number of years, I have always thought that one of the best ways to get amendments dealt with is to share them as much in advance as one can, or do that consultation with parties on all sides of the House, making sure the department is aware of it. This is, as are the other two initiatives, a very important piece of legislation.

I reflect on the last election, and having gone through a number of elections as a candidate, I can tell members that it is not that often that we get real anger at the door. On the issue of vaccinations, what surprised me was the degree to which so many people were very upset. We could see the divisions even within a household.

● (1310)

I can recall at least two or three occasions when I was talking to a person at the door and the individual would be getting visibly upset. Someone else from the household would come and ultimately save the day, if I can put it that way, and lower the temperature. We have to try to get a better understanding of why that is taking place.

During the election we really started to see the protests. When I was at the doors, I would often say to people that, whether it is members of the Green Party, the Liberals, the Conservatives or the New Democrats, we are all saying that people need to get vaccinated. All political parties, with the exception of the People's Party, were encouraging that.

People would ask about their individual freedoms, the Charter of Rights, and so forth. I suspect that, if the federal or provincial governments were denying people those basic human rights, opposition parties of at least one of the two levels would have stood on their feet to say we had gone too far. However, I am not familiar with any political party or individual member of Parliament sitting today who is saying that people should not be getting vaccinated. Yes, there are some concerns that some are not, but at the end of the day, to the best of my knowledge, I like to think that positive message is getting out.

One has to ask why the anger is out there. We need to expand upon that. What brought us to the point we are at today where that aspect of this legislation is necessary?

We can go back to March 2020, when very few people had an in-depth understanding of what the coronavirus was and its long-term impact, let alone its short-term impact. It was not that long ago when we were just told to wash our hands. Health care and science experts, at the beginning, were not saying that we had to wear masks. There was a learning curve, and it was very steep.

As we proceeded through the pandemic, we learned a great deal. Today, as a result, we find that people will continue to wear masks. I envision it will continue even after a year. Someone was saying to me that, if they were to have a cold, they would be inclined to wear a mask, as a consideration. I believe that masks will continue to be worn well into the future for different circumstances. It is not just something that will be gone two years from now.

I believe that people have a far greater understanding of why it is important to wash their hands. The 95% alcohol sanitizers are going to be selling well into the future because people will continue to use them. In the long term, this will actually save health care costs.

• (1315)

I used to be a health care critic in Manitoba, as well as a critic for a number of other portfolios. I would take tours of facilities, and I do not recall seeing people using the type of PPE that we have today. I suspect some of the things we are seeing now will linger into the years ahead, as it should. We have learned many measures through this pandemic.

If we look back to March of 2020, we were trying to get a better sense of the science. Health experts came together to make sure the advice they were giving to Canadians was right on the mark. That is why I consistently told people, virtually from day one, that I am not a health care expert, so the best thing they could do was follow what our health care experts were saying.

What we provided, as a government and as members of the House of Commons, was a first-class, second-to-none website presence through Health Canada, which was constantly being updated to provide the necessary information, so people could have a sense of comfort in knowing that the professionals were out there and there is a science to this. By clicking in, or by phoning their member of Parliament, Canadians could get an understanding of what was taking place and be brought right up to date. Provincial and territorial entities across the country, in all regions, also did likewise.

The problem was false news and people intentionally spreading misinformation. This is what fed into the whole anti-vax mentality. It somehow gave additional strength to anti-vaxxers. I was concerned when we started seeing rallies with people being bold enough not to wear masks in situations where there was a high concentration of people. People were coming together without masks to say that vaccinations were not the way to go. I would suggest that to think that did not have an impact would be wrong.

That is why each and every one of us has a role to play. The outcome of that misinformation, which provided an empowerment of sorts to those anti-vaxxers, was that it enabled them to espouse garbage, which is the best word that comes to my mind. We started to see protests. Let us imagine, if we can, some of the most vulnerable in society, the sick in a hospital facility, or those wanting to visit

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them, as there were limitations, and there were people protesting, making it more difficult for them.

Health care workers have really stepped up, working long hours and overtime, some of which was never ever claimed. Many health care workers got into that profession not because of the money, but because they truly care about the health and well-being of people. They want to contribute.

• (1320)

Those health care workers, and I am using that in the broadest terms, as I am talking about the cooks in our hospitals and the workers who kept our hospitals and long-term care facilities open, as well as the registered nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses aides and lab technicians, saved thousands of lives. All those wonderful people ensured Canada's population was, as much as possible, being provided the services that were absolutely critical to getting through this crisis situation. They prevented thousands more from ever having to go into ICUs. They were there, providing advice so people could ensure they could minimize the chances of people getting the coronavirus in the first place, whether it was testing, bed care in an ICU or the care provided in a long-term care facility. These are the heroes who took us through the pandemic.

I find it appalling that there are some in society who would actually protest people's entry into facilities, and the screaming and the yelling that was taking place. Whether they were protesting health care providers and workers, patients or visitors, they need to really reflect on that behaviour. We have to think about the roles we all play. During the election, there was no hesitation in my mind. When people would bring up the issue, I was right there, recognizing that people should not be protesting in the manner in which they were protesting. It was not right. Canadians recognized that, and this legislation deals with an important election promise.

I see I only have two minutes to go, and I have not even talked about the 10 days' paid leave. I am going to hop right over to that and maybe address more on it during questions and comments.

The federal government, a couple of years back, brought in three days of paid leave. In the last 18 months, the Prime Minister said to Canadians, and to Liberal members in Parliament on so many occasions, that we need to build back better, and this is a good example. Let us take a look at what Bill C-3 is doing. This is giving more social benefits to workers in Canada. This is something that is very strong and positive, and all of us should get behind it.

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People who are sick should not have to go to work. This extends what we previously did in 2019. It was nice to hear that B.C. is following suit. If Ottawa were to pass this legislation, I do believe it would send the positive message to our provinces and territories that we could have better labour laws. If the provinces and territories get onside and support this type of legislation, then all workers in Canada, not the minority but all workers, would be able to benefit.

• (1325)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear my hon. colleague stand up in this House. There was an interesting point that he did bring up and that was the issue of false information. During the election campaign, the finance minister and deputy leader of the Liberal Party was found to have engaged in false information on Twitter. In fact, she was marked as having manipulated the media for spreading falsehoods against her political opponents.

I wonder if he has a comment about that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, due to the wonderful mood earlier in the chamber, I was not going to use this quote, but I would like to share it with the member based on his question and the heckling he gave earlier.

On Wednesday, Premier Heather Stefanson, Manitoba's new Progressive Conservative premier stated:

I've been very clear about where we're going with this, I have indicated that to cabinet and caucus,...

It's up to them.

The vaccination mandate will coincide with the day that everyone entering the Manitoba Legislature must be fully inoculated.

To solve the problem with the ultimatum to all MLAs, they should either get vaccinated by December 15 or be removed from her caucus and cabinet. That is the type of leadership that I think is important for all elected people to take.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear the eloquent speeches given by my colleague from Winnipeg North, who, in the midst of the pandemic, has reminded us of the importance of disinfecting our hands with Purell or another liquid sanitizer.

To come back to a more serious subject, the Bloc Québécois believes that workers' rights are important and incontrovertible. However, this bill mainly proposes changes to the Criminal Code.

I would like my colleague from Winnipeg North to assure me, very clearly and very plainly, that workers will still have the right to protest near health care facilities.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, absolutely there will be opportunities for people to conduct peaceful protests. We do live in a democratic society and it is important.

The member made reference to labour laws. Virtually from day one, this government has brought forward positive labour legisla-

tion. As a government, we support workers in Canada. I think that, not only from a legislative perspective but also from a budgetary perspective, ample examples can be found that show how the government supports labour in Canada.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, at the beginning of the pandemic and throughout the pandemic, we heard very clearly from medical health professionals. They said that there are two things that are of top priority to protect the health of people in our communities: to get vaccinated and to have governments bring forward paid sick days, so that employees are not infecting colleagues when they go to work or having to make a difficult choice between paying their bills or going to work.

It is great to hear the minister today talk about seeing the light and it is good to hear Conservatives, the official opposition who sat on their hands on this issue, finally getting on board.

The CBC cited that 100,000 women have actually completely left the work force; 10 times that of men. We know there are many reasons for that, including the lack of child care and social supports for women throughout the pandemic that have surfaced.

One thing we know, and hopefully my colleague can agree, is that many women will be coming back to work in precarious jobs. They are going to be coming back on contract. Many will not meet the 11-month threshold, so they will not be able to get a full 10 days of paid sick leave when they come back to work.

Does the member agree with the fact that it is going to take workers 11 months to access the full 10 days of paid sick leave will disproportionately impact women even more? They are already facing challenges, while being at a greater risk of skills erosion and potentially hampering their ability to get rehired. Women will also have to face a transition to different roles in the economy, as a result of them disproportionately being impacted by COVID-19.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, given the general will and sense of co-operation in the House, I am very optimistic that the bill will pass and go to committee, where I am sure the critic for the NDP will no doubt be raising this issue in more detail. There will be a more detailed answer there.

Suffice it to say that the government brought in paid sick days in 2019. The provincial NDP government in B.C. recently followed with five days, as opposed to the three days we suggested, which is fantastic. Now this government has made a commitment to bring it to 10 days. That is a good thing for workers, particularly in B.C. but also across Canada.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to my great colleague and friend, the member for Winnipeg North, debating on the bill. He brought me back to the days during the campaign when we saw vicious attacks on health care workers coming from protesters. We all saw the protests on television.

In my riding of Don Valley North, we did not witness any of those gatherings, but at the door I did have conversations with some anti-vaxxers. Some of them were friendly and sophisticated and some were very angry, so I can understand what the member was talking about.

It also took me back to the news stories in which we saw that the Liberal leader had been targeted and was fighting a battle on two fronts: first with the opposition parties and the election, and also with the protests. Sometimes the opposition volunteers were disguised as protesters, or vice versa.

Now, when I read the bill I see that we will recommend increased penalties for those who commit this crime in the future. Would this be a good opportunity to educate the public at large on the severity of their actions, should they choose to target health care workers?

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I applaud the member for Don Valley North in recognizing, as our colleagues have, how important it is to support our health care workers. He has been a very strong advocate for them and I appreciate his comments. I believe that this legislation will also be a very important educational tool, and that it will make the environment safer for both health care workers and patients.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, this past week in northern Ontario a young mother with a child was attacked outside a vaccination clinic. She was called a “murderer”. This is not something we have ever seen in northern Ontario. We pride ourselves on our social solidarity and the respect that we show for one another. This is something I would imagine in Trump’s America, but it is happening in each of our communities.

We had a doctor who had to give up her practice in a small town because of harassment and threats from anti-vaxxers. We hear from medical workers who are being harassed and threatened when they are on the front lines of the pandemic every single day. They are putting their lives on the line and then getting anti-vaxxer harassment.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. What steps do we need to put in place to ensure that our health care workers are able to do the job without threats, intimidation and possible violence?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as elected officials, whether members of Parliament, MLAs or local councillors, we have a significant role to play on this issue. We need to call it out for what it is. We have to be there for the constituents the member referenced, and they have to know that we are there for them. We have to let health care workers know that they have the unanimous support of parliamentarians no matter where they live or what political party they belong to.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, what a joy it is to be back in the House and be here for the rare occurrence of hearing the member for Winnipeg North speak. It happens about as often as a full eclipse of the sun. It is amazing. I am going to tell my grandkids that I was here to hear the member speak. It is actually disappointing that the Liberals have so many new members, yet time and again it is the same chap who stands up, as much as I do understand.

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I will be sharing my time today with the member for Cumberland—Colchester, who is one of the new members we are allowing to speak.

We are talking about Bill C-3 today. I am glad to get a chance to get a word in edgewise, with the member across the way, but also to speak before the Liberals perhaps prorogue Parliament, call another snap election or use any other of their usual ploys to avoid accountability.

Bill C-3 is probably a needed bill, but it is an odd bill. Half is related to justice and the other half to the Canada Labour Code. I am not sure why the Liberals have put the two of them together instead of presenting them to the House separately. I hate to think doing it this way is a typical Liberal ploy, or that they are hoping someone will object to part of it, so they can scream and yell and say we are anti-health care workers. I know I am being cynical because there is no way in the world they would ever consider doing that. They would never try to wedge folks.

We have heard repeatedly from the government, and our colleagues from the NDP and the Bloc, about how much this bill is needed. Why now? Why not a year ago? Why not six years ago with the Canada Labour Code? Why have the Liberals waited? They have had the backing and support of all the parties during the COVID crisis to put through almost everything with unanimous consent. Why would they wait so long?

The labour changes the bill mentions easily could have been brought in before. Their delay reminds me of a great *Seinfeld* episode in which Newman, the postal worker and *Seinfeld*’s nemesis, helps to kidnap Elaine’s neighbour’s dog and eventually gets caught. When a policeman comes to arrest him, he, *à la* son of Sam, asks what took him so long. I have to ask the same of the government. If it was such a priority, why would it wait?

We could have had this before the House, debated it and sent it to committee long ago. The election took place on September 21 and we waited two full months to sit in the House again. In the U.K., Boris Johnson was able to re-form the House and get its Parliament back to work in six days. It took the government two months just to get us here.

We could have easily dealt with Bill C-2. In the House today during question period, we heard the Liberals tell the Conservatives to get on side and pass Bill C-2. We heard them say in debate that we should help small businesses and pass Bill C-2. Why did they not convene Parliament to get us back to work immediately so we could pass Bill C-2? It is the same with Bill C-3.

Government Orders

With respect to Bill C-4 on conversion therapy, people thought it was Bill C-6 or Bill C-8, because it was brought to the House several times. It was killed when the government prorogued Parliament. It was killed again when it called an early election, which no one really wanted and was not needed, as we ended up the same. If it were that important, why did the Liberals not try to pass the conversion therapy bill earlier? They had six years to bring it in.

One bill I remember they brought through in 2017 as a higher priority than the conversion therapy was Bill C-24. At the time, and I was using another *Seinfeld* quote, I called it “a bill about nothing”. Basically, the bill changed the bank account the old ministers of state were paid from in the estimates process. I think it also changed the official name on the cheques from Public Works to PSPC.

This was a bill we debated in the House and tied up the committee with. Somehow the government decided that was more important than a conversion therapy bill. They had been paid that way since Confederation. The ministers of state were paid out of one small bank account, and the other ministers, technically the government, were paid out of another. We could have continued doing that and brought the conversion therapy bill then.

The reality is this: The government is not serious about how it puts forward its legislation. It delays, obfuscates, throws it out and then demands that opposition parties get on board and hurry up to pass it, when it could have done that a long time ago.

• (1340)

Generally, everyone supports the first part of the bill, on criminalizing threats toward health care workers. We have all seen, during the election, the blocking of ambulances from getting to hospitals and the harassing of health care workers. We have heard the horrible stories from my colleague for Timmins—James Bay, where a small-town doctor, vitally needed, was chased out of his community by these threats. We just heard from him about the single mother who was horrifyingly harassed just for getting a vaccine.

Therefore, perhaps we need this legislation, but I would like to hear more details. Apparently, a lot of this is covered already under provincial or other laws. I would like to see how the bill would strengthen the protection for our doctors and nurses and, as my colleague mentioned, for people who are just going for a vaccine. There are the doctors and nurses we have to protect, but we also have to protect Canadians who are trying to access health care facilities.

During the election, we Conservatives had, as part of our election plan, the critical infrastructure protection act. This would provide additional security from those protesting vital infrastructure, such as our hospitals and our rail and pipelines. We saw what just happened in B.C., with its supply chain devastated because of the cuts to the CN and CP rails. That was obviously an act of nature as opposed to protests, but protests can be just as devastating, and we have seen it be just as devastating to our health care when we do not have consequences. I hope my colleagues in the House will eventually adopt a law that would protect other vital infrastructure besides our hospitals, and also our supply lines.

Unfortunately, from day one, we have had mixed messaging from this government regarding vaccines and the COVID crisis, and it has led to confusion, fear and anger. None of this, nothing this government or anyone else has done, excuses the violence and harassment of our health care workers, doctors and people trying to access health care. However, what the government has done has not helped. When Canadians needed certainty, leadership and consistency, we got false information from the government, like we saw with the Deputy Prime Minister being admonished for fake news on Twitter.

It is funny. We heard earlier that my colleague, the member for Winnipeg North, when he was out door-knocking, was surprised by the anger from the vax versus the anti-vax people. I felt the same thing. We had people threatening us with a shotgun if we dared come with that. We have all felt it, but he was surprised. I want to read something from the National Post for the member. It said that in January, the Prime Minister had argued against mandatory vaccines as “divisive” in our “community and country”. It said that in March, he mused about the inequality and inequity of vaccine passports. In July, he said there would be no mandatory vaccines. However, two weeks later, apparently led by internal polling that showed he could divide the country for political gain, he announced a mandatory vaccine, cynically just in time.

The article goes on to say that the Prime Minister’s “flip flop on vaccine mandates” exemplifies “a governing philosophy based on political calculus”.

This is not governing based on bringing us together, or on trying to get the unvaccinated vaxxed by convincing them of how good vaccines are and how they will lead us out of the troubles we are in. There is nothing about that. It is using it based on polling to create divisiveness in Canada for political gain.

The Prime Minister, when speaking out against protesters, used the term “you people” when describing the protesters. Now, I might perhaps, against some of the people who are blocking hospitals, have used harsher language, but he used the term “you people”. Now, I note for our feminist Prime Minister that the website *everydayfeminism.com* says “you people” is a racially coded phrase. Again, nothing the Prime Minister has done excuses the protesters and their actions, but nothing the Prime Minister has done has gone to alleviate the divisions in Canada. He has used this to divide the country.

Apparently I am out of time, so I will let it go and perhaps leave it open to questions and comments to address the second part of the bill.

• (1345)

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my respectful colleague's debate, and I get the picture. He is trying to say that the misinformation out there is caused by the government. The viciousness of these protesters is caused by the government.

I want to bring the House back to the last session, where official opposition party members daily and constantly questioned the amount of vaccines we would get, when we would get them and if they were effective. It was the same thing with the rapid testing.

The message the Conservatives are projecting to the public is to not trust these vaccines. They have had a lot to do with the attitude and doubt we have had in the public. As I said, we saw some Conservative volunteers disguised as protesters.

Now that we are talking about the bill, does he agree harsher sentences should be created through this amendment?

• (1350)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I do not recall reading a single National Post or Globe article stating that the Conservative Party was pushing misinformation or using it for political divide against the Prime Minister. I just read verbatim from a National Post article.

It is disgraceful that gentleman would misinterpret, purposely perhaps, my speech. Nowhere did I say that anything the Prime Minister did justified the protests. I was very clear in stating that. What I did state was that he used this issue for divisive politics.

It is unfortunate, when the parties are getting together, such as today, that he would choose that path instead of promoting a way forward on vaccines and Bill C-3.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his thoughtful speech. My question is in keeping with what we have heard so far and I, too, will try to ask it in a relatively thoughtful manner.

We are members of the House of Commons. We should be setting an example for citizens. The question about the vaccination status of the members of the Conservative caucus has come up several times. I can understand the debates about personal choices and privacy.

Government Orders

However, is it not true that people could doubt the effectiveness of the vaccine and disagree on their importance because the number of people who have requested an exemption for medical reasons may be higher than the statistical average? Is that not what is happening because of the way the Conservatives have managed this file?

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed with that question. I have respect for some of the interventions my colleague has made today.

We are talking about trying to bring Canadians together and not politicizing the issue, and that is what we are hearing with this question. Our party has been very clear that vaccines are the best way to get us out of this pandemic, not continuing to try to divide us politically between those who are vaccinated and the very small portion who are unvaccinated.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are very glad to see the Conservatives get on board now to support paid sick leave. One thing the member's colleague, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, talked about was bereavement. I really appreciate that because most of us cannot imagine the terrible grief of losing a child. It can lead to unresolved grief, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, addiction disorders, suicide even, homelessness, loss of education and loss of work.

Right now, Canada does not have a national bereavement strategy like the U.K., the U.S., Ireland, New Zealand and other countries. There is no funding for designated supports for bereavement, including for organizations like Camp Kerry Society or local hospices, and the pandemic has made things even worse.

Certain things need to happen. The government needs to allocate funding to exclusively support those who support people who are suffering from the loss of a child. Does my colleague agree that we need to extend supports for those grieving, those parents, and that they should not be at risk of losing their job and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): A very brief answer from the hon. member for Edmonton West.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, we need to do more. A lot of it is provincial jurisdiction. The member talks about funding, and I believe there is funding available. I looked at the wage subsidy, and the billions upon billions that were given to wealthy hedge fund managers and other corporations. That money could have fairly—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Government Orders

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to make something clear to my colleagues. The reason I decided to change my profession as a frontline health care worker was to come here to Ottawa. I have been married for 31 years to my wife, Deborah, who is a pharmacist. I also have a daughter who is a paramedic, so this bill has really important meaning for me.

I wanted to come here to help create good laws, such as the one around conversion therapy, which we all worked on together. I wanted to help support my constituents to live their version of the Canadian dream, which I have been very fortunate to be able to do. I also want to help return Canada to its rightful place on the world stage, having had the opportunity to serve our great country in the Royal Canadian Air Force for nine years as a flight surgeon. Being here today to speak to a bill to protect health care workers and patients alike, so they can give and receive the care they need and desire, is truly an honour.

This is indeed a terrible situation. It is one I have experienced personally, and it is one I have seen other people experience. The abuse is mainly verbal abuse, threats and sexual harassment. As I mentioned, there are health care heroes. At the beginning of the pandemic, health care heroes were ready to give their lives for the sake of their patients. I think I talked about this in one of my other speeches.

I have often thought about this: Why do some people run into burning buildings and others run away? That is a real characterization of primary care providers and first responders alike.

They provide life-saving procedures and care to many people who perhaps are not ready to receive that type of care and do not know what type of illness they have. My dear colleagues should think of this: When the pandemic began, there was a significant fear that we would get the virus, as frontline health care workers, and perhaps die from it. However, the worse fear was thinking we were going to take it home to our loved ones. I can remember taking three showers a day when I worked on the COVID unit and thinking I would lose layers of skin so that I would not take it home to my family. Also, a lot of us lived separately. Several of my colleagues bought recreational vehicles to live in the driveways of their homes.

I think that COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of health care providers and the care they provide. Our colleague from Winnipeg North talked a little about this. Sadly, though, COVID-19 has also contributed to a mental health decline among health professionals. As we know, violence against health care workers is on the rise, and it often begins at the bedside in hospitals. Sadly, it is often gender-based and racially motivated, although certainly not always.

I can give examples of violence I have witnessed from patients who were admitted to the emergency room, and in my own office. Fortunately, in my office it was often characterized by foul language and demands toward my front-office staff. I want to make it clear to people that in no way, shape or form did I find this tolerable, and I made that clear to those folks who wanted to purport that.

In my opinion, the reason for this rise in violence is multifactorial. It is related to access to our systems. It is sometimes related to

things like dementia or unhappiness with the health care system, which is suffering greatly; to differing opinions on the type of care people should have, or desire to have; to the mental health changes associated with isolation, fear, sadness and irritation; or to following multiple rules and mandates and uncertainty.

I have to be clear that some of these things have been made even worse by my colleagues across the aisle with their mandates and uncertain rules for people, as well as by their lack of clarity. Unfortunately, through social media the good graces that many in my age grew up with are gone. That is not to be disparaging to younger folks. That is unfair, but many of those good graces are gone and that is spilling over into real life. It is not just in the virtual world. That, too, makes me sad.

● (1355)

This is also exacerbated by the 24-hour news cycle and the need to report and dissect stories and positions by pundits, politicians, professors and profilers. Does this matter? I think it does matter, because if we also do not examine the root causes of why these people feel like they are not being heard and need to act in the ways we are seeing, then we are not going to be able to act as a good government, make good policies and give folks better direction.

Why does someone become a health care worker? Why do people work in nursing homes and emergency rooms and provide in-patient care? Why is someone a health care technician, nurse, physician, pharmacist or paramedic? The unifying idea here is that they want to help people. They think it is very important that they see people who are sick and unwell, and they are caring at heart. They want to help people get through those difficult times in their lives, whether through things like bereavement, a surgical illness or mental health illness, they want to be there to help.

I also want to make it clear to my colleagues that unfortunately this type of abuse is not only directed at frontline health care workers. We have also seen it directed toward policy-makers. In my own province of Nova Scotia, we have seen Dr. Robert Strang, our chief medical officer of health, subjected to these types of actions. We have also noted that Dr. Theresa Tam has been subjected to it. We know our own colleague, the shadow minister for natural resources and former shadow minister for health, suffered threats and humiliation.

What is important here is giving good direction and clear advice to Canadians, but also to come at that, as we have often talked about here in the House over the last several days, from a position of caring and concern for our colleagues and for all Canadians, and to give them a voice so that we can hear their issues. It is somewhat counterproductive to alienate millions of unvaccinated Canadians with more and more restrictive mandates. Unfortunately, we do hear from them over and over that they are losing their jobs, they are losing their pensions, they are concerned about losing their house and how they are going to provide for their family. Those are not the types of policies that are going to help us fix this situation.

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I watched the news the other day. I did hear one pastor say that unfortunately there are people out there who are going to dig their heels in all the way to their necks. We need to support the right to lawful association and for the right to express alternate opinions. As we will likely see in debates coming up in this House in the future, we know that free speech needs to be defended. In the immortal words of Voltaire, “I do not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to the death your right to say it.” Colleagues, this is not about restricting the right to protest. It is about ensuring the manner in which it is done does not harm another person.

On the second part of this bill and being a rookie politician, I am not sure how well they go together or how much it will add to those folks who already have significant federal benefits. I do get concerned about the trickle-down effects this may have on provincial governments and small businesses. We know that small businesses are essential to our economy moving forward, especially in this time of significant inflation, and that is going to be important as we go forward.

I am not entirely sure what the benefit is of having these two together and what benefit the second part of the bill is going to provide. Certainly, it is a worthwhile bill to present and to send it off to committee for further study.

• (1400)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to welcome the new member for Cumberland—Colchester. Indeed, we seem to be on similar paths in life, going from being doctors to being here in Parliament. I am really happy that he supports this bill. This week, we have seen some really nice change in terms of all being together on the same page, first with conversion therapy and now with this bill.

I want to ask about something he hinted at in his speech, which is the coming problem of lack of manpower in the health care profession, like doctors and nurses. We had it before, but I think he realizes, like I do, that it is going to be worse after COVID because a lot of people, through age or attrition, are not going back to work.

Can the member comment on ways he thinks we can start addressing the problem?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his understanding as a physician.

Canadians, as we know, are facing significant health care provider shortages. In primary care in Nova Scotia, for instance, we are lacking care for approximately 100,000 Nova Scotians. Some of the estimates around nursing would suggest that we are short 70,000 nurses. I do not know how we are going to replace them. However, I do think there is some great information out there.

Again, as my colleague would suggest, it is going to take the effort of the entire House to correct this problem. I am not entirely sure that the Prime Minister’s promise of 7,500 health care providers is going to be enough. It will take a lot of creative solutions to come up with that, but I am happy to work with my colleague opposite on the problem.

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, my regards to my colleague, and congratulations on his election, his commitments and his speech. I have two quick questions for him.

First, in his opinion, should the government have convened the House shortly after the election rather than waiting two months? That would have given us time to take a closer look at bills like this one and do a more effective job.

Second, as he pointed out in his speech, should the government have introduced two separate bills rather than address two very different issues in the same bill?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, of course we should have come back to the House sooner than 63 days after the election. That would have been crucial to enabling the House to do its work, especially seeing as there will be lots of important things to do in the days to come, I believe.

I also agree that it is not appropriate to deal with the two different issues we are discussing in one bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new member for winning his seat in the last election.

I want to follow up on one of the questions that was asked by my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River on the availability of health care workers. He spoke about his daughter, who is a paramedic, and I know that in Alberta there is a real shortage of paramedics. I have spoken to paramedics on their doorsteps, and the sadness, anger and exhaustion they expressed to me is really quite heartbreaking. We are hearing that from paramedics, from doctors, from nurses, from all health care workers.

I wonder if the member could speak a bit about the plan to get more health care providers in our system and to make sure that our health care system is more robust, with a better balance between federal transfers and provincial transfers, so that we have the publicly delivered, universally accessible health care that all Canadians need.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, it is important that we relook at the health care system. We know it is failing Canadians, and as part of team Conservative, that is one thing I heard at the doors over and over again during the election. People do not have the access they need. As I said previously, we also know that the mental health of health care professionals is suffering, and we need to work on this for all Canadians to strengthen the system we have.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Hochelaga.

Government Orders

I would like to acknowledge that I am addressing the House today from the ancestral, traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin nation. It is a unique opportunity to rise in the House today, surrounded by my colleagues who I am really happy to see again, to participate in the second reading debate on Bill C-3.

I will spend the time available to me today to provide some more details about the proposed legislation.

First, it would amend the Canada Labour Code to provide 10 days of paid sick leave per year to workers in the federally regulated private sector. This would affect nearly a million workers in Canada, most of whom work for larger enterprises. However, we also have to take care of the smaller operators and the impact this will have on them. I will have more to say about that in a bit.

Those employed in the federally regulated sector for private enterprise would include interprovincial transportation companies, pipelines, banks, postal services and broadcast outlets, among other things. These are all industries that people count on every day, yet workers in these jobs cannot necessarily count on appropriate support if and when they become ill. If they get sick, they feel the pressure to go to work, because putting food on the table is not a choice. Paying the rent or the mortgage is not a choice.

I know from my past, too many people want to be the hero. They want to go to work and they drag themselves there. As a broadcaster, I remember fighting my way through blizzards and alligators and dungeons and dragons to get to work so I could tell everybody to stay at home. This kind of heroism looks good on the surface, but when it comes to an illness, especially one as critical as COVID-19, it is really not a good attribute to have.

The bill we have before puts people first. As the Minister of Labour has said, people have always been at the heart of Canada's labour program.

Let us talk about the Canada Labour Code. It sets out rules that protect worker health and safety. Today's bill would amend part III of the Canada Labour Code, which sets minimum labour standards for the federally regulated private sector, and it is in part III that we will find the provisions dealing with things like standard working hours, leave, holidays, wages and important issues like sexual harassment. However, today's bill has to do with the leave provisions.

Currently part III of the code provides employees in federally regulated industries with a number of leaves related to personal illness or injury. I will mention three of them now.

The first is personal leave, which provides employees with up to five days of leave per year, the first three of which are paid. This would be for things like personal illness or injury or urgent matters concerning themselves or their families.

The second is unpaid medical leave. Workers have up to 17 weeks if they are unable to work due to personal illness or injury or medical appointments during working hours. Employees may also take up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave as a result of quarantine.

The last leave that I will mention today is leave related to COVID-19. In March 2020, the Canada Labour Code was amended to create this new leave provision. Prior to its repeal law November 20, it allowed for employees to take unpaid job-protected leave for

up to four weeks if they were unable to work for reasons related to COVID-19. This leave was designed to align with the suite of Canada recovery sickness benefits, and workers have been able to file claims for income support under that law.

On November 24, the government introduced legislation under Bill C-3, the one that we are debating today, that would reinstate the leave, extend its maximum length to six weeks and ensure it would remain available until May 7, 2022.

Ultimately these leave provisions mean that employees cannot take more than three days sick off work that are paid by the employer. It is clear, especially since the onset of the pandemic, that three days are not enough. Even looking at 2019 data, and that is pre-pandemic, Canadian workers took an average of 8.5 days of leave for illness or issues related to a disability.

What would Bill C-3 do? With Bill C-3, we are taking action to ensure Canadians in federally regulated industries have access to paid sick days. It would amend the Canada Labour Code to do three things.

• (1410)

First, it would make a change to repeal the personal leave that employees may take for treating their illness or injury. This is to avoid duplicating paid leave provisions relating to illness or injury and to set people up to use the new leave that would be created.

Second, on the new leave, the bill would provide that employees might earn and take up to 10 days of paid medical leave in a calendar year. They might take these sick days in one period or more.

Third, the bill would have some built-in flexibility. It would authorize the Governor in Council to make regulations to modify in certain circumstances the provisions respecting medical leave of absence with pay.

Before I conclude, I would like to pause on what is a bit of a sticking point for some. It is one I referenced earlier, namely that the changes proposed today would have an impact on employers, especially of smaller businesses. The government wants to make sure that employers have some lead-in time to handle these changes. That is why the coming-into-force date would be fixed by order in council. We would also commit to engaging in consultations with federally regulated employers to better understand the impact of these changes on their local realities.

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There are a few other mitigating factors. The workers covered by these new amendments mainly work in medium- to large-sized businesses where the financial impacts would be more diffuse. For example, 87% of the workers impacted by this are in firms of 100 employees or more. That leaves 13% in smaller companies who would likely feel the pinch of paid absences more acutely. They can also request a medical note from employees when they use their sick days. Again, this is obviously an opportunity, for smaller employers especially, to make sure that the leave being taken is legitimate.

In addition, if an employee has used up all of the leave in the previous calendar year or is a new employee, the employee would start to accumulate paid sick leave at the rate of one day per month. This reduces the exposure for employers. For employees who do not use 10 days in a year, the proposed legislation allows for a limited carry-over of days. This means that the employee is not starting from scratch in a new year. However, the maximum number of paid sick days for the year remains at 10.

The Government of Canada is working hard to finish the fight against COVID-19. However, as we have heard regarding the other part of the bill, there is resistance to this and there are impediments. There are people who, for variety of reasons, be it fear, ideology or just plain stubbornness, do not necessarily want to contribute to the most fundamental of Canadian values: acting for the common good.

Bill C-3 would help both come through. It would make sure that nearly a million more Canadians at least have access to enough paid sick days. This would be more in line with what some of the provinces are doing, such as British Columbia, which allows for five paid sick days and three unpaid sick days. The idea, of course, is that if somebody is sick, they maintain their position in the company, ensuring ongoing employment, especially for employees who are hard to find, talented and technically able. They would be maintained even if they do have to take time off when they are sick.

Bill C-3 would make sure a million or more Canadians have access to enough paid sick days. As the Governor General said in the Speech from the Throne on November 23, "As we move forward on the economy of the future, no worker or region will be left behind." Bill C-3 is intended to do just that, and I believe the debate and comments we hear from all sides of the House seek to enrich, inform and make this legislation better.

• (1415)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I usually talk about the protection of wild salmon together. It is nice to see him back in the House, and I certainly look forward to working with him on that.

I am grateful to the Liberals for finally getting on board when it comes to paid sick leave. Today, the New Democrats have talked a lot about the gaps in leave for workers, and one thing that has come up again is bereavement leave. We do not have a national bereavement strategy. We know that people who lose a child, in particular, do not get enough time to grieve the loss. There are huge mental health and illness effects that come with losing a child if people are forced back to work. HUMA did a really important report on bereavement and recommended that parents should get 12 to 15

weeks of paid sick leave so they can deal with and grieve the loss of a child.

Does my colleague agree that we need to do more to ensure there are better supports for parents who have lost a child?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, I will use the privilege of not being in cabinet to say, yes, I absolutely agree with my hon. colleague and it is something that I would encourage the government to work towards.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells and like my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni, I worked with him on the fisheries committee for a number of years.

Could the member explain how the bill would apply to companies that work or contract to federally regulated employers? We know that it applies directly to federally regulated corporations that are under federal regulations, but how does it apply to companies that contract and work under those federally regulated organizations?

• (1420)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, the short answer is I do not know. I think that is something that needs to be fleshed out in terms of the review of this legislation. That said, how far do we go, contractor to contractor, the aunt of a wife of an uncle of a contractor? There obviously have to be some boundaries.

The focus here is on employees working in federally regulated jobs and that is a good start. Whether or not it is expanded is worthy of further consideration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to come back to something that is very obvious to everyone this afternoon. Sick days are good for workers. Sick days are good for the workplace. Sick days are good for the community during a pandemic.

Therefore, I am very pleased that the Liberals have seen the light. Why did this recently become a good idea in 2021, when it was a bad idea in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic?

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, this is an example of how things morph over time just like the COVID-19 virus itself. New challenges are presented. We have been dealing with a moving target now for quite some time. What this demonstrates is the government's willingness to be flexible, to be innovative where necessary and certainly to be informed by the arguments presented by our colleagues in the opposition.

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[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke about compassion and about how this bill is an important way to help people who might be suffering during the pandemic.

It seems strange that the government is in such a big rush now to help these people, yet it called an election in the middle of a pandemic. This election slowed down our work in the House, which should have resumed this fall, and it interrupted and prevented the committees, which will not resume until February, from studying bills and topics that could help people.

Was it necessary to call an election in August, in the middle of a pandemic, and to halt our work here in the House at a time when people needed all of us to work together?

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that throughout the time up until we came back to the House, we had the Canada sickness recovery benefit that was in essence a backstop to this. To the other point, I think that election was necessary for precisely the reason that we are here talking about this today. We had to examine what role government should play.

The finance critic for the official opposition when the larger programs were first rolled out said that is not something Conservatives would do. Well, we would be in pretty tough shape as a country if that in fact was what we took forward in managing the pandemic.

Yes, Canadians in the election answered the question about what government is for and what government should do. This is the government they chose to do it.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will make it quick because the member already responded that he does not know how this legislation will apply to companies that contract to federally regulated corporations.

Had the government not thought about how the bill was going to apply to Canadians? It is another example of legislation put forward that is not fully thought out by an inept government. Why was it not thought out—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells has 10 seconds to respond.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, the government has acted as quickly as possible because of the need to get the supports in place. We had supports, and those supports and their legislative rules came to an end. We had to move, and we had to move quickly. However, we have always been prepared to refine as necessary to make sure the legislation does its job.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.) Madam Speaker, I am addressing the House from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I am proud to rise in the House today to support the new Minister of Labour in introducing Bill C-3, which will better protect Canadian workers and, most importantly, help keep them safe in their workplace.

It is unfortunate that some workers cannot afford to stay home when they are sick. It is a fact, and I have seen it many times right in my riding. Many workers across Canada cannot afford to lose income, not even for a few days. They have to cover the mortgage, pay the rent, pay the power bill, buy groceries and cover all the other costs that come with supporting a family.

Because of that, they risk their health and the possibility of spreading a virus. Forcing workers to face this dilemma is simply unfair. Now is the time to fix that and fill the paid sick leave gap.

The Canada Labour Code currently provides employees in federally regulated industries with three days of paid personal leave that can be used in case of illness or injury. If we look more carefully at the numbers, we see that, in 2019, Canadian workers took an average of 8.5 days of leave for illness and issues related to a disability. It is clear that three days of paid leave is just not enough.

With Bill C-3, we are taking measures to ensure that Canadians who work in federally regulated industries have access to the paid sick leave they deserve.

Our government has introduced a bill that will amend the Canada Labour Code to provide 10 days of paid sick leave per year to workers in the federally regulated private sector. That will have an enormous impact. There are approximately 18,500 employers in federally regulated industries. That includes federal Crown corporations, as well as certain activities on first nations reserves. Together, they employ 955,000 people, the vast majority of whom work in medium-sized to large firms, that is, companies with 100 employees or more.

The federally regulated sector includes workplaces in a broad range of industries, including interprovincial air, rail, land and marine services, banks and postal services. These are all important industries that people across the country rely on every day.

The bill before us today not only allows workers in these vital industries to stay home to take care of themselves when they are sick, but it also prevents the spread of illnesses in their workplace.

More specifically, Bill C-3 amends part III of the Canada Labour Code to make two changes. First, an employee would earn one day of paid sick leave per month of continuous employment, up to a maximum of 10 days in a calendar year. The words “treating their illness or injury” will be repealed from the list of reasons for which an employee can take personal leave. This is simply to avoid duplicating paid leave provisions relating to illness or injury under the Canada Labour Code.

These two changes would impact roughly 582,700 employees in the federally regulated private sector who do not currently have access to at least 10 days of paid sick leave.

Increased paid sick leave would support employees by protecting them in three ways. First, paid sick leave would protect workers' income. As I was saying earlier, I have seen workers and employees in my riding who were unable to take sick leave.

Second, it would protect their jobs. Third, it would protect workers' health, which is, of course, the most important thing.

Government Orders

Furthermore, studies have shown that sick leave benefits employers, because it helps prevent turnover, and it also prevents the public health system from getting overwhelmed.

The good news is that this means paid sick leave also protects our economy.

For these reasons, I think it is clear that we must move forward with Bill C-3. By adding 10 days of paid sick leave to the Canada Labour Code, the government is taking the first step in its plan.

• (1430)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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