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Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE AND THE CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

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

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[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, two reports of the delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

The first report concerns its participation in the second Parliamentary Conference on the G5 Sahel held in New York, United States, from November 14 to 15, 2019.

The second report concerns its participation in the Parliamentary Seminar on Parliamentary Oversight and Public Policy Evaluation held in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, from November 14 to 15, 2019.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-206, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (maiming or injuring self or another).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill that I had hoped would be adopted in the 42nd Parliament and again in the 43rd.

This bill would remove a significant barrier for members of the Canadian Armed Forces needing mental health assistance. We need to remove section 98(c), the archaic section of the National Defence Act that makes self-harm a disciplinary offence under the military code of conduct. This means that those who risk their lives for this country can end up subject to disciplinary action as a result of suffering a mental health crisis. Often this means our troops suffer in silence.

Canada is still losing more than one serving member each month to death by suicide. Removing self-harm as a disciplinary offence would mark a significant change in the way mental health challenges are addressed within the Canadian Armed Forces. The Liberals had a chance to fix this when they amended the military justice act in the 42nd Parliament. In the last Parliament, the defence committee studied how to improve mental health services in the Canadian Armed Forces, and I believe the government would have had all-party support to proceed at that time. Both these opportunities were lost, and as a result we continue to lose dedicated women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces to self-harm.

Today, I am reintroducing the bill in the hope that the House will finally listen to the families who have lost loved ones to death by suicide and come together to address this challenge by adopting this bill and taking other necessary measures to make sure we provide our troops with the mental health support they need.

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

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CANADIAN BILL OF RIGHTS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-207, An Act to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights (right to housing).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am here today to talk about every Canadian's right to have a home.

There was a time when I was young that when I saw a sleeping bag, I thought of times with family spent out camping. Now when I see sleeping bags, it is because there are so many people out on our streets across this country, carrying their bedding with them because they have no safe home to go back to. The reality is that the fact of owning a home has become an impossible dream, and finding a decent place to rent is getting harder and harder every day.

Routine Proceedings

Safe and affordable housing is increasingly out of reach. That is why I am tabling this bill today, an act to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights. This bill would ensure that the right to housing is firmly recognized in law. It is the difference between saying the right thing and doing the right thing. It would redefine the federal framework for housing legislation and set requirements for the Minister of Justice to ensure every regulation change is consistent with that right, because all Canadians deserve the right to have a safe and affordable home.

I would like to thank the member for Vancouver East for working so hard on the issue of housing and for seconding this bill. I look forward to the debate and hope to see all members stand in support of this bill.

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

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour this morning to take the floor virtually to present this petition. Working electronically, this is petition number 10619695.

The petitioners call on this government to abandon any plans to expand the Trans Mountain pipeline. They explain that the original pipeline, the one that was purchased at \$4.5 billion, is a pipeline in current use. Parenthetically, this is the one that had to be closed down due to the recent floods and has reopened. However, the petitioners are focused on the expansion, which is essentially a brand new pipeline being constructed, without permission, through indigenous territories. This pipeline, unlike the current one, would be carrying diluted bitumen. Diluted bitumen cannot be cleaned up if it should spill, and it crosses 800 waterways across British Columbia to the port in Burnaby for extended export in risky tanker traffic.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND SEARCH AND RESCUE PERSONNEL

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of our important volunteer firefighters and search and rescue personnel.

The petitioners, in their preamble, recognize that volunteer firefighters account for 83% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders. In addition, there are approximately 8,000 essential search and rescue volunteers, who respond to thousands of incidents every year right across this great country of ours.

The tax code of Canada currently allows volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers to claim a \$3,000 tax credit if 200 hours of volunteer services were completed in a calendar year, but that works out to a mere \$450. Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support legislation that would increase the tax exemption from \$3,000 to \$10,000 and help our essential volunteer firefighters and volunteer search and rescue people across the country with the important services they provide.

CANADA POST

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are communities of all sizes across this country. One of them, in my riding, Savary Island, had a Canada Post office from 1913 to 1980, but now they have none. More than 100 full-time residents on Savary Island do not receive mail at their primary address.

Canada Post is mandated to provide free mail service to all Canadians at their primary address. The residents of Savary Island have a right to be included in the free mail service to all Canadians. Just so members know, these folks are taking quite a long trip just to get their mail.

These citizens of my riding call upon the Government of Canada to ensure that residents of Savary Island in the province of British Columbia are serviced by a corporate post office in their community.

FARMERS' MARKETS

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk today about farmers' markets and the importance of proactive and healthy food for families as we head into rising prices of healthy food.

Farmers' markets are a key tool for COVID-19 recovery, as small business incubators, domestic system and food security builders, local economy community builders and farmers' markets coupon programs are a key support for new market development and to support existing markets and their provincial associations. The farmers' market nutrition coupon program helps 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 fruits and vegetables they consume.

The B.C. farmers' markets association, with 135 member markets and 4,000-plus vendors and its long-term partnership with the province of B.C., provides an excellent model for farmers' market nutrition coupon programs, providing almost 16,000 vulnerable families, seniors and pregnant women with access to weekly coupons, and seeing 1,909,000 to local farmers. Their current program has an average coupon redemption rate of over 91%, and 79% of those participants claim the program made a long-term change in their eating habits.

A national matching program would assist in meeting those demands, encourage provinces without a provincial program to create one, and support provinces that have a provincial program to expand to meet demand.

Therefore, we, the undersigned citizens and residents of Canada, call upon the Government of Canada to support Motion No. 78 and initiate a national matching program for all provincial farmers' market nutrition coupon programs across Canada that would match provinces that are already contributing to their farmers' market nutrition coupon programs and encourage provinces that do not have such a program to implement one by offering matching funding.

• (1015)

The Speaker: I am just going to make a comment on the length of petitions to remind all members.

For new members, while realizing that there are new rules that we learn as we come into a new area, we try to make it as concise as possible for petitions and just give the major lines to keep it short. I say “new members”, but I am also going to emphasize this for some of the members who have been here for a while. It takes a little while to learn.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND SEARCH AND RESCUE PERSONNEL

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a huge honour to table this petition on behalf of volunteer firefighters in my riding from Hilliers, Dashwood, Coombs, Cumberland, Bowser, Tofino and Ucluelet. They are stating that 83% of Canada's total firefighting essential response is from volunteer firefighters, and 8,000 essential search and rescue volunteers respond to thousands of incidents every year.

The petition outlines that the tax code of Canada currently allows a volunteer firefighter or a search and rescue person to claim \$3,000 in a tax credit if they volunteer for over 200 hours. Essentially, we know that these volunteers not only put their lives on the line and give their time, training and efforts to Canadians, but also allow cities and municipalities to keep their property taxes lower than if paid services were available.

The petitioners are calling on the government to support Bill C-201, a private member's bill that would increase the tax exemption from \$3,000 to \$10,000 to help our essential volunteer firefighters and volunteer search and rescue people across the country. This would allow them to keep a bit more of their hard-earned money. Right now, the current tax credit works out to a mere \$450 per year that we allow these essential volunteers to keep of their own income. This would be a significant change and reward them for the important work they do when we call upon them.

The Speaker: Once again, I want to remind the hon. members to be as brief as possible.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Business of Supply

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

OPIOIDS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to rise to request an emergency debate in the House at the earliest convenience because of the urgent need for the federal government to address the overdose epidemic that is destroying communities and families across the country.

This crisis has only become worse with the emergence of COVID-19 and the pandemic. Health experts and coroners' reports are now revealing the unprecedented and accelerating death rates from illicit drug overdoses due to a poisoned drug supply. I believe this meets the bar of Standing Order 52(6)(a), “the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.”

The Public Health Agency of Canada reported an 88% increase in opioid-related deaths last year. The coroner for Yukon just last week shockingly reported that opioid overdose-related deaths now represented over 20% of all deaths investigated by the Yukon Coroner's Service.

Indigenous communities have been hardest hit, with a new report, again last week, by the Chiefs of Ontario and the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, showing a 132% increase in opioid deaths among first nations during the first year of the pandemic.

Just yesterday, in response to this crisis, the Toronto Board of Health voted to join the Province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver in applying for the decriminalization of small amounts of illicit drugs as an urgent step in the right direction. Toronto Public Health has now said that it is experiencing a historic spike in suspected overdose calls over the last week, pointing to a further acceleration of the overdose crisis.

Due to this recent and unprecedented death toll from fatal and toxic overdoses that have been uncovered, it is imperative that an emergency debate be held in Parliament at its earliest convenience.

• (1020)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni for his intervention. However, I am not satisfied that his request meets the requirements of the Standing Orders at this time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC) moved:

Business of Supply

That, given that real-time parliamentary oversight was impossible due to the dissolution of Parliament, the House appoint a special committee with a mandate to conduct hearings to examine and review the events related to the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, including, but not limited to, the government's contingency planning for that event and the subsequent efforts to evacuate, or otherwise authorize entry to Canada of, Canadian citizens, and interpreters, contractors and other Afghans who had assisted the Canadian Armed Forces or other Canadian organizations, provided that:

- (a) the committee be composed of 12 members, of which six shall be from the government party, four shall be from the official opposition, one shall be from the Bloc Québécois, and one shall be from the New Democratic Party;
- (b) the members shall be named by their respective whip by depositing with the Clerk of the House the list of their members to serve on the committee within 24 hours of the adoption of this order;
- (c) membership substitutions be permitted, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2);
- (d) changes to the membership of the committee shall be effective immediately after notification by the relevant whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House;
- (e) the Clerk of the House shall convene an organizational meeting of the committee no later than Friday, December 17, 2021;
- (f) the committee be chaired by a member of the government party and, notwithstanding Standing Order 106(2), there shall be one vice-chair from each of the other recognized parties;
- (g) quorum of the committee be as provided for in Standing Order 118 and that the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government party;
- (h) the committee be granted all of the powers of a standing committee as provided in the Standing Orders;
- (i) the provisions of Standing Order 106(4) shall also extend to the committee, provided that any request shall be signed by members representing at least two recognized parties;
- (j) the committee have the power to authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings;
- (k) the Prime Minister, the Minister of International Development, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, and other ministers and senior officials, be invited to appear as witnesses from time to time as the committee sees fit;
- (l) the committee be instructed to present a final report within six months of the adoption of this order;
- (m) the committee's initial work shall be supported by an order of the House issuing for all memoranda, emails, documents, notes or other records from the Privy Council Office, the Department of National Defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, including the Office of the Prime Minister and the relevant ministers' offices, which refer to:
 - (i) the initiation of evacuation planning,
 - (ii) instructions to implement those plans,
 - (iii) the effect upon the implementation of those plans attributable to the dissolution of Parliament, the caretaker convention, or the facts that relevant ministers were simultaneously occupied with seeking re-election to the House and that many ministerial exempt staff were on leaves of absence, or
 - (iv) the determination of the number of individuals who would be evacuated or otherwise authorized to enter Canada,
 provided that,
 - (v) these documents shall be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, in both official languages, within one month of the adoption of this order,
 - (vi) a copy of the documents shall also be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel in both official languages within one month of the adoption of this order, with any proposed redaction which, in the government's opinion, could reasonably be expected (A) to compromise national security, military tactics or strategy of the armed forces of Canada or an allied

country, or intelligence sources or methods, or (B) to reveal the identity or location of any Canadian citizen in Afghanistan or of any interpreter, contractor or other Afghan individual who had assisted the Canadian Armed Forces or other Canadian organizations,

(vii) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall promptly thereafter notify the Speaker, who shall forthwith inform the House, whether he is satisfied the documents were produced as ordered;

(viii) the Speaker shall cause the documents, as redacted pursuant to subparagraph (vi), to be laid upon the table at the next earliest opportunity and, after being tabled, they shall stand referred to the committee,

(ix) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall discuss with the committee, at an in camera meeting, to be held within two weeks of the documents being tabled pursuant to subparagraph (viii), whether he agrees with the redactions proposed by the government pursuant to subparagraph (vi),

(x) the committee may, after hearing from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel pursuant to subparagraph (ix), accept the proposed redactions or, reject some or all the proposed redactions and request the production of those unredacted documents in the manner to be determined by the committee; and

(n) any proceedings before the committee, when hybrid committee meetings are authorized, in relation to a motion to exercise the committee's power to send for persons, papers and records shall, if not previously disposed of, be interrupted upon the earlier of the completion of four hours of consideration or one sitting week after the motion was first moved, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

● (1030)

He said: Mr. Speaker, thank you for reading the first opposition motion of the 44th Parliament completely into the record. I am honoured to divide my time with the shadow minister for foreign affairs, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Canada's Conservatives are using our first opposition motion of this Parliament to examine the failure of the Liberal government to act in the years and months leading up to the fall of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister put his own political interests ahead of taking care of thousands of Canadians and Afghans. He chose an election for himself over salvation for others. People were failed, and Canada's reputation has paid the price.

At the outset of my remarks today, I want to thank some of the incredible Canadians who stepped into the breach when their own government failed them. Veterans and volunteers from across Canada stepped into the void of leadership and did the job their own government should have been doing for months and years. That form of passionate and active citizenship inspires me and should inspire all Canadians.

“Canadian Dave”, Dave Lavery, a Canadian Armed Forces special forces veteran, one of the original JTF2 soldiers, was on the ground in Kabul literally risking his life every day. I also want to mention veterans like retired general Dave Fraser, David Mack from Oshawa, Ontario, and Tim and Jamie Laidler in Vancouver.

Through the Veterans Transition Network, Tim and Jamie raised a million and a half dollars to help get interpreters and Afghan contractors to Canada. They personally travelled overseas to do the job their own government failed to do.

I want to thank these outstanding Canadians for stepping up for our values on the world stage.

Business of Supply

Everyday Canadians have to step up because their government has failed to act, and we must ensure that it never happens again. We must learn from another failure from the Liberal government. A special committee would assess what needs to be done today to ensure that people are brought to safety. It would examine what went wrong in Afghanistan when Afghanistan was deteriorating and the government was equivocating.

We all saw the images of people running down runways, families desperate to get out of Afghanistan and women bristling with the fear of repression coming with the return of the Taliban. Those images are etched in our minds, and Parliament must now do the work that the election prevented us from doing at the time.

[Translation]

Our foreign policy should be based on the following principle: Canada should never turn its back on its friends and allies.

Thousands of Afghans helped Canada, but when they were in danger, Canada did nothing to help them. That makes the work of this committee vital.

[English]

The Prime Minister and the Liberal government must explain why they failed to act. We could have done work in the years and months before the crisis peaked this summer. We must know what can be done now to make up for lost time. This committee would focus on that.

As I said in my response to the Speech from the Throne last week, rhetoric and empty promises are often a substitute for meaningful action by the government: ambition over achievement; symbolism replacing action; and diversions and excuses rather than leadership and accountability. That is why Parliament must act.

Rescuing people from Afghanistan should have been a non-partisan issue. Our long mission in Afghanistan began under a Liberal government and peaked in terms of activity under a Conservative one.

● (1035)

Canadians bled in Afghanistan. Afghans took risks for our country, and many are still suffering today from that mission. One veteran who wrote to me during the campaign said, "I left part of my life in Afghanistan." We owe it to that country to never leave it behind.

[Translation]

This government's indifference is putting lives at risk. I have been urging the government to act for six years. I have worked with our veterans to try to bring those who have been forgotten back to Canada as quickly as possible.

That was important for me as a veteran, but also as a Canadian, a father and a patriot.

The Liberals listened only once, a long time ago. In 2016, they brought interpreter James Akam to Canada. However, unfortunately, that is where the non-partisan efforts stopped.

[English]

We did get one interpreter back, but shortly after that the Prime Minister removed John McCallum as immigration minister. From that point forward veterans, advocates and opposition MPs such as the MP for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman and I could not get the government to act when we had time to get people out of Afghanistan safely. The Liberals ignored the plight of thousands of people for many years. Even when the American pullout was imminent, the government did not act. Canadians watched in horror as those who helped our soldiers, our aid workers and our diplomats in one of the longest, most arduous missions in our history were left behind. Some even left to wade through sewage to get to the tarmac at the Kabul airport, only to find no flight out of the country.

Sadly, this inaction is a pattern for the current government. Time and again it fails to act. It ignored our calls for immediate funding to keep safe houses open. It downplayed a government data breach that may have exposed hundreds of vulnerable Afghans to danger. We repeatedly called for it to release a transparent timeline on when those who supported Canada could arrive safely on our shores. There was no action.

Canada has a moral obligation to find a way to bring to Canada those who are at risk because they helped Canada. We need to be a refuge for people like Ahmad, an Afghan interpreter who supported NATO and Canada for seven years. He, his wife and their three children, the youngest of which is two years old, have taken refuge in Pakistan, but a bureaucratic mess under the current government is asking them to go back to Afghanistan and put themselves at risk to qualify for help.

Let us take the case of Mohammed, who stood guard over Canada's embassy for almost a decade. In August, when he applied for a special program for ex-employees to bring his wife and family here, what was Canada's response? It stated:

Rest assured that we have received your message and that we will respond to your enquiry shortly. It is not necessary to send us another message unless your situation has changed.

It was an automated reply. How does Canada become a country that asks people to leave a message when their lives are in danger? What happened to the Canada that rescued American diplomats in Iran at its own risk? What happened to the country that over generations has become known as a safe harbour for those at risk? Stories such as Ahmad's and Mohammed's remind us that there are people being left behind that this Parliament needs to give a voice to.

● (1040)

[Translation]

These men and women and their families have had it with pointless symbols and gestures.

It is time to take real action. It is time to do something to bring them home. That is why we need this committee.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Today and every day, the Conservative opposition will be a voice for those losing hope, for those fleeing persecution and for those being left behind by a government of warm words, but cold inaction.

From Vimy Ridge to Kandahar, Canada has been known as a dependable ally that will be there to act and to help. For the thousands of people left behind who are losing hope, and who need a voice in Parliament, Canada's Conservatives will be this voice. This parliamentary committee would show what we need to do now, and would learn the lessons of the government's failure.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute, and recognizing the enormous value that our forces and those who supported our forces provided in Afghanistan at a time of need.

Beyond that, the first thing that comes to my mind is to ask where that advocacy was when I was in the opposition and asking for English translators in Afghanistan to be able to come to Canada in the first place? Stephen Harper and his regime resisted. There seems to be a bit of a double standard being applied here. It is important that we be consistent, as I have been, whether in opposition or in government.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I have been consistent, whether in opposition or in government. I have been an advocate. I think of constituents such as Mr. Daoud, who was a translator.

The member seems to believe that what is taking place is all because of Canada. The chaos at the airport involved more than just one nation. Would he not recognize that a multitude of nations have a responsibility and that Canada—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is right about one thing. This should have been a non-partisan issue. The Afghanistan mission started under the Liberal government and continued under the Conservative government, which created a program for interpreters and contractors. Some people were left behind after the mission ended: people who did not know about the program, in a country with no infrastructure.

In the last five or six years, I and the MP for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman have worked with the government, trying to work in a non-partisan fashion. John McCallum brought an interpreter named James Akam home. I praised him publicly when that happened. He was fired by this Prime Minister. I think he aged out. As the former minister now knows, he lost favour with the Prime Minister's Office and the replacement would not even respond to our inquiries from people who were at risk in that country.

It is time for the Liberal backbench to start showing leadership and demand the committee themselves to make this non-partisan.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the leader of the official opposition for his speech.

If one wants to know what is likely to happen with a committee, it can be useful to look at what has happened in the past. One example is our support for creating the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations.

To better understand the purpose of the proposed committee on the situation in Afghanistan, I would like to hear the official opposition leader's thoughts on bringing back the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, especially considering that things with China are not great right now.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

We need a committee on the situation in Afghanistan because the Prime Minister called an election right in the middle of a crisis in Afghanistan.

The people needed a voice over there, but we were deep in an election campaign. That is why we need a special committee to look at what happened and also take action now to help families at risk, like the families of Ahmad and Mohammed, whom I talked about in my speech.

We need to take action now to defend our values and interests, because the government has totally ignored the situation.

• (1045)

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was happy to hear from the leader of the official opposition that this motion today is not an opportunity to score points against a government that has very clearly not done a good job with Afghanistan over the last several months.

In Afghanistan, half of the population is risking starvation, their health care systems have failed, and women and girls are at risk. In the spirit of recognizing the devastation that is happening, what would the Conservative Party do in this very complex situation to get help to Afghans now, and at what scope does the Leader of the Opposition think that needs to happen?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I think in the spirit of non-partisan action, this committee would be specialized to do what Parliament should have done at the time, which is to look at the situations of people who are at risk because they helped Canada, or who are at risk because they are religious minorities or members of the LGBTQ community. How can we help them now? How can we help build capacity on the ground to get aid into Afghanistan from neighbouring countries?

In the spirit of non-partisanship, this motion will pass. We can do this work together if the NDP members step up and show that there is not a coalition, that there is a—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the way the western alliance left Afghanistan this past summer is a betrayal of the legacy of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers of the NATO alliance who fought in the war in Afghanistan for freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Some 3,500 men and women from NATO coalition forces paid the ultimate sacrifice and died, including 158 Canadian men and women in uniform and one diplomat. They died in the cause to liberate Afghans from the clutches of the Taliban and to secure our own country from terrorist attacks.

Forty thousand Canadians served in Afghanistan over 13 years. The western alliance's departure is also a betrayal of the thousands of brave Afghan interpreters, advisers and local experts on the ground who served alongside our troops during that war, and who were abandoned in the hasty departure last August. These brave Afghans saved countless Canadian lives. No doubt many more Canadian soldiers would have been killed in theatre had it not been for their work.

[*Translation*]

There is no doubt that the Trump administration's negotiations with the Taliban in 2020 on the Doha agreement set the stage for this disaster. The Doha agreement set a date for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in May 2021.

[*English*]

While the Biden administration realized the difficulty of the May deadline and extended it to September, it nevertheless failed to understand the faulty assumption of basing a withdrawal on a deadline. The withdrawal should not have been based on a deadline. It should have been based on a set of conditions. By withdrawing on a deadline, the Taliban were given a clear advantage in their takeover of Afghanistan by force.

It is easy, in hindsight, to question the decisions made by the United States, which has the burden of leading the free world. What is not in question is the fact that as the events unfolded in the first eight months of this year, it was clear at the time that the Taliban were making ever-increasing advances for the forceful takeover of the country and that the government of Afghanistan was going to collapse.

It was clear in the months before the fall of Kabul on August 15 that Afghanistan was going to fall to the Taliban. It was clear to non-governmental organizations on the ground in Afghanistan, such as Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. Members of that group met with me in April of this year to ring the alarm bells about the threats to women and girls from the Taliban, and pleaded with western governments to slow down the withdrawal from Afghanistan to prevent a catastrophe.

It was clear to the UN Refugee Agency in July of this year, which warned of a humanitarian catastrophe and indicated that

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some 270,000 Afghans had been displaced since the early part of the year.

It was clear from the constant stream of media reports, and it was clear from Canadian veterans who had served in the war in Afghanistan and were hearing directly from their Afghan brothers in arms. These are veterans such as Dave Morrow, an army lieutenant who served in Afghanistan. He raised the alarm bells in interviews he did with the CBC and The New York Times in June of this year before the fall of Kabul. Another veteran, Corey Shelton, also served in Afghanistan and pleaded with Ottawa in July to send Canadian Forces military aircraft into Afghanistan to evacuate our Afghan allies.

In fact, some Canadian veterans were so frustrated by the lack of action from the government to evacuate our allies that they used their own money, their own time and their own resources to evacuate these Afghans. They organized Facebook groups and worked with members of Parliament, including the member of Parliament for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

It was clear to us, as the official opposition, that Afghanistan was collapsing and that Canada urgently needed to evacuate these Afghans. More than a month before the fall of Kabul on July 6, we issued a statement calling on the government to take immediate action.

● (1050)

The statement said:

...Conservatives are calling on the Liberal government to take immediate action. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces who served alongside these Afghan interpreters are pleading for the government to listen to their calls that we must do the right thing and support them at a time when they need us most.

On July 22, the Conservative leader wrote to the Prime Minister directly, pleading with him to use the immense powers of his high office to uphold Canada's honour and to evacuate these Afghan allies. In that letter, the Conservative leader wrote plainly and directly about the need for the Prime Minister to take action. He wrote, "Not-for-profit organisations are doing more for these interpreters than your government. This is unacceptable. I am calling on you and the Liberal government to take immediate action."

[*Translation*]

It was clear to a large number of people and organizations that Afghanistan would collapse before anything was done. These people and organizations were vocal in expressing their views. They made statements, gave interviews, set up groups on Facebook and organized missions to evacuate these Afghans using their own time and money.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

The Afghan interpreters, advisers and local experts who assisted Canada, and their families, numbered in the several thousand, I have been told. Canada could have accomplished an orderly evacuation in the weeks ahead of the fall of Kabul on August 15. Canada has five Globemaster C-17s, each with a capacity of some 300 passengers. In fact, during the chaos of the fall of Kabul, one Globemaster carried 823 passengers out of the country. We could have easily evacuated some 3,000 Afghans over some 10 flights in the several weeks before the fall of Kabul, in an orderly fashion and upholding the honour of this country to our Afghan allies. Instead, the government did nothing. Despite the pleas from individuals and organizations, the government did nothing.

It did nothing on Sunday, August 15 as the city of Kabul fell to the Taliban, the last lifeline for desperate Afghans seeking to flee the country. Actually, the government did do something that day. On Sunday, August 15, the Prime Minister went to Rideau Hall to trigger a general election, amid the fall of Kabul and the beginning of a fourth wave of the pandemic, because he thought he could secure a majority.

However, even after the triggering of an election and the fall of Kabul, the government still did not do anything in the days after August 15, until, of course, it became an issue during the federal election. The government then sprang not into action but into full rhetorical flight, not for the lives of these Afghan allies but in order to save the life of the government. Rhetorical flight is all the Liberals had because, during the election and afterward until the swearing-in of the new cabinet on October 26 and, some would argue, until the government met the House on November 22, the government was in caretaker mode. During the election, Liberal ministerial staffers were on leave in order to campaign, rather than conducting the business of the nation.

That is why I support the motion in front of us today. We need to understand how numerous warnings that came from individuals and organizations that Kabul was going to fall and that the lives of our Afghan allies were at risk went unheeded by the government. We need to understand that in order to restore the honour of this country and to ensure in the future that Canada's word is its bond.

• (1055)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to review the text of the motion.

First, it is quite an expansive production of documents, memoranda and notes that are contained in subsection (m) of the notes. Is one month an adequate amount of time? Does the member opposite think that is reasonable, given perhaps the depth of the documents that would be requested?

Second, I have concern around the provision (x), in which, as noted, the parliamentary law clerk has the ability to redact this information. I presume that the information in question would have national security concerns and perhaps operational elements still under way for the government. There seems to be an ability for the committee to overrule those redacted recommendations from the parliamentary law clerk. Does the member opposite agree that this is appropriate?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I will respond to the second part of the hon. member's question first. The motion is reasonable in calling for the government to hand over to the law clerk unredacted documents, because the motion, in one of the earlier clauses, specifies the government is also to hand over the proposed redactions it believes to be injurious to national security so the law clerk knows what the government's position is on that issue.

With respect to clause (m), one month is plenty of time for the government to produce these documents, particularly because it is during a slower time of year where the government will not be occupied with the normal matters governments are occupied with, so one month is ample time.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, when you look at the situation in Afghanistan as a whole, it is evident that Canada does not have a clear foreign policy. Canada has welcomed 4,000 refugees even though it promised to bring in 40,000. Quite frankly, we still have a long way to go, and the government appears to be making things up as it goes.

This past spring, France started evacuating interpreters and others who had worked with the French army, and these evacuations went as planned. The government here was busy thinking about calling an election. Things were not going well.

There is one woman who writes to me every day. She was in Afghanistan and is now in Turkey. She must return to Afghanistan because she was told that she was supposed to fill in a form on a Canadian website from within Afghanistan in order to be considered a refugee. Last week she was shot in the leg, which makes it difficult for her to get around.

Clearly, now is the time for diplomacy. Unfortunately, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is at the beginning of her term and is likely not at maximum efficiency. This worries me, because this situation demands urgent action now, not later.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, to help Afghan refugees, the government could approach the Government of Qatar, which has diplomatic relations with the Taliban. The Government of Canada could ask the Qatar government to insist that the Taliban protect refugees and allow them to leave Afghanistan to come to Canada. This is just one diplomatic tool the government could use to improve the situation.

• (1100)

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I absolutely agree the government has failed Canadian allies.

However, I have a question specifically related to the many Afghani women and girls who have been left to deal with some of the worst human rights violations. Are the member and his party open to opening up more emergency spaces for refugees in Canada to deal with this current human rights crisis?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I believe the government should focus on practical measures it can take to evacuate Afghans from Afghanistan. One I mentioned to my colleague from the Bloc is for the Government of Canada to démarche with the Government of Qatar in order to impress on the Government of Qatar the need for the Taliban to release some of these persecuted minorities and to release Afghan allies who assisted us to other countries so we may process them for safe passage here to Canada.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for London—Fanshawe is rising on a point of order.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House during the debate on the business of supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(5) on Tuesday December 7th and Wednesday December 8th

a) the time provided for consideration of the supplementary estimates (b) in committee of the whole be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 16 periods of 15 minutes each;

b) members rising to speak during the debate may indicate to the Chair that they will be dividing their time with another member.

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

[*Translation*]

The House has heard the terms of the motion.

All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I begin by congratulating the member for Wellington—Halton Hills on once again being the official opposition's critic and also the critic of the Bloc Québécois and the critic of the New Democrats.

I begin today's discussion with two people in mind. The first is Wahida, a young Afghan girl who was nine years old when she was sponsored by the church at which I was the minister in 2001 to come with her uncle from Afghanistan. Over the last 20 years, Wahida has found a way in Canada, shared stories and allowed Canadians to continue to be part of her life in a country that has been torn and wracked by war, civil dispute and international conflict over the last many decades.

Business of Supply

I call her to mind, because each time we talk about Afghanistan, it is important to remember the people of Afghanistan whose aspirations, hopes and dreams have been shattered again and again. I believe every single member of this House has their best interests in mind.

Another woman who is in my mind today is Adeena Niazi. She is the executive director of the Afghan Women's Organization, an organization in Toronto that works extensively in my riding of Don Valley West, assisting refugee claimants and immigrants who come from Afghanistan and are making an important contribution to Canada every day. She reminds me, through the stories of the people she works with, of the families left behind, of the terror and real chaos in Afghanistan, and of the importance for Canada to maintain, build and create new ways of helping the people of Afghanistan. We, on this side of the House, stand firmly in support of the people of Afghanistan, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Over the summer we witnessed the tremendous chaos, difficulties and desperation of Afghan people as their government fell and as the Taliban took over key aspects of safety and security, including the Kabul airport. I watched as people scrambled to try to get to Canada and to other places around the world in safety.

There are important questions about that period of time. We acknowledge that those questions are important to be asked. We need to look at every aspect of the situation in the fall of Afghanistan, and of Kabul particularly, and the role of Canada and its allies. There are important questions I believe the opposition has every right to ask. Those questions are being asked by members of Parliament on both sides of this House.

Whether they are about the humanitarian assistance Canada needs to provide now and in the future; the military operations, which for Canada ended some 10 years ago, but we have continued to be present in Afghanistan in humanitarian and development ways; or about the tremendous work of our public servants during a very difficult time this summer, I think we want those questions answered. It is fair for Parliament to request those answers on behalf of Canadians and have them, in a reasoned and thoughtful way, be examined by parliamentarians.

Where we may disagree is where, when and how that should happen.

I want to speak about the role of our standing committees. All through the motion today the Standing Orders are mentioned. We have a foreign affairs committee. That committee will be struck shortly. It is part of the standing committee structure of this House. It is charged with engaging, and it can work with other committees such as the defence committee, the citizenship and immigration committee and other committees that are implicated in this topic.

We want to be mindful of the best use of our resources. We had a special committee on China that was an important aspect of our last Parliament. That may come back this time. We want to make sure that we are using our time effectively.

Business of Supply

• (1105)

People often talk about the role of a member of Parliament and how stretched we are, and some people think it is because of our operating budget. I never feel stretched because of my member's operating budget. The scarce resource that all of us have is time.

All of us have this scarce resource, which is how much time we are able to put into every topic, but that does not mean that the topic of Afghanistan is not critically important for every one of us. However, let us find a way to do it that makes sure we do it well, carefully, and using the resources we have as individuals and of the House, which are important.

We will be asking important questions. We will be asking what actually happened last July and August. We will also ask who knew what, when and where, which are important questions to ask. Also, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I will not denigrate the public servants of this country.

I will not denigrate the tremendous work of our mission in Afghanistan or our armed forces, who jumped in to help with our allies and colleagues from NATO partner countries. They worked carefully and quickly with commercial airlines, as well as with operatives from Public Safety, the RCMP, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, to find ways to have special measures to help not only Canadians who were in Afghanistan, but also Afghans who were at risk, which included women, human rights defenders, advocates, lawyers and NGO partners in Afghanistan. Canadians worked with Afghan interpreters, security agents and the people who kept us safe some 10 years ago. They had worked with us right up until the former prime minister withdrew Canadian troops some 10 years ago. This left us in a very different position than we might have been in if that had not happened.

Afghanistan is a place of conflict. It is a place that has continually had internal difficulties and external forces, and I think we should hear about that. We should listen to the stories of our partners and allies to find out what happened, when it happened and what actions were actually taken, so we could actually dispel some of the misunderstandings, and I will not say "mistruths", being held by the official opposition.

I do not blame the Conservatives for not understanding or for not having heard what happened. They were busy on a campaign, as we were. They were busy fighting government-sponsored refugees, for instance. Now they are calling upon us to help. They were extremely busy tearing down the structures and systems that we need to have at play to make sure Afghanistan is helped by Canada.

I will be very clear. I have never been shy about criticizing my own government, which is one of the roles of a backbencher. We do that work, but in this case, I want to commend the government. I particularly want to commend the public servants who worked day and night, seven days a week, through a very difficult time as a country was folding in on itself.

Of course, there were contingency plans. We have contingency plans for evacuation for every country, which is the way that Global Affairs Canada works. Of course, on the ground, we have a small mission in Kabul that was at the ready to work with our partners, but nobody, frankly, could have predicted the rapidity of the chaos

that ensued following the American troop withdrawal. Nobody could have predicted that.

I think we need a committee to discuss, and I would argue the foreign affairs committee could do this, what lessons we learned. Were there mistakes made? Could we do it better? Those are absolutely fair, good and reasonable questions, because everyone in this House wants to make sure we have the ability in this country, as a trusted ally, to make a difference in the world.

During those several weeks of chaos, my office, like many members' offices, was inundated with calls from people. I represent Don Valley West, and that riding has one of the largest populations of Afghan Canadians, as well as newcomers who are not yet citizens. My office was inundated with calls from family members fearful about those who were trying to reach safety, or trying to reach them to have a conversation.

We want to know what systems were put in place, and I understand that. Each one of us was frustrated as a member of Parliament, and it is fair to be frustrated.

• (1110)

We also have to recognize that public servants are human beings. They are doing the best they can. The structures are in place to help them. We want to learn from them and hear what they did, without jumping to the conclusion that "nothing", and I quote the opposition leader, was done. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and it is simply irresponsible for an opposition leader to claim that.

Was enough done? Perhaps it was not. Could it have been done better? Absolutely, as everything can always be done better. It is not fair to denigrate our public servants and Canadian armed services, whether they are public safety officers, immigration officers or some of the 200 Global Affairs staff who were mobilized to help the small contingent at the mission that existed in Afghanistan at the time.

We have helped the Afghan people in the past, and we will continue to help them. It is one of the prime places we send humanitarian aid. Right now, there is no way we will be recognizing the Taliban. It is a terrorist organization in Canada, but it is nonetheless the de facto government.

We are finding ways to work around them, but it is still difficult. The situation on the ground is still tenuous. We have to be absolutely careful about the safety and security of Canadian personnel there, and we have to work in conjunction with our NATO allies, who continued to have forces on the ground after we left them behind.

We will continue to build bridges, such as consular affairs. We will also be making sure that we continue to help the 1,400 people who have already been evacuated who were Canadian citizens, permanent residents of Canada or their family members. Around 1,400 have come back.

We still have files open. Some of them are hard to connect with. Some of them have left Afghanistan. Some of them have gone to Pakistan and other countries. We are still in conversation with them and trying to help them. We are also guaranteeing to commit to our plan to bring at least 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan into Canada.

Obviously, there are millions of refugees who have already left Afghanistan and are in places outside of Afghanistan. There are also people at risk inside Afghanistan. This includes women and girls, and LGBTQI people, who are at risk. I am getting constant communications from them. We have to find ways through civil society groups and third-party countries to get them into Canada or other safe countries. We do not need to have a monopoly on goodness in this country. We need to work with other countries that share our values and want to make sure that Afghan people are safe.

We will call upon the Taliban. We will call upon them to live up to their stated concerns about the well-being of the people of Afghanistan. We will also call them to follow the international rules-based order and the expectations of the international community in the exercise of their power. We are not going to negotiate with them. We will demand that they do that.

Meanwhile, we are going to continue to work to make sure that we find a way to help the most vulnerable people. That is our goal. We have been in Afghanistan before. Previous governments have committed. This government continues to commit and recommit to the people of Afghanistan because, as the Leader of the Opposition did say, we have a stake in this. We have CAF members who have given their lives for Afghanistan, and we have aid workers and veterans who have come home and who care deeply.

We are absolutely there, but we are not there just because of that. We are there because that is what Canada does and that is what Canadians want us to do. They want us to continue to be a beacon of light and hope in the world. We will continue to find ways to get humanitarian assistance there. We will continue to find ways to reignite our development projects. We will continue to find ways to support women and girls, and democracy and human rights in Afghanistan, in a very complicated and difficult situation.

• (1115)

As I said, I do respect the will of this House to get answers to those questions appropriately, but we will also safeguard the information that will be released by government. No reasonable or responsible government will ever put at risk military strategic plans. We will never put individuals at risk, through their names or identities, and we will never even put at risk the reputations of the people who are attempting to do their very best. They have sworn an oath to Her Majesty and to the people of Canada to publicly serve to the best of their abilities.

We are in this together, and I do not believe anyone has ever been elected to opposition. I do not believe that. It is the reality that, after an election, some people find themselves in opposition and others find themselves in government. I have been in opposition. My hope is that the opposition will always find ways to constructively help Canada and the Canadian government make a difference and make positive contributions. Anyone can criticize.

Business of Supply

Anyone can cut down, but to build up takes more. That is what I would call upon the opposition to do today, to find a constructive and creative way.

I have been in contact with members in the third and fourth parties, and I believe there is a way we can do this. There is a way that we can bring this information to the foreign affairs committee to make sure we exploit, in the best sense of the word, what a standing committee is for. The Standing Orders are there to protect the rights of every member of the committee, both opposition and government sides, to further the work. We are open to a very early study on Afghanistan. We are very open to finding a way to work together on this, to be creative, to find answers and to ensure that our number one goal is not to have gotcha moments or to one up each other, but to actually create an environment where we can have a discussion.

I have been incredibly impressed with the member for Edmonton Strathcona and her passionate and compassionate approach on humanitarian assistance. I congratulate her on her new role in foreign affairs more broadly and generally because, to me, we are involved in foreign affairs in all of our ways of ensuring that we are finding a way to make our world better. That is why we create differences.

No world was ever made better by dropping a bomb. It is made better by giving people hope. We give people hope by making sure they are fed, have democratic rights, and can contribute to the best of their ability to find a way to make a difference for their families and in their lives. We do not do that perfectly. No government in Canada has ever done that perfectly. We can be better, and will continue to work on it.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

I greatly appreciate the work done by the member for Montarville. He is always extremely sensitive and compassionate. He stands up for the interests of all Canadians and Quebecers wanting to create a safe, prosperous and equitable world, where everyone can live with dignity.

[*English*]

We can work together on this, and that is what I would like to take from this. I am not casting aspersions on the official opposition. I hope opposition members want to work with us as well to find a way through these tricky situations and to not overtax our committee members or public servants. I would sooner they spend more time on humanitarian assistance, creating pathways of communication and dialogue, and working with our allies around the world, than in producing documents that will simply not be helpful to us.

I want to find a way to be resourceful, constructive and dignified. I am looking forward to the House—

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): On that note, questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the parliamentary secretary. I am relieved he is continuing in his role.

With a non-partisan spirit, we worked very closely together in rescuing Canadians around the world at the beginning of COVID-19. I am less pleased with how we are doing in rescuing Afghani women, the people who worked with Canada and the women in Afghanistan's parliament, who are now at grave risk. I agree with him that the member for Edmonton Strathcona has the right approach.

What do we do now? How do we get humanitarian relief now? I am less convinced that we need a committee that reports in six months. I am sympathetic to the notion that we should not beat up on our civil servants, but I am talking to people who are working with people trying to get out of Afghanistan now, and they do not believe that the Taliban is the biggest obstacle on the ground. They think our unnecessarily bureaucratic immigration procedures as the Government of Canada are a bigger obstacle.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, as usual, I agree with most of what the hon. member has said.

First, on the issue of women and girls in Afghanistan, it is critical. It is absolutely essential that we find ways to address it. Do I think we have bureaucratic structures and systems that sometimes get in the way? Absolutely. I have been frustrated, as have others, with respect to all of that.

Some of those are put in place to ensure public safety and confidence in the immigration system. I respect that, but I also think we should find ways to cut through them. I do not believe a special committee is the place to do that. We need long-term solutions because this is going to happen again. Let us find a way to do this through our committee structure.

• (1125)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, the failures in Afghanistan are not anything new, especially when it comes to religious minorities and minority groups like the LGBTQ community. As someone who has personally sponsored a refugee family from Afghanistan, I know first-hand that it took the Liberal government four years to get that family here when they were under persecution.

I want to correct the member, but this is not to denigrate the civil service at all. It is to hold the government to account for its failures. I went through that process and have seen it, and the Liberals continually fail. We are at 1.8 million cases in immigration backlogs. It is not the fact that the public service has failed; it is the government's failure for creating this bureaucratic mess. We have all seen images of the young women and girls who are being forcibly converted and married. What is going on is devastating.

Let me be very clear. The Conservative Party does not want to destroy the refugee class in any way. Actually, we want to make it better because of the bureaucratic backlogs the Liberal government created—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. parliamentary secretary a chance to answer.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, the officials at IRCC are working day and night to do these processes. This is not something new. I was in opposition during the Harper government, and believe me, I waited years and years to help refugees at that time. The system does not work perfectly. Can we find ways to improve it? Absolutely. Let us take that to the citizenship and immigration committee, which needs to do it.

We will continue to stand with Ahmadiyya. We will continue to stand with the Sikh community in Afghanistan. We will continue to stand with persecuted religious minorities in Afghanistan, because that is what we do and that is what Canadians want us to do.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulo, BQ): Madam Speaker, frankly I do not even know where to begin.

I was listening to my colleagues and I could see a lot of motivation on their part. Nevertheless, this is not the first war we are getting involved in. We know the consequences of getting involved in a war and the consequences of having people work for us and help us in a country that is not our own. We have known all of this for a long time.

We should have planned our involvement from the outset and had a vision of the future for these people; the same goes for when we left the country in 2014. Now where are we? We are improvising, asking for things from people who do not even have access to the Internet, and closing the embassy. Every government is at fault. We have to acknowledge that and review this situation to ensure that it does not happen again.

Does my colleague agree that we must examine what happened to ensure that girls, women and children never again starve to death or get killed?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I agree. I believe such a review is indispensable.

However, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development must also conduct its own study. That is very important.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to think about how we can work together and how we can work in a positive forward-looking way, but I have to call my colleague out on one of the comments he made today, that is, that nobody could have predicted what was going to happen in Afghanistan. I wrote to the minister in February and explained that this would happen. My colleagues in the NDP have written to the minister as well. People from the Hazara community had written to the minister and explained what was going to happen in August when we knew the U.S. would be pulling out, so I do want to call him out on that a bit.

More importantly, I would like the member to comment, if he could, on the situation we are in. Will the government be coming up with a plan to work with the non-profit sector, CSOs and multi-lateral organizations to ensure they can get support to the Afghanis, knowing the very complicated scenario we have in Afghanistan with regard to anti-terrorism legislation and whatnot?

• (1130)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, yes, absolutely. We need to work with civil society organizations. I have had conversations with Rainbow Railroad. I have had conversations with a number of organizations that are attempting to find pathways in a very, very difficult situation.

I would not say that no one could have predicted what was going to happen. When the decision was made by the United States to withdraw on September 11, contingency plans were put in place, obviously. What we needed to do then was absolutely expedite them to make sure that when the decision was made to advance, we did the best we could. Was this perfect? Absolutely not. Can it be improved? Absolutely, yes. We will continue to do that, and we welcome help and suggestions.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of comments rather than a question, and some corrections to make to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

First off, the mission did not end a decade ago. The combat mission ended a decade ago, but we did not leave Afghanistan until 2014.

I would like to correct a few members who keep referring to “Afghanis”. That is the currency in Afghanistan. It should be “Afhghans”.

Next, the member mentioned that—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): To the hon. parliamentary secretary, we have not finished questions and comments.

The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, I think the member will find it easier to respond to my comments if he actually listens to them.

He talked about time and that nobody could have predicted this. He sort of corrected that in his last response, but this was predicted. His own backbencher, the MP for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, raised a concern with the Liberal government two years ago that this was going to come down the pike, so this should have been predicted. I raised it myself in the national media weeks before the government took action.

I will agree with the member. It is the backbenchers' responsibility to stand up and criticize the government at certain times. I am looking forward to members of the Liberal caucus voting for this motion today.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, my apologies. I thought you were recognizing the next debater.

Business of Supply

On the question, let me be very clear that in four months, this government brought in more Afghan interpreters than the previous Conservative government brought here in four years. That is absolutely true. I know those people; they live in my riding. I am in contact with them every day. I understand what that was about. I also understand that the situation changed and Canada continued to adapt.

I want to thank the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, who was absolutely helpful in raising the issue. We have constantly been engaged on the issue and will continue to be engaged on it.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I always find my hon. colleague's remarks in the House to be very insightful and engaging.

During the last intersection, I had the opportunity to ask the member for Wellington—Halton Hills about the concerns I have with the text of this motion regarding the one-month timeline and the committee's ability to basically overrule the parliamentary law clerk as it relates to the redacted documents.

Can the member speak about his concerns regarding that particular text?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, obviously we have a concern about that because we already have a taxed public service. We have a holiday period coming up. We think it is unreasonable, and we have to find ways to work around that.

We also have suggestions, and we have a proposal right now on how we should be handling documents that we think parliamentarians should have access to. We will find a way—

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean, who will give a superb speech that I will be most pleased to listen to.

First, I would like to highlight what I believe to be some strong points in the motion presented today by the Conservative Party. As the saying goes, we should not throw out the baby with the bathwater, and the motion has some worthwhile elements.

I am thinking in particular of the reason why they are asking that a special committee be created. My colleague, the parliamentary secretary, mentioned that he hoped the study would be conducted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. However, this matter touches on international relations, defence and immigration, a combination of areas that we do not see all that often.

Business of Supply

In addition, one of the advantages of creating a special committee is that it frees up the schedules of the standing committees, which, as one might expect, will have a lot on their plate in the coming year and will be very busy. I am thinking in particular of the standing committees on foreign affairs and international development, national defence and citizenship and immigration. The study the motion proposes is extensive and could take several months. Tasking a standing committee with this study would likely prevent that committee from focusing on other equally important issues.

Finally, there is a need to restore the Canadian Armed Forces' image, a significant issue that I will carry forward and address over the next year. A number of military members have taken it upon themselves to help the local interpreters they worked with in Afghanistan. They have provided private funding to set up houses to keep people safe. If nothing is done and we send the message that some individuals could be left behind, we risk undermining not only the alliances we may want to make with international partners on future missions, but also the Canadian Armed Forces' internal recruitment.

For all these reasons, I think it is appropriate to ask the question and to study what went wrong and why allies who had worked with Canada were not evacuated.

The wording of the Conservatives' motion raises the issue of calling an election in the midst of the Afghan crisis. It is very interesting and relevant, but is this really the right place to raise the issue? I am not sure. However, if we were to go down this road, I daresay it might be interesting to see how we could put limits on a government's power to unilaterally call an election without being brought down by the House. I doubt that the Liberals and Conservatives would want to discuss this in the context of the motion we are debating, but I still think it is worth raising this possibility.

What bothers me about this motion is that the Conservatives seem to have written it more to make the government look bad than to really find immediate and future solutions. I will give an example.

Paragraph (m)(v) of the motion calls for an enormous quantity of documents to be produced within one month of the creation of the special committee, which is likely to be voted on tomorrow. One month from now will be January 7. Between now and then, there are about seven or eight sitting days left in the House, people and staff will be on vacation, and they may still be on January 7. On that date, it would be very easy for the Conservatives to say that the government has once again disobeyed an order of the House by not producing the documents requested by the deadline. That deadline, however, is absolutely impossible to meet, so the objective will not be met.

Accordingly, I think that we could be a little more flexible, for example by allowing the committee to decide for itself which documents it wants to obtain and the timeline for producing them. These choices can change depending on what happens in committee and what the committee needs in order to plan or amend its decisions.

Another aspect of the motion that bothers me is the fact that it is only retroactive in scope. While the Leader of the Opposition

talked more about the need for recommendations for the future, it seems to me that it is more about picking at scabs than anything else. Just between us, I do not think that we need a special committee to see that things were botched.

• (1135)

We have only to ask the members who had all their immigration cases put on hold this summer because of the lack of capacity to deal with Afghan refugee applications. The system was not even close to being ready; cases in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration were already moving slowly, and this just added to it. Afghan refugees do not need a special committee to tell them that things were botched. We only have to ask the 200 Afghans whose names were leaked to the media by IRCC, which put their lives at risk. They do not need a special committee to tell them that things were botched. We only have to ask the 40,000 minus 3,700 Afghans who are still there. Let us ask them if they need a special committee to tell them that things were botched.

With that in mind, there is no point to creating a committee whose sole purpose is to analyze the past. It is somewhat akin to the work of a coroner who is asked to determine the cause and circumstances of a death. Their work would not be that important if it simply involved telling us why and how a person died. The coroner's real job is to make recommendations to prevent it from happening again. That is what I would like to see from the committee that is to be set up.

If worst comes to worst, an amendment could be introduced to that effect. If the special committee's sole purpose is to provide feedback, it becomes less useful. I would prefer to have it look at other issues, such as what to do with the people who are still in Afghanistan. There could be millions of them, and they could starve to death in one of the worst famines in human history. How can we get international aid to these people in the immediate future?

The committee might consider what kind of diplomatic ties we should have with the Taliban government. Although it is the de facto government, it is not a recognized government, since the Taliban are considered a terrorist organization. Still, we will need to figure out how to deal with them to ensure delivery of humanitarian aid.

It is also important to look at government funding. Since the Taliban have been recognized by several countries as a terrorist organization, aid is often frozen. International donors are more fearful, so the money that the government relies on to keep running is not coming in.

Under the circumstances, we do not really seem to be grasping this sense of urgency and the need for action right now. Those are not secondary issues; they should be a key focus for the special committee. I think that is what the Conservatives' motion is lacking. I would not be comfortable supporting the motion as written. It is basically smoke and mirrors. Really, it is mud-slinging, and it is not constructive.

Business of Supply

When I read the motion as it stands, I worry that it will not help anyone other than maybe the Conservatives. Passing this motion will not get any more Afghans out of Afghanistan. It will not get any humanitarian aid into the country. This motion will not do anything to improve diplomatic relations insofar as that is possible.

I think there is room for improvement. The Bloc, as always, wants a partner it can talk to and work with constructively. We are reaching out to our Conservative colleagues, not for their good, not for the good of the government and not for our own good, but for the good of those who need it most right now.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that there is always room for improvement through amendments. I am looking forward to seeing those and hopefully coming to some sort of consensus, if her party wants to put forward amendments.

I would also agree with her that this committee is not just about identifying what went wrong. It is about figuring out what we need to do better for the future. Having ample experience with lessons identified and lessons learned within the Canadian Armed Forces, the key difference is that if we do not actually learn from mistakes made in the past, we can identify them until the cows come home and we will be doomed to make the same mistakes again.

I encourage the Bloc Québécois to work with our Conservative team to come up with an amendment that would work for all of us.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, I have two things to say about that.

First of all, as I said in my speech, the need to learn from mistakes is one thing. I am not rejecting that part of the Conservative motion, but I think it needs to lead to something else, and that is what I want to emphasize.

Second, I just made some suggestions for possible amendments. The Conservatives did not try to get any support from the other parties to make sure this motion passes or to make it worthwhile. This only makes me question the purpose of the motion even more. Is it just smoke and mirrors? The question remains.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree that the motion looks more like theatre than looking to improve the lives of Afghans and the functioning of our government.

Having a critical look at what has happened in the past is something our committees could do. Our existing committees are set up for that.

Could the hon. member comment on the role that could be played by the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, or the public accounts committee or other committees to look into what happened and what we could do better in the future?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, as I said, this is such a broad subject, which encompasses so many files and requires such a large effort, that it should be the purview of a special committee.

Will the Department of National Defence really look into why Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada did not have enough staff to deal with the cases? This is such a complex problem that, on the face of it, it warrants the creation of a special committee. As well, that would avoid monopolizing the time of other committees that will already have a lot on their plates during this Parliament.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, a unique part of this motion to create a special committee is that it would be accompanied by a special order of the House, which is informed by experiences of standing committees in the previous Parliament that ran against obstructive measures from members of the government and had to request the House's help to solicit documents and actually have them put before the committee.

I wonder if my colleague has any comments on the fact that we are probably saving some time by putting a special standing order of the House in the motion so the committee is equipped with that before and would not have to make use of it at a later stage.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, there is an interesting aspect to the motion in paragraph (n). It is a kind of clause to prevent filibusters surrounding the production of documents and the presentation of witnesses. I find it interesting to see that come from the House. That is something that cannot be done in a standing committee.

That is why I am comfortable with the idea of creating a special committee. However, I would reiterate my comment that it is not realistic to ask for all the documents to be produced in a month in the middle of the holidays. Leaving it up to the committee to choose its own documents and set its own deadlines would be a sign of confidence in the committee.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to say just how much I enjoyed hearing what my hon. colleague from Saint-Jean had to say. I especially liked her comments about the purpose of this motion and the fact that, in its current form, it does not seem to help anyone.

When Syrian refugees started arriving, several groups in our communities sponsored them.

Does the member agree that Canadians and Quebecers are ready to welcome refugees from Afghanistan?

Business of Supply

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, I wish we were already at the point of asking ourselves if we are ready to bring these people here and sponsor them privately. We are not quite there yet. These refugees are still in danger. No one knows how to get them out, and that is the problem. When people do private sponsorships, it is because the refugees have already crossed the border and are in refugee camps. We are not even there yet, and Canada has not even—

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

• (1150)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will try to measure up to my very dear colleague from Saint-Jean.

Some things are important in politics, but sometimes, in the House, we lose sight of what is important. To begin with, I would like to point out two things we need to bear in mind throughout this debate.

First, throughout all our discussions, we must remember that more than one million children could die from malnutrition in Afghanistan this winter. I am not making this up; representatives of the United Nations World Food Programme have said so.

Second, we must remember that we have a duty of solidarity toward the Afghan people, which means we have an obligation to get results. I often tell my children that they should always finish what they start. In the case of Afghanistan, that means that we need to follow through on our commitment to keep those who worked with us on the ground during this difficult war safe. Interpreters and their families put their lives at risk at the time and are still suffering for having helped us. We must therefore do everything we can to help them and repatriate them.

With that in mind, we need to ask ourselves whether what we are doing is useful in the grand scheme of things. I agree that we need to identify the stumbling blocks and mistakes in the government's efforts to repatriate our Afghan allies. I also agree that we need to make sure we never again witness such chaos in a future military conflict and that we learn from this mess.

However, I do not agree that we should embark on a mission to nose out scandals that will last until the next election. I also do not agree that we should start combing through redacted material so that we can interpret fragments of confidential information in the hope of finding a comma out of place.

Every member here knows that this is a complex situation, especially the Conservatives. They did not do much for our interpreters either in 2014.

Like the Conservatives, I condemn the government's inaction last August, and I would like to remind the Liberals that they called an election at a time when people were so desperate to flee the Taliban that they were clinging to moving planes. I also think that we are seeing some professional improvisation in the management of the repatriation, which is an operation that the Minister of Public Safety will undoubtedly leave off his CV. Like my Conservative colleagues, I get some incredibly tragic files in my riding office.

Despite all this, if the motion of the hon. member for Durham and leader of the official opposition is intended only to embarrass the government and not to review the events constructively, I do not see how the Bloc can support it. Unfortunately, when I read the motion, I get the feeling that the hon. member for Durham is playing politics rather than trying to resolve the issue. He is more concerned with scoring points off the Liberals than scoring points for the interpreters and their families.

I will give a few compelling examples to support my arguments, and I will explain the conditions under which I might consider supporting the motion. Since my dear colleague from Saint-Jean already went over those conditions in detail, I may be repeating some of what she said.

First, in paragraph (l), the committee is being instructed to present a final report within six months of the adoption of the motion. The current motion makes it seem that the Conservatives absolutely want this to fail. Six months is great, but, under paragraph (m), the documentation has to be produced within one month.

I know what is going to happen: The Liberals will not be prepared to answer our questions and will be filibustering. That is how things will go at every meeting. The Conservatives are well aware of this, since there is a measure in paragraph (n) of the motion to prevent the Liberals from filibustering. However, there will be four hours of discussion before the mandatory vote and that means that, for four hours, members will be able to filibuster.

The Conservatives know that the Liberal Party will never waive its parliamentary privilege. This says a lot about both parties, but it says even more about the motion, which seems virtuous at first glance, but appears to be intended solely to embarrass the Liberals. In fact, the strategy is to trip up the Liberals, not to conduct a real review of their management of the crisis, which, incidentally, is still ongoing.

To get back to the timetable, the period during which the process would start also poses a problem. First, the Conservatives know that the holidays are approaching, that Parliament is going to wind down, that parliamentary and government public servants will not be available and that all this will undermine the redaction provided for in paragraph (n). This single step will take months, or it will monopolize every staff member in the departments involved.

• (1155)

Second, getting back to what I was saying about the crisis, the public servants they want to call to testify or monopolize for redactions are currently trying to repatriate the Afghans in question.

If someone in the House wants to tell me that there are currently no delays at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, either they do not work on immigration files, or they are Liberal. The department has been struggling with staggering and inhumane delays for years now, and the situation has only gotten worse since August, because it is working almost full time on repatriation cases.

Business of Supply

I said earlier that we need to keep two things in mind throughout the debate, namely that children will die if things do not change, and that we have a duty toward our allies.

Will putting more pressure on our public servants improve the situation? No. Will politicizing the crisis right now improve the situation? No. Do the Conservatives want to create a committee to further their partisan interests rather than help the Afghans? That is a fair question. Moreover, it is entirely reasonable to ask why the Conservatives want to create a committee on Afghanistan, but do not want to extend the mandate of the special committee on Canada-China relations. We still do not understand why that is, but it is obvious that the Conservatives see special committees as an essentially political tool.

Would it not be more appropriate to examine the actions Canada could take?

Let us change the motion together now, to ensure that the main purpose of the review shifts from the past to the present and the immediate future, with a view to providing humanitarian aid and evacuating vulnerable Afghans. The Bloc Québécois has a lot of ideas, and that is why we are here. We want to work together with every party in the House.

Let us look at the humanitarian situation and the assistance Canada should be providing, given that millions of Afghans risk dying of hunger in the coming months. This is one of the worst humanitarian crises on the planet. That is what we need to do to help.

Let us consider diplomatic ties, as my colleague from Saint-Jean mentioned. Should Canada forge diplomatic ties with the Taliban government? Yes. How can the government communicate with the Taliban if it does not recognize them? We can look at that.

We can also look closely at the government's goals. I am the immigration critic for the Bloc Québécois. The government promised to take in 20,000 Afghan refugees, and then 40,000. So far, we have taken in 4,000 out of those 40,000. That raises questions.

Yes, we agree with the idea of a special committee, but let us change the wording of the motion so that its purpose is not necessarily political and partisan but aligns with the real objective that such a committee would have, namely to help those people who are stuck in Afghanistan. Right now, in Afghanistan, parents are selling their daughters for food, and people are hiding in safe houses to avoid being killed. It is that simple, and it is tragic.

What do we do with these people? These are all questions that do not appear anywhere in the Conservative motion. We talk a lot about immigration, but this is also a matter of international co-operation and human rights. What do we do about the NGOs, which are reluctant to help the Afghan people because the current Taliban government is considered a terrorist organization? What do we do with the information circulating about human trafficking to meet the needs for food as I just mentioned?

Let us not forget the elephant in the room, the veterans' groups that are financing safe houses to protect Afghans and their families with what little they have, without any help from the federal government. We have all seen their requests for help in our riding offices. What is the government doing about those issues?

I am repeating myself, but that is okay. Let us not forget that one million children in Afghanistan could die of starvation. Let us not forget that we have a duty to the Afghan people, a duty to fulfill our commitment to their security.

Let us find a way to do that and focus on what really matters for our allies. Let us study the situation in Afghanistan. Let us make it our first order of business to evaluate the humanitarian aid that Canada should be providing to bring relief to the Afghan people. Let us be smart and realistic in how we proceed. If a special committee is formed, let us give its members and the officials who will be assigned to support them the flexibility and time they need to do their job, given the scope of work involved.

Above all, let us ask ourselves why we were elected. Let us take responsibility and work together.

• (1200)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with much of my colleague's speech and with the member for Saint-Jean's comment that the wording of the Conservatives' motion is a problem.

I think the time has come to have discussions on Afghanistan. Every member of the House knows that the situation is serious.

Will my colleague be proposing an amendment to the Conservatives' motion?

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I know that discussions are currently under way. We will want to propose amendments to this motion, and I am convinced that we can reach an agreement.

I am eager to see what my Liberal colleagues are going to do when they see the amended motion. They will realize that, as elected officials, we need to vote in favour of this motion as amended to simplify the general idea behind the creation of the special committee.

The idea is to provide assistance to Afghans, to look at the mistakes that should not have happened and ensure that they never happen again, while focusing on the present and the future. I hope that my Liberal colleagues will join us in this adventure.

[English]

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, again, I have one slight correction for the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

In 2014, things were different. At the time, a lot of Afghans did take the opportunity to seek immigration here to Canada, but the majority of Afghans wanted to stay in their home country, because they felt that they had a future there. They felt that the path was on the right direction. Unfortunately, things have changed most recently.

Business of Supply

However, I do believe that we need to focus on the urgency of this situation right now and speak to local NGOs that are working this file, and there are over 10,000 files in their databases of trying to get Afghans to safety. Would the member agree that this is urgent and it needs to be dealt with right now?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I did not want to offend my Conservative colleagues by bringing up what happened in 2014. I like them far too much for that.

There is indeed an emergency, and that is why this motion is inadequate in its current form. What we want to do is to repatriate these people. We want to figure out how to do that and how to help them.

We will certainly not do so by having a study conducted by different committees, where there would be constant filibustering in the absence of the paragraph (n) in the motion, which, incidentally, is a very interesting paragraph.

Yes, this is an emergency. However, we must make sure we work together, and the Conservatives must accept the amendment we will be proposing. Then we will be able to work for the common good and, especially, for the benefit of our allies stuck in Afghanistan.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I admire my colleague's work in the House of Commons, and his commitment to human rights and to the rule of law.

The member spoke about moving forward, looking forward, and solutions for the Afghan people. One of the situations that I am hearing about, which I am really quite concerned about, is that the anti-terrorist legislation that is in place is preventing organizations on the ground from getting help urgently to the Afghan people and the people who are at risk of starving to death this winter.

Could the member give us his thoughts on how we could work around those anti-terrorism laws to make sure that the Afghan people do not suffer at this time of urgent need?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton Strathcona, whom I like very much. We are working together on several files, and I must say that she is fully invested in international human rights. I find her sincere and extremely dedicated.

To answer her question, I would say that that is precisely why we need a special committee. We can then call representatives of these organizations to testify and tell us what they need to help people on the ground.

That is what special committees are for. A special committee is necessary in the case of a situation like the one in Afghanistan. People from these organizations will be able to testify and tell us what they need. We will then be able to act quickly.

• (1205)

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver East.

This is my very first speech, so I hope you will humour me, Mr. Speaker, as I thank my constituents for once again allowing me the great privilege of standing in this place to represent them. I will tell members a bit about Edmonton Strathcona before I undertake my speech.

Edmonton Strathcona is an incredible, amazing community. We are a community of artists and musicians; a community of small business owners, teachers, professors, students and workers. We have incredible events like the Fringe; the Folk Music Festival; the Strathearn Art Walk; and the Canoë Volant, which is an opportunity to ride a canoe down a ski hill. We have the French district with Campus Saint-Jean and La Cité Francophone, the University of Alberta. Being able to represent Edmonton Strathcona really is the deepest honour of my life, and I want to thank everyone who elected me. I want to thank the volunteers who helped me to come back to this place.

I want to finish by thanking my husband and my children. We all stand in this place. We work long hours. We know that often our private life is sacrificed because of the work that we do for the public good. My husband Duncan and my two beautiful children inspire me. I am so grateful for their love and support. I thank them so much.

Today, I rise to speak to the opposition motion calling for a special committee to examine and review the events related to the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in August of this year. My overarching message that I want to give to every single person in this House is one of urgency. Every parliamentarian in this House needs to understand that what we are dealing with in Afghanistan, what we are seeing in Afghanistan right now, is not one crisis and not two crises; it is three crises that are happening at the same time and they will require urgent action from the Canadian government and from governments around the world.

I come from a background of international development. I have spent over 25 years working in international development and sustainable development around the world. I have worked with people who have led the way working in Afghanistan to raise women and girls in Afghanistan. I am so proud of the work that our sector, the Canadian CSOs, have done, including Janice Eisenhower and Lauryn Oates from Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. We have seen incredible work out of Islamic Relief Canada, Care Canada and World Vision. These organizations have been working on the ground for so long to support the Afghan people. I am so proud that I have been able to support them in my role.

I have to say how devastating it was in August to watch what was happening on the ground, to watch the despair and the pain in Afghanistan. The thing that I felt most shocked about was that we knew this was coming. The runway for this was very long. For years, New Democrats have been calling on Conservative and Liberal governments to do more, to act faster, to invest more in the Afghan people. For years, members of the religious minorities in Afghanistan have been saying that they are at risk, that their very lives are at risk and that if they are not supported to flee Afghanistan, they would die.

Even just in February 2021, I wrote to the minister and explained that we were watching the failure of a peace process and we were watching women be silenced in Afghanistan. That is exactly what happened. We wrote to the minister and said that when the U.S. left Afghanistan, as we knew it would because the Americans had told us they would, what would happen would be chaos. It was chaos. We saw this coming. We knew it was going to happen and then when it happened, instead of being ready, instead of having a plan, instead of doing the work we needed to do, we left those people behind.

• (1210)

We should be ashamed of ourselves. The government should be ashamed of itself.

We also know that we need to think of a way forward. We cannot turn the clock back on the failures of the government. We cannot go back in time, so have to look at going forward. We have to look at what to do about these three crises right now.

First, there is the humanitarian crisis; 23 million Afghans, more than half of the population, are at risk of starvation this winter. The situation in Afghanistan is dire, with the economy on the verge of collapse, food shortages and a crumbling health care system. The latest United Nations' humanitarian response flash appeal is currently deeply underfunded, with only 20% of the required assistance committed.

The Government of Canada simply has to do more to help the people of Afghanistan, who are facing these food crises. We must commit to more humanitarian aid and we must work with the multilateral and civil society organizations to ensure that the aid can get to those Afghans who need it the most. This is complicated. This will be very difficult to do, but we have to do this work. We know that antiterrorism legislation makes it extremely hard for CSOs and multilateral organizations to work in Afghanistan, but the government needs to be clear. It needs to make very clear declarations on what CSOs can do, how they can do it and how they will be protected to do the work.

The government will have to look at opportunities to get health care to Afghans. While we do not, in any way, want to recognize any legitimacy of the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan, we may need to find ways to get health care, food and essential services to those in Afghanistan who need the help the most. We need a clear plan. We need the government to take leadership. We need the government to meet with CSOs and folks who are on the ground who know the situation, who can get us through and get the help to those people in Afghanistan right now.

Business of Supply

The second crisis is immigration. My colleague from Vancouver East will be speaking about the immigration crisis, but the government keeps promising things, like 40,000 refugees will be coming to Canada, knowing very well that it has no ability to do that right now. What the Liberals are not telling Canadians is that the majority of those refugees are not coming from Afghanistan. We are asking people in a country with a collapsing economy to get out of Afghanistan before they can come to Canada. We can do better.

Finally, the third crisis is the international development crisis. This is not something I will just put on the current government. This belongs on the governments of Stephen Harper as well as the governments of the current Prime Minister. Our failure to invest in the people of Afghanistan and to stay with them is something we have seen in our international development file for a very long time. We are at the lowest level we have ever been in the history of our country.

Over the last 10 years, we have failed to invest in people or in international development. What we see is a country like Afghanistan, where the people are unable to survive without support, and our failure to protect them over years has caused this. Our failure to invest in them and work with our allies has caused this.

Therefore, I call on the government to recognize that we have a humanitarian crisis, an immigration and refugee crisis and an international development crisis unfolding in Afghanistan right now. Could we all please work together to find solutions to these three crises to protect the people of Afghanistan?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping the member could expand on this. Parliament has a standing committee structure. It would seem to me that many of the issues or concerns the opposition wants to deal with could be dealt with by the foreign affairs committee. It has the ability to make those communicational links between the immigration committee and other committees that might warrant it.

Could the member provide her thoughts in regard to our standing committees and the potential role they could play in this issue?

• (1215)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, while I do think there is value in using our standing committees for many aspects of what is happening in Afghanistan right now, this committee is important because of the scale and scope of the challenges we see in Afghanistan.

I also want to point out that the foreign affairs committee, prior to the Prime Minister calling an election in the summer, was not working terribly well. There were multiple instances where filibustering was happening within the committee and other instances where the committee was not working well.

Finally, there are many other things that this foreign affairs committee needs to look at, including vaccine equity, which is a personal favourite of mine on which we need to do much more.

Business of Supply

The foreign affairs committee already has a lot of work. This committee can look at something that is different and on which we need the voice of parliamentarians.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I also wish to begin my question for the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona by congratulating her for her re-election in Edmonton Strathcona. She will recall that her predecessor, Linda Duncan, has been a friend of mine since around 1983 when there were not that many environmental lawyers across Canada. She is a worthy successor to the role Linda played in the House.

I am very taken with the member's comments. I am also in touch with many organizations that work to try to help Afghan women particularly. I am very concerned about the multiple failures, and I agree with the hon. member that it is not just one federal government but successive governments.

In the current circumstance, what does the member think the benefit is of a committee that reports in six months as opposed to a focused effort of this place, in a non-partisan fashion, to get aid and support to the people of Afghanistan who will remain there in a humanitarian crisis, as well as to ramp up the acceptance of Afghan refugees to Canada?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, what we need to look at with this is that it is not one or the other. It is not that we have this committee looking at what is happening and reflecting on the lessons. We need to learn from what happened in August of this year versus having some efforts by members in this place looking at the humanitarian assistance going to Afghanistan. Both of those things can happen at the same time and, in fact, it is imperative that both of them do happen at the same time.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member about a specific part of this motion, paragraph (m), where the committee's work will be supported by an order of the House. In my view, this section of the motion is probably informed by the troubles that standing committees had in the previous Parliament and this may, in fact, be saving this special committee time, because it will be backed up by a full-force order from the House.

Does the member have any comments on that part in relation to the troubles we experienced in the previous Parliament?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, in the previous Parliament, there was obstruction, there was a deep disrespect from the government for the opposition in how our parliamentary processes would go forward. There is a need to have things put in place to protect our parliamentary roles as opposition to question the government, to demand documents from it, to work to hold the government to account. It is very important and him raising this question was an excellent intervention.

• (1220)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given this is my first full speech in the House, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the people of Vancouver East for sending me back here, to bring their voices to the House of Commons. I often look at this place as this place of the people and it is absolutely essential for us to do our jobs and bring our constituents' voices here, represent their needs and drive change. What I have done through-

out my entire political life is to really stand by the community and fight for change that matters in their everyday experiences.

I also want to take a moment to thank the campaign team members. Without them, I would not be here. I often say that I am not here because of me; I am here because of the amazing people who work with me, support me and lift me up to do this work.

Finally, I come to this place always with these words in mind from the late lieutenant-governor David Lam. He said to me many years ago that it was not the title that brought one honour but rather what one did to honour the title. These are the words I live by every day in the House.

I requested an emergency debate on Afghanistan on the second day the House resumed after the election. It was my first opportunity to raise the issue, and I was so disappointed the Speaker ruled against it.

Now we have this motion before us, and the Afghanistan issue is absolutely a crisis to which Canada needs to put its mind. The situation in Afghanistan is heartbreaking and it did not have to be this way.

For decades, after risking their lives to help the Canadian Armed Forces, many Afghan interpreters, other collaborators and their extended families were left in the highly precarious situation, being targeted by the Taliban.

I was astounded, to be honest, when the former minister of immigration's, now the Minister of Public Safety, initial response to help them get to safety was that they could use the existing immigration measures. That was his suggestion. This delay in action prolonged the threats and further endangered lives. Let us be honest about that and let us own that reality. Canada owes them a debt of gratitude and every effort must be made to bring them to safety swiftly.

With the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, Canadian Afghan families are absolutely desperate to bring their loved ones here. I do not believe a day goes by where I do not receive a message from a family member across the country, or even outside of Canada, asking for help.

In fact, as recently as just this week, I received a message from an Afghan interpreter who received support from the United States and landed there, but whose family members were left behind. Afghan interpreters also helped the Canadian military. Now, even with the government's new Afghan measure it recently announced, they are precluded from being able to bring their family members here because they have to be in Canada in order to exercise that measure.

There is something really wrong with our approach to this entire situation. Time and again, the Canadian government, the Liberal government, has shown that it is not there for the people who helped us when we needed them the most.

According to the government's own website, "Canada and its allies have received assurances from the Taliban that Afghan citizens with travel authorization from other countries will be allowed to leave Afghanistan." Canada must not squander this small window of opportunity given the dire situation in Afghanistan. The NDP is therefore calling on the government to bring in an emergency immigration measure of utilizing temporary residence permits to help Afghans get to safety.

• (1225)

There is no question that the granting of TRPs should be made with temporary travel documents to all Afghans and their extended family members who have supported the Canadian military, to those who are advocates, fighting for human rights, and to women and girls in particular, who are in such dangerous situations. I know of judges and lawyers who have also been left behind. They are asking for help and urging the Canadian government to come to the forefront.

I am calling on the government to expand the same support to human rights activists in Afghanistan and Afghans with family members in Canada, especially those with family reunification applications still awaiting processing.

I have a constituent who fled Afghanistan and came to Canada as a refugee three years ago. The minute he was able to, he submitted a family reunification application to bring his wife and his children here to Canada. They have been waiting for three years, and it still has not been processed. Now this has happened. Every time I talk to him he is literally weeping, because he is so worried about his wife and his daughter. Why? It is because they are women in that country, where they cannot be alone. They cannot even go out to get groceries on their own. How do members think families like that feel, who are struggling with this problem? Special immigration measures need to recognize that women and girls need help. They cannot travel without a man accompanying them in Afghanistan right now. That is their reality.

The government needs to work with advocacy groups in Canada to identify people in Afghanistan and provide them with a TRP and travel documents so that they can get to a third country. I would say that Canada also needs to recognize that under the current environment, Afghans are inhibited from obtaining the necessary travel documents, including a valid visa.

It is essential that the Government of Canada waive the requirements for documentation at this time and immediately provide them with a TRP and the necessary travel documents. Once they are in safety here in Canada, we can then work to get the necessary paperwork in order, including family sponsorship applications or private refugee sponsorship opportunities. For all of that to work and for the government to promise that 40,000 refugees will be able to come to Canada from Afghanistan, we must also waive the refugee determination requirements.

Currently, in Turkestan, where many Afghans have fled, there is no system in place for processing Afghans who recently fled from Afghanistan, and refugee determinations are required to qualify under all of Canada's refugee streams. The government must recognize that and rectify it. It is not something unheard of, by the way. It was done for the Syrian refugee initiative in 2015. If we could do

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that for refugees from Syria, we can do the same for refugees from Afghanistan. I am asking that we undertake those measures as we undertook them for the Syrian refugee initiative.

Canadians are deeply compassionate and more than willing to help those in need. Mr. Dan On is a successful entrepreneur in Vancouver. Some members may have seen the products he has on his shelves: the Dan-D Pak and all kinds of products and yummy things. He was a refugee from Vietnam. He came to Canada with literally the shirt on his back and was able to rebuild his life and become a successful entrepreneur. People from Vietnam are a model of how successful refugees can be. He has undertaken to fundraise, to support Afghan refugees all on his own and not ask for anything in return. He understands what it is like to have travelled that journey, and he wants to help.

I urge the government to take action. We can do it at committee; we can do it outside of committee; we can do it anywhere if we have the political will to make that difference. Let us save lives.

• (1230)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member makes the appeal that we can do anything if the political will is there. There is a great deal of goodwill, I would suggest, that comes from all sides of the House in trying to resolve this in a co-operative manner.

I reflect on the motion, and at the very least one could say it might be somewhat premature. We have standing committees if we want to look at the refugee file. I know the member opposite has always been fairly keen on the refugee issue. Would she not agree that one of the best ways we could deal with that specifically is to not only discuss it in the foreign affairs committee, but also take it to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, where many members have a very active interest in the refugee file and could possibly have a lot to contribute to the debate in terms of how to be of help to Afghanistan? Would she not agree that that is also a good thing to do?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I am a little more than fairly interested in the refugee file. I am deeply interested in the refugee file, because that is what we need to do. Humanitarian action is required.

On the issue of a special committee, the advantage of a special committee is that it would bring a number of different departments and ministries together to get the job done, because so far it is not working.

The government, unbelievably, called the election in the middle of this crisis, which it knew was coming. The day the election was called was the day the Afghan government fell. Then the government told the refugees not to worry, that it would bring them to Canada and that they should make applications and send their information to Global Affairs Canada. The government sent special emails to everyone, but those emails are just sitting there gathering dust.

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I cannot say how many people have said they have not heard from the government even though it has recognized that they are indeed interpreters and told them their families should get to safety. They have had no response—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Oshawa.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things Canada leads in around the world is women's rights and child and maternal health. I was working with an Afghan leader to bring a project to Afghanistan when everything went wrong. He is now stuck in Turkey. These people have helped our initiatives and we are leaving them there.

The Liberal member said this is premature. I am sure my colleague has a comment, because this is a message for future missions. Canada needs to stand up for the people who support it.

Could the member please comment on the Liberal member's comment about this being premature?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that action from the Canadian government to support people and get them to safety is absolutely essential and urgent. It is not premature. In fact I would argue that it is late in the day for us to get going on this. This should have been done before the election. It should have been done even with the prior administration. The Conservatives created a program from 2009 to 2011, which required at least 12 months of service starting in 2007 for Afghans to qualify to get to safety, even though we knew the Canadian military faced some of the heaviest fighting between 2006 and 2007.

Successive governments have failed. It is not premature. We should have done this yesterday.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot of talk about stalling by the Liberal government. How is the Liberal stalling on this humanitarian crisis costing lives at this moment?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely costing lives, because people cannot get to safety. The government made an announcement saying it would bring 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan, knowing that the refugee determination process does not enable them to get to safety and knowing they cannot get the documentation to get to safety. All of that is just words. It is meaningless and costing lives.

• (1235)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a sense of duty and honour that I stand here today in the House to support this motion to set up a committee to review Canada's actions during the evacuation of Canadian personnel and civilians and our Afghan friends and allies from Kabul; those who got out.

As a former associate minister of national defence, I want to say that my heart goes out to those 40,000 Canadians and their families who served in Afghanistan, and to our ill, our injured and, most importantly, our fallen. They made the ultimate sacrifice for Canadians so that among other victories, little girls could go to school in peace in Afghanistan and not fear having acid thrown in their faces or being married off at the age of nine. Have we forgotten the at-

tempted murder of Malala by the Taliban in Pakistan, when she spoke up for the education of girls?

Like Canadians who served during the Afghan mission, the Afghan war, I want to say how profoundly saddened I was to watch Canada strike her colours and run from Kabul, leaving many Afghan friends and allies behind, along with their families, for the Taliban to decide their fate. The victors of Vimy, the Hundred Days, D-Day and Kapyong, had they been able, would have cried out in rightful indignation at the scenes at the airport and at Canada's final retreat. For me and many friends and colleagues, it was a week of feeling frustrated, weak and sickened by the government's half-hearted approach, which can be summed up by "last in and first out".

To be clear, I have nothing but praise for the professionalism of the Canadian embassy staff and our Canadian Armed Forces personnel, particularly our special forces, who were left to hold the bag for the Liberal government. I only wish they would get the love and support they need from the government in terms of modern equipment, but that is not the Liberal way. It apparently is not the Liberal government's way.

As a former minister, I get to see how decisions are made behind closed doors; I have an idea of the "battle rhythm" of a crisis and the response to it. Canada's response has been slow, overly bureaucratic, risk averse and without any real political leadership to get things done. We could see the dithering at the highest levels of the Liberal government, because we were in the lead-up to an election and then into an election that the Liberals thought they had in the bag. To put it simply, the government shamefully had its eyes on a majority government at a pivotal time and could not have cared less about the national interest or the human tragedy unfolding thousands of kilometres away in Afghanistan.

Canadians have the right to know what the government did in the run-up to the fall of Kabul and what it did afterward. The peace treaty with the Taliban was signed on February 29, 2020, and later, on April 14, 2021, the Biden administration announced its intention to withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

If February 29 did not ring any bells in Ottawa at the Prime Minister's Office or the Privy Council Office or Global Affairs or National Defence or Citizenship and Immigration, there can be no question that alarm bells should have been ringing on April 14, with the clear end date set for September 11.

What did the Liberal government do when the United States administration announced its planned withdrawal? Did it strike an interdepartmental committee of deputies? Did it lay out plans for an all-of-government response? Did it send a reconnaissance team to Kabul to look at the logistics of getting thousands of Canadians and their Afghan allies out of the country? Did it lean ahead and start evacuations of, say, our Afghan embassy staff and interpreters, likely the easiest to clear, and get them and their families out?

It looks like the government was like a deer caught in the headlights and did nothing. Had there been any action, the government would no doubt have stood on soapboxes across the nation to announce the news. Instead, it chose to do nothing, and this is the point. It was a choice.

● (1240)

The government had months to plan, marshal its resources, lean forward and carry out evacuations with the Afghan government and U.S. military still in control of the country. It did not do it. Then between May and July 2021, the Taliban started to make predictable gains on the ground in Afghanistan. As U.S. forces started to withdraw, as money dried up for pay of the Afghan army, as America withdrew the logistics consultants that kept the Afghan air force flying and the Afghan army vehicle fleets moving, the Canadian government had access to the same intelligence as our allies and could have sped up its evacuation operations then.

Did we reach out to the Pakistani government or the military and ask them for assistance? Knowing that the tide was turning on the ground, what did the Liberal government do to get our people, our friends and our allies out? Where was our logistics hub? Why was there not a search capacity in place to process visa applications? Almost a month after, on July 23, the government announced its so-called path to protection; path to protection, indeed. Almost as soon as the path to protection was announced, the government was running in the opposite direction and jettisoned the 72-hour application deadline.

Let us look at timelines. Four months after President Biden announced the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the first evacuation flight out of Kabul landed in Canada. By August 10, the Taliban controlled 65% of Afghanistan and the second and third largest cities, Kandahar and Herat, had fallen. On August 13, Canadian officials announced a plan to resettle 20,000 Afghan refugees, including interpreters, activists, women leaders and members of the LGBTQ community. Two days later, Kabul fell to the Taliban and the Haqqani network. The death squads started to prowl the streets, going house to house to kill people who put their and their families' safety aside to work with Canadian diplomats, aid workers and soldiers. On August 17, two more flights got out with embassy staff and Afghan interpreters. While death squads were roaming the streets looking for our people, the Prime Minister said he would not give the Taliban diplomatic recognition. By August 20, Canadian officials managed to stop COVID testing and waive passports for refugees. On August 26, we witnessed two bomb blasts by suicide bombers at the airport and the Liberal government, in an election morass, pulled the plug; the evacuation ended. Our ambassador had gotten out 11 days previous.

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Would it not be interesting to see the correspondence between Privy Council, Global Affairs and National Defence? Imagine what the Prime Minister's Office was saying to people about taking no unnecessary risks. All this time, innocent Afghans who took us at our word were seen falling from the landing gear of transport aircraft in desperation to leave and find safety. All the while, the Liberal government was playing for time with the media and the electorate.

Liberals said that we could stay after the Americans left, that we would get them out by land, that we would evacuate them from regional partner countries like China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan. It was all smoke and mirrors, all a great game to protect the Liberal Party of Canada and its interests over the national interests and, literally, human life.

Where are the Liberals' priorities? How many refugees did the Liberal government rescue? It was 3,600 with another 1,200 in transit. First, the target was 20,000 refugees, now it is 40,000. These are targets, not reality.

In 2006, during conflict in Lebanon, the Conservative government, with less time and warning, evacuated 15,000 Canadian citizens from that war-torn country. It acted with leadership, alacrity and dispatch; quite a contrast to the Liberal government.

As a former associate minister of national defence, I want to say that we simply cannot forget our allies in times of need. Words with no plan are useless and are costing lives. A special committee and its recommendations are absolutely necessary to streamline bureaucracy and show both compassion and agility.

Mr. Speaker, priorities.

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Since this morning, much has been said about this motion, whose purpose seems to be to score political points, rather than quickly producing tangible results to help the people of Afghanistan.

This morning, we heard several times that some people are now—just as we are talking together or going for a snack in the lobby—in so-called safe houses, or secret facilities. Those individuals are waiting for the people of a G7 country, whom they helped for several years, to go and get them. We have a duty, a responsibility, towards them.

My colleagues made some interesting suggestions this morning concerning changes to proposals and amendments to this motion. Given the current state of affairs, we unfortunately cannot vote in favour of the motion, as it is a dog and pony show.

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For example, we talked about reducing the number of documents required, streamlining the process, giving the committee more power and focusing more on the present and the future.

What is being done to move forward and recruit the staff required to send humanitarian aid to those who need it now? Would my colleague support this set of amendments?

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree with my friend that we must act and we must do better. We are in a very serious situation and we need this committee and its recommendations. We need to take a closer look at this. As for our allies, our friends, the interpreters and those left behind, we need to get them out and we need them out now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, within the motion, the opposition is suggesting that members should be limited in terms of their ability to pose questions, I believe it is four hours, and to share their thoughts with this special committee.

Does the member believe the government putting in motions to limit opposition's ability to speak in committees is any more right than the opposition doing it to the government?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, generally speaking, I would say that I am not a big fan of closure of debate and I know my hon. friend does not like it either because he often has a lot to say in this House, and we both welcome and fear those interventions sometimes. In any event, this is a very serious and urgent situation. The reason to get on it within certain parameters is to target our discussions and get the recommendations out as quickly as possible.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just had a question around some of the topics in the committee. I agree with the urgent need to help translators and allies get out of Afghanistan.

Will this new committee address with urgency the challenges for girls and women now and in the future?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I am particularly concerned about the fate of women and young girls in Afghanistan. We have all seen the videos of nine-year-old girls being sold off into what they are calling “marriage”. This is very serious. I mentioned the need for education of girls and the fact that our efforts allowed them to be educated. Recently, at an international security forum, there was a woman from the former Afghani Parliament there. She was articulate. She was educated. She was passionate and so concerned about the women and girls in her country. We should be just as concerned for them.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in recent years, Canada has shown that it is not a power with influence on the world stage.

Right now, we are following the example of other countries who are miles ahead of us. Canada has had multiple foreign affairs min-

isters since 2015. It takes stability to score points on the world stage.

In its deliberations, could the committee consider whether it would be a good idea to have some permanency at the Department of Foreign Affairs? If not, Canada will continue to be considered a minor player.

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, we should not be considered a minor player. We were a major player in the efforts in Afghanistan. It is with shame, I would say, how we withdrew from Afghanistan and left people behind. We should continue to, in effect, punch above our weight and be integral to bringing those people out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important I begin by providing some background so that people can understand why we are debating a motion today about what happened in Afghanistan.

Let us remember that exactly 20 years ago, Canada was part of an international military coalition seeking to combat terrorism in Afghanistan. At the time, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, Canada decided to join our partners from the United States, Great Britain and other countries in fighting the al-Qaeda forces that had gathered in Afghanistan and that were being harboured by the Taliban government in power.

The coalition obviously included the United States, Great Britain and Canada. Upon their arrival, they had one main mission, a combat mission. It was the first time in years that Canada was officially at war and that our soldiers were being called upon to fight al-Qaeda Taliban terrorists.

Many of the troops on the ground, many Canadians, engaged in direct combat. We never really saw any figures and so, even though the information exists, we never really found out how many terrorists Canadian soldiers killed outright and wiped off the face of the earth, something I see as a good thing.

It is also worth remembering that hundreds of Canadian troops lent a helping hand. Those who were fighting the enemy had an extremely difficult, complex and dangerous job, but there were also troops deployed there to help the Afghan people, girls and women in particular, to rebuild schools, and to repair drinking water sources and infrastructure that had been demolished by the Taliban, who are completely insane.

In the 10 years or so that Canada was directly involved, our troops on the ground devoted all their energy to fighting on the one hand and helping the Afghan people on the other. The Afghan people were under the total control of the Taliban and members of al-Qaeda, some of whom even came from other countries to settle directly in Afghanistan, where they could have land and train as terrorists.

Let us not forget that 158 Canadian troops lost their lives in Afghanistan. Hundreds, if not thousands, of others were injured. A very good friend of mine blew up three vehicles by driving over improvised explosive devices. He walked away with his life, which is frankly a miracle, because most of the time, once is enough to be fatal. Fortunately, my best friend survived.

This shows once again, in addition to the 158 men and women in uniform who died either from explosive devices or otherwise, that there are dozens and hundreds of people, like my friend, who almost died for the cause and in order to help. They were there as good Canadians who were deployed on a mission. When Canada deploys on a mission, it is to help. Fighting is one thing, but helping people is what motivates us the most. That is what we did, and Canada's military has never wavered.

I was in the military at the time. I personally had to train soldiers who were deployed to Afghanistan, here in Canada, and even in the U.S. The training was on counterterrorism response and how to go into villages and fight the enemy lying in ambush. I was also trained on how to go and inform a family that a soldier had been killed. I learned how to deal with the family of a soldier killed in action.

Canadians can be very proud of what the military has done and what Canada has done. Some 40,000 Canadian troops were deployed during those years, both the regular and reserve forces. These were moments of great pride. It was dangerous, but the troops who trained and deployed had the great honour of doing that job.

Canada stopped fighting in 2011 and left Afghanistan in 2014. We completed our mission. We did what we could with the resources that Canada had. It was very difficult and very demanding, even though it was a source of pride. However, it still seriously challenged the ability of the Canadian Forces to do what we did, and we stuck with it until the job was done.

• (1255)

The United States, Great Britain and other countries stayed longer to ensure that Afghanistan stabilized and that the government could remain in place. Unfortunately, as we saw this summer, the country collapsed. Everyone left Afghanistan on August 31, 2021, and the Taliban has taken power once again.

What happened over there? How, after 20 years of work, did we wind up completely losing control over the situation? After all of that, how did the Taliban regain power?

We need to investigate this and gather as much information as possible, but most importantly, we must look back to understand why Canada did nothing to help our allies on the ground, the Afghans who worked for us, people like Wali and Mohammed and their families. These people worked as our interpreters and cooks, putting their lives at risk.

Let us not forget that, during the 10 years that we spent there, hundreds of thousands of Afghans risked their lives to help us. As soon as an Afghan was associated with the Canadian Armed Forces, they were considered an enemy by the Taliban. These people helped us accomplish our mission, helped Canada and the allies

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save their country, at great risk to their own lives and those of their families.

We knew that this was coming. Months before August 31, 2021, we knew that there was a problem and that these people's lives were being threatened. The NGOs warned Canada and the coalition countries. Everyone was warned.

The Americans prepared to help the people of Afghanistan who helped them, but in Canada, there was complete radio silence. We were in the middle of an election campaign. Then all of a sudden, Canada realized that we had friends there and that we had abandoned them.

The Prime Minister thought the election campaign was more important. We got the feeling that he did not care about what was happening in Afghanistan, that he did not care about those people. Perhaps that is not the case, but that is the impression that we got from what the Prime Minister and the Liberals were saying. It did not seem as though they had any consideration for the Afghans who helped Canada for so many years.

However, warnings were issued. Everyone knew that the danger was coming and it was time to act. Of course, it is complex to intervene, but the time to act was when the Americans and the British were still over there. There is no sense in waiting until August 31, when everyone has withdrawn, and then arriving late and saying that it is complex to intervene, as the Prime Minister told me during question period. Of course it is complex, but what were the Liberals doing when it was time to act?

That is why the official opposition, hopefully with the support of the other two opposition groups, will get a special committee established. The purpose is to get to the bottom of this. I agree with my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois that immediate action is needed, and I hope the government across the way is moving on this. I hope that the Liberals are moving quickly and doing everything they can to help people like Wali and their families come here.

We need to investigate and find out why our government did not take more effective action, to understand what was not done and why it happened, so that it does not happen again. That is why we as parliamentarians have a job to do.

The special committee to be set up will be able to carry out the necessary investigative work to help us understand. If the government needs to be reprimanded, it will be. If there was no other possible action, we will find that out. The important thing is to get to the bottom of this, and that is why we are here today. In order to shed light on what happened, all parliamentarians have to vote in favour of this motion.

I agree with the Bloc Québécois that we must act now. However, it is up to them, on the other side of the House, to hurry up and get the Afghans whose lives are currently in danger out of their country.

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• (1300)

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative motion reminds me of the relationship that I have with my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles on Twitter. Let us just say that my intentions are not always the best when we debate on Twitter, and I get the impression that what the Conservatives are trying to do is embarrass the government.

I would ask my colleague whether he would agree with me that there should be an amendment to the Conservative proposal to focus on the present and the future from a humanitarian perspective.

Would that not be a good way to untie this knot that perhaps leaves us with the impression that the aim of my Conservative friends is to make the government look bad?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Jonquière for his question. We all like to poke fun at each other on Twitter from time to time.

In the first part of his question, he says that the purpose of our motion is to make the government look bad. However, if the government had done its job properly, we would not be debating this motion today, and we could have debated a motion about something else. If the government does not do its job properly, then it must answer for that.

With regard to the second part of his question, I was told that the Bloc Québécois has amendments to propose, which I think are quite acceptable. I cannot give the final confirmation because I am not the one responsible for this matter, but I think that the Bloc Québécois is raising some interesting points. The important thing is that we be able to adopt a motion that everyone finds acceptable in order to hold the government to account.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have asked this question of others and would be interested in the member's response to it.

We have standing committees on foreign affairs, immigration and defence. They have been known to coordinate in the past. There would be more involvement by members of Parliament.

I am wondering if the member believes that our standing committees have a role to play in this. Should they be pushed to the side in favour of this motion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is good to see him in the House, so I thank him for being here.

The fact is that all the committees are already overloaded because they have to conduct their own studies on specific subjects or bills. For example, the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations had to be established because there were so many subjects that needed to be studied.

More recently, the Special Committee on the Economic Relationship between Canada and the United States was established. The reason we need to form special committees is that there are too

many subjects to study and the existing committees do not have time. For example, if the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development were asked to do a study, it could take six months or even a year to complete.

We must act swiftly. I think that enough members would want to be on the special committees, so that is not a problem, because all of them would be happy to be part of these committees.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his dedication and service to our country, in particular in preparing our service members to help out in Afghanistan and help Afghans.

He highlighted the risk that Afghans face on a daily basis from the Taliban. I know first-hand the torture and abuse and how vicious the Taliban can be when they take revenge on those they feel do not support their cause.

I would like the member to elaborate further on the urgency of setting up this committee and getting solid recommendations to the government to take action now.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He is a great soldier who served missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. When he was elected for his first term in office, he was just getting back from Iraq. I thank him for his military service.

We know the Taliban are capable of the worst cruelty imaginable. They are lawless people who will do whatever they want to a five-year-old child because that child is just a piece of meat to them. The Taliban deserve no respect because they do not respect human life. That is why we must act now. People over there are in dire straits. Their lives are in imminent danger. The Taliban would just as readily kill someone who helped Canada as they would a fly.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting and important discussion we are having today. Earlier I posed a question to the leader of the official opposition, and prior to asking the question, I commented on what we share in common. The aspect both of us agree on is our appreciation and love for members of the Canadian Forces and, over and above them, service members who were engaged in what took place in Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan issue has been before the House of Commons at many different points in time over the last decade or more. In fact, it very much predates my first election to the House of Commons back in 2010. I want to approach the issue of process first and foremost as a parliamentarian and second as someone who has gone through the election and heard what the Leader of the Opposition and other members talked about regarding the election call, priorities and so forth.

Back in the day there was a war taking place in Iraq, and there was a great deal of pressure on then prime minister Jean Chrétien that we be engaged. We were being criticized, from what I can remember, by the Conservatives for not committing. I believe the NDP was opposed to it. The former prime minister, back in the day, made the decision that Canada would not get directly involved, even though the Americans wanted us to be.

We argued that we wanted to work with the United Nations and others in dealing with the issue of terrorism and the other issues that were taking place in that area of the world. The decision was made somewhere in the early 2000s, in 2001 or 2002, that Canada would have a presence with members of our forces. We should never take that lightly.

We have heard members indicate they have served. The former minister of defence is, from my perspective, a hero. I believe he has served two or three terms in Afghanistan or in that area of the world. There are a number of other members of Parliament who have served.

I had the privilege of serving in the Canadian Forces, but that was in the early eighties so I was never deployed. However, on November 11, I would be walking with World War II veterans in parades, which was immediately followed by going to the legions and listening to the horror stories of World War II. The sacrifices made by members of the Canadian Forces are important to recognize, and we need to state very clearly that we will never forget and that where we can learn, we will learn.

At the end of the day, I believe that not one Liberal member of Parliament is saying there is nothing we can learn from what has taken place. There are already standing committees, and there is nothing that prevents standing committees from dealing with what is being proposed today by the official opposition.

I believe there is a bit of politics in the motion. Those who say there is no politics in it should read some of the speeches provided by the leader of the official opposition. Members cannot tell me there is no politics within the motion, because there is. If opposition members believe it is time we put politics to the side, at least at the onset of this, I suggest they are undermining the potential value of our standing committees.

• (1310)

They are proposing a committee that would have, I believe, 12 members. Standing committees such as foreign affairs should absolutely be dealing with it. In fact, it could even be coordinating with our other two standing committees on immigration and defence.

More resources and more members of Parliament would all be able to contribute, if in fact what the official opposition said was true: that it is not on a political witch hunt, but is trying to get a better understanding of what has taken place. Let us see what happens in the standing committees. Depending on what takes place, there might need to be a follow-up motion of this nature. Anything before that, I would argue, is somewhat premature and possibly politically motivated.

This is not the first time Afghanistan has been the type of issue it is today. In 2009, when we were in a minority and the Conserva-

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tives were in government, the production of papers was always an important issue. We recognize and understand that. That is why the government House leader, the other day, stood in this place and provided an option to deal with what was happening with the Winnipeg lab and the records that were being demanded by members of the opposition. He put something on the table that would alleviate the concerns parliamentarians had with regard to the release of documents.

When we were in official opposition and the Conservatives were in government and there was a need for documents that could potentially be of interest in terms of national security and beyond, an agreement was signed by Stephen Harper, Michael Ignatieff and the leader of the Bloc. They understood that a blanket motion, such as the motion that we have seen today, was not in our best interests.

Let me go back. I said earlier that as a parliamentarian, I was very interested in one aspect of the motion. I will read that part. It is really interesting. When I was in opposition, there is no way I would have supported a motion of this nature. The Conservatives are saying:

[A]ny proceedings before the committee, when hybrid committee meetings are authorized, in relation to a motion to exercise the committee's power to send for persons, papers and records shall, if not previously disposed of, be interrupted upon the earlier of the completion of four hours of consideration or one sitting week after the motion was first moved....

The Conservatives talk about parliamentary tradition, but there seems to be a bit of a double standard here on the standing committees, or at least the standing committees that I have participated in. I would ask my colleagues from the opposition, if they are going to vote in favour of this, to tell me that this is another standing committee, especially if the Conservatives are in government. They are saying that whether a member is in the government or the opposition, members will not be able to continue to have dialogue and ask questions.

It was interesting to listen to the leader of the official opposition when he was giving his comments. He said that maybe if the New Democrats did not work with the Liberals, they would be able to get this thing passed. It is kind of a bit of a rub with the NDP.

• (1315)

We all recognize that, yes, the NDP play a very important role in this and, yes, the Conservatives can maybe shame the NDP into supporting what they are trying to do here, but from a parliamentarian's perspective, I do not believe that it is a healthy motion that deserves the support of the House of Commons. It needs to be amended, at the very least.

The Conservatives would never advocate for that for opposition members in other standing committees, because they understand the importance of a member's right to be able to say something in the standing committees. At times there is a need to get things through, and unfortunately there are limits that are put into place from time to time, but I do not believe, given the subject matter we are talking about and the makeup of the committee, that this aspect of the motion is good.

The motion states that:

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(vi) a copy of the documents shall also be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel in both official languages within one month of the adoption of this order, with any proposed redaction which, in the government's opinion, could reasonably be expected (A) to compromise national security, military tactics or strategy of the armed forces of Canada or an allied country

It goes on to talk about the need for national security, so within the motion itself it is realized that there are very sensitive documents that one has to have a higher security clearance level to deal with.

We already have a standing committee that can deal with the issues that are being proposed. We are a part of the Five Eyes, which as of today has an all-party agreement and the security clearance to deal with this. We already have a motion on the floor from the government House leader, as I pointed out, to deal with the lab and the release of documents that have security concerns through the Department of Health. There is an arbitration mechanism. There is a wonderful opportunity for all parties. It is a very apolitical mechanism.

Where is the official opposition, in particular, in terms of wanting to genuinely come to the table and say, "Okay, let's work this thing through"? It can be done if the opposition has the political will to make it happen.

Where we agree is on the need to look into these matters and to pose these questions. It is not just members of the opposition who have questions. There are many government members who have questions and they, too, want to hear answers.

We are not trying to hide anything. That is not the intent of the government, but much like when Stephen Harper was the prime minister and another issue regarding Afghanistan was before the House, an agreement was put in place that involved the three larger parties in the House: the Liberals, Conservatives and the Bloc. What has changed, other than that the Liberals are on the government benches and the Conservatives are on the opposition benches? Does the Conservative Party have no interest now in trying to resolve this? When passing this motion, which is yet to be determined, I would hope that members of the House would take a look at what is being asked of them.

In 2001, there was participation in some form or other from the Canadian Forces. I do not know the details of what it was. In 2002, the Canadian Forces really began to be deployed. In 2006 or 2007, the forces were deployed in a much larger number, and in 2014 the then government pulled the Canadian Forces out.

● (1320)

In that period of time, 159 members of the Canadian Armed Forces died as a result of being engaged in Afghanistan, not to mention the injuries and the psychological issues that have followed, and not including the non-military personnel. I believe that we owe it to those people to make sure that we do this correctly and appropriately. At least at the very beginning, let us take the politics out of it. There is a need to show compassion.

Members have mentioned that during the election we said 20,000 refugees. In 2015, when there was a crisis in Syria, we committed to 25,000 refugees. The Conservatives seemed to indicate that we

would not be able to do it: that it was just an election gimmick. We more than surpassed that, by huge numbers.

We take very seriously the commitments that we have made. We talk now about 40,000. The member makes reference to those who supported the Canadian Forces. I remember talking to the media when I was in opposition about English translators supporting our Canadian Forces, and the need to accommodate them. It was in 2013 or 2014 that we first raised the issue and challenged the government to respond to that need.

We do not need to be told. We understand. We know what Canadians expect of the government. We will hit our targets that the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs talk about, and the commitments coming from the Ministry of Defence. I really believe that the opportunity to provide humanitarian aid is there today. Our global diplomats have a focus on the refugee situation. I applaud those civil servants and diplomats who are going through some very difficult files seven days a week. I believe that the government is open to ideas, whether from members of the Liberal caucus or members of the opposition caucuses.

At the end of the day, I believe there are things we can learn from this. I am just not convinced that the motion before the House is really in our best interests. I understand why the official opposition has moved the motion, and I suspect that other opposition parties might be following suit. Maybe there could be some potential amendments. If the opposition came to the government and talked about it, maybe we could resolve this in a positive way, just like the positive resolution in 2010 that Michael Ignatieff, Stephen Harper and the leader of the Bloc signed off on. They did so because they recognized the importance of national security and the interests of Canada and of all the thousands of people who were directly affected by the release of information.

That is why I would have much rather preferred to see negotiations before getting to this point. My challenge to opposition members is to never give up on the negotiations. Bringing forward motions of this nature is an easy way out.

● (1325)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will first make a quick correction to something the member on the government side said: 158 Canadians died in Afghanistan, not 159.

The member talked throughout his speech about partisanship and that whole angle, yet he spent more time talking about the official opposition and history than the actual motion at hand, which is the importance of the urgency in taking care of these Afghans who risked their lives to support Canadians. Now we are leaving them behind. He suggested the standing committees as possible solutions to this. However, in the last Parliament, particularly at the defence committee, we witnessed Liberal members filibuster non-stop, and he wonders why part of the motion is to deal with this issue.

Will the member stand up for those Afghans who helped save Canadian lives and vote for this motion, or will he not?

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, when I sat in opposition, I stood up for translators and argued that they should be able to come to Canada, given the service they had provided our nation. I believe most, if not all, parliamentarians recognize the valuable contributions locals in Afghanistan performed, endangering their lives in many different ways. We are all concerned. That is one of the reasons the Prime Minister and this government have made the solid commitment of 40,000 refugees. We will hit that target, and if anyone needs to be convinced of that, one needs only to look at the commitment we made to Syrian refugees, when we more than hit the target of 25,000 we set back then.

That sense of commitment is there. The passion and compassion are on all sides of this House, as we all want to resolve this in a positive fashion.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg North always delivers very elaborate speeches that touch on several different issues. What he seems unable to do is admit that the government dropped the ball and sent out confusing messages. People were asked to do COVID-19 screening, fill out paperwork and have valid passports while the country was at war. There comes a point when a government has to act fast.

The Bloc Québécois does not want to dismiss this motion altogether. It could be part of a motion calling for humanitarian action. Does my colleague agree that a committee should be created that would decide which documents need to be provided, set its own deadlines and analyze the humanitarian situation to truly help the Afghan people?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would turn to the agreement signed by Gilles Duceppe, the member's former leader, Michael Ignatieff and Stephen Harper. They recognized that there was very sensitive information, yet an agreement was achieved and documents were shared. We are not saying we should not be studying this issue. The government is not saying that.

There are questions on how to best do that. The government House leader made a recommendation on Health Canada and the lab issue, which would allow for it. Given the political desire to deal with this issue in an apolitical fashion, why not allow for negotiation to draw this to a conclusion? Instead, the opposition party is trying to force the government or the Speaker to make a ruling. This can be negotiated; it should be negotiated.

• (1330)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member for Winnipeg North's concerns. I think there is a desire from all members of the House to really look at this issue in depth. We may quibble over what the best format of that is, but the Conservatives have put together a motion, and that is for us to consider.

I wanted to ask about the specific section of the motion that makes reference to a House order, and I would invite the member to consider that this part of the motion is probably informed by the experiences the opposition had in the previous Parliament. I have

heard other Liberal members make reference to the fact that time is our most precious resource. In my mind, having this part of the motion in place would save this committee time because, if there were to be any kind of obstruction or delays in this committee's attempt to gain information, at least it would have an order of the House accompanying it.

Would the member not agree that this has been informed by previous experiences, and that this would really be giving us the tools to do our job and hold the government to account?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member knows Mr. Christopherson from Hamilton. I would sit in committee with Mr. Christopherson, on such topics as on the Elections Act, and he would talk endlessly. As much as I would get a bit bored of what the member was saying, I respected what he was attempting to do. I believe that, through standing committees, we can negotiate compromises that will improve upon things.

Whether it is in provincial legislatures, here in Ottawa or in parliaments around the world, filibusters do, at times, improve situations. I would appeal to members to consider what should be done here. This motion is, in fact, premature. There is an obligation in this House to attempt to negotiate the best interests prior to bringing forward a motion of this nature. I wish that is what had happened.

If Gilles Duceppe, Michael Ignatieff and Stephen Harper could negotiate on an Afghanistan issue back in 2010, why can we not do it here? Why is there this confrontation? I do not think the confrontation is necessary because we all agree that we want to look into it, study it and learn from it.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just say to my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North that the probable reason there would be some confrontation here, if there were, and it is our view that there is not, is that there is not any information on the table. The government has had that information since last spring. If they had put it on the table and acted then, we would not be bringing this motion forward today, and we would have easily seen some results and activity out of it.

We would have a special meeting simply because, as it states right in the motion, under a special committee any information that would put any kind of security in jeopardy, for Canada or Afghanistan, is allowed to be redacted.

Is my colleague not in favour of saving the lives of these Afghan people who helped us make their country a better place?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there is the core of the problem, from my perspective. That is not accurate because, if there is an attempt to redact anything, the committee can say no and reverse it. This is one of the reasons.

I would recommend the members take a look at the government House leader's response to the issue on the health labs, getting information and the mechanism that is set up. I believe that we need to have a mechanism to deal with national security and the best interests of the Canadian Forces, as well as the best interests of the public as a whole. That is what we need, and that is not within the motion.

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• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question will be brief, but I imagine the answer will be long, and I would like to stress the nuance.

Could my colleague tell us about what happened in the past when Mr. Harper, Mr. Duceppe and a third person, whose name I forget, found a way to study such a file?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot we can learn from the agreement achieved between the Bloc, the Liberals and the Conservatives back when Stephen Harper was prime minister.

There is a lot for us to learn. My suggestion to the opposition parties and, in fact, to all members, is to take a look at the advantages of negotiations. I know the government House leader is very open to talking this thing through and getting it resolved. Every member of Parliament, including Liberal members of Parliament, want to see a study on this take place.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time rising in this Parliament, so I would like to thank all of the wonderful people of Calgary Forest Lawn for putting their trust in me and sending me to this wonderful place to be their voice. I am thankful for all of the support from my family and everyone else who got me here.

I rise today in support of this important motion. The fall of Afghanistan was tragic, and the tragedy is still unfolding today. The U.S. made no secret of their troops' withdrawal. It was only a matter of time before the Taliban would advance through the country once American soldiers were out of the way.

When the U.S. made that announcement, veterans, NGOs and experts warned governments around the world that Afghan interpreters, support staff and their families were in urgent need, yet at the time that Kabul fell, Canada had no active plan to respond to the deteriorating situation.

The government conveniently hid behind the excuse of national security while our NATO allies were launching full-scale evacuation operations to get their citizens, and Afghans who had supported them, out of the conflict zone.

It has been about four months since Kabul fell, and we finally saw the first plane of privately sponsored refugees come to Canada last week. After almost 120 days, the government has yet to put a plan or a timeline in place for fulfilling its promise to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees. The government has had months to prepare, months since the U.S. began its withdrawal and months since the Taliban took over the country. To say the situation in Afghanistan is dire would be an understatement. There are increasing food shortages, little to no access to money, and travel outside the country is severely limited.

The Taliban is actively hunting anyone who supported NATO and Canadian forces. The regime is arresting religious minorities, including Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Hazaras and Ahmadiyya Muslims, and charging them with blasphemy, putting their innocent

lives at risk and, in some cases, resulting in death. Women's rights leaders, LGBTQ people, pro-democracy activists and anyone who dares to speak out against the Taliban are harassed, tortured and killed. Vulnerable Afghans are stranded in Afghanistan, watching their friends, family and neighbours arbitrarily arrested or summarily shot in the street.

In the middle of the Taliban takeover, the Prime Minister called an unnecessary and unwarranted election. He dissolved Parliament and with it, any accountability his government would have had to face. Whenever we ask the minister of immigration what his government is going to do to address this disaster, he has said that it is complicated, that they did not have enough information and that they are working on it.

Do members know what is hard? Hard is when a person has to hide in the country they fought for, knowing they are on a list and being hunted by a regime with historical ties to some of the most horrific terrorists in history. Hard is living in a country without money or food, unable to feed one's family, practice one's religion or speak one's mind. That is hard.

The government had months to plan for, and now months to evacuate, those who served alongside our forces and in our embassy. Now it makes excuses and talks about a big commitment to settle 40,000 refugees in Canada. Like other Liberal promises, this one will surely be left behind, just as the government left people stranded at the airport.

The situation has only become more urgent after the data breach at IRCC, which released hundreds of Afghan refugees' personal information. When I wrote to the privacy commissioner calling for an investigation, I knew that the government would do nothing about this. I welcome the privacy commissioner's investigation into this life-threatening data breach, and I hope changes are made by the government to prevent further leaks of sensitive data. This incident, along with the government's inaction, gives me no confidence that the Prime Minister or his cabinet will do anything.

There seems to be a lack of urgency coming from the Liberals. It is sad. Afghan refugees feel abandoned. They have been stranded in a country with a regime that is hunting them. My inbox is flooded daily with emails from Afghan interpreters and other vulnerable people desperate for help. They are pleading for someone to do anything to help them. Their calls and emails to IRCC go unanswered. They cannot even get an acknowledgement from the department on whether their case is even being processed or not. It is all well and good for the minister to state that they are in the process, but those families have been left completely in the dark, just like the tens of thousands of individuals stuck in the government's massive backlog of applicants.

● (1340)

It is not just those stranded in Afghanistan. This fall, I met with former Afghan interpreters who were resettled in Canada by the previous Conservative government. Now that the Taliban is back in control, they are trying to get their families out and into Canada as soon as possible. They told me stories of how their families were in more danger now than ever. However, IRCC is dragging its feet, leaving these people in the dark.

When the Afghan government fell, there was no time for the public servants to destroy sensitive documents, so the Taliban now has all the information on anyone who served with the International Security Assistance Force, the Afghan military and Canadian Armed Forces. The interpreters, proud of their service in the war, had shared photos and stories on social media. The Taliban took that information too.

Since the Taliban began retaking Afghanistan, they have used any information they can get their hands on to find, target, arrest, torture and kill anyone who served with us and our allies in the war. If the Taliban cannot find the interpreters or support staff, they target their families.

The Taliban send the interpreters messages and emails threatening their families, their parents, siblings, spouses and children. When they realize that the interpreter is in Canada, they begin killing the interpreter's family members. The government's answer to this desperate situation is to offer to prioritize family sponsorship applications, the same applications that are in massive backlogs and that were not being processed throughout the pandemic.

I have personally experienced first-hand the inaction and bureaucratic disaster of the Liberal government. In 2015, I helped to sponsor an Afghan family to come to Canada. The family members are religious minorities who were persecuted by the very people who now control Afghanistan.

Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention I will be splitting my time with the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

My older brother, the late Manmeet Singh Bhullar, started an amazing initiative to bring those persecuted Sikhs and Hindu refugees over here. It took four years for the Liberal government to bring those who were heavily persecuted to Canada. This included young women and girls who were being targeted as they walked to school. They were being forced into conversion and forced marriages, and the civil government sat around for four years.

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We see the same thing today. It is all due to the bureaucratic, Liberal-made backlog that is causing so many families harm. In this case, it is costing lives. Today, 1.8 million applications are backlogged, waiting to be processed. Families are behind those backlogs. It is hurting families and costing lives.

Let us think of the refugees who are ignored by the government and are left hoping for private sponsorship. If the private sponsorship only happens every few years during an election year, how can anyone say the government is not abandoning these refugees?

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the veterans and active-duty soldiers in Canada, first for their service and second for their tireless efforts in trying to get Afghan interpreters and their families over to Canada after the Taliban took over. It is because of them, other Canadians and people around the world that Afghan refugees are getting out.

These brave veterans have partnered with NGOs to fill the void left by the government. That first plane of Afghan refugees who finally made it to Canada was only possible because of veterans and private citizens who took the initiative and acted. That is why we need to pass this motion to finally get to the bottom of the disaster that has unfolded in Afghanistan and to not let our soldiers' sacrifice be in vain.

We need to finally act and evacuate those Afghan refugees abandoned by the government. Families of people still stuck in Afghanistan tell me that they live in constant fear, afraid every time the phone rings. They are afraid that it will be the call telling them their loved ones have been killed by the Taliban.

Enough is enough. We must pass this motion to hold the government to account and get to the bottom of its failures. We are a country that prides itself on being peacekeepers, defenders of democracy and a land of opportunity. Now is our opportunity to do the right thing.

● (1345)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we heard the previous Conservative member talk about the need for collaboration, to get along and remove partisan politics from this. However, the entire last speech took political shots repetitively at the government.

Does the member not feel the same way, that it is important to try to remove the politics from this?

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Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Speaker, what is political is the fact that when Kabul was falling, that member's boss, the Prime Minister, called an election and abandoned any responsibility to those who served our country. That was political. The failed \$650 million election was selfish and an expensive cabinet shuffle. These are the words of those who served our country. They deserve this investigation to find out what happened. Why were they abandoned? That is why we brought this motion forward.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think all our western allies will view that what happened in Kabul was a catastrophe with respect to our nation-building claims and ability.

What concerns me is that we are not talking about learning the lessons. Rather, we are dealing with the hurt feelings of the Liberals while we discuss the catastrophe that happened in Kabul.

Veterans were calling me daily trying to get the interpreters they worked with safely to Canada. I talked with international midwifery organizations that were trying to get women health workers. They were having to rely on other nations. To me, this is not about blame; this is about putting billions into Afghanistan. We told the Afghan people we would be there. We lost a lot of young people in Afghanistan. We have an obligation to find out what happened in Kabul and let the chips fall where they may. Would my hon. colleague agree?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Speaker, I agree with that. We owe a sense of duty to those who serve our country and we owe it to them to know what exactly happened. When they did everything they could to serve our country, why were they abandoned? Our country was supposed to serve them.

That is the heart of this motion. We want to strike a committee for those people. It is for the veterans and the NGOs that had to step up when their government failed to do so. They want answers. The people who have been abandoned want answers. This is not about politics. I hope the NDP will join us in supporting the motion so we can get to the bottom of this.

Mr. Garnett Genus (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one issue that I worked on, and I know other members have been working on it as well, for the last six years is with respect to the creation of a special program to help the religious minority communities that face severe persecution in Afghanistan. We have been calling for that for six years. Sadly, the government did not act and, in many respects, it is now too late for many of those people. It is very disappointing.

I wonder if the member can comment specifically on the situation of those minority communities that could have been helped, but were not helped.

• (1350)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his advocacy.

We as the Conservative Party put forward in our platform that we would help those refugees who had been persecuted. I have been through the process of trying to resettle a family from Afghanistan through private sponsorship. Again, it was the Liberal-made backlogs and bureaucracy that stopped this from happening. We recog-

nized this in our platform and we wanted to speed up those refugee applications. We want to put more emphasis on private sponsorship, because we have seen the government-led programs and they are even worse. The backlog is costing lives, which is why we proposed that in our election platform.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my speech with this quote:

...“welcome to Canada” is more than a headline or a hashtag. It is the spirit of humanity that every single one of us would yearn for, if our family was in crisis. I pray that you continue to open your homes and your hearts to the world's most defenceless children and families, and I hope your neighbours will follow your example.

This was said by Pakistan's most prominent citizen, Malala, in the House of Commons in April 2017. Anyone who was here in the 42nd Parliament was able to hear those words of Malala and see the work she was doing on human rights, especially for women.

This is a really important time, because yesterday we celebrated 100 years of women in Parliament. We can reflect on this and what we see today in Afghanistan. I want to reflect on some of the history of Afghanistan and how we got to this place.

As many members noted, after the horrific incidents that happened on September 11, 2001, Canada joined its allies to fight against the Taliban.

Canada contributed to the war as the Taliban and their insurgency continued to grow. Canada concluded its operations in 2011, and left Afghanistan in 2014, but it was part of the rebuilding. In Afghanistan, we lost 158 of soldiers and many others were left with psychological and physical issues.

This is a very important conversation because we have to look at where we are today. Why were we there and what great work was done during this period of time? When the Taliban took over, we knew the horrific things that were happening to women in that country. It is really important that we have this committee. It is important to not only look at the \$2.2 billion in humanitarian aid to that country, but also to look at where they are today and see how we can move forward.

As I indicated, yesterday, we celebrated 100 years of women in Parliament, but we have to reflect on what we see in Afghanistan. All elected officials of its government are males. They are not there to be the voices of women. They are there to be the voices of the Taliban.

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I have heard many people speak about some of the tragedies. As I was doing my research and looking at all the information for this speech, I looked at the fact that in our own chamber, we have former litigators, former journalists and people who worked in public broadcasting. However, today in Afghanistan that would not be an option for a woman. The Taliban has taken that away. In the last four months, women who were fighting and continuing to be the voices of women have now been stuck in their homes and told not to come out because of security reasons. These are the same things that we heard from 1996 to 2001, when the Taliban ruled that country. Unfortunately, we are seeing the exact same thing beginning to happen today.

What is Canada going to do about this? We are a country that talks about human rights. We are a country that wants to see more for women. We know now that young men and boys are allowed to go to school, from grades seven to 12, but girls are not welcome. The girls are not back in those houses of education. Malala indicated, “The extremists are afraid of books and pens. The power of education frightens them. They are afraid of women. The power of the voice of women frightens them.”

That is exactly what we are seeing today, a country that is going backward. We are seeing a country that has now taken all of the rights of women backward. Unfortunately, a lot of these women are trying to go forward and are trying to have their voices heard. As we have heard from many members, at what cost. A lot of times the cost is their lives and we have to be very worried about that. These are the things we should be speaking to at the committee, not just how we failed Afghanistan in August 2021 but how we can move forward to ensure there is equality.

An Olympic athlete from Afghanistan would like to compete in the 2024 Olympics, but right now she is hiding in her home. She had a number of Taliban come to her home looking for her because of her postings on Facebook and other social media feeds. This young woman is now fearful for her life. These are the people for whom we should be fighting. These are some of the most vulnerable people in the world. They should be able to have this opportunity.

• (1355)

When Afghanistan was ruined after the Taliban, Canada was part of remodelling and restructuring of Afghanistan. We were part of the education and we were part of the infrastructure. We were part of the education when it came to policing and training. This is what our role was.

To all of those persons, whether they are in the Canadian Armed Forces or are members of NGOs across Canada, I thank them so much for making it a better world. Unfortunately, we are at a stalling point and we know we are going backward. It is really important that we continue to move forward, though.

I would like to read a quote from the Olympic athlete I was talking about. She is a paralympian athlete, who said, “Please, I request you all, especially all the women from around the globe and the female institutions and the United Nations to not let the right of a female citizen of Afghanistan in the Paralympic movement to be taken away, so easily.”

This is a young taekwon do athlete. These are the things that here in Canada we strive for. With children in our own country, we try to make sure they have opportunities. We know poverty continues to get worse in Afghanistan and that the opportunities for food are not there, and there are many other things its citizens have to deal with every day.

When the Taliban came to power, it promised to respect women and allow them to participate in public life in accordance with Islamic law, but secondary schools remain closed for girls and many women are finding returning to work difficult, with the exception of some professionals in some of the health care sectors.

We have to recognize that women's rights are not being upheld. We need to talk about what we want to see for this globe. When we are talking about wars and things that happen in these countries that are horrific, we know a lot of it has to do with equality. Unfortunately, what we are seeing in Afghanistan is the exact opposite. This is why we need to work together. This is the reality of what Afghan women are seeing, and once again, we need to be on the ground and helping these people.

On August 26, we were able to bring some to Canada, who were able to get to flights. We need to do more. As many members have indicated, veterans and other people watching what is happening in Afghanistan are writing emails and letters and calling our offices to ask how they can help.

We know this tragedy is not going to go away if we just turn a blind eye. It is important to have this committee to talk about where we were in August, what we should have done and how we are going to move forward.

This is an urgent time for all and I would like to talk about the ministry and what has happened. We see simple things like the fact that the ministry of women's affairs has been replaced. Since the Taliban has come into force, there is not a ministry of women. It has now been replaced with the ministry for the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice.

Perhaps somebody can tell me what that means. It seems very forceful and not about women's equality, not about education for women and not about the opportunities for the families and the generations to come. What are we going to see next?

I would like to end with a quote from the interim mayor of Kabul, who said that women municipal workers in Kabul should stay home unless they hold “positions that men could not fill or that were not for men.”

We have to understand that we do not want to move backward. We need to be a country that shows its principles, works with other countries and ensures we are there for Afghanistan in its time of need.

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have five minutes remaining for questions and comments after the next proceedings.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

• (1400)

*[English]***COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Spadina—Fort York has been fortunate for many years to have the dedicated service of Carolyn Johnson.

Carolyn recently stepped down as co-chair of the York Quay Neighbourhood Association, after volunteering countless hours to ensure that our community was informed and engaged on the many issues facing our vibrant and diverse urban centre. From helping to build a waterfront that is accessible to all to enhancing community safety and so much more, we owe Carolyn a debt of gratitude for her leadership and unwavering commitment.

On behalf of the people of Spadina—Fort York, I express my appreciation to Carolyn for her work as YQNA co-chair and wish her and her husband good health and continued success. I also look forward to continuing to work with YQNA, with Angelo, Ulla and Mary, whose tireless work keeps residents of our community fully aware of issues that matter the most in our neighbourhood.

* * *

TAIWAN

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mr. Simon Sung for his hard work and contribution to his home country of Taiwan and its relationship with Canada.

After starting out in journalism as a young man, Mr. Sung, or just Simon, as most of us know him, decided to pursue his master's in peace studies. He went on to join the foreign services of Taiwan serving in Taipei, Singapore, the U.S. and for the past seven and half years, here in Ottawa at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office.

Simon has a great love for his home country of Taiwan and for Canada. He has worked diligently to educate people on the history and culture of this beautiful place, making sure that Canadian MPs are aware of what Taiwan has to offer our country and the world. Most importantly, Simon has made sure that the political situation of Taiwan stays top of mind for all of us.

I thank Simon for the great work he has done here in the Ottawa region, and wish him all the best as he returns home. I bid Simon farewell.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the House, I have worked extensively on international human rights issues, but nowadays, I see many stories from Canada suggesting that we are a country in need of intervention.

One recent story that got my attention was from Timothy Que, a 16-year-old who attends Eric Hamber Secondary School in Vancouver.

Timothy tried to start a Catholic club, a voluntary association of students who get together to discuss Catholic ideas, but administrators forbade him from sharing Catholic teaching at the club, even with students who chose to attend the meetings. This is a shameful violation of freedom of association, but it is one small drop in a growing sea.

Religious services have faced pandemic-related restrictions that have not been applied to casinos. Government is proposing criminal charges for people who express certain personal or religious views in private conversations. The Liberal platform promised another ideological values test imposed on charities. Dozens of churches were destroyed or vandalized this summer with virtually no comment from political leaders. If these events were happening in another country, I know that Canada would not be silent. I hope more members of Parliament resist the populist pressure to clamp down on minority opinions and instead defend freedom of speech, association and religion as they are protected in our charter.

* * *

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to make this statement today, on the 100th anniversary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

His holiness was a Hindu swami of the Swaminarayan denomination. He gifted the people of Canada the magnificent BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, the first traditionally hand-carved Hindu place of worship in Canada. The Mandir stands as a symbol of Canada's diversity, cultural mosaic and spiritual popularity.

Today, BAPS carries out spiritual and humanitarian activities in 154 towns and cities across our country. Living by the motto "In the joy of others lies our own", his holiness inspired spiritual, humanitarian, environmental, education, health promotion, youth and children's initiatives that touch the people of Canada and the world.

* * *

*[Translation]***CARTIER-BRÉBEUF PARK**

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulo, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Cartier-Brébeuf Park is in my riding. This park is where Jacques Cartier docked his caravel for his first winter and where he had contact with Donnacona and his community. Therefore, it is a national historic site symbolizing the dialogue between francophones and first nations. It could be an ideal place to introduce schoolchildren to the history of Quebec, but this is not possible since the park is closed during the school year.

In the summer, anyone who wants to learn about our history has little in the way of resources. The signs are partly illegible; the reproduction of the caravel has rotted and burned without being rebuilt; the cross that was a reproduction of Cartier's has been so neglected that Parks Canada removed it, with no intention of replacing it. The history between francophones and first nations needs to be highlighted and celebrated through better funding for Cartier-Brébeuf Park and year-round public access, because Cartier-Brébeuf Park needs to be more than just a nice, well-mowed park.

* * *

● (1405)

HOLIDAY FUNDRAISING IN VIMY

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the holiday season is fast approaching, and many families will have to rely on food banks to help them celebrate the holidays this year.

I encourage all Canadians to open their hearts and give generously. I encourage the people of Vimy to make a donation to our community organizations. Whether through the food drive organized by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the toy drive organized by the Centre communautaire Val-Martin or the fundraising drive organized by the Centre de pédiatrie sociale, there are many ways to help those in need.

[English]

Whether it is food, a gift for a child or money for a local charity, even the smallest donations go a long way in brightening the holidays of those who are struggling. In the words of Winston Churchill, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

* * *

QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February 6, 2022, marks the 70th anniversary of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen's platinum jubilee is a unique, momentous, historic occasion never seen before and likely will never be seen again.

In keeping with tradition, Canada should use this anniversary to honour outstanding Canadians with a platinum jubilee medal in recognition of public service, volunteerism and other significant civic contributions. Whether it is for rescuing people threatened during the recent catastrophic flooding or appreciating frontline service providers during the current pandemic, rewarding community service with a recognition medal is a Canadian tradition.

I encourage all Canadians to sign electronic petition 3651, initiated by Deep River resident Lucas Bibby, on the House of Commons website before December 21. We can thank our outstanding citizens and honour Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of her 70th anniversary, and say, “Long may she reign.”

* * *

JOHN MEANEY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one elected has served the City of Kirkland longer than John

Statements by Members

Meaney, who sadly left us last month. First elected to city council in 1975, John served as mayor from 1994 to 2013. All told, he led Kirkland from a town of about 7,500 into a populous and prosperous Montreal suburb of 21,000, doing so with an efficient decision-making style and practical common-sense approach.

John Meaney was a proud Irish Montrealer born in the iconic downtown neighbourhood of Griffintown. In 2008, in a fitting honour, he was named Grand Marshall of Montreal's legendary St. Patrick's Day parade; and, in 2012, Montreal's Irishman of the Year.

I ask members to join me in offering our sincerest condolences to John's wife Evelyn and daughters Sharon, Colleen and Laurie.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the first woman to represent my community in the House, I recently reflected on the importance of women's participation in public life.

[English]

We began this week by reflecting on the tragedy of the École Polytechnique massacre. Each year, this moment of mourning and reflection brings back hard memories and the pit I felt in my stomach when I first heard the news that day as a law student surrounded by my female peers.

[Translation]

That cowardly act of misogynistic violence did not stop the progress made by women in our professions or in academia. We would not let it.

[English]

Of course, we also marked, yesterday, the 100th anniversary of Agnes Macphail's election as the first female MP in this country. Today, we have a record number of female MPs and I expect to join many of them this evening, as Equal Voice Canada celebrates 100 years of women parliamentarians at a gala dinner. Let us use our time here to model to our daughters and granddaughters that this is a place where they belong.

[Translation]

Their voices and their contributions matter.

Statements by Members

[English]

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to recognize the 100th birth anniversary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His holiness was a Hindu swami of Swaminarayan denomination and he gifted the people of Canada the magnificent BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, which is the first traditionally hand-carved Hindu place of worship in all of Canada. The Mandir stands as a symbol of Canada's abundant diversity, cultural mosaic and freedom of religion.

His holiness lived by the saying "In the joy of others lies our own". This was evident in his work, which promoted health and inspired spiritual, humanitarian, environmental and educational initiatives. BAPS charities have supported communities right across Canada, including in my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods, and provided thousands of COVID vaccines to Canadians.

Since his passing in 2016, his successor, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, continues his legacy of inspiring people around the world. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life work is one that needs to be preserved and celebrated for the present and future generations.

• (1410)

The Speaker: Before continuing, I want to call order. Members are making statements and we would like to hear everything they say. It is nice that everyone is talking among themselves, but the murmur is getting to a point where it is more than that and it is making it difficult for us to hear.

While I am up, I want to remind all members that S.O. 31s are 60 seconds long. Some of them have gone a little longer than that. I do not want to have to cut anybody off.

The hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

* * *

LOCAL BROADCASTING

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to register deep concern over the performance of some local radio outlets during the storms and flooding in British Columbia.

On one forum, a former broadcaster commented, "After watching Abbotsford Mayor Braun's 9pm press conference on the city's YouTube channel last night, warning residents of Sumas Prairie to evacuate NOW...I thought I'd dial up the city's radio station to hear what they were doing. After painfully struggling through a 5-minute commercial cluster, they played their station ID and went back to another 10 [songs] in a row!"

A disaster can wipe out land lines, cellphones, cable and the Internet, but traditionally news and alerts have always been as close as that car or truck radio. I plan to ask the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to review broadcasters' performance in B.C., including disaster plans, staff resources and technical resiliency. With station ownership now so much in the hands of large corporations, there is no excuse for Canadians to be underserved.

[Translation]

FOOD BANKS

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is the time to open our hearts and give generously to those in need. Food banks support people of all ages in my riding through different services. Over the past year, there has been an unprecedented demand for those services. Many food banks in the region have seen an over 50% increase in demand and in the number of people using their services, and they have also had to deal with supply problems.

During this holiday season, I encourage members of our community to join me in making food or monetary donations to support families. Many local and regional food drives, associations, family support centres and grocery stores are working together for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Each of our RCMs can count on the following volunteer organizations: Moisson Kamouraska in La Pocatière, the Carrefour d'Initiatives Populaires in Rivière-du-Loup, Soupe au bouton in Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, and Maison de secours La Frontière in Montmagny.

I invite everyone to be very generous to ensure that everyone can enjoy the holidays.

* * *

[English]

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight, with Equal Voice, we are celebrating 100 years of women in the House and the 374 female members of Parliament elected since then.

Over this century, there have been many firsts, beginning with Agnes Macphail breaking the glass ceiling when she was the first woman elected to the House of Commons, along with the first female cabinet minister, Ellen Fairclough, and our first female prime minister, Kim Campbell. I have the honour of being the first female engineer in the House of Commons.

I want to thank these trail-blazing women for their hard work and dedication in paving the way for us now, and I want to honour their legacy by having more diverse voices from women, marginalized communities and minorities here in the House. This will better reflect the diversity of Canada and create a strong political foundation for the representation of all Canadians.

Let us celebrate 100 years of women in this House and look forward to a future of even more.

Statements by Members

● (1415)

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS RESEARCH

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House today to highlight some of the remarkable work being done at McMaster University.

I am a proud Mac grad and Marauder, so the opportunity to speak to their work to develop Canada's global nexus for pandemics and biological threats is especially significant.

[*Translation*]

McMaster University worked with world experts on infectious diseases to fight COVID-19.

[*English*]

They established Canada's first global nexus, a network of experts from academia, industry and government, working to prevent and prepare for the next pandemic. Researchers at Canada's global nexus have developed a second-generation inhalable vaccine, which is expected to be highly effective against emerging variants. I read this morning that researchers at Mac are starting the phase-one trials of the inhaled COVID vaccine now.

Canadian research excellence is leading Canada's contribution to the global recovery from this pandemic, so that every country can emerge stronger and more resilient than ever.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank all the staff at McMaster University for their hard work and innovation that has saved lives.

* * *

[*English*]**ALBERTA**

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing the impacts of climate change in Canada, from the recent floods and mudslides in British Columbia to the storms that have threatened Atlantic Canada and the wildfires, floods and droughts that have wrought havoc in Alberta.

However, Albertans are actually facing two crises. One is the climate crisis and the other is the economic crisis. Albertans are caught between the need to reduce emissions and our reliance on the oil and gas sector. A total of 140,000 Albertans work directly in the sector, and hundreds of thousands more jobs rely on it. If we do not support workers in Alberta, Canada will not be able to meet its climate obligations.

After decades of Alberta's contributing to building Canada's economy, it is time for federal leadership to help Alberta secure a lower-carbon future. We need targeted investment to reduce emissions within the sector and targeted investments to create jobs outside the sector. Alberta has the knowledge base, and we just need the federal government to invest in Albertans. This cannot wait. The government must invest in a federal jobs plan now.

[*Translation*]**CHARLEVOIX MARITIME MUSEUM**

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for a long time, the St. Lawrence schooners, those beautiful, traditional wooden boats, were the only means of transportation available. They delivered supplies to the towns and villages along the St. Lawrence River and enabled them to flourish long before the railways and roads were built.

As the daughter and granddaughter of schooner captains, I know how courageous and knowledgeable the men who sailed these small but noble hand-built vessels were, and how much they loved the river. I want to highlight the importance of preserving these schooners, which are full of memories, history and pride.

The well-known Musée maritime de Charlevoix has been working hard to implement a major schooner conservation project. The Government of Quebec has just confirmed its contribution of \$5 million for that project.

As a daughter of the river, I would be remiss if I did not reach out to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and ask him to follow suit and confirm the \$700,000 requested by the Musée maritime de Charlevoix. This would round out the funding we need to preserve our remaining schooners, the jewels of the St. Lawrence.

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[*English*]**CHILLIWACK—HOPE**

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to the people in my riding of Chilliwack—Hope for their selfless and heroic actions during the B.C. storm last month. Farmers rushed into rising flood waters with their trucks and trailers to help their fellow farmers rescue thousands of animals in the Sumas Prairie. Hundreds of people sandbagged in the middle of the night to prevent a catastrophic failure of the Barrowtown pump station.

The people of Hope cared for 1,200 stranded travellers who were cut off for days due to landslides and road closures. Faith communities, service clubs and neighbours sprang into action to help however they could. Angling guides used their own boats to deliver food, take people to medical appointments and help with the recovery effort. First responders and road crews worked around the clock to rebuild supply lines and keep us safe.

I have never been more proud of my community. We came together in a spirit of unity to do whatever needed to be done. We were there for one another during the crisis, and I know we will continue to be there for one another as we rebuild together.

Oral Questions

● (1420)

BOB KILGER

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour a friend and former Liberal MP, Bob Kilger, whose battle with cancer came to an end last week. I never got the chance to serve with Bob, but I got to know him through my dear friend, his wife, Courtney.

Bob was so generous with his time, not only giving me advice but also being a mentor to my staff. Bob told me early on to never be on the bad side of the whip, and that the people working in the whip's office are extraordinary. They have seen it all, he said, so I should take their advice and guidance. He said they would not steer me wrong.

My favourite story about Bob is the time Wayne Easter and another Liberal MP were not in agreement on an issue, and there was a contentious committee meeting coming up with the two of them. Bob, as whip and a former NHL referee, went to the committee meeting, sat right between the two and made sure nothing happened and that they all stayed in line. As someone who served with Wayne a lot on committee, I know how difficult it is to keep him in line.

I will miss my chats with Bob, but I will not forget his lessons. I want to thank Bob's wife, Courtney, and his entire family, for sharing Bob with us. This place is better because Bob served here.

ORAL QUESTIONS

*[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years is how much time the government had to prepare for the evacuation of Canadian citizens, interpreters and contractors in Afghanistan. A 2019 CSIS report said there would be a quick collapse in Afghanistan if the U.S. withdrew.

With over two years to prepare, how did the Prime Minister oversee the biggest foreign policy disaster in decades?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have continued to be there for the people of Afghanistan, even after withdrawing our troops over 10 years ago. That is why we continued to work with our partner and allies on the evacuation of people from Afghanistan through the summer. Indeed, we continue to stand by our commitment to repatriate 40,000 Afghans to their new home in Canada over the coming times.

This is the work we are continuing to do because Canadians expect it. We continue to work alongside our allies around the world to do just that.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the end of August, when evacuation operations ended in Afghanistan, 1,250 Canadians remained in that country: 1,250 Canadians were stranded on the ground as a terrorist group seized control of the country. What was the Prime Minister doing at the time? He was campaigning.

The longest war in Canadian history ended with Canadians, Afghan interpreters and contractors being completely abandoned by the Prime Minister. Canadians want to know why.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout the month of August, officials, ministers, extraordinary members of the Canadian Armed Forces and diplomats were engaged in a historic effort to get as many Afghans out of the country, and as many Canadians home, as possible.

We worked alongside our partners around the world. We were there to support as many as possible, and we continue to stand strongly with our allies on pressuring the Taliban to allow people to leave the country so we can welcome them here in Canada to start their new lives.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he says historic efforts. Do members know what the Prime Minister was doing as Afghanistan fell? He was preparing for an election. He was calling an election as Kabul fell. He was planning an election instead of an evacuation.

My simple question for the Prime Minister is this. On August 15, when he was briefed that Kabul was about to fall, why did he put his own political survival ahead of the real survival of people on the ground in Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can all remember the speed at which events unfolded in Afghanistan and the intensity with which members of the Canadian Armed Forces, our diplomats and our partners around the world continued to step up to evacuate people from Afghanistan and make sure that Canadians were getting out to safety, and indeed continued to be engaged with the people of Afghanistan throughout.

We know we need to continue to put pressure on the Taliban government to allow people to leave Afghanistan. That is what we are continuing to do alongside our partners, and we will bring 40,000 Afghan citizens to Canada to start their new lives.

● (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had two years of reflection, slowness and failures, and this continues despite the SOS messages. The evacuation of Canadians and the Afghan interpreters and contractors who helped us was not a priority for this Liberal government.

Why did this government ignore Canadians' pleas and cause the greatest diplomatic disaster in decades?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank our soldiers, diplomats and all those who worked tirelessly to evacuate thousands of people from Afghanistan. They are still working to make sure that 40,000 Afghans will soon be able to come to Canada.

We will continue putting pressure on the Taliban to allow people to get out safely. We will continue to work with the international community to give a better life to tens of thousands of people who genuinely deserve it.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing the Prime Minister does tirelessly is call elections. This Liberal government's foreign policy is a disaster. It is one failure after another.

There are 1,250 Canadians trapped in Afghanistan. The terrorist group continues to terrorize people, but this Prime Minister was focused on calling a pointless election. He is all talk and no action.

Why did this government abandon our Afghan allies?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is quite simply not true. We worked with our allies in Afghanistan, with organizations and with our partners around the world. Members of our armed forces, our diplomats and our officials worked tirelessly to save as many people as they could in August.

Since then, we have continued to work with the international community to put pressure on the Taliban so that we could get people out of the country and bring them to Canada. We will bring in 40,000 people to make sure we continue to be there for the people of Afghanistan.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that our Liberal friends have discovered the virtues of physical attendance in the House. I am really happy about that.

However, I am concerned, and I want to tell all of them that I am concerned, because, according to the CBC, Ottawa is preparing to make changes to an extremely important regulation that prohibits releasing water from oil sands tailings ponds directly into the Athabasca River. That is obviously not permitted under the current regulation, since that water contains heavy metals and very toxic chemicals.

Can the Prime Minister tell us that this terrible news is not true and that he will not allow that water to be released directly into the Athabasca River?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that we cannot have a healthy economy without a healthy environment.

We are working with indigenous leaders, the provinces, the industries and stakeholders to develop strict standards for the release of oil sands tailings water in order to issue draft regulations in 2024. This important work will help us reduce the environmental and health risks associated with storing the toxic materials.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a clear measure for him: the ban that is currently in place.

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change must be having a rough time these days, because not only is the government

Oral Questions

funding the oil and gas industry, it is making up false emissions caps and removing regulations. It never ends. This government is so pro-oil that the Conservatives are going to have an identity crisis here in the House.

I am formally calling on the Prime Minister to maintain the ban on direct release into the Athabasca River on a permanent basis.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is currently a ban in place, but we are setting strict standards that could take effect as of 2024 on the quality of oil sands process waters that could be released. These measures are backed by science and are intended to protect our environment.

* * *

• (1430)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fiscal update presents an opportunity for the Liberal government to tackle inflation, which is driving up the cost of living for families. Families are feeling squeezed, and they are struggling to make ends meet. The Liberals say there is nothing they can do. We disagree. They could immediately help people find a home that is in their budget. They could also put a limit on the charges that cellphone and Internet companies charge Canadians, which are among the highest in the world.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to using the economic update as an opportunity to tackle the rising cost of living?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite said, next week we will be releasing our economic and fiscal update. We will provide Canadians with a transparent look at our public finances and our plan to finish the fight against COVID-19, make life more affordable for Canadians and ensure that our economic recovery leaves no one behind. The best way to get our economy growing and support Canadians is by ending COVID-19.

We are going to continue to move forward, as we have, on initiatives such as increasing the Canada child benefit to match the cost of living, \$10-a-day child care for families, boosts to GIS for vulnerable seniors, more supports for students and the many other things we continue to do to support affordability for families.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the economic update is an opportunity for the Liberal government to address inflation, which is driving up the cost of living. It is becoming increasingly difficult for families to make ends meet.

Oral Questions

The Liberals say they cannot do anything, but we disagree. The Liberal government can help families find affordable housing. It can also put a cap on cellphone and Internet plan fees.

Will the Prime Minister commit in the economic update to making life more affordable?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has caused inflation around the world, and Canadians are facing rising prices.

Just as we were during the pandemic, we will continue to be there for Canadians. The 2021 economic and fiscal update will give Canadians a transparent look at our public finances and our plan to finish the fight against COVID-19, make life more affordable for Canadians and ensure our economic recovery leaves no one behind.

The best way to get our economy growing and to make life more affordable is by ending COVID-19. That is exactly what we are doing.

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[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we put forward a motion for a special all-party House of Commons committee to examine Canada's flawed evacuation in Afghanistan. Instead of saving lives, we had an election. Some 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in Afghanistan and worked closely with Afghan interpreters, whom we promised to protect and evacuate from the country. Now they are hiding in safe houses to avoid Taliban death squads.

Will the government support this motion to examine what went so wrong on its watch?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course the question of Afghanistan is important. It is important to our government, and it is important to all Canadians.

I just came back from NATO and the OSCE, where I had the chance to meet with many of my counterparts to look at the lessons learned regarding what happened in Afghanistan. We can be extremely proud of being one of the countries that will be resettling the most Afghan refugees in the world, at 40,000. That is our commitment and we will get there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Of course, we can also be proud that we will be resettling many of the NATO-linked refugees. Flights are arriving as we speak.

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members of the way things work in the chamber. They ask a question and they get a response. If they ask questions while a person is answering, it just messes things up and makes things difficult.

The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would love it if we got a response. What I am hearing are delays, platitudes and excuses. That is just not good enough.

There are 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members who put their lives in the hands of our allies and interpreters in Afghanistan. They served together bravely and selflessly so that we could try to build a new Afghanistan. We promised our allies and their families protection and a new life, and the government broke that solemn bond. Just talking about the 40,000 without doing anything means nothing. Canadians returned here to safety—

• (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Immigration.

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think all members of the House will agree on the importance of Canada making good on its commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees.

Members on the opposite side are asking when people are going to arrive. Two weeks ago, when I was asked this question, I said 3,800 were here. Earlier this week, when I was asked the question, we had more than 4,000. I am pleased to share that by the end of this week, 500 more Afghan refugees will be arriving, including, for the first time, privately sponsored refugees from Afghanistan in my home province of Nova Scotia.

Our commitment will not waver and we will make good on bringing 40,000 vulnerable Afghan refugees to Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer, Canada failed in its duty to help our Afghan allies.

Who among us could forget the sad memory and tragic sight of Afghans clinging to airplanes as they were taking off. What happened in Afghanistan is terrible.

Those people are our friends and allies. They helped Canadian soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. They are interpreters, support staff and their families. Canadians need to know why we were unable to give them the help they needed.

If the Prime Minister did nothing wrong, then why is he not supporting our call for a parliamentary committee to study the matter?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Afghanistan issue is indeed very important.

Of course, Canada served alongside many of our NATO allies in Afghanistan, and we were supported by many Afghans on the ground, which is why we decided to honour that Afghan commitment to Canada by bringing 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada. We have now taken in almost 5,000, and we are one of the countries that has received the most Afghan refugees. Right now, the situation in Afghanistan is very difficult, and we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that those refugees get here safely.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during this debate, let us always keep in mind that these Afghans, who are our friends and allies, put their lives on the line so that Canadians could benefit from the current situation. That is why we must not play partisan politics with this issue.

It is very sad to see the minister laugh, because as far back as 2016, the Leader of the Opposition warned the House that we needed a plan to bring these people home. This summer, when all of Canada's efforts were needed to get these people out, the Prime Minister called a partisan, self-serving election.

If the government has nothing to be ashamed of, will it accept our proposal to create a committee—

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have no lessons to learn from my colleague when it comes to playing partisan politics, because that is exactly what the Conservatives are doing right now.

That being said, we definitely need to learn from what happened in Afghanistan. As a government, we must do that. We are prepared to work with the opposition, but other countries have to do this as well. We are also working within NATO.

The most important thing is to be there for the Afghans who helped Canadians and want to come to Canada. We must do this while safeguarding Canada's national security and that is what we will do.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those who served alongside Canadians in Afghanistan deserve better than being “left unread” by the government. The Prime Minister avoided accountability and abandoned those who served Canada by calling a selfish election. Veterans, Canadians and Afghan interpreters want to know why the Liberal government failed them so badly.

Will the minister commit to voting in favour of today's opposition motion so Afghan interpreters and support staff know why they were abandoned, and to make sure this failure never happens again?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course we want to learn what happened in Afghanistan. We also want to make sure the future Afghanistan is better than it is right now, and that is why we are continuing to follow the situation in Afghanistan very closely.

We are very preoccupied with the situation of Afghans, particularly women and girls who are right now in Afghanistan. It is why I have raised the issue with all my counterparts, it is why this is an

Oral Questions

absolute priority and it is why we will play our part as a country to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees to our country.

• (1440)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is such a priority that an election needed to be called.

The minister loves to say that 4,000 Afghan refugees have come to Canada. Only a Liberal would pat themselves on the back for meeting only 10% of their promises without any timeline or plan to complete the rest. It seems like only privately sponsored Afghan refugees have been arriving recently. Veterans, charities and NGOs have been picking up the massive slack left by the government.

On what date will the remaining 90% of Afghan refugees be brought to Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to frame this in terms of the recent election campaign, I would point out that on this side of the House we campaigned on a commitment to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees here. On the opposition side, members campaigned on a commitment to end the government-assisted refugee stream. He criticizes our—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I missed the hon. Minister of Immigration's answer. Could he start from the top, please?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the truth hurts sometimes, but the reality is that if the members of the opposition would like to frame this in the context of the recent federal election campaign, I would point out that the government campaigned on a commitment to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada.

The Conservative Party of Canada campaigned on a commitment to end the government-assisted refugee stream altogether. If the member is concerned about the timeline for new arrivals, we anticipate that on two charter flights tomorrow an additional 520 Afghan refugees will land in Canada. That is something we should all be proud of.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there was another shooting yesterday. This time, an 18-year-old was shot at a library in Laval. Now we are at a point where even our libraries are not safe. No good can come from normalizing the use of firearms to the extent that people feel free to fire guns in public places.

What will the minister do right now to reassure worried families?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. Our thoughts are with all the victims of violence perpetrated with assault-style weapons or any gun. We are transferring \$46 million to the Government of Quebec to draft and implement prevention strategies for dealing with gun- and gang-related violence. I will be talking to my provincial colleague later, and I will continue to work in close collaboration with all our partners, including members of the House.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if we are at the point where libraries are getting shot up, what is next? The situation is getting worse by the day in greater Montreal, and yet there does not seem to be any sense of urgency on the federal government's part. No one is reassured to hear the federal government talk today about what it has done in the past to tackle gun trafficking, because everyone can see that it is not enough. We want to see the minister send a clear message and take concrete action so we can be satisfied that the federal government is finally assuming its responsibilities.

What is the minister going to do?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns. That is why our government has already taken meaningful action such as banning assault-style weapons, adding more resources to the border to stop them, continuing the fight against gun violence and working closely with the government to create safe spaces for everyone.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a gun culture where criminal groups buy, sell and use firearms as though they were toys mainly because they are just as easy to obtain as toys.

The minister has some solutions. First, he could look to his own party for inspiration. The Liberals spent the election campaign saying that the RCMP is not adequately funded and that prison sentences are too lenient. Then, he could listen to his employees. Border services are telling us that they are underutilized. Finally, he could implement the Bloc Québécois's suggestions. We keep making them.

The minister has been repeating the same thing for two weeks. When will he take action?

• (1445)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is always willing to work with the Bloc Québécois and with all parties in the House to seek and find concrete solutions in the fight against gun violence. We will continue to work with the Government of Quebec to stop gun trafficking at the border, and we will be participating in several joint forums with the United States.

This is a major challenge and a major issue, but our government is committed to resolving it.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in order to supply themselves with cheap cash for their record deficits, the

Liberals had the central bank flood lending markets with \$400 billion of cash. We now learn that \$192 billion of that overflowed into mortgage markets, and a quarter of all mortgages outstanding today are low quality and variable rate, which are highly subject to increases in interest rates. That has inflated housing prices by one-third and created the second-biggest housing bubble in the world.

Will the finance minister admit that Canada has a housing bubble?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to irresponsibly fearmonger and try to talk down the Canadian economy. The fact is that our Q3 GDP was 5.4%, beating market expectations and surpassing the U.S., Japan, the U.K. and Australia. We have now recovered 106% of the jobs lost to the COVID recession, compared with just 83% in the U.S. In the fall, Moody's and S&P reaffirmed our AAA credit rating.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always reassuring to have your credit rating backed up by those who said subprime mortgages were rock solid in late 2008, but the question was about Canada's housing bubble. I have asked the minister eight times now in the House of Commons if we have a housing bubble. Raj wants to know. He is driving Uber in addition to having an IT job in order to save up over the next 15 years to make a down payment on a \$1 million Brampton home.

Canadians deserve to know. Bloomberg has said Canada has the second-most-inflated housing bubble on earth. Yes or no: Will the minister admit that Canada has a housing bubble?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that it has been a long time since the member opposite has spoken about affordable housing. He has found it fashionable to talk about it, but here is the record. Every time we have put forward measures to help first-time home buyers access affordable housing, help the most vulnerable in our communities to access permanent housing solutions, or help women and children fleeing domestic violence to get rental support, he has voted against these measures.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT**

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the manufacturing industry in the greater Chaudière-Appalaches region is currently losing \$7 million a day in production as a result of the labour shortage in Quebec. The industry needs temporary foreign workers right now in order to get the job done.

Will the government present a plan to simplify the approval process for temporary foreign workers?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are definitely going to do that. We have an agreement with the Government of Quebec with regard to foreign workers.

[English]

We are making the processes more simple. The Government of Quebec is now able to bring in more workers more quickly. Some of the measures came into place yesterday and the rest will come in the weeks to come, but I can assure the member and everyone in the House that we are working very closely with the Government of Quebec on temporary foreign workers.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government needs to implement a plan to save Quebec's manufacturing industry as quickly as possible. Anything less will not do. The government needs to make the labour shortage a priority before our businesses move to other parts of the world because of this government's lack of leadership.

Will the government conduct a full review of the approval process for temporary foreign workers so that it is faster, more flexible and more consistent for the well-being of Canada's economy?

• (1450)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to talk down Canada's strong economic recovery following the COVID-19 recession. Perhaps that is because we did a better job than they did in 2008 when they were in office. Canada has already recovered more jobs than those that were lost during the COVID-19 recession. By way of comparison, it took nearly eight months more to recover jobs after the 2008 recession.

* * *

*[English]***SENIORS**

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Emanuel Benjamin is a 71-year-old senior from my riding whose GIS benefit was suddenly reduced because he accessed pandemic supports last year. Emanuel was already living below the poverty line, and his income has now been reduced from \$1,500 to \$600 a month. He cannot afford rent, food or medication. He may lose everything if the government does not step up and fix the issue immediately.

The Liberal government has admitted there is a problem, so when will it fix this and do what is right for Canadian seniors?

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic we told Canadians and seniors we would be there for them as long as they needed, and that is exactly what we are doing. We have always prioritized the most vulnerable seniors by strengthening their GIS. We provided immediate and direct financial support to seniors this summer. When it comes to CERB and GIS, I can assure the hon. member we are working on that issue to find the best solution.

We will be there for seniors.

* * *

COVID-10 ECONOMIC MEASURES

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, raising the GIS just to claw it back again is not going to do anything for people like Emanuel, and that answer is not going to pay his rent. We have been asking this question for some time now. We see a government that has clawed back the GIS and the Canada child benefit, and it has cut the CRB for 900,000 Canadians just as we are seeing COVID case counts go up. Financial support is not there for all of those 900,000 people who need it.

When is the government going to stop building the recovery on the backs of the financially vulnerable and actually look for some of the money at the top, such as with publicly traded companies that took the wage subsidy and have not paid anything back, except to their shareholders?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure everyone in the House that we have been unwavering and continue to support workers throughout this pandemic. That is why Bill C-2 talks about continuing the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit. That is why we are creating the lockdown benefit. That is why we are continuing with support for businesses to hire workers and to provide rental support.

There is a lot we are doing for workers and businesses, and as the Deputy Prime Minister has said, we have regained 106% of the jobs we lost during the pandemic. Our unemployment was down last month again, for the sixth month in a row. We are within 0.4% of our record high in February 2020.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week we were shocked to learn that the Yukon's rate of opioid fatalities is Canada's highest. While this toxic drug crisis has been addressed with many interventions in recent years, we are painfully aware that there is still much to do. Safe supply, supervised consumption, better access to treatment, effective prevention and decriminalization are all approaches that can help prevent more deaths.

Can the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions update the House on how the federal government is working in partnership with the Yukon to stop this ongoing tragedy?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his extensive work on this issue as medical officer of health for the Yukon and for joining me last week for the discussions with Yukon ministers and first nations leadership.

Our hearts are with the families, loved ones and communities of those we have lost to the overdose and toxic drug supply crisis. Our government is working in partnership with the provinces, territories, municipalities, indigenous communities, experts and those with lived and living experience to consider all proposals to implement innovative bottom-up solutions to this crisis.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as an MP with four border crossings in my riding, I can tell members that the ArriveCAN app has been a real mess. Take the example of Bernadette in my riding. She was forced into a 14-day quarantine when she is double vaccinated and had a booster. She is now receiving threatening phone calls harassing her to complete her testing requirements or face jail time and/or a \$650,000 fine. She is 75 years old.

When will the Liberal government fix the mess it created at the borders and rescind this unnecessary quarantine order against my constituent?

• (1455)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all members that we are never going to hesitate on this side of the House to introduce the public health care measures that are necessary to protect the health and safety of all Canadians, especially now that we are dealing with a new variant of concern in omicron. The ArriveCAN app is a useful and essential tool in understanding—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I will have to interrupt the hon. minister. I am trying to listen, but the yelling in my left ear makes it very hard.

I will ask the hon. minister to start from the top so I can hear the whole answer, please.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this government will never hesitate to introduce the public health care measures that are necessary at the border, and the ArriveCAN app is one of the tools in the kit that we are using to ensure that we screen returning Canadians who are vaccinated. This has been a mandatory requirement since the beginning. We will continue to communicate and will introduce flexibility at the border where we can, but at

the end of the day, we have to ensure that we are doing everything we can to protect against the new variant of concern in omicron.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is just not listening. One of my constituents, Allan, crossed the border with his wife to attend a matter in Washington state and returned an hour later. The government announced a 72-hour exemption, but despite being fully vaccinated, Allan and his wife, because he does not use a smart phone, were told their documents were not acceptable and they would have to quarantine and send in virtual tests or face a \$5,000 fine.

Will the government quit discriminating against people like my constituents for not having a smart phone and immediately rescind this unfair quarantine order?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague just acknowledged, this government has already introduced flexibility at the border to ensure that we are facilitating the arrival of Canadians, including the 72-hour exemption rule particularly for those Canadians who are going back and forth across the border and need essential goods. However, we will not compromise when it comes to health and safety. That is the reason we are requiring those returning from the United States to be fully vaccinated. That is why we use the ArriveCAN app. It is to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians, particularly now as we are dealing with a new variant of concern in omicron.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the horror show of Liberal quarantine hotels has returned. There are five-hour waits in crowded airports, buses to hotels at secret locations and people served food described as cold gruel.

An Edmonton woman with celiac went 40 hours without food that she could eat safely. Babies are going without milk and diapers. Some people do not have hot water or heat in their hotel rooms. It is almost like jail, but at least in jail people get hot meals, fresh air and care packages from home. “This is not Canada,” one man told us yesterday. He is right. Where is the respect and dignity Canadians deserve?

“Shame on the Canadian government” is what we have heard repeatedly from Canadians. When will the Liberals end this inhumane treatment and for once treat Canadians with dignity and respect?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we made a commitment to Canadians to do everything we can to protect their health and safety. We are also protecting our economy. Canadians, over the last year and a half, have sacrificed a lot. We need to be vigilant at the border to ensure that we mitigate the arrival of omicron.

However, I have a question for the Conservatives. Last week they said we need more measures. Today they are saying we need fewer measures. I am not really sure what they are asking for. We will follow the advice we received from public health experts.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, PCC): Mr. Speaker, we need the right measures.

[*Translation*]

It is not just the airports that are a mess. Liberal ministers have once again lost control.

The Minister of Health keeps saying that the measures will take a few days to implement. The Minister of Transport says that the measures may still change. The Minister of Public Safety is doing nothing. The conditions at the quarantine hotels are appalling.

Who is telling the truth? This morning, Paul Arcand said that the programs were a mess.

When will the ministers act for Canadians, not against Canadians?

• (1500)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to speak to this issue. He knows as well as I do how important it is, with the new omicron variant, to protect people's health and safety. He knows very well that these measures take some time to implement.

By the way, I would like to thank all our partners, including our airport partners. I would like to thank public health, obviously, and all the experts telling us that we must be careful and vigilant right now. That is what we are hearing from all the experts, and I would be curious to hear what our friends in the opposition think about it, too.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week it appeared as though Ottawa was being proactive at the border, but now we see that it just bungled things up more quickly.

The government decided to require COVID-19 tests for passengers arriving by plane even though it knew that some airports were unable to provide these tests. People are confused and they are worried about having to quarantine somewhere while they wait for a courier to pick up their test. No one knows who will have to quarantine or for how long.

What is the government waiting for? When will it straighten out this troubling mess?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this gives me the opportunity to say hello to and congratulate my colleague since we have not spoken since his election. I also commend him for his concern for the health and safety of Canadians during these very troublesome times.

Oral Questions

We are getting the right things done quickly. We are quickly putting measures in place. People know that the border measures changed a few days ago and that they will continue to evolve in the coming days. As everyone should know, COVID-19 is not over and we need to keep a close eye on this variant and disease in the coming days and weeks.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the COVID testing chaos at airports is straight out of the permit A38 scene in *The 12 Tasks of Asterix*.

Quebec families who have gone through this airport fiasco will surely think of the minister when they watch *Ciné-cadeau* during the holidays.

How is this government going to stop the chaotic management of testing from being “the place that sends you mad”?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reference to the upcoming holidays is indeed a good one. People know that, over the next few weeks, things are going to change. People are going to be interacting more indoors.

I think that Canadians, and Quebecers in particular, understand the importance of following public health guidance in uncertain times. I think that people have so far made the right choices and will continue to make those right choices over the coming holidays.

* * *

[*English*]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and many rural Canadians are unable to access fibre Internet because large ISPs will lay down the backbone but fail to finish the important last mile. Although the universal broadband fund supports the last mile, many of the ISPs are not taking advantage of it and are simply leaving Canadians not connected.

What will the government do to ensure that all rural Canadians receive last-mile connections?

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 2015, we have approved programs and projects that are going to connect 1.7 million Canadian households. By 2026, we are going to connect another 1.2 million Canadian families with better, faster Internet. By then, 98% of Canada will be connected. Connecting every household, every business and every community is how we are going to build back better.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of living has been dramatically increasing since the Liberals formed government in 2015. It is much more challenging now to keep up with the rising prices on literally everything, but especially the essential items.

Jennifer, a single mother from my riding, told me that she cannot afford the basic needs for her kids. She often finds herself having to choose between buying clothing and putting food on the table. This is not just inflation.

When is the Liberal government going to stop printing money to cover up its economic mismanagement?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me share some more good economic news, as the Conservatives seem determined to talk down the Canadian economy. The OECD, in its economic outlook for December, noted that not only does it expect our recovery to be the second fastest in the G7, but our net debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to decline and remain the lowest in the G7.

Canada is recovering and Canadians should be proud of it.

• (1505)

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, labour shortages in the Columbia Valley are tied directly to issues with the temporary foreign worker program and the lack of affordable housing. Our economic recovery in Kootenay—Columbia depends on the government doing more than talking when it comes to fixing these issues for tourism and hospitality operators like Pavi Khunkhun in Golden, British Columbia.

When will the government stop talking and start fixing the problems that make it impossible for the tourism and hospitality sector to succeed?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say one thing that all members of the House, including the members opposite, could do this week for the tourism and hospitality sector. That is to help us pass Bill C-2. This legislation is there to help precisely those tourism businesses.

We understand that omicron is here. We understand those businesses need support. However, what I do not understand is why the Conservatives, who allegedly care so much about these vital small businesses, do not want to actually help them.

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic is hurting not only Canadians, industries, and small businesses, but also community organizations. Our government has supported them by quickly rolling out programs such as the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

We have also created a more targeted program, the Black entrepreneurship program, which is very welcome in the riding of Bourassa.

Can the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development elaborate on this program that supports Black entrepreneurs?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and congratulate him on his re-election.

Black business owners make important contributions to the Canadian economy. Their success is a priority. A total of \$10.7 million has already been distributed to support Black entrepreneurs in Montreal, like those in Bourassa, through the Black entrepreneurship program's national ecosystem fund.

I look forward to sharing some news about other successful projects in the near future.

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 361 days ago, the House came together to vote unanimously on the motion put forward by the member for Cariboo—Prince George to take immediate action to establish a nationwide three-digit 988 suicide prevention hotline. In a world where we can hold a \$600-million election in the midst of a global pandemic, surely we can activate a three-digit telephone number that nobody is using and work with dedicated stakeholders on an initiative everyone agrees is a priority.

This is important and it should be easy. Why is it taking so long?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government supports a national three-digit hotline for Canadians in crisis, and I thank the member for Cariboo—Prince George for his tireless advocacy on this issue.

The CRTC is currently considering public input from consultations that concluded on September 1. We believe that such a line should have the capacity to connect people to the most appropriate support in the most appropriate way.

Our government remains committed to fully funding a national three-digit mental health crisis and suicide prevention hotline.

*Oral Questions***HOUSING**

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is out of touch with rural Canadians. My constituents in northern Saskatchewan are frustrated with the made-in-Ottawa greener homes grant. Because they live a long way from urban centres, the cost of the inspection process nearly equals the grant. This simply does not make any sense. Unlike the Liberals, my constituents cannot afford to not think about monetary policy and just print money to pay for their bad decisions.

Is the Liberal government intentionally designing programs that exclude rural Canadians?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our national housing strategy has a rural lens to it. That is why 38% of the rapid housing initiative projects are in rural and indigenous communities where the need is the greatest. We make sure that in the National Housing Council there are representatives who bring a rural lens to everything that we do through our national housing co-investment fund and other investments that we make in affordable housing in Canada.

* * *

● (1510)

TRANSPORT

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, residents of York—Simcoe have many concerns about a proposed aerodrome in the town of Georgina. In Greenbank, Burlington, Tottenham and elsewhere, corporations have used a loophole in the federal aerodrome regulations to exploit municipal soil laws. They use the pretense of building or expanding an aerodrome to dump tonnes of contaminated fill at significant cost to the environment and to local taxpayers.

What has the Liberal government done to close the loophole, and can the Minister of Transport guarantee this will not happen again in Pefferlaw or anywhere else?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee to my hon. colleague that I will always be open to speaking with him and other colleagues about the issues they have of concern in their own communities.

I have spoken with my hon. colleague on a couple of occasions on this issue, and I committed to him to continue to follow up with him on his concerns and on the concerns of the local community. We want to make sure that we build a better Canada for everyone.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the people of Calgary Skyview for the honour and privilege of serving as their member of Parliament after serving as their city councillor.

Throughout the campaign, I heard from many seniors about the struggles they—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to ask the hon. member to pause for a moment. I just want to make sure that we can all hear the question. It is rather difficult to hear the question.

I will get the hon. member to start from the top so that we can all hear his question.

Mr. George Chahal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the people of Calgary Skyview for the honour and privilege of serving as their member of Parliament after serving as their city councillor.

Throughout the campaign, I heard from many seniors about the struggles they have endured due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Northeast Calgary seniors are community leaders and beloved members of our families. Their health, social and financial well-being must continue to be a top priority for our Liberal government.

Can the new Minister of Seniors tell the seniors I represent about what we are doing to support them in their communities?

Hon. Kamal Khara (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my new colleague on his election. I think he will make a fantastic representative for his constituents.

I would also like to thank him for giving me the opportunity to highlight an important program that benefits seniors across Canada. As the Minister of Seniors, I am very excited to announce this year's—

The Speaker: I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the hon. minister. I am trying to hear her answer. She is very close, but I still cannot make it out. I know that I am getting old and my hearing is starting to go, but I do not think that is the problem today.

I would ask the hon. minister to start from the top.

Hon. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my new colleague on his election. I think he will make a fantastic representative for his constituents.

I would also like to thank him for giving me the opportunity to highlight an important program that benefits seniors across Canada. As the Minister of Seniors, I am very excited to announce that this year's New Horizons for Seniors program call for proposals is now open. I encourage all members to connect with organizations in their own ridings that serve seniors to apply.

I would like to thank in advance all organizations for the work they do to support seniors.

*Points of Order***HEALTH**

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, only 6% of people in low-income countries have received a COVID-19 vaccine. The African continent needs hundreds of millions of doses just to get 40% of its people vaccinated, yet deliveries were slashed because of supply shortages, putting us all at risk.

Global vaccine production must expand immediately, but Liberals are blocking WTO efforts to get this done. Will the government finally support the TRIPS patent waiver to help countries produce desperately needed vaccines, yes or no?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic does not recognize borders and will be overcome through coordinated global action. We have been clear from the start that no one is safe until everyone is. That is why we committed over \$2.6 billion to the global COVID-19 response in 2020 and we have an additional \$1 billion for the International Monetary Fund. We will work with our allies and international partners to get this done.

• (1515)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was not an answer. It certainly was not the answer we were looking for.

The Liberals say they are proud of the actions delivering vaccines globally, but this is the government that pledged 200 million doses for countries in need by the end of next year and they have not even delivered 20% of that. This is the government that refuses to waive the vaccine patents to allow poor countries to vaccinate their populations.

We will continue to see dangerous COVID-19 variants until everyone is vaccinated. When will the Liberals do their part to end the global health pandemic?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with the hon. member on this issue and other topics as well.

As I stated, the pandemic does not recognize borders and we will only overcome this with coordinated global action. We have donated the equivalent of 200 million COVID-19 vaccine doses. I have had discussions with my other COVAX colleagues. We will work with our international partners and our allies to get this done.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GUN VIOLENCE

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, given the increase in gun violence and the numerous deadly shootings in the streets of Montreal and the metropolitan area in recent weeks, and notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House:

(a) the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security be instructed to undertake as a priority a study on gun control, illegal arms trafficking and the increase in gun crimes committed by members of street gangs;

(b) the members to serve on the committee be appointed by the whip of each recognized party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members before the adjournment of the House;

c) the Clerk of the House shall convene a meeting of the committee on a priority basis no later than Wednesday, December 8, 2021; and

(d) the Minister of Public Safety, as well as representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, appear before the committee as witnesses for a period of three hours each as the committee sees fit.

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

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

I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, Members, Senators and departmental and parliamentary officials appearing as witnesses before any standing, standing joint, special or legislative committees may do so in person.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay. Hearing no dissenting voice, it is agreed.

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)

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER**NOISE IN THE HOUSE**

Mr. Gérard Deltell (House leader of the official opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I want to point out that the House is governed by rules that we are all called upon to follow. For example, when we ask a question, we stand up. We must also abide by a certain code and listen to the answer given, if any, of course. We must always respect that.

Since the House resumed sitting, there has been a lot of background noise, as there are more members present in the House. We recognize that. That was not the case in the last six months of the previous Parliament, from January to June, when there were only a handful of government members and a few dozen opposition members. We admit that the noise was less intrusive then.

We also recognize that when someone rises to answer a question and we hear some heckling, the Speaker frequently rises to call members to order, as he should. Mr. Speaker, I would urge you to be very careful about inviting members giving an answer to start over from the beginning. Inevitably, their speaking time is much longer, allowing members to repeat exactly the same argument. However, the people at home have heard the answer because the microphones picked it up, particularly when the question comes from someone who is not physically present in the House.

I therefore invite everyone to follow the Standing Orders very strictly, which state that we should not heckle and that we should listen carefully to the person speaking.

Unfortunately, breaches can occur, because we are human. People who have things to say must be able to say them, provided that we hear them properly. If, unfortunately, there is too much noise at the start, we can stop and start again at the beginning, but not at the end.

• (1520)

The Speaker: I would like to thank the hon. member for his observation. He is right that members of the House need to listen to each other. That is something we have to do. We must show respect. It creates problems when the answer cannot be heard. The House proceedings are for the benefit of the House. This is not a show for the people at home. I want to make sure that the members of the House can hear the question and the answer. That way, we will all be on the same page.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just posit that there is a very simple solution. If the member is concerned with the matter that he has raised for my hon. colleague, of course they could just listen to the question that was posed and not scream and yell at the person trying to answer and create a ruckus in the House. It is among the Standing Orders that somebody is supposed to be given the opportunity to speak.

There have been many instances where I can barely hear the answer myself because there is so much screaming and hooting and general buffoonery happening on the other side, and I would suggest that is not good for this place.

The Speaker: I will repeat what I just said. Business of the House is to take place in the House and people here want to hear the question and the answer so we all understand what is being said. Therefore, I want to ask all members to respect each other and not shout when someone else is either asking or answering a question.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I only want to add that the rules do not state that people be allowed

to hear. Rather, Standing Orders 16 and 18 specifically forbid people from interrupting and speaking disrespectfully. Therefore, the onus of our rules is on the individual to not interrupt or speak. That may be for the purpose of allowing other people to hear, but the rules are violated whenever someone is interrupted or treated disrespectfully.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for pointing that out.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would not have risen on this, but I will because the Liberal whip stood up on it. Precedence is important. I was on the government side for many years and while I was trying to answer questions, I could not hear because the Liberal whip was one of the people yelling at me. The precedent at the time was that sometimes the Speaker would stand to ask people to be quiet, but never once in that time was I given the opportunity to repeat my answer to the question.

The Speaker: I am sorry that the previous Speaker did not give the member that opportunity.

Once again, I would like to remind hon. members that we are here trying to do Parliament's business. I want to ensure that everyone can hear each other, both the questions and the answers, so we can all work with information that is well heard and well planned out.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ACCESS BY MEMBERS TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS PRECINCT—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the question of privilege raised on December 6, 2021, by the member for Yorkton—Melville concerning medical exemptions for the COVID-19 vaccination.

In her intervention, the member alleged that a decision of the House on November 25, 2021, imposed inappropriate conditions on the independence of the House of Commons' nurse in determining whether medical exemptions should be provided to members. She argued that such actions by government set a precedent with regard to political interference in objective decision-making by medical professionals. The member further suggested that parliamentary privileges could be eroded by arbitrary limitations made in this manner at the whim of the government.

[*Translation*]

The member for Timmins—James Bay intervened to indicate that it was appropriate for the House to make decisions for the benefit of the entire membership, including on the issue of a safe work environment, even if it supersedes certain privacy rights.

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On November 25, 2021, the House made a decision allowing hybrid sittings and requiring members attending proceedings of the House in person to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19. The order also required that a valid medical exemption from vaccination be guided by the Ontario Ministry of Health document entitled “Medical Exemption to COVID-19 Vaccination” and by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

• (1525)

[English]

It is therefore difficult for the Chair to understand how the House of Commons' nurse or any other health and safety personnel are working under the imposition of unwarranted conditions caused by this order. The House has the authority to make decisions affecting access to the chamber and once such a decision has been made, it is the Chair's responsibility to see that it is applied appropriately. Given the clear decision of the House, I cannot find that the member's privilege has been breached.

In the view of the Chair, the matter has been decided by the House and accordingly, I find there is no *prima facie* question of privilege.

I thank all members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Kanata—Carleton.

I rise this afternoon to speak about the brave members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their civilian colleagues on the ground in Kabul who helped coordinate the daring evacuation from Afghanistan this past summer.

I want to speak about this whole-of-government mission and how we worked closely with our allies and partners to bring as many Canadian citizens, permanent residents and Afghans to safety as possible.

First, let me say how grateful I am for the brave men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces. This event was certainly one of the most difficult non-combatative evacuation operations ever undertaken by Canadian Armed Forces, and their members stepped up when the world needed them to.

All of us gathered here today have seen the harrowing images of thousands desperate to leave, with a limited number of spaces to get people out, and the CAF members doing their best to evacuate panicked civilians as the security situation disintegrated rapidly around them.

We know that prior to the rapid fall of Kabul to Taliban forces, Global Affairs and IRCC were working around the clock to get Canadian citizens and those vulnerable Afghans who were approved for resettlement in Canada onto flight manifests and out of the country as fast as possible.

With the Taliban now in charge, this was no longer a straightforward process. What used to be a short drive to the airport now took about 12 hours. Streets were clogged. With the security situation getting increasingly dangerous, chaotic and desperate by the hour, Global Affairs and IRCC issued a general call for all eligible evacuees rather than a staggered approach. This was done to ensure that the greatest number of people possible made it onto flights.

At this point, the single-biggest challenge to the evacuation effort was getting people to the airport through all the congestion, the Taliban checkpoints and the sporadic violence. For those who made it to the airport gates, they faced intense crowding, violence, sweltering heat and the reality there was no guarantee one could actually get inside. For those who managed to make it inside, the desperate situation caused fights to break out. We heard about families getting separated from each other in the chaos.

When Canadian Armed Forces evacuation aircraft arrived, they could only be on the ground for a very short window to keep the U.S.-led coalition air bridge functional. Despite all these significant challenges, CAF members still safely escorted large numbers of Canadians, permanent residents, allied citizens and vulnerable Afghans through the Kabul airport.

In total, Canada successfully evacuated approximately 3,700 people. All of us here are extremely proud of the Canadian Armed Forces members who worked under such incredibly dangerous conditions, with support from staff at Global Affairs and IRCC. We thank them again for their courage and compassion in the face of great danger to their own lives.

A lot of this coordination work was carried out from the Canadian embassy in Kabul. I want to recognize Global Affairs staff members for their essential work securing the facility and preparing for evacuation. We began developing our evacuation contingency plans in the spring of 2021. Next, the CAF deployed a strategic advisory team to design plans for a rapid evacuation and possible mission closure if the security situation were to deteriorate.

DND and the CAF had been working closely in support of government and Canadian partners for months as we carefully watched deployments on the ground, and it was those early discussions with our partners at Global Affairs that allowed us to plan well ahead of time for a number of different scenarios, including the potential extraction of personnel from the country by the Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

On July 23, the Government of Canada announced a program to resettle Afghans who had supported Canada's security and development efforts in Afghanistan. Defence team officials worked closely with Global Affairs and IRCC to explore how military personnel and assets could help support this important resettlement program.

By July 30, the government approved a request for assistance that began direct CAF involvement in evacuating Canadian citizens and permanent residents from the country as well as Afghan nationals eligible for settlement under IRCC's special immigration measures program.

• (1530)

The first CAF and civilian chartered flights operated by the Government of Canada began transporting evacuees out of Afghanistan by August 4. On August 15, Global Affairs decided to temporarily suspend operations at our embassy in Kabul and all personnel were evacuated. By August 26, the end of the evacuation mission, the CAF had transported approximately 3,700 persons from Kabul in very difficult conditions.

In the aftermath, our departments have continued to do everything they can to support the resettlement of at-risk Afghans. The defence team is working to identify more interpreters who supported the Canadian mission and helped IRCC bring them over. We are also confirming employment records as part of the resettlement efforts.

We supported NATO's Operation Allied Solace and its mission to airlift over 1,000 Afghan contractors and immediate family members from Kuwait and Qatar to temporary camps in Kosovo in Poland. As part of this support, the CAF deployed three members to Kosovo, themselves originally from Afghanistan, to serve as interpreters at the camp.

At NATO's request, Canada had agreed to resettle up to 472 Afghan contractors subject to screening protocol. This is the highest commitment among our NATO allies and it is a commitment we gladly undertake. This pledge is part of our broader commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghans.

In the midst of the chaos in Kabul this summer, there were poignant reminders about why Canadians were there doing our best in a nearly impossible situation. There was an Afghan girl at the airport who was awestruck at the sight of a woman military police officer as she boarded one of our evacuation flights. She asked her dad, "How can a woman be a police officer?" Her father explained that in Canada women could be police officers. Looking up at the soldier, the little girl said that she wanted to be a police officer when she grew up.

There was also a little Afghan boy at the airport who was so greatly admired by one of our Canadian soldiers that he would not leave his side as the soldier carried out his work during an evacuation flight. We heard how the soldier cared for that boy who was about the same age as his own son, who was waiting for him to return safely home to Canada.

These are but two of what will eventually be thousands of personal stories of Afghan evacuees beginning a new life in Canada. On behalf of the Government of Canada, we welcome them to their

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new home. For members of the Canadian Armed Forces and all civilians who supported the evacuation effort, Canadians thank them for a job well done.

• (1535)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, if people listened to the member's speech, they will excuse me for saying that he painted a rosy picture of what was going on at the Kabul airport.

In fact, having dealt with this situation for the better part of a month and a half, some of the correspondence I was getting said that it was literally a "*Walking Dead* situation" at the airport, thousands trying to get through the gate, some people being shot, others hung up in the barbed wire, and women and children were fainting.

How can the member reconcile that story with what the actual facts on the ground were telling us, that there was complete chaos going on? How does he reconcile that? What this committee is designed to do is to get to the bottom of what happened, to ensure that it never happens again and to look to the future to help Afghanistan nationals come to Canada.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, all day long, I have heard Conservatives talk about how they were not trying to politicize this issue. If the member had just listened to my speech, which he clearly did not, he would know that I was not painting that picture.

Let me reread a quote for him. I said, "For those who made it to the airport gates, they faced intense crowding, violence, sweltering heat and the reality there was no guarantee one could actually get inside." Does that sound like I am painting a rosy picture?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to see you in the chair. It is a nice surprise for me this afternoon.

With respect to Afghanistan, there is one issue of particular concern to me, and that is what people think of the sacrifice that our veterans have made in going to the front lines, as well as the plight of the Afghans.

We must ensure transparency, and it is a good idea to establish a committee to shed some light. As parliamentarians, we also have a responsibility to look at the present and the future.

With this in mind, I would like to hear from the member what he personally plans to do to ensure that we learn from our mistakes in this conflict.

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[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, that is a very reasonable question and I appreciate it. We always have to learn from our mistakes in order to do better in the future. I do not have a problem with studying this very important issue and understanding what went right and what went wrong. It is when we start to overpoliticize it and use it as an opportunity to score political points that it becomes an issue for me, which is why, if we look back at everything I have said today on this matter, I have tried to steer clear of being overly partisan with this particular issue.

Do we have an opportunity to learn here? We absolutely do. Should we be studying this issue? We absolutely should, and through studying it in an open and transparent process where we get to understand the facts, we can do better next time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I believe we all want to help the Afghans who have been stranded and need to get to safety. There are some measures the Canadian government can undertake, including, for example, waiving the refugee determination requirement, so that people who cannot access the UNHCR offices would be able to get refugee status to get to safety. Another measure would be waiving the requirements for documentation, because the reality is that people cannot access travel documents, visas or passports for that matter.

Would the member work with the NDP on these calls to action for the government, to really put something substantive on the table to help refugees get to safety?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, with the two examples that were raised by the member, there is an opportunity to look at them and see whether those would be solutions that would improve the situation moving forward, so I certainly would not rule them out. Can I say point-blank at this point that I am supportive? It really depends on the work that any committee, whether it is this special committee or another committee that the issue goes to, does in order to look at those different tools and see how they can best be applied.

• (1540)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am of course moved by the individual stories the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands told, but I have to say that the member for Barrie—Innisfil, and I do not want to make this partisan either, more accurately describes the scenes I have heard of from the airport.

I wonder if the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands can suggest what we can do better now, not what we should have done last summer, but what we can do better now.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, that would go back to the question from my colleague in the Bloc Québécois.

We should study this issue, in whatever form that takes place, in order to be better prepared for next time and in order to do more now. I have mentioned the commitments we have made in terms of bringing people into Canada, and if there is a way we can do that better through some form of study that can be brought forward, then why would we not do that? I am extremely supportive of looking for—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality.

Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the concerns and questions from my colleagues throughout the day on both sides of the House about how Canada and the world responded to the upheaval of the fall of Kabul. The difficulties in operating in Afghanistan cannot be underestimated, so I want to respond to the motion today by sharing information about the government's Afghanistan exit strategy.

Since the end of the air bridge evacuation in August, we have helped over 1,400 Canadians, permanent residents and their family members leave the country. As we heard the minister say earlier today, another 520 Afghan refugees are arriving here tomorrow. However, by no means have we ended our consular support in Afghanistan.

Today, nearly four months since the fall of Kabul, a dedicated team of Global Affairs Canada officials continue to support Canadian citizens and permanent residents in Afghanistan who want to leave. Global Affairs Canada is responsible for providing this emergency assistance to Canadians abroad under, of course, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act. This responsibility includes the repatriation or assisted departure of Canadians in distress. In the event of a crisis, Global Affairs Canada activates these tools and strategies in support of Canada's network of diplomatic missions abroad. This allows them to rapidly mobilize, situate resources where they are most needed and directly support the people affected by an emergency.

Global Affairs undertook significant planning and preparedness efforts in the months prior to the fall of Kabul. The department did this to ensure that Canada was ready for all possibilities. These efforts ramped up significantly in July 2021 as the security situation worsened. During this period, Global Affairs convened interdepartmental task force calls, or ITFs. These ITF calls ensure interdepartmental collaboration and common situational awareness among departments.

At the same time as Global Affairs was holding these ITF calls on Afghanistan, similar meetings were taking place across the government of Canada, including at the deputy minister and PCO levels. To ensure maximum situational awareness, Global Affairs also ramped up international liaison activities with like-minded countries. This enabled Canada and its international partners to share information and to work together on consular matters and repatriation efforts. Communicating with Canadian citizens and permanent residents abroad is critically important during an emergency, and we know it can be a lifeline.

At all times during the Afghanistan crisis, Canada was in contact with citizens and permanent residents. Global Affairs proactively developed vital updates and information and shared them widely. The department did so via the registration of Canadians abroad system and through social media and other communications channels. These actions enable Canadians to take difficult decisions regarding their safety and well-being. They were an essential tool for those who chose to leave Afghanistan.

To manage the surge in consular requests, more than 200 Global Affairs employees joined the effort at headquarters and from missions abroad. They worked as emergency responders and emergency contact centre agents throughout August and September. More than a dozen standing rapid deployment team members were deployed to Qatar and Islamabad in support of response efforts. Officers from the Department of National Defence; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency were embedded within the Global Affairs emergency watch and response centre to ensure the most effective response possible. Robust case management teams were established and worked long hours to provide services in support of Canadians, permanent residents and their families. An Afghanistan crisis management team continues to operate today.

• (1545)

Together, these dedicated public servants have done and continue to do their utmost to support the safe passage of Canadians, permanent residents and their family members. The special immigration measures programs continue to be an essential tool to help Afghan nationals who have significant and enduring Canadian connections to resettle here in Canada.

Prior to the evacuation in August, Global Affairs and National Defence worked closely with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to advocate for the need for a program to safeguard vulnerable Afghan nationals who may be at risk due to their work supporting Canadian efforts in Afghanistan. Both before and after the establishment of special immigration measures for Afghanistan, Global Affairs has supported IRCC in its efforts to resettle Afghan nationals here in Canada. Global Affairs support includes acting as a referral agency for incoming Afghans, as well as coordinating and facilitating safe passage with National Defence and international partners. Today, a dedicated team of Global Affairs officers continues to support those who wish to leave Afghanistan.

The current operations have a dual focus. The first is ensuring that those who wish to leave have the documents they need in order to travel, and the second is working with international partners to identify and take advantage of departure opportunities when they become available.

I am proud of the work of our Global Affairs staff. Despite the closing of the air bridge and very challenging conditions on the ground, Global Affairs has helped to repatriate more than 1,400 Canadian citizens, permanent residents and their families, and the work continues. That means 1,400 women, men and children will not be subject to the repressive policies of the Taliban regime.

I am fully aware that the work is not done; it is far from done. It is important, though, that we learn from the challenges we face together, and I hope all members will agree that we cannot do so by

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politicizing the men, women and children we brought home. It would be completely inappropriate, of course, to do so.

I believe we can find a way to have these discussions respectfully, in the pursuit of truth. Is the forum being proposed by the opposition today the best place for that discussion? I am not sure it is, but I will certainly carefully consider the arguments being put forward today.

One sure thing is that operations remain under way to help Canadian citizens, permanent residents and their families who wish to leave Afghanistan. Our consular services are dedicated to helping Canadians in distress, whether they are in Afghanistan or anywhere in the world.

• (1550)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about politicizing things, but it is funny that she did not talk about a political election being called, abandoning those who served this country and their families.

I have a very simple question, since the member brought up an exit strategy. Was the exit strategy to call an election, abandoning those who served Canada and avoiding any accountability?

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, we will not stop until the remaining Canadians and vulnerable Afghans who supported our work in Afghanistan and who wish to leave are able to depart. We are there with all in the Afghan Canadian community who worry about their relatives, and we will continue to work tirelessly towards that goal.

We should also take a moment to thank neighbouring countries for their support in welcoming refugees. We continue to work very closely with our allies and countries in the region to help get as many people out as possible. This is a whole-of-government effort, and together we will not stop until we achieve that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, on the one hand, I find our Liberal colleague's take on the evacuation of Afghans surprisingly optimistic for what I would consider a dismal failure. A mere 3,700 people were able to leave Afghanistan, when the government's goal was to bring in 40,000. At this rate, given how much time has passed since August, it will take three years and nine months to achieve that.

On the other hand, if I were military, I do not know what I would think of my government. What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

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[English]

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Madam Speaker, we are working tirelessly to stay in contact with and support those who remain in Afghanistan and who wish to come to Canada. IRCC continues to process applications for Afghan refugees day and night, and we have mobilized our entire global network to process visas and issue them on an urgent basis. To date, IRCC has approved applications for more than 9,500 persons under special immigration measures to resettle Afghan nationals who assisted the Canadian government, along with their family members.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I met with an individual who told me this situation. They have family members in Afghanistan who worked for the previous government in the area of biometrics. After the Taliban took over, it visited workers in those departments and tried to force them to give them access to that biometrics information. It wanted to see both who was in the system, so as to target them, and those who could be erased, as in the terrorists it could protect.

The family member is very concerned about the safety of their loved ones. In fact, their loved one's co-worker was visited by the Taliban. Subsequently, when they refused to provide the information or access to the biometrics, they were killed.

That is the reality of what they are faced with. For an individual with loved ones in Afghanistan in those situations, what can the government provide or offer in support of those family members at risk?

Mrs. Jenna Sudds: Madam Speaker, we have been very clear that safe passage must continue to be allowed for all foreign nationals and Afghans with travel authorizations from allied countries. Afghans who wish to leave must be allowed to do so safely, but also humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach all those who need it through air and land borders.

This is a clear message that Canada and over 100 allies have conveyed to the Taliban, and we will continue to do so.

• (1555)

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

The Taliban regime is known for its brutality, human rights violations and ruthless killings. For months now, we have been hearing from our men and women in uniform about the imminent dangers to those who fought alongside them in Afghanistan and that their lives are at risk. Thousands of Afghan refugees remain stranded in Afghanistan and surrounding countries, but the Liberal government has yet to announce the timeline or a plan for resettling all 40,000 refugees it promised to bring to Canada.

These brave individuals supported our military heroes in Afghanistan during their darkest times. The least we can do is help make sure they are safe. Despite the deteriorating situation, and the life-threatening conditions these refugees are living in, the Liberals continue to sit on their hands. In the four months that have passed since Kabul fell, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has failed to deliver on the promise made by the government to Afghans fleeing the Taliban regime.

The inaction of the Liberals on this issue is inexcusable. NGOs, experts and veterans all warned the government months before Afghanistan fell that urgent action was needed to help Afghan interpreters, support staff and their families. The government ignored these warnings and instead called an unnecessary election.

The government had months to prepare for the refugee crisis in Afghanistan. It knew vulnerable Afghan refugees needed help before the U.S. withdrew its troops from Afghanistan. The Liberal-made backlogs have left refugees in the dark. Veterans and members of NGOs have had to step up and become the last hope for many Afghans stuck in limbo, a limbo created by the government.

Not only did the government fail to get Canadians, interpreters, support staff and their families out of Afghanistan as the country fell to the Taliban, it also refused to continue to fund their safe houses. Safe houses have been protecting religious minorities and women as the country faces growing economic and food crises. These brave men and women continue to be forced to hide from the Taliban.

In addition to the government's complete indifference, there was a serious government data leak that exposed many Afghans who had applied for visas here in Canada. It occurred shortly after the Liberals promised to bring in 40,000 Afghans threatened with Taliban reprisals because of their previous work as rights advocates, journalists, members of the judiciary, or because they belong to religious and ethnic minorities targeted by these terrorists.

The recent data breach at IRCC continues to threaten the lives of several hundred vulnerable Afghans seeking refuge from the Taliban. The ramifications of this inexcusable mistake will have life-threatening consequences, and the government must take immediate action to address this unacceptable error.

We heard from Canadians who are worried about their loved ones. I have met with many of them in my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods, and they continue to hear of the Taliban using phone and Internet surveillance to track down, and in some cases kill, perceived enemies and religious minorities in Afghanistan.

I am standing here today to ensure the government shows some accountability because further mistakes of this nature, or delays in bringing Afghan refugees to Canada, could have grave consequences for those whose help we once needed, and they desperately need our help now. Afghan interpreters, embassy staff and their families are now being hunted down by the Taliban because they put themselves in harm's way to help our country. Extremist and terrorist groups are making it difficult for refugees to escape on foot through rural Afghanistan to countries such as Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Liberal government has brought to Canada less than 10% of the number of Afghan refugees that it had promised it would bring during the election. Faced with the prospect of life or death, these brave Afghans cannot afford more incompetence and red tape from the Liberal government.

● (1600)

Canadians need to know that safeguards are in place to protect those who fought alongside our country in Afghanistan. We must examine what contingency plans Canada had in place for evacuations of Canadians, and we need to ensure that real efforts are being made to bring Afghan interpreters and others who helped the Canadian Armed Forces in that region to Canada.

The fact that those who served alongside our men and women in uniform were left behind in Afghanistan is a stain on our country. This is why Conservatives are calling for a special committee to review and analyze the inaction of the Liberal government on this issue and make recommendations on how Canada can quickly get these Afghan interpreters, support staff and families to Canada. This committee is not just about looking back. It is also about looking forward and making an actual plan to help them.

I cannot speak about Afghanistan refugees without thinking about and acknowledging the heroic work by my dear friend and former Alberta minister Manmeet Singh Bhullar. When he heard of the plight of religious minorities in Afghanistan, such as Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities, he worked day and night to try to get them here to Canada as refugees.

Manmeet was killed in a tragic accident in 2015. His dream of bringing these religious minorities to Canada lives on through the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation and organizations such as the World Sikh Organization, where hundreds of Canadians have collected funds to support applications to bring refugees here to Canada. Unfortunately, much like with the issue with interpreters, contractors, their families and those who supported Canadians, there is little progress. There is no timeline, and there is no clear plan to bring them here.

Religious minorities, women's rights leaders and democratic activists continue to be forced into hiding from the Taliban. They need our help. Any attempt by the government to cover up their failures in Afghanistan by using security concerns as an excuse will not be acceptable. The requested documents will be subject to a thorough process that will protect Canada and its allies from publicly releasing potentially sensitive security information.

Words without action or a plan are useless. As the Taliban's grasp on Afghanistan tightens, and its hunt for remaining allies continues, now is the time for action. Lives are at risk. We need real answers,

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followed by real action. Our friends in Afghanistan and their loved ones depend on it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the many issues to come out of Afghanistan, including its refugees, are of a great, serious nature. We recognize the value of having committees. I stood up to speak to our standing committees. The official opposition is spearheading this through this particular motion, yet I would rather have seen a negotiation take place among the different parties to ensure that it was depoliticized, that the politics were taken out of it. I think we owe that to members of the forces and those who have been engaged in what has been taking place virtually since 2001.

I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts, at least at the onset going into this, on whether we should be trying to depoliticize this so we can get right to the facts and have the necessary dialogue. Maybe at some other time in the future, if the opposition wants to make it political, they can do so. What are his thoughts?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, Canadians elected us to come here to hold the government to account. That is exactly what we are doing here today. We are presenting ideas. We have presented this idea to have a special committee to look at this very important issue, an issue that he himself is saying is very important. We are just debating it.

All members of this House have the opportunity to discuss this issue, debate it, and vote on it. That is how this place works, and that is why we have put this forward. This is not only to look back at the lessons learned, the mistakes that may have been made or that were made, or the fact that they decided to hold an election when they should have been taking action, but also to look forward.

It is not very often that we, in this place, discuss an issue as vital and as important as this. I can truly say that this is a matter of life and death. That is why this is so important, and that is why we need this committee.

● (1605)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Edmonton Mill Woods for honouring the soldier and person he knew who passed in this very solemn theatre of war. In my own reflections, I am thinking about Hamilton's own Mark Anthony Graham. He was a larger-than-life Olympian who served in the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment of the Canadian Armed Forces. I am also reminded of the casualties of war and who ultimately pays the price for war.

Business of Supply

I ask for those on the front lines and all the civilians who have been left without any choice in the results of the Afghan war, how does the member think donor governments should interact with the Taliban authority when it comes to international assistance? No western government, including Canada's, is likely to offer diplomatic legitimacy to the Taliban anytime soon. What suggestions does the hon. member for Edmonton Mill Woods have in terms of the pragmatic problem of getting food, medicine and shelter to the people who need it most?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I would much rather have Canada work with NGOs that understand how to help people on the ground. One other point the member made that is very important is that this really is about people on the ground. I know the Liberals throw around this number, and they made a big announcement that 40,000 Afghans would be brought to Canada, but they have barely scratched the surface on that. They have not taken action to bring them here and they do not have a plan or a timeline.

The remaining people in Afghanistan are not just a number. The people in my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods sat with me and talked about their brothers, fathers and mothers: people who are still in Afghanistan and badly need our help. We need to be there for them.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his continued advocacy, especially when it comes to refugees.

We have both had experience going through the first group of Afghans who came to Canada: the Sikhs and the Hindus. People who sponsored one of those families, as I did, saw the bureaucratic backlog and what it did. Right now there is a backlog of 1.8 million that is stopping families from being reunited and from bringing those refugees to Canada. It goes to show that our NGOs and our veterans are the ones who stepped up when the government failed to serve those who served this country.

I want to give my hon. colleague a little more time to talk about our older brother, the one we miss so dearly and who many in the House looked to as a mentor: Manmeet Singh Bhullar.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the legacy of Manmeet Singh Bhullar will truly be how much he wanted to bring so many of the Afghan religious minorities to Canada. He literally stayed up day and night, talking to them on Zoom during the night to learn more about their situation. He worked to get some of them, very few, to India and then worked on a process to get them here. Very few of them have made it here.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, on July 14, I sat on a Zoom call with a former Canadian interpreter from Helmand Province. On that call were several of my colleagues, including the hon. members for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and York—Simcoe. It was an emotional call. It was an interpreter who was pleading for his life. The Taliban were 500 metres away, and they were hunting those who had helped allied forces during the Afghanistan war. I was in my constituency office, and after that call I actually had tears streaming down my face. My staff asked me what had happened. I said I had just heard the most horrific pleas that I could ever hear.

From that time, we saw Afghanistan descend into chaos. We all know the stories about what happened at the airport, but through it all there were Canadians and Canadian veterans. In my former role as critic for Veterans Affairs I was dealing directly with those veterans, and being supplied with hundreds of names of those whose lives were in jeopardy in Afghanistan and who had helped our Canadian Forces. I was supplying those names directly to the minister at the time. I was getting phone calls at 3 a.m. from Afghanistan. Somehow my cellphone number got out. The callers were begging for help, and all I could do was supply their names to the minister directly. I thank the minister for taking my calls and being there at a time when people needed him the most.

There were veterans, volunteers, NGOs and individuals like Zarmina and Khalil Nekzai in my riding of Barrie—Innisfil. Zarmina had gone through the situation with the Taliban earlier and had escaped Afghanistan in advance of Taliban rule. She told me she came out on a donkey to another country and found a life in Canada. She had given back to young girls in Afghanistan by trying to educate them and trying to get them to play hockey. She came into my office many times crying, begging and pleading for any way that we could help those hockey girls of Kabul to come to Canada, and asking that we do everything we could.

We saw the descending chaos and it should have been no surprise to anyone here, even the government, that the Americans had already concluded that they were going to leave Afghanistan in September. There should have been better planning. We need to know this, and this is why this committee is so important. We need to find out what happened from the time the Americans announced that they were going to depart Afghanistan to the time that Afghanistan actually fell. What were the actions of the government at that time? What were the Liberals doing other than preparing for an election that nobody wanted?

I will remind the House that at the time it was not just that Afghanistan was falling: Wildfires in B.C. were decimating the interior of British Columbia. The priority of the government at that time was to call an election, when it should have been dealing with all of these other issues. The desperation, the despair and the anxiety that were coming to my office, and I am sure the offices of colleagues in the House, were incredible to deal with. In fact, I did not start my campaign until two and a half weeks after the election was called because this was my focus.

I was supplying as many names as I could. People not just in my riding, but all across Canada and around the world were giving me names to get to the Liberal government so they could be helped in Afghanistan before everything fell.

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There were others. There was the Veterans Transition Network, which included Corey Shelton, a former army officer who served in Afghanistan. There were people on the ground in Afghanistan: Canadian Armed Forces veterans who were desperately putting their lives in jeopardy trying to help people at that time. Through the whole process, as we have heard several examples of today, many Canadian military personnel were on the ground; however, diplomatic officials and consular officials had been pulled back. There was nowhere for these people to go.

• (1610)

In fact, I have heard stories. I have emails that I will read into the record about some of the desperate attempts by people to get to the airport and what they were being told by the government about where they needed to be. In one case, people were told to go to a hotel and that there would be Canadian officials there. There were no Canadian officials there. People were risking their lives going from the safe house that they were in to this hotel, and when they got to the hotel American forces were there and they were told, “No, we’re not taking any Canadians at this point.” Where were the Canadian officials? They were nowhere to be found. In one case, the 82-year-old father of a lady in my riding left that hotel only to be beaten up by members of the Taliban because they figured out why he went there. We need to know why these types of things happened.

Another email I got stated, “Hi there, I’ve emailed IRCC dozens of times and now I’m asking for your help. Please, please don’t let me get killed. Please help me get my family out of Afghanistan. I dedicated my life for Canada and helping any Canadian that crossed my path. Please help me.” Another said, “How long do we have to stay at this airport? This is two days. There’s no water. There’s no bathroom, additional security. We did not sleep and we will be dying with the situation. We are close to this gate. Where are the Canadians to help us?”

I cannot say what he says next, but those are the instructions that he received. This is why we have to get to the bottom of where those failures were. Why was the government too distracted at the time to help not just those Canadians who were still in Afghanistan, but those who were vulnerable?

The instructions people received read, “You are receiving this message from Global Affairs Canada, Consular Services with regards to an assisted departure from Afghanistan. Please find attached a letter of facilitation which may assist you to clear checkpoints to access the Karzai Airport. We also remind you of the following guidance for the airport: Please proceed to the north gate.”

We know the stories of the north gate. There were people getting hung up in barbed wire, and people being shot because they were being identified by the Taliban at that time.

The instructions continued, “Wear red if you have it.” That identified people as Canadian. That is exactly what was going on. The instructions that were coming in were putting our people in peril. They also instructed, “Make your way to the front of the crowd and identify yourself as Canadian.” How could they do that when there were thousands of people who were doing the same thing?

I think of Sam, whose family was there. They were told to go to the airport. They were given notice that there was a flight available to them at the airport, and they had two hours to get to the airport. They sent me the video of themselves driving to the airport. People were being shot in front of them and they were driving over dead bodies. They felt so at risk that they did not make their flight, but turned back and went home to a safe place.

Speaking of safe places, we know that our Canadian interpreters, those who are vulnerable, had safe houses, but they were not being funded by the government. They were being funded by private organizations and private donors raising billions of dollars. At a time when those safe houses needed to be extended, what did the Liberals do, despite being asked to fund them? The government did not cancel them, but it did not fund the extension of them. This means that right now those interpreters and their families whose houses have been blown up by the Taliban have nowhere to go. They are living out in the open in the middle of winter, being hunted down by the Taliban.

We need to know why these types of things could happen. The government members can gloss over it all they want. They can paint as rosy a picture as they want. However, Afghan Canadians and others trying to help those who were vulnerable, those interpreters and others who helped us, know the truth: that it was a government that was in chaos in dealing with this situation.

We need to know, through the proposed committee, why this situation happened so that it never happens again. We also need to better understand how we can help those who are still struggling to leave Afghanistan to come to this country.

• (1615)

I know the government talks about politicization and the politics of this, but since when is demanding answers and getting answers politicization of an issue? That is what Afghans and Afghan Canadians expect us to do; that is what our veterans expect us to do, and damn it we are going to do it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): As a little reminder, the member should mind his words.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, no one in the Conservative opposition cares more or has more compassion for what is taking place in Afghanistan, whether we mean today, yesterday or back in 2001. No one owns a monopoly on the issue. We all care about the types of stories the member just finished raising in the House.

Where we seem to differ is that the government is concerned about the confidentiality of secret documents, which is apparently something the Conservative Party does not care about. We do care about certain things that cannot become public information. The opposition knows that. That is why there was an agreement between Stephen Harper, Michael Ignatieff and the Bloc party back in 2010.

Business of Supply

Whatever happened to the principle of ensuring secrecy? Why will the Conservatives not negotiate with the government so we can protect Canadian—

• (1620)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, given the context of the motion, it speaks to exactly the issue the member is concerned about. There is the potential to redact documents. In fact, the parliamentary law clerk would review all of the documents before this committee.

I do question why the hon. member is concerned. Why is there concern from the government over getting to the bottom of what happened? Why are they concerned about accountability? Why are they concerned about the truth of what happened?

As I said, Afghan Canadians know the truth and veterans and the service organizations that have tried to help Afghan nationals during this unbelievably chaotic time know the truth as well. It is therefore time that Canadians know the truth that their government failed not just the people of Afghanistan, but also Canadians.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, some of the messages the member read out are not dissimilar to the ones I have received. The messages from IRCC and GAC in response really shocked me, because essentially they were stock answers that told people to please go away. They did not provide a resolution or an approach for how they could get to safety. Many people who received documentation from the government were not recognized at the airport and were turned away. Many wrote to GAC in the special email that was given to them, only for it to fall into a deep hole and never see daylight because they never got a response.

In looking forward toward action, will the member support a call for the government to issue temporary resident permits to bring people to safety and to waive the refugee determination requirements so that people can get the refugee status they need to get to safety, given there are no UNHCR offices available? Finally—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, one thing haunts me the most, and still does every single day: How many of those names I gave belong to people who are no longer alive? I do not know. I am not in the government and I was not in the government. All I can do is pass those names on to the minister and his staff. I acknowledge that they were well received, but I just do not know.

The challenge right now in Afghanistan is making sure that we get visas for the people. It is even difficult for Afghan nationals to get passports at this point because they are being pegged. They are being identified by the Taliban as wanting to leave the country. Then we have our partners in Pakistan and elsewhere who on some days keep the borders closed so that Afghan nationals cannot get into the country.

The bottom line is that unless Afghan nationals are out of the country, they cannot come to Canada. There is no easy pathway for

them. The committee could study how to make things easier to make that happen.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his emotional speech. I have been in Kabul many times and have sent members of the RCMP into the area to rebuild, build on law enforcement and build schools for children. I have seen young girls laughing and having fun.

Does the member really see a sense of urgency here, knowing how brutal the Taliban is? Why are we not acting on this right now?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, do members know where I get the sense of urgency the member speaks about? It is from those who previously escaped Taliban rule. They know how difficult this is going to be for young girls. They know how difficult this is going to be for vulnerable communities and ethnic minorities. They know their lives are at risk. That is what makes this urgent, and that is what makes this committee so relevant to the situation.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just want to mention that I will share my time with the member for Scarborough Centre, a colleague I respect deeply, like very much and have had the pleasure of knowing for six years now.

Before I begin my speech, I would like to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment to the position of Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. I appreciate the dignity and wisdom you bring to the role of House of Commons referee.

I rise in the House today to discuss the opposition's proposals with respect to the situation in Afghanistan. Their goal is to determine how we can help Afghan refugees. This is a very serious matter.

Where to begin? First of all, this is a life and death issue. As several members have already mentioned, it is a real shame the Conservatives are making political hay out of this situation. It is outrageous.

I think that all members of the House want us to reach out to the Afghans who are at risk in Afghanistan because of the Taliban government, and I would venture to say that the vast majority of Canadians want that as well. We want to help those Afghans, especially the men and women who helped us and our allies' troops, who have been trying to bring stability to that country, which unfortunately has been torn apart by civil war and Taliban forces.

No one is going to tell me that the Taliban can improve the well-being of the Afghan people. It is unfortunately a government run by radical Islamist forces that completely distort the tenets of this major religion. As a politician, I have had the pleasure of learning more about this religion, as I have gotten to know my Muslim constituents.

Business of Supply

The government, the Canadian Armed Forces and Global Affairs Canada have been working very hard to ensure that we can welcome those who helped us in Afghanistan. That is remarkable.

As a government, we made a solemn commitment to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada. We have made a lot of progress despite some very difficult situations. Almost 4,000 people have regained their freedom here in Canada. We are working very hard on this.

Tomorrow, another 500 Afghan refugees will arrive safely in Canada on two chartered flights. As part of a commitment we made, we are also working with the various governments to bring another 9,000 Afghan refugees to Canada.

• (1630)

Some progress has been made, although the situation is far from ideal. Very few credible individuals really understood how quickly the Afghan government collapsed over the summer. In spite of that, we have made a serious commitment to put in our share of the effort and bring these people home.

I cannot begin to describe how harmful the Taliban is to women's rights in Afghanistan. The situation that Afghans, especially women and girls, are facing is absolutely terrible. When I was younger, I studied international relations in university and I remember that we looked at what was happening in Afghanistan. It was horrifying.

I think Canada had the right to intervene and to be part of the coalition forces that went into Afghanistan to stabilize the country and form a democratic government accountable to Afghans. Unfortunately, that was not enough.

The Canadian Armed Forces have been out of Afghanistan for a long time now. Several governments have had the opportunity to carry on the work and do their part to welcome Afghan refugees. Everyone tried, but no government's commitment was as firm and ambitious as the one we made last summer. We made that promise to Afghans and to Canadians, and we will keep it.

We are keeping up our efforts in Afghanistan to bring these refugees here. We will be there for vulnerable Afghans. We will be there to repay the Afghans for their service in support of the Canadian Armed Forces stationed there. We will be there for our translators, our interpreters and the people who forged connections between our military personnel and the Afghan people. We really want to help those who need it most, and we will be there for them.

It is important to look beyond the creation of another committee, that is, a special committee that would look at these matters. I think we are all very aware of the workload that we have. We do not need a new committee. There are already committees where these issues can be addressed. We have the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and the Standing Committee on National Defence. Let us use the tools already available to us instead of just empty rhetoric.

• (1635)

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal member said that the government will be there for the Afghan people. The problem is not that it is there

now; the problem is that it was not there for Afghans. He said this is a matter of life and death, which is true. I know people in this situation who were killed. I helped one couple, that last ones to get on a flight out of that airport to come to Canada, but someone else lost their daughter.

I would also like to point out that the government announced that 40,000 people could come to Canada while it simultaneously closed its embassy. It therefore could not help those people. Was the government so concerned about and preoccupied by the election that it could not help and save lives?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge my friend from the opposition, with whom I had the opportunity to work on a private member's bill.

He asked a very simple question, but life is rarely so simple, and simplistic solutions rarely work in complex situations. We saw a very unusual situation with the fall of the Afghan government and the return of the Taliban, which very few serious people saw coming.

We made a firm commitment. Our National Defence staff, security forces, and diplomats are working very hard and are moving heaven and earth to make sure that we honour our commitment to those who helped us when the Canadian Forces were there.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my Liberal colleague whether, despite the comments he made about the Taliban, which we all share, his government is prepared to talk, discuss and negotiate with the Taliban in order to facilitate, or even speed up, the process. It is urgent—there are 35,000 people that we want to bring to the country. I am waiting for his response.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, again, I want to thank and commend my friend from the Bloc Québécois.

I can easily answer his question: The answer is yes. The government is already doing that. We are working with the Taliban government to ensure that we can safely repatriate these Afghans who want to leave and settle in Canada. These discussions are currently under way.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question for the parliamentary secretary is this. Would the government be willing to waive the refugee determination requirement for Afghan refugees, as it has done under the Syrian refugee initiative?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Vancouver is asking an important question. I do not have an answer for her at this time, but I can assure her that I will raise her question to get that answer. We all want the same thing: to provide help to the Afghans swiftly and effectively.

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Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and his commitment to this very important file. I agree that the work that needs to be done does not require a whole new committee. I would like his thoughts on what the next steps should be. How do we achieve this in a non-partisan way?

• (1640)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Milton and commend him on the quality of his French. He has worked very hard these past two years, and I congratulate him for the progress he has made.

As members of Parliament, we have an obligation to deal with this issue in a non-partisan way, especially when discussing matters of life and death. The best way to achieve this objective is to work with the existing House committees, such as the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, the Standing Committee on National Defence, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration—

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Kenora, Canada-U.S. Relations; the hon. member for Vancouver East, Housing; the hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country, Employment.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your role; it is good to see you sitting in the chair.

As this is my first speech in the 44th Parliament, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Scarborough Centre for placing their trust in me once again to be their strong voice in Ottawa. I will work hard every day to be worthy of their trust and to bring the issues they care about to the government and to the House of Commons.

I would also like to thank all my campaign team and volunteers. While the COVID environment did present some challenges, their hard work and dedication never cease to amaze me and their energy keeps me going on the longest days. I thank them.

I thank my family, my husband Salman and my sons Umaid and Usman, for their continued support in my political journey.

I would like to focus my remarks today on the immigration aspects of the crisis in Afghanistan and what we can do to ensure as many people as possible who are in need are brought safely to Canada and to ensure they are able to settle safely here with their families and build a new life in peace and prosperity.

I am a firm believer in learning lessons, so what we do in the future can be improved. A post-mortem of the entirety of Canada's mission to Afghanistan, not just a few select years, would be a valuable exercise to the benefit of Canada's foreign policy and international aid and development programs.

I would point out that, especially from an immigration perspective, what is happening in Afghanistan is an ongoing crisis. People

need help right now. Our focus should be on how we can finish the job and get those who need our help to safety.

Let us first acknowledge the progress that has been made to date.

More than 4,000 Afghans have already arrived in Canada and are being resettled, and some 415 individuals have already arrived through Canada's humanitarian program, which targets the resettlement of particularly vulnerable Afghan nationals, including women leaders, human rights advocates, LGBTI individuals, persecuted religious and ethnic minorities, and journalists.

Officials at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada are working day and night to process Afghan refugee applications and issue visas. More than 9,000 applications, under the special immigration measures to resettle Afghan nationals who assisted the Government of Canada, along with their family members, have been processed. Officials are doing all they can to stay in contact with and support those who remain in Afghanistan and wish to resettle to Canada.

The biggest issue remains the Taliban's control of the region, which makes it very difficult to get people safely out of the country. We call on the Taliban to allow safe passage for those who wish to leave.

The people-to-people ties between Canada and Afghanistan are strong, built over the length of our long-term deployment there, as we did our best to help secure the country and provide development and opportunity for all people of Afghanistan.

My community of Scarborough Centre has strong ties to Afghanistan, from business to cultural to personal, and they have watched the events of this past year with deep interest and keen worry. I hear every day from my constituents on this issue. Many are separated from their families, with siblings or parents in Afghanistan. They worry for their safety and for their future, especially the women and girls, for whom, as we all know, life is very challenging and very dangerous under Taliban rule.

Canada and our allies must continue to be clear with the Taliban that they must show respect for basic rights, especially for women and girls. We must find ways to support women and girls in the region who need our help. With winter approaching, it is critical the international community works collectively to meet the needs of vulnerable Afghans.

My constituents want to know how their family members can be brought to safety. They want to know what Canada is doing to help them.

• (1645)

Canada has committed to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada. Given the challenges I have outlined, that will be a challenging goal. I certainly welcome all suggestions and ideas for how meeting this goal can be accelerated so the families in my riding and across Canada can be reunited and their loved ones brought to safety.

Already many Afghan refugees have been resettled in the greater Toronto area, and I want to thank local organizations such as the Afghan Women's Organization and Agincourt Community Services Association that have been working to support and welcome them.

A few weeks ago, I met with a group of recently arrived Afghan refugees. As members can imagine, they are excited and relieved to be here, but they also worry about extended family left behind and what the future holds for them in Canada. We need to ensure they are supported and get answers to their questions and we need to ensure lessons learned from the Syrian refugee resettlement are applied in this program.

I should note that at the heart of both of these programs is the government-assisted refugees program. A lot of attention is paid to privately sponsored refugees, and this is a great Canadian innovation that sees community groups come together to sponsor and support refugee families for their first year in Canada. It is an important part of our immigration and refugee system, but it cannot be our entire refugee program, which is what the Conservatives proposed just a few months ago in their election platform when they promised to do away with government-assisted refugees.

A look at refugee data shows that government-assisted refugees tend to be the more vulnerable, the more at risk, the more in need of Canada's help. To turn our backs on them is to turn our backs on those that most need Canada's help, and that is not what Canada should be about. The refugees we are helping in Afghanistan are government-assisted refugees and they need Canada's help. Therefore, my focus is on how we can help make the Afghan refugee program a success and bring these people who need our help here as quickly as we can.

I do not oppose the idea of a special committee, but I think these are certainly issues the immigration and refugee committee could take up and bring its expertise to bear by bringing in witnesses from those familiar with the situation on the ground to organizations focused on resettlement to provide actionable recommendations to the government.

What gives me pause is what seems like a very broad request for documents, many of which are likely to contain information that could compromise national security, military tactics, intelligence sources and methods, and the identity and location of Canadian citizens in Afghanistan or interpreters or contractors who assisted Canada and our allies. I do not see how this would help Canada bring more Afghan refugees to Canada. My constituents are not asking me for documents; they are asking me to help their families, and this request could potentially put their families in danger.

If we truly want to help the refugees, let us get the politics out of the motion and focus on what really matters here: helping those who need Canada's help.

• (1650)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, the issue is that the government has said it will bring 40,000 Afghans who supported us in our armed forces and helped our efforts in Afghanistan, but only 10% of them are here. We do not even know where that number of 40,000 comes from or whether it covers the number of people who have to get out of the country. It

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could be more than that. However, it is a number that the government picked and there has been no debate about it, so that could be the kind of question that would be asked at a committee like this.

Earlier today, one of my colleagues from the Liberal Party said that we should be talking about what was happening today or what may happen in the future, not the past. One of the reasons we study history is so we do not make the mistakes of the past, which is very important in this discussion. Sure, we want to do things in the future, but the government has had a lot of time to do those things for the future. We waited and waited until the House resumed, because it was our first opportunity to have a debate like this and to have a committee set up—

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

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for all the work we did together on the immigration committee in the last Parliament.

I agree with the member that it has been slow. We need to do better, and better is always possible, but I want to remind him that the department and the officials continue to process applications for Afghan refugees day in and day out. They have mobilized the entire global network to process the visas and issue them on an urgent basis. There are 4,000 Afghan refugees here. Another 500 will be coming this year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, as a result of this debate, my thoughts are also with our veterans and our troops who served in Afghanistan. Several years later, I find that the message being sent gives them the impression that their mission was futile.

What message should we be sending these military members who, in many cases, sacrificed their lives or put their mental health at risk? How can we help them and ensure that they have support so their sacrifices are not forgotten?

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, yes, we need to thank the people who helped the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Canada and Afghanistan have had a long-lasting relationship, with the long deployment, and many Afghan people have been there for our Canadian troops. It is very important that we continue our work and ensure that we bring the vulnerable people here, the people who have helped, as well as those people, especially Afghan women and girls, whose situation is really terrible. We should all figure out ways in which we can do better to bring more people here as soon as possible, so they can start a new life in Canada.

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Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, without a doubt, the hon. member for Scarborough Centre is well connected in her community. As she expressed and hearing the stories from folks who were being settled through this process, they will know the dire consequences their relatives, friends and families are being left with back home.

I think back to the government's attempts to settle 25,000 Syrian refugees. As a former city councillor, one who was working on the settlement side in Hamilton, I have grave concerns about the lack of adequate planning and perhaps supports for local communities in settling these purported 40,000 refugees.

My question for the hon. member is this. What is her government doing to ensure that, while these lofty promises are being floated out there, particularly at election times, local cities and municipalities are going to be adequately equipped and funded to ensure those who do make it here are accounted for?

• (1655)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, I have been a member and the chair of the citizenship and immigration committee. We have done important work in that committee to ensure that the settlement agencies that do the important work to settle refugees here, as well as new immigrants, have all the supports they need to help. I have seen first-hand the work of those agencies in my riding. I will continue to work with them to ensure they have the support and help they need to serve new immigrants.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, who is someone I am honoured to serve with. As a veteran, he has done numerous missions and tours in Afghanistan and I am looking forward to his comments later. I know that sometimes he can be a little “rough” around the edges, but we are looking forward to his comments.

I am glad to be able to speak to the motion we brought forward on this day of supply, which is asking to set up a special committee to look into the crisis in Afghanistan and get our friends, allies and citizens out of Afghanistan after it fell to the Taliban; to find out what lessons we can learn so we do not make these mistakes again; and to find out why this was not made a higher priority by the government.

It should not have been a surprise to the Prime Minister or anyone in cabinet. We know that on May 2, 2019, CSIS presented a report that said that if the United States decided to withdraw from Afghanistan, the Taliban would recapture the entire country, including the city of Kabul, in very short order. That report was in 2019. Then, of course, Donald Trump, when he was still president of the United States, announced on February 29, 2020 that he was officially withdrawing and winding down U.S. operations in Afghanistan. Of course, the coalition that Canada had been a part of in Afghanistan would not be able to be sustained without the U.S. in theatre.

The question becomes this: If CSIS warned, based upon sound intelligence, that Afghanistan would be quickly captured by the Taliban, and Donald Trump announced the withdrawal in February 2020, why did the government not act? Instead of planning for the withdrawal and making sure we got our interpreters out before the

country started to fall under the control of the brutal Taliban and the harsh conditions that exist there today, we could have been moving people out. Instead, the Prime Minister planned for a selfish and unnecessary, \$650-million election. That is despicable.

Many of us on this side of the House and even members on the other side were getting contacted by veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces. They were pleading with all of us to get their friends who were over there out. These were people they served alongside, who supported them as interpreters and drivers and made sure their base camps and forward-operating locations were safe and secure. They served together. They were a team. We lost 158 Canadian soldiers, and over 40,000 served. Our Canadian veterans who served developed great relationships and considered their allies to be brothers and sisters in arms. To then see the government turn its back on these allies was so disheartening.

The true heroes throughout all of this have been those veterans. I would like to mention guys like Corey Shelson, Tim and Jamie Laidler, General David Fraser and General Denis Thompson, among others who have really done yeoman's service in organizing and getting people out of Afghanistan. In particular, because I and my office have been working closely with him, I want to highlight Robin Rickards from Thunder Bay.

Robin has had multiple tours in Afghanistan. He started contacting me over six years ago regarding getting these interpreters out of the country. Under the previous Conservative government, we had a special immigration program for Afghanistan interpreters. It got filled up; people quit applying and it wound down. We were able to get a few more out after that, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned this morning in his speech. However, the reality is that people like Corey just would not quit, and they forewarned the government and us as members of Parliament. I know the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River worked incredibly closely with Robin as well.

• (1700)

Every time any of us contacted cabinet, whether it was the minister of defence, the minister of immigration, the minister of foreign affairs or the Prime Minister himself, it seemed to fall on deaf ears. Nothing seemed to happen until the fall of Kabul in the middle of a federal election.

These veterans, through the Veterans Transition Network and many other NGOs, raised money to fund the safe houses. Generous donations came in from veterans, current serving members and Canadians at large. They chartered flights, bought airline tickets and continued to build both the air bridge and the land bridge to safe havens for those who were left behind. Of course, because they were relying on generosity and because things started to heat up so desperately, the money for those safe houses started to run out. On behalf of those veterans, a number of us asked in this House and in writing if the Government of Canada would give the organizations \$5 million, so that we could keep the safe houses open and keep those interpreters and their families, the hundreds of people who were in the safe houses, safe in Kabul. The government callously said no. Five million dollars is a drop in the bucket around this place, and it would have gone a long way to protecting Afghan interpreters who were waiting to be processed as applicants to come to Canada.

The people in the Veterans Transition Network really did a lot of heavy lifting. They were part of the group that identified and made sure that the people making claims to come to Canada as refugees had served with our forces and had all their documents in order. They were reaching out to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to get all the applications processed, but unfortunately all of that kind of went up in smoke when the fall of Kabul happened. We saw the complete chaos that occurred at the Kabul airport.

Since that time in the middle of August, when we saw the chaos and craziness that happened, our allies, like Germany and the United States, have continued to move out the refugees and citizens at risk, as well as interpreters and support staff to their armed forces, without any problem. They have been chartering flights in and out of Kabul non-stop. That is why the United States is already sitting on something like over 40,000 refugees in the mainland.

However, we are not seeing that happen here. Why is the Government of Canada not chartering those flights or at least making sure there are tickets on commercial aircraft for all those applicants who are sitting there waiting in Kabul or Kandahar to get out?

The Liberals talk a good game. We see the minister of immigration almost throw his shoulder out every question period here, patting himself on the back for getting 4,000 Afghan refugees out so far. The Canadian Armed Forces identified over 23,600, yet IRCC has processed only 14,675 and there are only 4,000 here so far. That means there are 9,600 Afghan refugees, interpreters, LGBTQ community members, and ethnic and religious minorities like the Hindi, the Sikh and the Hazaras, all sitting there waiting to be processed. They made the applications, yet red tape seems to be holding them back.

I have to thank my staff. They have been dealing directly with Afghan refugees, with our interpreters and our friends and allies, including Canadian citizens who are still trapped in Afghanistan. Some of them had to leave Kabul when the safe houses closed. They went back to their homes only to find that they had either been burnt down or were being lived in by the Taliban themselves. There were actually notices issued to arrest them. I know some went back, saying, "If I turn myself in, maybe they won't kill my family and they'll execute only me."

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We have so many stories of people who served with our forces, who served as journalists and who have been left behind and given up on Canada. That is not the Canada we are supposed to be. We are supposed to be the Canada that, because of the great work of our men and women in uniform who go out there and right the evils in the world, stands up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. Those people sacrificed blood and treasure in serving Canada. Let us support our veterans and let us bring home those Afghan allies who served with us.

● (1705)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am someone who advocated many years ago, when I was in opposition, that we get Afghan translators to Canada, and I do to this very day. I am joined by my Liberal caucus colleagues and all members of this House in recognizing how critically important it is that we open our doors and accept refugees from Afghanistan. There is no doubt about that. We also believe it is absolutely essential that our committees on defence, immigration and foreign affairs deal with this.

Within the motion there are serious concerns about security. There is information that could potentially be harmful for Canada's future and the best interests of real people today. Does the member not have confidence in our standing committees? Why does he feel the Conservatives were unable to negotiate something? It seems to me to be a bit of an easy way out. Can he explain?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, why would we want to split this work up over three committees, when those three committees can be doing other work? We should be having a special committee, as we have done in the past, such as in the previous Parliament, on Canada-China relations. There have been other committees in the past, like the special committee on the war in Afghanistan, which operated through Parliament the entire time and was outside the Standing Committee on National Defence.

This would be a short-term committee to look at how the government failed and how we can correct it so we can get better in the future. If the member does not want to learn from the mistakes his government has made, I can see that. He has always been in here as an apologist, trying to orchestrate the cover-ups that are so important to the front benches.

If the member is sincere about saving lives, let us get this committee to work. Let us find out what is happening and make sure we can come up with ideas on how to go forward.

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Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the truth of the matter is that this problem has been escalated between successive governments. The Harper administration, from 2009 to 2011, did offer an immigration stream for Afghan interpreters. However, with that program there were very specific requirements. First, they had to have served 12 months before they could qualify for that measure, and second, it applied only if they had served from 2007 onward. That is to say that if they served before 2007, they did not qualify. If they served 360 days as opposed to 365 days, they did not qualify. It was reported that two out of three of those who applied were refused.

Successive governments have failed Afghan interpreters and collaborators who supported our military. With that in mind, would the Conservatives agree that in going forward we need to take responsibility for past actions and look for solutions to the problem, including waiving the refugee determination requirements?

• (1710)

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, the member from the NDP seems to forget that our Afghan interpreter refugee program was fully subscribed. People used it, and at the end it was just a trickle that was coming in. People who came here were proud to be coming to Canada. They became citizens and they sponsored their families to get to Canada as well.

I am very proud of that program. I am proud of our forces and the job they did in fighting for women, girls and those who could not stand up for themselves in Afghanistan, in liberating villages and in fighting the tough fights in and around Kandahar. We need to be there with those veterans now as they are trying to get their friends and family out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, it seems to me that there is currently a lack of leadership from the government on the Afghanistan issue. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I could go on forever.

If there had been leadership from the Liberals, the minister of defence, the minister of citizenship and immigration and refugees, the minister of foreign affairs and especially the Prime Minister himself, we would not be in this situation today. If we had not had that unnecessary and expensive election that was all about the Prime Minister's hubris, we would have had boots on the ground sooner, equipment in the airfield and people moved to safety.

There were so many controls put on the special forces in Kabul trying to get Afghan refugees out that they were not outside the wire. The government would not let them outside the wire. The Ukrainian special forces went and got a bunch of Canada-bound refugees and took them to Ukraine.

That is leadership.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, considering this is my first speech here in the House in this new Parliament, I want to thank the constituents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for giving me the privilege and honour of rep-

resenting them here once again. I thank my family, all my volunteers and everybody who helped get me back here to the House of Commons. It truly is a privilege.

Before getting into the details of this motion, I want to thank all the Daves, Coreys, Pauls, Eleanors, retired generals and so many NGOs and charities that have been working behind the scenes on this issue for months now. This includes the Afghan Strategic Evaluation Team, the Veterans Transition Network, the Journalists for Human Rights, the Afghan Canadian interpreters, Building Markets, Aman Lara and Raven Rae Resources.

I also want to thank a former colleague of mine, Greg from Nova Scotia. He has a full-time job running his own business and he comes home at night and spends upward of five to six hours talking to his contacts on the ground in Afghanistan helping get Afghans and Afghan Canadians across the border, facilitating visas and getting them out of that country and to safety. I thank all of these people.

I want to address why this motion and this committee is so important. There are two key reasons and we have mentioned these already during the debate. First is we have to learn what went right and what went wrong. Canada cannot make the same mistakes in the future.

As I mentioned earlier, it is great to identify what went wrong, but if someone does not learn from it and apply it in the future, it is all a waste of time. This is key for any future diplomatic, humanitarian or military mission, regardless of where it is in the world, as we deal with risks. More importantly, we need to do this so that we can help those Afghans who are still in dire need of our support, and are being actively hunted by the Taliban. Their lives are at risk.

To provide some background to the members here in the House who maybe do not know who I am, I spent over 25 years in the military. I spent two deployments in Afghanistan. The first was in 2007 in active combat, where I depended on these interpreters daily in order to communicate, understand the cultural differences and do my job to help give them a better life.

The biggest thing I remember from that tour, more than anything, is talking to the local Afghans. They are no different from any one of us. People around the world are all the same. They just want to live in peace and prosperity, put food on the table and allow their children to have a better life than them. Under the Taliban, women and girls cannot go to school. We should always be fighting against regimes like this, no matter where they are in the world.

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My next deployment was in 2012. I did eight months over there with the Canadian contribution to the NATO training mission. We were actually trying to put the hard work in to develop the institutional capacity of that country. Again, it is impossible to do without cultural advisers and interpreters.

We took one of the regional military training centres in Kabul during that deployment and we turned it into a language school. Not to teach them English, but to teach them Pashto and Dari because a lot of the recruits coming through their military or police forces could not read or write to a grade 3 level. It is hard to fight corruption, fraud and other challenges that Afghanistan faces if one cannot communicate.

We had many Afghans who were helping in NATO missions, helping Canadians and helping Canada accomplish what we wanted to do in that country and now we are failing them.

The Taliban are brutal and I am going to get into a specific example momentarily. Again, as my hon. colleague who spoke just before me, the former shadow minister for defence said, this was predicted; we knew this was coming. The former minister of national defence was briefed on the security situation and the probable Taliban resurgence tied to the U.S. withdrawal over two years ago. Former president Trump gave that deadline and indicated that the U.S. were going to withdraw. This was reiterated by President Biden. The Liberal MP, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River raised these concerns two years ago with the Liberal government.

• (1715)

Let us go back to some of the situations here. I am going to read from a national media article that I wrote on July 22, months before Kabul fell:

Being able to communicate with a population is essential when you are conducting military operations. Without this, it would be next to impossible to ensure the safety of not only the men and women on the operation, but it would have had major consequences for the outcome of the mission.

This is why the local interpreters, cultural advisors, and support staff in Afghanistan were so essential to Canada's mission.

They enabled us to be more effective, and quite frankly, without them, there would have been fewer Canadians who would have come home.

During my two tours in Afghanistan, I had first-hand experience with these individuals.

In 2007, on combat operations in Kandahar, these Afghans provided the essential real-time monitoring of Taliban radio chatter that provided my combat team invaluable warning of impending attacks, ambushes and insurgent movement. During shuras (meetings with Afghan elders/leadership), they allowed us to communicate, and more importantly understand the cultural nuances that enabled trust and situational awareness. They took on this vital role before, during and post-combat.

I'll remind the Canadian government, and all Canadians, that the Taliban does not follow international law. During my deployment in 2007, my combat team escorted an Afghan National Army company to Ghorak to reinforce an Afghan National Police outpost. Just prior to our arrival, solely because the boy delivered bread to the police, a local eight-year-old boy was hung, and his father beheaded by the Taliban. While talking with my own interpreters at that time, they shared their own concerns that this is why many used aliases and always kept their faces covered during interactions in order to protect themselves and their families. I share this horrific tragedy to highlight why action must be taken immediately to bring the interpreters, support staff and their families to Canada.

These Afghans faced danger every day in order to help Canada and were willing to give their youth, and their lives for our shared goal of a freer and more prosperous Afghanistan.

These Afghans stepped up for Canada. Now, in their time of need, Canada needs to step up for them.

To get to the motion at hand and why this committee is so important, I am going to actually offer a bunch of solutions that this committee should focus on, providing that we get the support for it today. They have come from these NGOs, charities, people and former veterans who are working behind the scenes, as they were shared with me.

Priority one is to stand up an interdepartmental task force focused on safeguarding and evacuating eligible Afghans remaining in Afghanistan. Priority must be on having a single leader to run the interdepartmental task force empowered to coordinate and execute this.

The feedback that I have been receiving is that for GAC and IRCC, during the evacuation operations by our Canadian Armed Forces, interdepartmental communications were not working. Additional resources have to be brought to bear. IRCC staff are being overwhelmed and likely experiencing vicarious PTSD because they do not have the policies, support and leadership to solve the problems.

Another thing that this committee could be focused on is application processing as 45% of the applicants that certain NGOs are tracking still have not had their initiating email to IRCC responded to in order to make that application. Only 20% of those who NGOs believe are eligible have been issued IRCC numbers that suggest that they might be successful.

None of the employees that Canadian NGOs are tracking who work in Afghanistan to advance Canada's mission have been successful in their application to come to Canada under the special immigration measures.

The majority of applicants with approved applications do not have passports. A mechanism needs to be put in place to get these people who do not have passports out of Afghanistan. Applying for a passport at this time can result in a family being targeted and killed.

Next, we need to leverage the charities, the NGOs and the veterans. The Canadian government needs to find a way to leverage our partners and our vets to get biometrics into Kabul. This would allow the government and NGOs to move people out of the country directly without having to accumulate them in third countries.

There need to be less restrictive funding parameters. I understand that this funding needs to be tracked but right now it is too bureaucratic, too complicated to get the help needed as mentioned to support these safe houses and more.

In conclusion, we need this special committee. We need to learn what went right and what went wrong and we need to ensure the appropriate urgent actions are taken by the government. These Afghans stepped up for Canada. Now, in their time of need, Canada needs to step up for them.

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● (1720)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that was an excellent speech. I would also like to acknowledge that of all of us, 338 in this House, likely no one has as much experience or perspective on this issue. I want to thank the hon. member for adding to that discourse today. I hear what he said regarding the need for a committee. I also appreciate that he did not just stand up and talk about problems; he also presented quite a lot of solutions.

I also heard my colleague and friend, and others on the opposite side, talk about how responsive various ministers have been and they have appreciated that access.

Since this is an emergency, since we need to move fast, since lives are at stake and we all know how long parliamentary committees take to actually get work done, how is this the most proactive and urgent way to find solutions like the ones that he presented? Why is a parliamentary committee the fastest way to get urgent work done?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, this committee would be there not only for the urgency and to make sure we identify key ways to move it forward, these are measures that have been suggested to the government already, but are not getting traction. By us shining a light on the problem through the committee process, we are going to attract that.

As I mentioned, another issue is about learning for the future. If we do not learn from what went right and what went wrong and we do not capture that properly and understand where the challenges are across departments, we are doomed to make the same mistake on a future mission and we are going to have a heck of a lot more trouble getting those interpreters and foreign nationals to work with us in future missions.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague with whom I served on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I have a lot of respect for him. His speech had substance and helped us truly understand what is going on and what things are like there. His speech was quite moving.

We learned earlier that 500 Afghans are expected to arrive in the coming days. Does he think that the Canadian government could welcome more than just 500 people every once in a while?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

The short answer is yes. It was already brought up by previous speakers. Our Globemasters have the capacity to bring out hundreds of people per flight. I think the record was almost 800 on one flight alone, so the capacity exists to get these Afghans to Canada in a much more expedited fashion. This is all about risk assessment. We are not getting them directly out of Afghanistan anymore because the Taliban controls everything. However, as we work with the other solutions that I propose, we can definitely bring more of them to Canada faster.

● (1725)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his service to this country and indeed all hon. members in this House who have served our military prior to their service as members of Parliament.

Given what the member has described in terms of our moral obligation to the Afghans on the ground who served alongside our military throughout operations, I appreciated that he provided interventions on what immediate measures can be taken by the government based on what we have learned. Has the member determined, based on his subject matter expertise, which countries around the world involved in the Afghan war serve as a gold standard for how they supported and ultimately protected those Afghans who served in their respective nations and if so, which nation should we be looking to and which immediate next steps should we take, learning from them?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, that is a great question, but unfortunately I do not have the right answer. However, it is definitely something we should be looking at and comparing ourselves to. It is truly important and the member asks a valid question that we should be focused on. It is another issue that this committee could focus on. Ultimately, as some of the previous speakers have stated, the U.S. has some 40,000 Afghans out now, so other countries are obviously doing a lot better than we are.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, since this is my first opportunity, I want to congratulate you on being appointed Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. I also thank you for letting your name stand and running for Speaker, and, in doing so, contributing to this democratic exercise in the House.

Again, since this is my first opportunity to do so, I want to warmly thank the people of my riding of Montarville who put their trust in me once again and who solidified my majority with 1,500 votes more than I received in 2019. I am very honoured that the people of Montarville have put their trust in me.

That was my 12th election campaign and 11th victory overall. Six of those campaigns and wins were at the federal level. I am particularly proud to participate in this Parliament with all of the members here. I congratulate each and every one of you.

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I would like to warmly thank the members of the Bloc Québécois in Montarville, especially the members of the election committee and the volunteers who worked hard to achieve the outcome that we did. Finally, I would, of course, like to thank my family, without whom I would not be able to do this extremely demanding job. I do not think I have to tell any of you that it is a huge challenge for our loved ones, our family members and our friends. I think we should be grateful for the sacrifices they make to allow us to be here and to represent the people of our respective ridings.

In fact, there is no better introduction to today's debate than to talk about the election campaign. During the election campaign and in the days that followed, all the immigration issues in our respective ridings were put on hold because the government was in the process of extricating itself after the gross mismanagement of the situation in Afghanistan, which is what we are talking about today.

The government delayed in taking action and then went into panic mode and dealt with the situation in a haphazard way in the middle of the election campaign. It imposed extremely bureaucratic measures on people who wanted to get out of Afghanistan and who were in the most dire straits. It was an absolute disaster. That is for sure.

While the UN Security Council was calling an emergency meeting to consider what was happening in Afghanistan and while Prime Minister Boris Johnson was recalling the British Parliament, what was the Prime Minister of Canada doing? He was calling an election on the very day Kabul fell. That is how seriously the Canadian Prime Minister took what was happening. As the international community was mobilizing, the best thing the Canadian Prime Minister could come up with was to call an election.

Of course, that led to a number of problems. We have been talking about it since this morning, we are still talking about it, and I imagine we are going to be talking about it for quite some time. Again today, the Prime Minister is saying, "We will be there". However, think about the Canadians still stuck in Afghanistan in full violation of their constitutional right to return to Canada and our Afghan allies, without whom our armed forces could not have done their work and whose lives are being threatened. What good does it do them to hear the Prime Minister say, "We will be there"? Where was the Canadian government when these individuals needed it this summer?

• (1730)

What is rather fascinating is that the government seemed to be taken by surprise by what was happening even though the withdrawal had been announced a year earlier. The Taliban did move quickly, perhaps more quickly than anticipated by the West, but the withdrawal had been scheduled for August 31. It was no surprise because everyone knew that western forces would withdraw on August 31. Why was there such chaos when the withdrawal had been announced in advance?

The confusing communications by the government in the first hours after the fall of Kabul clearly demonstrated that the government had made absolutely no plans for August 31.

As is often the case when political crises or natural disasters occur, the Canadian government moved quickly to close its embassy

after the fall of Kabul, literally leaving Canadian citizens still in the country in the lurch and in the dark.

The Canadian evacuation ended on August 26, or a few days before the August 31 deadline. We wonder why the government was in such a hurry to end an evacuation operation when some countries, such as Mexico, were still there after Canada left. Why was Mexico able to maintain a presence in the country while Canada decided it was time to decamp?

We heard today from the Minister of Foreign Affairs that we need to learn from what happened so that we can do better. This brings us to the heart of the motion we have before us today. How can we learn from what happened so that we can do better in the future?

The Conservative Party, the official opposition, is proposing a way to do that through the motion tabled by the Leader of the Opposition, without any prior discussion. That is in keeping with how the Conservatives tend to do things and what they did with the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, or CACN, right after the 2019 election. I guess the Conservatives have done all they thought they could do with CACN because, oddly enough, they are not interested in that committee at all anymore.

However, the threat regarding the unlawful detention of the two Michaels and Meng Wanzhou's situation in Canada has now been removed. We are at a crossroads. We now have an opportunity to realign Canada's policy on China, and this is when the Conservatives choose not to continue CACN's work. I was very surprised by that because my Conservative colleagues told me informally that they wanted to do so. Now the Conservatives have come to us with a new gimmick, or what I would venture to call, to quote myself, a "convoluted hare-brained scheme", with this much-vaunted committee on the situation in Afghanistan.

I read the motion very carefully and I would say that the only quasi-good thing I can say about the Conservative proposal is that it prevents us from working in silos.

Since this morning, the Liberals have been asking us whether the Standing Committee on National Defence, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, and the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration could not address this. Yes, they could, but the problem is that only one of those three committees will do it and some important aspects of the problem could fall through the cracks if we leave this to just one committee.

Perhaps one of the only merits of the Conservative motion is that it ensures that we do not work in a vacuum or in silos and that we have a special committee to address this situation and allow us to get to the bottom of things, but what are we trying to get to the bottom of? This is about picking at a scab that the Liberal government caused. As we know, the situation was a fiasco.

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Now, we can try to understand why in order to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

● (1735)

What we want to know is how we can get the more than 1,000 Canadian nationals who are stuck in Afghanistan out of there. How can we help our Afghan allies who are still stuck in Afghanistan and whose lives are at risk every day? How can we support the Afghan people who are threatened with starvation? What can we do for the women and girls who are once again under the control of the Taliban fundamentalist government? This is what we want to know, but there is no mention of any of that in the Conservatives' motion.

I want to go through the details of the motion's introduction. Several aspects of the introduction seem to indicate that the intent is to discuss the government's so-called lack of "contingency planning" and "subsequent efforts to evacuate", but it makes no mention of the humanitarian crisis that is developing in Afghanistan, which is something that we should be considering.

In point (b), the motion gives the whips of each party 24 hours to submit a list of members, which is not a problem. Points (a), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) are acceptable. We do not have a problem there. The same goes for points (h), (i) and (j).

However, in paragraph (k) they draw up a list of ministers they would like to call before the committee, probably to put them on the hot seat and score some political points. The Conservatives got us accustomed to that during the last Parliament. Next are paragraphs (l) and (m).

Paragraph (m) is quite fascinating because it asks for a whole series of documents without knowing if they are the least bit relevant. Then it goes on to say that the government has one month to produce these documents. What is the date today? It is December 7. It says one month, which means that the government would have to provide all these documents by January 7. Our Conservative friends figure that the people at Foreign Affairs are going to spend December 24, 25, 26 and 31, as well as January 1 and 2, working on this to satisfy them, otherwise there would be a scandal, contempt of Parliament and then a question of privilege.

We would be hard-pressed to find a better example of political theatre by the Conservative Party. I think our Conservative friends may have had good intentions, but in reality, the motion is riddled with very clear indications that they wanted to make this an extremely partisan exercise.

As I said, what we are interested in is finding out what is going to happen to Afghans facing famine, to the women and girls who are once again being controlled by an Islamist government, to our Afghan allies who risk death every day they remain in that country and to Canadian nationals who are still stuck in Afghanistan. That is what we are interested in.

That is why we asked ourselves how we could amend this motion to make it acceptable, not just a Conservative smoke and mirrors show. As it stands, it would create a committee focused solely on making political hay by picking at the wounds of the past. How can we change it to create a committee that will really do useful

work by looking at future-focused solutions, making recommendations to the government and learning from what happened so we can do better, which was the hope the minister shared this afternoon.

Canadian nationals and allies are still stuck in Afghanistan. The people there are facing one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent years. We must take rapid, constructive action. We have to work together.

● (1740)

While some members of the House have yet to understand the message sent by the voters of Canada and Quebec, they need only look at the results of the last election. The House of Commons ended up with more or less the same composition as the previous Parliament, which was dissolved on August 15. In other words, the voters were reminding us of the mandate they gave us in 2019 to work together. It is possible for us to do what voters asked, what they elected us to do, which is to work together?

It is therefore a little surprising that the Conservatives would move such a motion at the beginning of this new Parliament, when the people have told us they want us to work together to come up with solutions, not to try to find every possible and unimaginable opportunity to score political points.

In that spirit of collaboration, we proposed an amendment to the Conservatives, one that we also submitted to our friends in the other political parties. The Conservatives have considered our proposed amendment, and I believe we are close to a solution that will allow us to embark on a very productive process. At least that is my hope.

If we want to talk about the past, I respectfully submit to our Conservative friends that they should not throw stones because they are living in a glass house in some respects. When the Conservative government ended the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, it was also asked at that time to evacuate Afghan interpreters, and it did not.

Had the evacuation gone ahead at that time, when our hands were not tied and we could have taken action, we probably would not be in the situation we find ourselves in today. If the Conservatives decide to pick at the wounds of the past, they could be seen in an equally bad light. The Conservatives and the Liberals must stop doing this and try to find positive solutions to move forward.

I heard my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman say how proud he was of the Canadian troops in Afghanistan. I agree with him. Having been a member of the armed forces in the past, I can say that we can all be very proud of the work of the Canadian military in Afghanistan.

That said, it is absolutely tragic that 158 of our own lost their lives and many more returned with permanent physical and psychological injuries only to see those they tried to overthrow by intervening in that country return to power.

I would like to move an amendment to the Conservative motion. I move:

That the motion be amended as follows:

(a) by adding, after the words “other Canadian organizations”, the following: “, and that the special committee conduct its work with the primary objective of assessing the humanitarian assistance to be put in place by Canada to assist the Afghan people”; and

(b) by replacing paragraph (m) with the following: “the committee shall determine which documents are necessary to complete its study and issue its recommendations, provided that,

(i) these documents shall be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, in both official languages, within such time as the committee deems reasonable in the course of its study,

(ii) a copy of the documents shall also be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel in both official languages, in accordance with the committee’s instructions for the production of the requested documents, with any proposed redaction which, in the government’s opinion, could reasonably be expected (A) to compromise national security, military tactics or strategy of the armed forces of Canada or an allied country, or intelligence sources or methods, or (B) to reveal the identity or location of any Canadian citizen in Afghanistan or of any interpreter, contractor or other Afghan individual who had assisted the Canadian Armed Forces or other Canadian organizations,

(iii) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall notify the Speaker, who shall forthwith inform the House whether he is satisfied the requested documents were produced as the committee ordered,

(iv) the Speaker shall cause the documents, as redacted pursuant to the committee’s instructions, to be laid upon the table and, after being tabled, they shall stand referred to the committee,

(v) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall discuss with the committee, at an in camera meeting, to be held within two weeks of the documents being tabled, whether he agrees with the redactions proposed by the government pursuant to subparagraph (ii),

(vi) the committee may, after hearing from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, pursuant to subparagraph (v), accept the proposed redactions or, reject some or all the proposed redactions and request the production of those unredacted documents in the manner to be determined by the committee”.

● (1745)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion, or in the case that he or she is not present, consent may be given or denied by the House leader, the deputy House leader, the whip or the deputy whip of the sponsor’s party.

Since the sponsor is not present in the chamber, I ask the deputy whip of the official opposition if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, we concur and accept the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The amendment is in order.

Before I go to questions and comments, the Minister of National Revenue is rising on a point of order.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL C-3—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) and 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code. Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

● (1750)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, we heard a speech from the Bloc Québécois that was a nice jump between different planets, but at the end of the day, it looks like we landed on planet earth.

Considering the agreement we just had on the amendment submitted from the Bloc Québécois, does the hon. member think the government will support this motion, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I have no idea.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate my colleague for his election victory and his long political career. I also thank him for his military service.

The situation being what it is, we need to focus on the work ahead. It would be reasonable to have this conversation in many standing committees, including citizenship and immigration, foreign affairs, international development, veterans affairs and national defence.

Why do we need to establish a new committee? Is it purely to score political points?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his kind wishes and his question.

I want to say two things in response to that question. First, I believe I said that the amendment we moved sought to remove any attempt to make the motion a partisan exercise.

Second, I also had the opportunity to say that we had a Standing Committee on National Defence, a Standing Committee on Immigration and Citizenship and a Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs.

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However, we must not take a compartmentalized approach to studying this multi-faceted issue. On the contrary, we need a comprehensive perspective to ensure we are not just studying bits and pieces without seeing the big picture. Seeing the tree is all well and good, but it is important to see the forest too, and I believe that is what this committee will enable us to do.

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

I liked it when he said that we should look at whether we can get to the bottom of things. I am not going to look into the past and pick at scabs, but getting to the bottom of things also means asking ourselves whether a military venture like the one Canada was involved in in Afghanistan is really not the predictable story of an inevitable defeat.

Social and cultural change rarely comes at the point of a gun. Military force has not been able to bring about the changes we wanted to see, for example, in girls' education, infrastructure, democratic life and justice in Afghanistan. The late Jack Layton was actually insulted when he asked such questions in the House a few years ago.

Beyond this global vision, in my opinion, this is part of the debate that we must have. Would a committee such as the one proposed, with the amendments suggested, not make it possible to put pressure on the Liberal government to keep this issue in the news and to continue to bring it up, perhaps to speed things up so that the Canadians still stuck there and the allies who helped us, regardless of what we think of this mission, can be repatriated as soon as possible?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I suspect that my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie is aware of the speech I gave to the Parliamentary Assembly to the Council of Europe a few days after the election this September, in which I spoke about the repercussions and implications of the conflict in Afghanistan. I spoke about how it is often very difficult to make fundamental changes through military intervention alone, especially when the countries working to drive out the Taliban are dealing with a cultural context that is so different from their own.

It was clearly a resounding failure, as I pointed out in my speech, when I spoke about how the Taliban that we chased out has now reclaimed power in Afghanistan. We did all of that work and people were killed and injured for virtually no reason. We must reflect on what kind of intervention is possible and on how to intervene in other countries when we want to bring about fundamental social changes.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I cannot help myself, based on the comments by the member, to interject and give a little of a different perspective.

I agree the mission unfortunately failed. We are seeing the repercussions. However, I am still optimistic about those girls and women who had an opportunity for the better part of two decades to get educated and to live in some semblance of peace and prosperity, which they did not have under the Taliban. I am optimistic that they

are going to come back. I predict that one of those individuals who did have that opportunity will be leading Afghanistan in the decades to come.

We cannot just turn our backs, and we cannot avoid getting involved as a nation. Canada is privileged to be one of the few countries in the world that can make a difference. We need to continue to do that. It does need to be a whole-of-government affair. It cannot just be military. We need to continue to focus on helping those who need the help.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague. I think that when we must intervene or are called upon to intervene we must do so in a timely fashion.

I also agree with him that Afghanistan, which is currently under Taliban rule, is not the same Afghanistan that the Taliban controlled when the international coalition intervened. This intervention by the international coalition is likely the reason why the Afghanistan of today is not the same one that the Taliban controlled when we first intervened.

I agree that we should be optimistic, but we must also take a realistic look at which aspects of our intervention were successful and which aspects were more or less appropriate.

Yes, we must intervene, but we must also find the best way to do so.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent speech and for the inspired leadership he is providing in the situation we are dealing with in the House of Commons.

I would like him to tell us what he thinks about the current geopolitical situation in Afghanistan and about the actions of the Americans, the Europeans and the various powers in the world so that we can see what lessons Canada could learn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, my colleague just asked me a really big question. I want to thank him for that.

We can see it with the Russian troops massing on the border with Ukraine. We can see that a number of countries that do not necessarily share our values may have interpreted the coalition's withdrawal from Afghanistan as a sign of weakness and may seek to take advantage of that supposed weakness to impose their views.

We certainly have to pay close attention to what is currently happening in Europe, but we also have to pay close attention to what is happening in Asia. I think one of the biggest challenges facing western countries in the relatively near future is the situation in Taiwan. I actually think the People's Republic of China, like Russia, sees the West as weak and a failure. They may believe they are in a position of strength vis-à-vis the western nations.

We will most certainly have to ask ourselves some serious questions sooner rather than later, perhaps some of the toughest questions we have had to ask ourselves in many years.

What happened and is happening in Afghanistan is bound to have consequences. It is linked to what is happening and likely to happen with the world order that is currently being established.

* * *

• (1800)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, during the debates on Tuesday, December 7 and Wednesday, December 8, 2021, on the business of supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 will please say nay.

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Edmonton Manning, should there be any left today. I will try to keep my comments short.

In 2019, someone said:

Because of their sacrifice, young girls are allowed to freely go to school. Because of their sacrifice, we are safer at home. We will never forget the price these women and men paid.

Of course, that was the hon. former minister of national defence.

The situation in Afghanistan is, in a word, disastrous. I must say it is an honour to be asked to speak on this issue as it has deep personal meaning for me and many of my constituents.

In 2006, three young men lost their lives too soon in Afghanistan. To this day, their families reside in and around Truro, Nova Scotia, which is part of my riding of Cumberland—Colchester. Warrant Officer Frank Mellish is survived by his wife and two children. His parents, Barry and Sandy Mellish, are friends of mine and were also patients at my medical practice. Corporal Chris Reid was a single man and the son of Tom and Angela. When he died, he was their only surviving child. Their other child, a daughter, died in 2002. At a Remembrance Day ceremony this year at the Truro Legion, I had the opportunity to lay a wreath on behalf of the Government of Canada while Tom and Angela laid a wreath as Sil-

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ver Cross parents. Sergeant Darcy Tedford left behind a wife and two daughters. He is the son of Robin and Paulette Tedford, who are also people I know very well in Cumberland—Colchester. They miss their son every day.

They are three Silver Cross families in one small community in Nova Scotia. So, is this personal for me, for many Canadians and certainly for the Afghans left behind? Madam Speaker, you can bet it is.

I spent nine years in uniform as a flight surgeon serving our great nation in Shearwater and Comox, and in Kuwait and Bahrain. My brother continues to serve. He indeed served at the KAF from July 2010 until January 2011.

Despite the significant losses of their sons, these three families are still amazing patriots. They believe in Canada and the work the Canadian Armed Forces was tasked to do in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the withdrawal of the Canadian Forces from Afghanistan has left a bitter taste and indelible stain on our Canadian reputation. Canada is known globally as a nation founded on democracy and human rights. Since the 1960s, Canada has used these principles to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the hope that it would one day enjoy peace and stability.

The story of the descent of Afghanistan into civil war after the withdrawal of international troops should come as no surprise. Sadly, it appears to be a significant retelling of the same tale that happened after the former Soviet Union withdrew from its decades-long war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The Taliban regained control and severely limited civil rights. It would appear that terrorist groups ran rampant, which of course led us to the events of September 11, 2001. The Canadian role in Afghanistan evolved during the time of the conflict. In the early days, we were primarily based as an interdiction force on the seas. Subsequent to this, our air power was tasked to support the efforts on the ocean and soon after forces from JTF 2 were on the ground.

As time rolled on into 2003, we provided support to other nations in Kabul patrolling the western part of the city. Over time, once again the Canadian role changed. In 2005 Taliban activity in Kandahar ramped up and with the Canadians there it became clear that more forces were required on the ground to combat the significant Taliban forces. It has become well known that Canadians involved in this attempt to stem Taliban insurgency were under ever-present danger as they went outside the wire, which sadly brings me back to 2006, at which time Warrant Officer Mellish, Sergeant Tedford and Corporal Reid were killed in action.

All of this has come at a significant cost. There were 158 Canadians who died; countless others have been both physically and mentally changed forever and their families have been significantly affected. The incredible toll this has taken on our soldiers is not well represented by the number of casualties we suffered. This was a war of uncertainty, IEDs and one that now has an ending that has left many soldiers feeling let down by their country.

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• (1805)

In the airlift at the end of the summer of 2021, approximately 3,700 people were evacuated from Kabul airport. One former military member watched on TV as events unfolded. She recognized one person who had worked for the Canadian Forces and returned to school, had become a nurse and then a physician. That man returned to the airport five times into the sewage, wearing a red ball cap, as we have heard previously, to try to stand out. She does not know if he was safely evacuated or was killed. She has received several emails. I will read from a couple. One states:

Hello my dear friend. It is so nice to hear from you as well. No I'm not living in Dubai, I live in Kandahar. Since the U.S. troops pulled out, the Taliban control almost all the Kandahar. It's very dangerous now. Do you remember Farid, the guy who was working with me in shop? They killed him. Today is my 27th day I'm hiding in home. I can't go outside. I've been working in KAF from 2008 till the end of 2013, but not as interpreter. Do you remember I was contractor? I need your help, my friend, to come to Canada. I don't want them to kill me. I have six kids.

Another email from an Afghan still in Kandahar says:

How are you doing? It's happened in Kandahar. They put bombs in house door. The kids' parents are died and this kid is injured. We are living like with animals. They destroyed my beautiful city.

Investing in nations after war is essential to the rebuilding of said nations. Post World War II, Canada remained involved from a military perspective in Germany for 50 years. We now have a robust export to Germany worth \$6 billion annually as of 2020. After seeing the colossal failure of the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the chaos that ensued and given our history in Germany, how could we think that a rapid drawing out of forces without significant support would be or could be successful?

The Liberal government has failed Afghans and Canadians. This summer the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, and our soldiers in Canada's armed forces as well as Afghans who served Canada were at risk. Instead of prioritizing this crisis and taking action, the Prime Minister called an election. As chaos ensued outside Kabul's airport, the Prime Minister was asked whether he regretted announcing the election. His answer was a resounding no.

Many vulnerable people, including female leaders, humanitarian rights defenders, journalists, religious minorities and members from the LGBTQ community were left to hide from the Taliban. Many of them continue to hide to this day, because the Liberal government has brought to Canada less than 10% of the Afghan refugees that it promised. To make matters worse, this October the Liberal government's data breach threatened the lives of several hundred vulnerable Afghans seeking refuge from the Taliban.

Canada's reputation as a compassionate country is now tarnished as our government has turned its back on vulnerable people, but we can change that. The first step is to create an all-party special committee on Canada's Afghanistan response. We need to come together to review what Canada's contingency plan was, its evacuations of Canadians and its efforts to bring Canada-Afghan interpreters and contractors to Canada.

As the Taliban continues to hunt for remaining Afghans who supported Canada during our mission to Afghanistan, now is the time for action. Our Conservative Party is taking action right now. We need the special committee to understand that the errors which were made are not repeated. We must find ways to repatriate our

supporters and restore Canada to its rightful and historic place on the world stage. Make no mistake: This is urgent and lives are at stake.

• (1810)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I genuinely appreciate the member's service and that of other members who have contributed to the debate. I thank them for that.

We hear of so many heart-wrenching examples and the types of things that are happening there that are so horrific. I would not want members to give an impression that there are some members of the House who care less than other members. We all want to make a positive difference in what is happening in Afghanistan.

Back in 2010, Stephen Harper was the prime minister; Michael Ignatieff was the leader of the Liberal Party and Gilles Duceppe was the leader of the Bloc party. The three of them came together to deal with the concerns that we are trying to deal with: the issue of security and confidentiality. An agreement was actually signed off on by those three leaders. Stephen Harper was the prime minister. Does the member believe there should have been some responsibility from the current opposition at least to achieve an agreement or, at the very least, let the standing committee—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, there are provisions in the bill that are about the redaction of important comments. Also, if members care so much, why was an election called? If they have such great emotional support, why do they not simply support this bill?

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to extend a big thanks to all the military men and women here in Canada who put their lives at risk every day to protect us.

With respect to the Afghan mission and the people left behind, we are in a situation where many people are in desperate straits. However, there are a number of measures the government can take to address this issue.

I wonder whether the Conservatives would support a measure that calls for the government to ease the documentation requirements. As it stands right now, people cannot get their visas processed, for example, to get to safety. Would they support easing the measure with respect to the refugee determination requirements?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, I have only been here a short time, and the trust I have for the government to do anything quickly, expeditiously and in good faith is waning very quickly. I am saddened by that. We therefore believe we need to take the bull by the proverbial horns and get the job done ourselves.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to single out another one of our veterans, Trevor Greene, who is enormously brave and was a hero throughout the Afghanistan conflict. He was originally born, as the member for Cumberland—Colchester was, in Sydney, Cape Breton, and moved to Vancouver Island. I am honoured to be his friend. He lives in Nanaimo.

Some members here will recall his name, because he was the soldier who took off his helmet out of respect for village elders and was attacked with an axe to the back of his head in 2006. He is enormously brave and was interviewed around the time the writ was dropped, on August 15, as the Taliban took over Afghanistan. He was enraged that we would be going into an election at that moment.

My question to the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester is whether he is convinced that forming a new committee will get more Afghans to safety than working with the existing committee structure.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, I will keep it short. Yes.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*English*]

The question is on the amendment.

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

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, we request a recorded division.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, December 8 at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on the basis of the discussion I just had with members of the official opposition, I suggest that if you were to canvass the House at this point in time, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:30 p.m., with the understanding that we will wait for the appropriate minister to come before us.

• (1820)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Do we have unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 6:30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just need a couple more minutes to make sure the House is set up. Be-

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cause of COVID, it takes a little longer to set things up, so I apologize for the delay.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I think it is customary at moments like these to begin right away. I wonder if perhaps you might offer some clarification for the House as to the technical problems the clerks are trying to solve.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am waiting for a piece of equipment that will help me to better judge the time. If members can give me a couple of minutes, we are hoping to get everything in order. This will not take away from the time allowed for the debate.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, if the issue is keeping time, I am sure some of us would be very happy to lend our phones to the Chair so that you can begin keeping time. Some of us are quite anxious to start. We have been looking forward to this all day and are just trying to better understand the delay. Perhaps you might enlighten us as to the piece of equipment you require to begin the proceedings.

• (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, we are ready, and as soon as you get the mechanism that you are waiting for, we can move forward. Hopefully that will appease the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): At this point, we are ready to start.

Pursuant to order made Thursday, November 25, the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes in the supplementary estimate (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

[*Translation*]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

[*English*]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2021-22

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes in the supplementary estimates (B), Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair)

The Deputy Chair: Today's debate is a general one on all votes tabled before the House on Friday, November 26. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party. After that we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time, which may be used for both debate and posing questions. Members wishing to use this time to make a speech have a maximum of 10 minutes, which leaves at least five minutes for questions to the minister. When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15-minute period will be used, meaning how much time will be spent on the speech and how much time will be used for questions and answers.

Also, pursuant to order made earlier today, members who wish to share their time with another member shall indicate this to the Chair. When the time is to be used for questions and comments, the Chair will expect the minister's response to reflect approximately the time taken by the question, since this time will be counted in the time originally allotted to the members.

[English]

Pursuant to order made earlier today, the time provided for the debate tonight may be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 16 periods of 15 minutes each.

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

We will now begin tonight's session.

The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to order made Thursday, November 25 consideration in committee of the whole of all votes in the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

My first question is on Afghanistan. Many Afghans are trying to flee the country. The state of Qatar has a unique and special relationship with the Taliban. Has the government had a *démarche* with the state of Qatar to request that it intervene with the Taliban to allow persecuted minorities and Afghans who assisted Canadian soldiers to leave the country?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, obviously we want to make sure that we are able to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees. My deputy had the chance to go to the region, including to Qatar, Kuwait and Pakistan, to find ways to partner with these countries to resettle the 40,000 refugees I just mentioned.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, I have a question on Ukraine. Russia has amassed some 90,000 troops at the Ukraine border. Bloomberg News reported today that President Biden will call the leaders of France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany to talk about the situation in Ukraine. Bloomberg News also reports that the president is going to call Ukrainian President Zelenskyy.

Canada has troops in Ukraine under Operation Unifier. Has a call been scheduled between the Prime Minister and President Biden on this issue?

● (1830)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, obviously what is happening right now in Ukraine is very important. We know there is a Russian military buildup on the border of Ukraine, and that is why I raised this very issue with my colleagues at NATO and the OSCE, including Ukraine's foreign affairs minister, my counterpart in the U.S. and my Russian counterpart. We take allegations very seriously and want to make sure that we deter Russia from acting.

It is very important that Canada plays a role. Not only that, but as my colleague mentioned, we are already in Ukraine through Operation Unifier.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, I have a couple of questions on our bilateral relationship with the United States.

The Great Lakes Fishery Commission issue has been unresolved for six years. Thirteen U.S. senators and members of the House of Representatives have written twice to the Canadian government on this issue. The finance committee, under former MP Wayne Easter, issued two reports two years in a row recommending that the issue be resolved.

The Prime Minister was asked about this in his meeting with the congressional delegation organized by Senator Schumer and Speaker Pelosi. When is the government going to address this issue?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague is right that this issue was raised by congresswomen and congressmen in the U.S., and I had the chance to have a conversation with the Prime Minister directly about it. I know it is very important. It is dear to me as well, and we are working on solutions.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, President Biden has said in recent weeks that the U.S. needs more oil. In fact, he has called on OPEC on several occasions to pump more oil, even threatening consequences if it does not. He has recently authorized the release of 50 million barrels from the strategic reserves in the United States, and has coordinated with Japan, the United Kingdom, South Korea, India and even China to see those countries release more of their reserves.

In light of the fact that Canada is the fourth-largest oil producer in the world, did the Prime Minister or the government raise this issue when they met with the White House two weeks ago?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, every time we meet our colleagues and friends in the U.S., we mention our national interests, and obviously we raised the question of Line 5, which is key to ensuring we can get our product to markets, including in the U.S.

Business of Supply

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, I believe two weeks ago today, the most powerful senator, in my view, in Washington, Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, called on the President to reverse his decision on Keystone XL in light of the President's desire to see more oil enter the United States.

Has any member of the government contacted Senator Manchin to discuss his statement on this issue two weeks ago and his desire to see Keystone XL completed?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we know that workers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and across Canada will have our support when it comes to our natural resources sector, including the oil and gas sector, and it is always a priority for the government when talking with our friends, the Americans.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, I will move to questions on China. The government has started to use the term "Indo-Pacific" recently. It is reported that the government is coming forward with a new policy on China.

Could the minister tell the House when that new policy will be forthcoming?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, let me start by saying that we are very happy that the two Michaels, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, are back home. I would like to thank everybody who was involved in ensuring we were able to get them released, including Ambassador Barton, the Prime Minister and many of our colleagues in the House.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, on the Olympics, last week, the U.K. government indicated no ministers would be attending the Beijing Olympics and Paralympics. Yesterday, President Biden indicated that the administration would be implementing a diplomatic boycott of the games.

Is the government going to do the same? When will it make a decision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I share my colleague's concerns regarding the next winter Olympics. We were informed by the United States yesterday about its decision to not send any diplomats to Beijing. We will continue to engage with our allies and like-minded countries on this issue. I know my colleague shares my point of view in terms of ensuring that our athletes can attend, but obviously we are still in discussions.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, the government joined the Beijing-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2018 and it is now a member. Last June, the bank left the door open to funding the military junta in Myanmar.

As a member of the bank, has the government voiced its opposition to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to funding the military junta in Myanmar?

• (1835)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, our government very much believes that human rights need to be an important part of all foreign policy decisions. We are very concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and the situation the member opposite mentioned. These concerns are at the heart of our commitment to human rights around the world and we will take them into consideration.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Chair, I have been asking the government what the plan is to evacuate the 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada. We have yet to hear a real response. I see in the supplementary estimates that the government is looking to fund resettling Afghan nationals in Canada.

I will ask again: Now that the government is asking for funding, what is the plan to bring the remaining Afghan refugees to Canada?

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think all members in the House will agree on the importance of Canada making good on its commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees. I am pleased to share that by the end of this week, 500 more Afghan refugees will be arriving, including, for the first time, sponsored refugees from Afghanistan in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, respectfully, that is only 10.5% of the total that the Liberals are supposed to resettle.

Former embassy workers, Afghan interpreters and other support staff who have applied to the special immigration program have only received auto replies. The government has highlighted improving IRCC client services as a priority.

Does the minister believe that sending auto replies to Afghan refugees, who are waiting months for any reply at all, counts as improving client services?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, the Government of Canada is working in close collaboration with trusted international and Canadian partners to implement a second humanitarian stream that is focused on resettling the most vulnerable Afghan nationals. We are going to continue to work with our partners to ensure that we can resettle the objective of 40,000 Afghans.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, seeing as an auto reply does not count as good service, how is the government going to improve its communications with those Afghan refugees who have not received any information since August?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I would like to inform my hon. colleague that we are taking all the necessary measures to bring these Afghans home to Canada. We will continue to ensure that we communicate with them and we will continue to inform the House on how we are doing.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, many religious minority groups, women rights leaders and members of the LGBTQ community are stranded in Afghanistan and have no way out. Many have sought shelter in safe houses, but the safe houses have run out of funding from private sources.

Will the government be providing assistance in Afghanistan to the safe houses that are protecting many vulnerable refugees?

Business of Supply

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we know it is very important that we focus on the Afghans who we are trying to resettle here. The LGBTQ individuals are also very important. We will continue to work with our partners on the ground and in Canada to ensure we resettle them in Canada.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, last month, there was a data breach at IRCC, which saw the personal information of hundreds of Afghan refugees leaked. This breach threatens the lives of refugees. While the Privacy Commissioner is now investigating it, the government has not outlined how it is strengthening cybersecurity and privacy protections.

How are refugees in Afghanistan or any vulnerable persons abroad able to trust the government with their data?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, as the hon. colleague knows, IRCC has approved 9,800 people under the special immigration program. Of this number, more than 3,800 Afghan refugees have already arrived in Canada. We will continue to do that and take into consideration the difficulties that we hear are ongoing on the ground.

• (1840)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, Canada heard from CSIS and our allies, long before the U.S. completed its troop withdrawal, that the Taliban would take over. They all knew what that would mean.

How many Afghan interpreters applied for refugee status before Kabul fell?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I want to convey for my hon. colleague that we are focusing on the safety and security of the Afghan people. We will continue to work very hard to—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, again, how many Afghan interpreters have settled since Kabul fell?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, if I understand the question, there are over 3,800 Afghans in Canada. We will continue to work on ensuring we get—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, in my home province of Alberta, the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline extension is devastating to thousands of oil and gas workers. The KXL project was going to employ thousands of indigenous and union workers, and now other pipelines are at the mercy of President Biden.

What is the government doing to stand up to the Democrats and protect our vital energy projects?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, workers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and across Canada will have our support when it comes to their natural resources sector, particularly the oil and gas sector. We also know that Canada is the single-largest supplier of energy to the United States, and we always remind our friends in the U.S. of that.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, it is clear the Prime Minister's relationship with the U.S. government is souring. It is hurting cross-border business and threatening Canadian jobs. While

the supply chain crisis in the United States continues to cause delays for goods being shipped across North America, the IRCC and the U.S. State Department are dragging their feet on processing the visas for truckers. This is directly impacting a lot of my constituents.

What is the government doing to fix the backlogs affecting truckers?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, as members know, we have brought over 300,000 refugees and immigrant newcomers to Canada. We will continue to get to our objective. I know this is a very important concern and we will provide our report very soon.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, the government has not put a plan in place to address backlogs. There is a backlog of 1.8 million immigration applications in Canada. Now the wait time for truckers to get U.S. visas is going beyond 12 months.

What is the government doing to work with the U.S. to speed up the process for essential work visas, such as those needed for truckers?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we know, and my hon. colleague knows also, that the pandemic has brought new challenges to our immigration system and we have faced them head-on. We are acting quickly. We are moving from paper to digital, extending visas and adding resources where they are needed most. We have welcomed nearly 100,000 new Canadians—

The Deputy Chair: A very brief question, nine seconds.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, will all 40,000 of those refugees be brought into Canada?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we are working very hard to get to that objective and all together we will be able to get there.

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, today I am pleased to table the Supplementary Estimates (B), 2021-22.

[*English*]

The ability to exercise oversight is one of the most important roles parliamentarians can play on behalf of our citizens. In fact, accountability is predicated on parliamentarians knowing how public funds are being spent, so they can hold the government to account for its actions, which is why our government will continue to make every effort to ensure that parliamentarians have access to accurate, timely and understandable information about government spending.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

The supplementary estimates are part of a wide array of reports that provide Canadians and parliamentarians with information about expenditure plans and results. Departmental plans, the financial review, the departmental results reports and the public accounts are just some of these reports.

This information is also found in GC InfoBase, an interactive tool that provides a lot of data in a visual form. This tool contains the estimates and other data pertaining to finances, people and federal government results. The publication of the estimates data set with digital tools is essential to providing parliamentarians and Canadians with more information about the allocation and investment of public funds.

- (1845)

[English]

I would now like to turn to the supplementary estimates in more detail. The supplementary estimates present information to Parliament on spending that was either not ready for inclusion in the main estimates or has since been refined to account for new developments in programs and services.

With the supplementary estimates (B) for 2021-22, the government is seeking Parliament's approval of funding to address matters of importance to Canadians. This includes the government's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as infrastructure and services to address the specific needs of indigenous communities.

The health, safety and well-being of all Canadians are of the utmost importance to the government, which is why approximately \$1.2 billion of proposed bonus spending is for the government's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Canadians care about each other and they also care about those less fortunate outside our borders. That is why budget 2021 announced funding to help some of the world's poorest countries access the tools they need to help contain the spread of COVID-19.

[Translation]

In these supplementary estimates, the government is requesting \$375 million to follow through with the commitment to support developing countries' access to vaccines, treatments and diagnostic products.

I mentioned that these supplementary estimates seek Parliament's approval of funds to respond to the needs of indigenous communities. I would like to draw your attention to some of the main voted items.

The 2020-21 budget provided funds for the government to accelerate efforts to close the infrastructure gaps in indigenous communities, which will help create good jobs and build indigenous communities that will be healthier, safer and more prosperous in the long term.

These supplementary estimates fulfill that commitment with \$725.2 million to support the construction, renovation, operation and maintenance of housing, schools, health care facilities, water and waste-water systems and other community infrastructure.

[English]

This funding will also support the transfer of infrastructure to indigenous-led organizations and will fund the operation and maintenance of indigenous-owned infrastructure. These estimates also seek \$412.2 million for the specific claims settlement fund, which provides compensation to first nations in accordance with negotiated agreements, as well as \$361.3 million to fund prevention and protection services to support the safety and well-being of first nations children and families living on reserve.

To ensure indigenous people can access high-quality health care, budget 2021 announced several measures, including one in these estimates of \$332.4 million to ensure continued high-quality care through the non-insured health benefits program. This program supports first nations and Inuit people with medically necessary services that are not otherwise covered, such as mental health services, medical travel, medications and more.

Another budget initiative that is presented in these estimates is funding to help people on reserve, and status Indians in Yukon, transition from income assistance to employment and education. Specifically, \$308.7 million is sought to assist eligible individuals and families with basic or special needs, case management and pre-employment measures designed to increase self-reliance, improve life skills and promote greater attachment to the workforce.

[Translation]

In Canada, we are lucky to have Canadian Forces personnel to defend Canada and its interests and to step in during times of crisis, be it the devastating floods in British Columbia or a pandemic.

The supplementary estimates request \$327.7 million for a salary increase for Canadian Armed Forces personnel in accordance with the settlement of collective bargaining for the core public administration.

The funds will also support the restructuring of pay and allowances for certain occupations within the armed forces, as well as the extension of the allowance paid to personnel deployed to support Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to draw the attention of the House to the part of the supplementary estimates that relates to my department, although a very small amount of those funds are for the Treasury Board Secretariat itself.

Business of Supply

As part of the compensation adjustments vote, we are asking Parliament to approve \$1.5 billion. These funds will be used to compensate organizations affected by wage adjustments resulting from recently negotiated collective agreements and other changes to terms and conditions of employment. It will also compensate employees for damages related to the Phoenix payroll system and for delays in the extended implementation of collective agreements in the 2018 round of collective bargaining.

• (1850)

[English]

That concludes my presentation of some of the major voted items in these supplementary estimates, and I am pleased to report that parliamentarians have online access to even more detailed information than I have had time to present today. We will continue to make that information available because of our belief in Canadians' right to know where public funds are going and how they will be invested on their behalf.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Deputy House Leader of the Government, Lib.): Madam Chair, the pandemic has had tragic impacts on public health. Almost 30,000 Canadians have died due to COVID-19, over 1.8 million have been infected and everyone's mental health has been impacted. To finish the fight against COVID-19, protect people at work, ensure businesses can get back up to speed and, most importantly, make sure our kids can safely return to school, we need to do everything we can to keep public spaces safe.

The Government of Canada is the largest employer in the country and has taken a leadership role by requiring vaccinations across the public service. Can the President of the Treasury Board provide an update on the requirements for public servants to be vaccinated?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I want to start by thanking all the public servants who stepped up and got vaccinated to make sure we could continue to fight through this pandemic, and to make sure that the health and safety of Canadians was our first priority.

Over 95% of public servants have received both their vaccines, and over 98% have received their first dose. This is a great demonstration that we are moving forward with a policy that works for all Canadians.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Chair, it goes without saying that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to succeed, and that means paying women equally for work of equal value.

Based on the most recent data in Canada, for every dollar earned by a man, a woman earns 89 cents, as measured in hourly wages for full-time and part-time workers.

Can the President of the Treasury Board answer how the funding for public service job classifications improves equity?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we all know women should receive equal pay for work of equal value, and proactive pay equity legislation will address the systemic undervaluing of work performed by women.

For the public service, we will work with bargaining agents and employee representatives to identify gaps between positions held mostly by women and ones held mostly by men that have work of

equal value. Once pay equity plans are in place, we will systematically close any pay gaps. We are committed to creating a more inclusive federal public service.

• (1855)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I know the minister and the Prime Minister have been very strong advocates for indigenous communities, and that building and establishing a more positive relationship has been a priority for this government since 2015. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report is very important, and we committed to all 94 of its recommendations.

The minister made reference to the millions of dollars being spent to support things in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report. I am wondering if she could provide her thoughts on the importance of truth and reconciliation, or more importantly, her thoughts on the indigenous initiatives the government is taking.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Chair, the hon. member's question is one of exceeding importance in the House, particularly as we reflect on the last four months with the discoveries and rediscoveries of unmarked graves. Obviously this is a sober reminder to all of us, and to those in indigenous communities for whom it is a trigger of immense trauma, that truth comes before reconciliation.

It is in and around the events of Kamloops that, as a government, we realized the funds that had been allocated toward continuing to support communities in their search for truth were insufficient. We have deployed over \$320 million that has been allocated to assist communities, at their pace and on their leadership, in getting to the bottom of this terrible chapter, and to the ongoing, unwritten chapter of trauma in our collective history.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Chair, the Conservatives botched the Phoenix pay system from the start by choosing a high-risk cost-cutting route, causing real suffering for tens of thousands of public servants. Over 100,000 public servants suffered personal or financial hardship because of Phoenix, including some financial costs.

While the government has put in place compensation for current public servants, when will former public servants affected by the Phoenix pay system be compensated?

Business of Supply

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we recognize that the implementation of the Phoenix pay system has had an impact directly, or even indirectly, on many current and former employees, and damages agreements have been reached with all bargaining agents to compensate employees for general damages and severe impacts caused by the pay system. Claims processes are in place for most of these agreements, and we are working closely with the Public Service Alliance of Canada to implement the remaining element of that agreement by the end of this year. We will continue to work very hard on this file.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Chair, I want to inform the government members that my questions will be primarily for the President of the Treasury Board and the Deputy Minister of Finance, who is also the Minister of Tourism. I also want to say that I do not need the timing of questions and answers to be precise but that I hope that the government will try to respond within a reasonable amount of time.

My first question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Again, I congratulate her on her speech and on her appointment to this important position.

When the House passed Bill C-30, the budget implementation bill, in the spring, she decided to slash the budget of the Canadian Securities Transition Office in anticipation of its closure. Senior officials told the Standing Committee on Finance that it would be shut down very soon.

Six months have passed and the supplementary estimates do not contain more funding for the office, and I understand that it is set to close. My question is the following. Has the Canadian Securities Transition Office closed down in accordance with the legislation passed by Parliament? If not, when will it close down?

• (1900)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I will make the necessary inquiries, with my colleague's permission. Things are happening right now, and I want to make sure I have the right answers. I should be able to get that answer to the Speaker of the House shortly.

I would just like to say that this evening is really important for us to be able to do our job as parliamentarians, because the Supplementary Estimates (B) are a very important part of our budget cycle. I will continue to answer questions throughout the evening.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, my next question could be handled by the Associate Minister of Finance.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the House has passed a number of bills to provide income support to workers, including the self-employed, and to businesses affected by the pandemic.

The House is currently considering legislation that would extend the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency rent subsidy, subject to certain changes in the selection criteria.

My question to the minister deals specifically with self-employed workers in the cultural sector, who are not getting any support under the bills currently before us. I would like to ask the minister

what the government plans to do to support these people who cannot be left behind.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, as my colleague knows, I once served as parliamentary secretary to the minister of Canadian Heritage. Workers in the cultural sector, which is included in the tourism sector, are very important to us.

It is clear that the Canadian economy will not recover without the tourism sector, and we will do everything we can for all workers in the tourism sector, including those in the cultural sector.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his answer. I would like to point out that the Bloc Québécois is calling on the government to make a public and formal commitment to support self-employed workers in the cultural sector and to not leave them behind. A few years ago, we asked the government to distinguish between employed and self-employed workers. In Quebec, this is what we see in most cases. It is such an important sector that we think it is absolutely necessary to protect it and to help people get through the pandemic in order to preserve their expertise.

There is something else to consider in terms of supporting businesses and workers affected by the pandemic. In the bill currently before us, there is special concern for the tourism and hospitality sector, which includes the entire cultural sector. This is a well-defined initiative and we welcome it. However, we do have some concerns about other sectors that are very important to us and that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. I will give a few examples.

Looking at the figures published by manufacturing associations, we see that the aerospace sector has a long way to go before it gets back to pre-pandemic revenue levels. A number of other manufacturing sectors are also struggling, including the many companies that are facing a shortage of semiconductor-based chips. They are struggling and facing cash flow and labour retention problems. They have skilled labour, and they do not want to lose it.

My preamble was long, but here is my question. Currently, these sectors do not have the same support as the tourism and hospitality sector. Today, in committee, senior officials confirmed that the Governor in Council has the power to amend such legislation by regulation. Will the government commit to doing so if there is a demonstrated need?

• (1905)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Business of Supply

We recognize that the aeronautics and aerospace industry and its workers have been particularly affected by the pandemic. The Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry has been in continual contact with key stakeholders in the sector. We have always stood up for Canada's aerospace workers, and we will continue to do so. By working together, we will find solutions so that this sector can continue to grow in our country in the years ahead.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for her answers.

Once again, we in the Bloc Québécois expect a formal commitment from the government to be prepared to step in and amend by regulation the parameters of the upcoming bills passed to support the sectors most affected. As a society we cannot afford to turn our backs on them. The purpose of assistance programs is to collectively support these strategic industries so that they can get through the pandemic. That is really important to us.

Now I would like to point to another situation. Since the summer, we have all heard from seniors in our ridings who are experiencing really terrible financial hardship. Some are in disastrous situations, for example working seniors who receive the guaranteed income supplement. When the pandemic hit, those who had to stop working were told to apply for the CERB. However, the benefits they receive are taken into account in the calculation of the guaranteed income supplement they are entitled to. The government is telling them that they received too much money, that either they pay it back or their guaranteed income supplement will be clawed back.

Among the points I would like to raise, I wish to touch on three issues concerning the Canada emergency response benefit and the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. First, the Bloc Québécois is asking that CERB payments be considered employment income for the purposes of calculating the GIS, so that recipients are not penalized as much. Otherwise, seniors will fall well below the poverty line and will be unable to make ends meet. The criteria were poorly explained, which has caused a lot of problems.

Second, the guaranteed income supplement should be recalculated immediately, regardless of whether seniors dealt with Service Canada or the Canada Revenue Agency. At first, depending on the agency, applications could not be made. Now, any applications are systematically rejected, as though by a computer.

Third, it should be possible to make repayments over three years, rather than over the current year. Some seniors earning \$1,500 a month have to pay back \$800 or \$900 a month, which leaves them with just \$600 to cover rent and living expenses. That is an impossible situation.

Is the government committed to correcting this injustice? If so, how, and when?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for giving me the opportunity to lay out the real facts about everything that has happened in our economy since the pandemic hit.

I want to emphasize that the Canadian economy has almost fully recovered. We have recovered 106% of the jobs lost at the height of the pandemic. Earlier this week, we learned that 154,000 jobs had been added to our economy. That points to one very important fact

I want to stress this evening: We rebuilt our economy rapidly after the recession. This is the shortest economic recovery in Canadian history. I think it is very important to point out how entrepreneurs across the country and our government set the stage for such a strong and powerful economic recovery.

To answer my hon. colleague's question, we know how difficult the pandemic is for seniors. I have spoken about this with my constituents. I spoke to people who voted for me, for us, and they are asking for our help. That is why we worked very hard during the campaign. We stated very clearly in our platform that we are here to improve seniors' lives, and that is why we worked hard to improve seniors' income security, including the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS. We created the CERB to help people at the height of the pandemic, and we know that some seniors who usually receive the GIS are facing certain challenges today because they received the CERB. Resolving this problem is a complex task, but we will do it because we are up to the challenge. We are making a solemn promise to seniors across Canada.

• (1910)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his response. We obviously expect the government to take quick action to rectify the inequity associated with CERB and the GIS. This is essentially a humanitarian issue. Some seniors in my riding say they are no longer able to pay for medication, even though Quebec has pharmacare. They are therefore choosing to go to the hospital, since that is the only place where they can get their medication covered.

One of my Bloc Québécois colleagues told me about a woman who was no longer able to pay rent, so she had to sell her furniture and move into a friend's room. Once she is able to pay her debts, she will not be able to find housing comparable to what she had before, given the rising cost of rent. She will have to buy new furniture and settle in a new place. These are dire, urgent situations. I am pleased to hear the minister make some commitments.

I have one last question and the government can use the remaining time for its response. The provinces pay around 80% of health care and the federal government pays around 20%. When will the federal government commit to funding 35% of health care spending?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am obviously very happy to answer that question, because I was just talking to my provincial and territorial colleagues about that issue a few days ago.

We will talk again tomorrow about how we are going to get out of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new variant crisis together. We have worked together a lot over the past 20 months. This has demonstrated the strength of federalism and, above all, the strength of solidarity and working together.

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[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by indicating that I will be using my entire time for questions and answers, and I will not be restricting my questions to any one minister in particular. I find it hard enough to get an answer around here, and I would hate to unduly restrict the possibility that I might get one.

We have already talked in this Parliament about the fact that Canadians are not going to be safe from COVID-19 variants until everyone in the world is properly vaccinated. We know that wealthy countries such as Canada have had some success in rolling out the vaccine, but in the rest of the world the vaccination rate is just unacceptably low. We also know that for some time now there has been an effort at the WTO to get what is called TRIPS waiver, which would release the intellectual property rights to vaccine production and allow others to expedite production of the vaccine in their own place.

Could someone on the government bench tell me what it would cost the Government of Canada to support the TRIPS waiver at the WTO?

• (1915)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, would be more than capable of answering that question and could probably do a better job of it than I can.

First of all, I will say that it is an extremely important question.

[English]

We know that ending this pandemic anywhere means ending it everywhere. That is why we have been working so hard with our international partners since the very beginning of COVID-19. We did not wait until Canadians were almost all fully vaccinated to do this. We were one of the early major contributors in and agents for setting up COVAX, with 200 million doses promised to the rest of the world with a \$2.5 billion investment, which I may come back to in a moment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a dollar amount in there, so how much would it cost the government to support the TRIPS waiver?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, the \$2.5 billion is not for vaccines. It is for additional investments to help other countries not only receive and manage, but also administer those vaccines.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, what would be the dollar cost of supporting the TRIPS waiver at the WTO?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, there is obviously value in working internationally together to set up these efforts, and that includes working with the WTO, including on the TRIPS waiver. With this, something has been done for a large number of months now.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister meant to say zero dollars. The good news is that there is that much requested for the TRIPS waiver in the estimates, so it is a fully funded initiative. I look forward to the announcement.

There is \$1.8 billion requested, or stated, in the statutory expenditures for the Canada recovery benefit, but we know very well that in fact a lot of what was paid out under CERB and the CRB is now being clawed back from some of the most financially vulnerable people in Canada: our seniors on the GIS and low-income families that depend on the Canada child benefit.

I wonder if this is an adjusted amount to reflect that the government is clawing back so many of those payments from our most vulnerable.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, and as the Minister of Seniors has said, this is a complex issue. We are working this issue. We understand the situation seniors are facing with a clawback from their GIS for those who received CERB.

It is an important question. We are going to continue to work on this question. We have heard from seniors. The Minister of Seniors and our whole government are working on this issue. We will get it done.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, in fact, it is not complicated. It is just a matter of excluding the pandemic benefit income from the eligibility calculation for these income-tested programs. I will ask this again: Is the amount of the clawback represented in the figure presented in the estimates?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, as I stated, and as I will continue to state in answer to the same question, this is a matter that we are taking very seriously. We have heard from seniors. It is a question that is active inside our government. The Minister of Seniors and the whole of government is working on this very important issue.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the people who take it seriously are the seniors who are being evicted right now, those who have already been evicted, and the people who are advocating for them here in the House. We know that the government has stated there is another \$1.8 billion under the Canada recovery benefit. What we do not know is if this represents the amount they are saving by clawing back the benefits of vulnerable seniors and low-income families.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I think our government has proven its mettle in the face of the worst global pandemic in 100 years. This is a progressive government full of compassion. We invested over \$380 billion into the livelihoods and lives of Canadians, businesses, seniors and people of all ages. We will continue to do the right thing by Canadians.

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Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, let me put it another way. How much is the government budgeting to save on GIS and Canada child benefit costs this year as a result of people falling out of the program because they received pandemic benefits last year?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear that the investments this government made in Canadians are exactly that: investments. We are not making any calculations that would even in anybody's wildest dreams be called "savings". These are investments in Canadians, and we will continue to make them.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, we know that the government has written letters to, for example, foster kids who graduated out of foster care during the pandemic. They were told by the provincial government in Manitoba, for example, that they could not apply for social assistance in the summer of 2020, despite the fact that there were no jobs, and that they had to apply for the CERB first. Of course, there was a no-fail policy, so they got the CERB, and now the government is asking for that back.

Does the minister have a number on how much the government intends to get back from low-income Canadians who received CERB payments in good faith? How much is the government looking to save on the backs of those vulnerable Canadians?

• (1920)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, our record speaks for itself. We supported millions of Canadians during the pandemic. We are continuing to support Canadians in the hardest-hit sectors as we come through this recovery period. I might say to my hon. colleague that if he wants to make sure some of the most vulnerable people are supported, I encourage him and his caucus members to support Bill C-2.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I encourage the minister to read his bill, because the fact of the matter is that 900,000 people were kicked off the CERB in October with two days' warning, and the bill will not do a thing for any of those people. In fact, when I asked the minister in opening the debate how many regions and which regions of the country would be covered by the Canada worker lockdown benefit from October 23 to the present day, the answer was none, and we have not heard anything that would change our point of view about that.

I will ask again. When it comes to low-income Canadians from whom the government is demanding repayment of CERB benefits and who do not have the money, how much is the government anticipating that it is going to get back?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, this is a government that has always supported people. It has been very clear that, as we get into what we hope are the final stages of this global pandemic, now is the time to pull back on some of the more generous benefits, because these once-in-a-hundred-year investments in our economy were always intended to be and always translated as exceptional measures for an exceptional time. Now that we are coming out of that time, we are making these adjustments. We will always be there for people. The proof is in our investments in Canadians, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, when the minister says it is time to pull back on the benefits, is he referring to the clawbacks?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about making sure short-term measures are in place, like the lockdown, and should a jurisdiction in the country go into lockdown, Canadians will be able to access benefits.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, it is about time we had a CERB low-income repayment amnesty in Canada, and that would do a lot toward not leaving behind those financially vulnerable people I am talking about.

With respect to the 900,000 Canadians who were dropped like a brick from the CRB program with just two days' notice, what training resources does the government intend to provide in order to help them qualify for the jobs that are currently available in the market?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, our government has proven itself, not only with investments during the pandemic, but also with retooling and reorganizing the entire way we fund skills development in this country. The minister has been very clear on that and so has our government.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that we have a labour shortage here in Canada, yet we have a lot of workers who are seeking work and cannot find jobs, and 900,000 of them were on the CRB. What dollar amount is being requested here in order to provide training supports so they have the skills and education that employers are looking for to fill their positions?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's focusing on the issue of labour, because it allows me to remind all members that we have before this House a crucially important piece of legislation, Bill C-2. I would remind colleagues that Bill C-2 would extend the Canada recovery hiring program until May 7, 2022 for eligible employers and increase the subsidy rate to 50%. In short, this benefit will be good for Canadians. We hope the opposition will support it.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, employers cannot hire workers who are not qualified for the positions they need to fill. Instead of just trying to starve those workers back to work when they do not have the qualifications, what is the government doing to support them to get the education and training they need to fill the jobs that are available in the market?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that 106% of jobs lost during COVID have been recovered. The economy is coming back, the fastest rebound of an economy after recession in Canada's history. The recovery is uneven. I know that from my file of tourism, but 106% of jobs recovered since the worst time of COVID says that people are getting back to work.

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• (1925)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I see the government is reporting an increased expenditure for the caregiving benefit and the sickness benefit, to the tune of about \$2 billion. One of the things we heard at finance committee today was that the government is not aware of which provinces have legislative plans to extend leave provisions in their provincial legislation so that workers under their jurisdiction can benefit from these extended programs. I am wondering if the numbers here in the estimates reflect lapsed funding from delays in provincial leave extensions.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, what is important to know about this matter is that we will be working with our provincial colleagues to clarify the matter. The supports are there. The programs are in place. All Canadians will have access.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, can the minister name the provinces he has secured commitments from to take urgent legislative action to extend the leave provisions in their jurisdictions?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, we continue to have those discussions with provinces.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I heard that as a “no”.

While I have the opportunity, I want to ask the President of the Treasury Board about reforming the estimates process. We are here tonight talking about the estimates process. It is obviously one of the pillars of the Westminster parliamentary system, this oversight by Parliament of government spending. There were some experiments in the Liberals' first years in government that led to quite a row in the House over a centralized vote, and I am wondering if the President of the Treasury Board has any plans to improve the process, which is now what it was prior to 2015. I think there was widespread agreement among the parties and the pundits and others that it was a system that did not lend itself to proper financial oversight.

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I am the new President of the Treasury Board, I am currently working with the process that we have and I am always looking for possibilities for improvement. Maybe through a conversation with all of my colleagues we can make sure we have the best process for our government.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, when we had some discussions about estimates reform in the 42nd Parliament, one of the ideas on the table was moving toward a fixed budget date. There seemed to be some interest from then minister Brison. I am wondering if the minister would now consider moving toward having a fixed budget date.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, as we know, we just went through a very difficult pandemic. We need to look at how we will continue to support Canadians and how we are going to continue to bring our investments forward for Canadians. We will look at the process of our budget cycle as we go along.

At this time, as my hon. colleague probably knows, we have the fall economic statement next week, on December 14, and after that we will know what the next steps will be.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, when listening to the government, one sometimes wonders whether we are getting past the pandemic or not. What we saw here was an all-party willingness to

suspend some of the normal financial procedures while we were in the thick of the crisis. Liberals are telling people who are on CRB that it is too bad; it is done and they should get back to work, whether they qualify for the positions or not, or whether there is government assistance to help them get the training they need or not.

It is time for the government to get back to work and to experience accountability to Parliament. One way to do that would be to improve the estimates process, and one of the signature ways of doing that would be to commit to a fixed budget date. We saw suspension of some of the rules around the estimates that were mandated in a time of crisis. Surely Parliament would be willing to do that in respect to the budget. However, in the meantime, Canadians have a right to expect regular reporting from their government on the budget. Therefore, will the minister support a fixed budget date?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, again I thank my hon. colleague for bringing forward an idea. We always want to improve our system and at this time we will have next week, on December 14, the economic outlook of our country. We will look at the next steps for investments for Canadians and our accountability and transparency as we continue to support them through the pandemic, which we are still in at this time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, Canadians have been called upon to take extraordinary measures to ensure the safety of all. We have been in an emergency situation that has required large-scale lockdowns and closures, which have threatened the ability of millions of Canadians to work and thousands of businesses to continue operating.

In response to this extraordinary situation, our government has taken unprecedented action thanks to the collective effort of so many people working tirelessly to help their fellow citizens. We have put in place a comprehensive package of measures to help workers and businesses across the country meet these challenges.

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● (1930)

[*English*]

We saw neighbours helping neighbours, frontline workers who did double and triple shifts to keep our communities safe, and people who retooled their entire business lines to produce protective equipment for frontline workers and Canadians in need. In this time of historic commitment to helping others, our government was there to ensure that Canadians, their families, their businesses and their communities would be supported through the worst.

[*Translation*]

Our income and wage support programs, along with rent subsidies, made it possible for households to support their families. Those programs also enabled millions of Canadians to keep their jobs and hundreds of thousands of Canadian businesses to keep operating during the darkest days of the pandemic.

Thanks to robust public health measures, vaccination rates are high and the child vaccination campaign is moving along quickly. Grandparents and others who need it are receiving their third dose, the booster dose. Our health care system is finding better and better ways of dealing with the virus.

[*English*]

While the recent emergence of the omicron variant of COVID-19 is cause for concern, there is still reason for cautious optimism that we are turning the corner in the fight against this virus and seeing better days. Thanks to the hard work of Canadians, we are approaching the last mile of this long and difficult journey.

On the economic front, the recent OECD December 2021 economic outlook confirmed that Canada is still expected to have a strong recovery relative to pre-pandemic levels of GDP, ranking the second-fastest among G7 economies by 2023. Of the three million jobs that were lost at the peak of the crisis, all have now been recouped, faster than after any other recession. This has been possible because of the supports we provided. They prevented unnecessary increases in insolvencies and kept Canadians and Canadian businesses largely intact. They limited economic scarring and laid the foundation for a strong recovery.

In my riding of Edmonton Centre, I spoke with the now third-generation owners of Kunitz Shoes. The owners live in my riding. It is a third-generation shoe store on Jasper Avenue. It was going to go under, but because of collaboration with other business leaders in the community and due to the supports that we had in place, Kunitz Shoes is now thriving and back on its feet, if members will excuse the pun. The owners told me that they paid taxes, in their case for over 60 years, with the expectation that when they needed it, the government would be there for them. They said it had never happened in the history of the company, but it happened in the past year. The government was there for them, and they thanked me and my colleagues for that.

In short, the government took action and it worked. Canadians and most parliamentarians supported this unprecedented spending because they understood that it was not only the compassionate thing to do, but also the economically smart thing to do. Our government strongly respects that Parliament plays a key role in enforcing this accountability, and I would like to recognize all mem-

bers participating in the committee of the whole tonight for their role in this regard.

The Department of Finance has also played a key role in enforcing this accountability through its budgets, fiscal updates and reports to Parliament, and it will continue to do so. Further to this goal, as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has announced, the government will be providing an economic fiscal update on December 14.

Through these supplementary estimates, the government is seeking parliamentary approval for \$8.7 billion in new voted spending. These planned expenditures would support Canadian priorities with infrastructure and services to address the specific needs of indigenous communities, the government's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and supporting access to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics in developing countries.

In fact, approximately \$1.2 billion of the proposed voted spending in supplementary estimates (B) is for the government's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that Canadians are counting on this funding to protect their health and well-being.

However, Canadians are not just counting on us to invest in their health and well-being. Canadians need and want good jobs with fair wages and clear rules. Therefore, we need to make sure that businesses, especially small businesses, have the support they need. That is why we have introduced Bill C-2 in Parliament.

Among other things, the bill would extend the Canada recovery hiring program until May 2022 at an increased 50% subsidy rate. This would encourage businesses to continue to rehire workers, increase their hours and create additional jobs that Canada needs for a full recovery from the COVID-19 recession.

● (1935)

[*Translation*]

That said, the government is also aware that some businesses are unable to resume all their activities and create those jobs because of the public health measures that, as I said, are necessary to protect Canadians. We are therefore proposing in Bill C-2 two new support programs targeting specific types of businesses in order to promote economic recovery. In both cases, the businesses must show that they experienced significant revenue declines during the first 12 months of the pandemic as well as the current month.

I will start with the tourism and hospitality recovery program, which will help hotels, restaurants and travel agencies, which are still grappling with public health restrictions and the fact that people are travelling less because of the measures in place.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy and Canada emergency rent subsidy rate for these businesses will be 40% for those with a current-month revenue loss of 40%. The rate would increase in proportion to this revenue loss up to a maximum of 75%.

[English]

This legislation is key to getting us to the end of this pandemic and it is unfortunate that our colleagues in the Conservative Party and the NDP are voting against it. Make no mistake: This support will be crucial to getting our tourism sector back on its feet. I spoke with many leading tourism operators and businesses at the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's conference here last week and I can say that they are emphatically asking and demanding that everyone in the chamber support Bill C-2.

Since taking on the role of Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, I have been moved by the passion of those in the tourism sector for the work that they do. These are the people who tell our story to the world and they are the people who are going to inspire people from around the world to come and fall in love with Canada.

At this moment, this industry is reeling from the body blow of this pandemic. Revenue has declined almost 50% from 2019 levels. Jobs directly attributable to tourism decreased 41% from 692,000 to 409,000 in the same period.

[Translation]

However, even with these challenges, Canada's tourism sector is moving forward, and our government recognizes the vital role that tourism plays in providing employment and opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses and further fuelling economic growth. In short, our economy will not fully recover until the tourism sector recovers. With government support, businesses in this sector are starting to get ready to welcome Canadians back to experience the great places and activities this country has to offer.

This support includes the measures introduced in budget 2021 to support the tourism sector, totalling \$1 billion over three years. This includes \$500 million over two years flowing through regional development agencies to help our hard-hit tourism businesses adapt their products and services and invest in future growth.

This also includes \$200 million through the regional development agencies to support them and help ensure that Canada continues to draw millions of visitors from all over the world to our large arts and cultural festivals and major events.

I have to thank the former tourism minister, who is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the entire government for their foresight and for including all of these measures in budget 2021.

Our government will continue to ensure that Canadians are informed of the details of not just our spending, but of all the investments that we have made to protect and support Canadians in the fight against COVID-19. A full recovery will take time, but we are

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committed to doing what it takes to finish the fight against COVID-19, to speed up the recovery, and to lay the foundation for years of strong, sustained growth.

• (1940)

[English]

As we continue to gain ground in this fight, our support for Canadians is becoming more targeted, ensuring that help is being focused on those who need it the most.

Help is here and hope is on the horizon.

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Cambridge is very quickly becoming Hollywood north. We are a destination for a lot of films and TV shows, including *Murdoch Mysteries*, *The Queen's Gambit* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, to name just a few. One of the interesting spinoffs of this is tourism associated with the fans of those TV shows.

I am wondering if the minister could quickly explain what the government plans to do to help communities like mine bounce back in the tourism industry.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to share with my hon. colleague that we have to put some numbers on this. My hon. colleague is right to say that we want to support Hollywood north and all of the sectors of tourism excellence in our country.

Fifteen billion dollars is the support that we have given Canada's tourism sector since the start of the pandemic. The regional relief and recovery fund alone has supported more than 180,000 workers across the country. Add to that the Canada emergency wage subsidy and more than \$1 billion in budget 2021, and we are well on our way to seeing the tourism sector come back. In the cultural sector, support for artists is important for us. I am thinking about people in the cultural industry, the technicians, actors and musicians. These are the people who make the films, the movies, the plays and the video games that we and people around the world want to see.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend the minister has been a very strong advocate for tourism since long before he was appointed Minister of Tourism. I

In Winnipeg, we have this wonderful thing called Folklorama. It is a two-week extravaganza of Canada's diversity. We can visit the Philippines, the Punjab, India, Ukraine and all over the world during those two weeks. The cultural diversity is simply amazing. We can participate in things such as dance, food and phenomenal entertainment.

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The Prime Minister had the opportunity to meet with the Folk Arts Council. The Folk Arts Council said that the wage subsidy program enabled them to keep their doors open. This is not a new organization. It has been there for over 50 years. The point is that through programs, the government has been able to keep our arts and cultural communities, among others within our tourism industry, active and around to be able to survive the pandemic, in many ways.

The NDP and Conservative coalition voted against Bill C-2. This was going to extend the benefits for many of those businesses, communities and arts and cultural organizations. I am wondering if the minister can express why he believes Bill C-2 is so important for businesses and Canadians as a whole.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I have to thank my hon. colleague for his exuberance and his perspicacity.

We are here for workers in the cultural sector. We are here for workers in the tourism sector. Bill C-2 is the bridge the tourism sector needs to get through this last winter to the end of the pandemic, well into the third quarter of 2022, when we can welcome Canadians from coast to coast to coast and travellers from around the world to come to Canada to see Folklorama, the Edmonton Folk Music Festival and all the other great festivals and tourism attractions in Canada from coast to coast to coast.

• (1945)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Prince Albert.

I am going to be focusing my questions mainly on the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Prime Minister has admitted that his self-imposed export ban on Prince Edward Island potatoes to the United States is not based on science but based on politics. Since his decision is not science-based, when will the Liberal government lift this export ban on P.E.I. potatoes to the United States?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern regarding potatoes in P.E.I. We know it is a very important industry. That is why I have been in contact with the premier on this very question. Also, the Prime Minister raised it with President Biden when we were in the Oval Office two weeks ago.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, why are the Liberals outsourcing our foreign affairs and trade policies to the United States?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I refuse to accept the premise of the question. Of course we have an independent foreign policy and are very proud of it.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government did it under CUSMA with our dairy processing and dairy products in that we have to have permission from the United States if we want to export those products. Now it has done it again with P.E.I. potatoes, taking the lead from the United States to put a self-imposed export ban on a Canadian product.

I would ask the minister once again, why has Canada outsourced its foreign affairs and trade issues to the United States?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, we will not take any lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to trade with the U.S. The member should talk to the Leader of the Opposition, his boss, regarding the fact that during the CUSMA negotiations, he himself wanted to capitulate. We were there and we fought strongly for our own national interests and our industries and we were able to make a good deal for Canadians.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree with the agriculture minister and the member from P.E.I. that the decision to ban P.E.I. potato exports to the United States was not based on science but was based on politics, yes or no?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has been on this. It is important that we work with farmers in P.E.I., and that is what she has been doing. We are working right now on many solutions, but we will always fight for our farmers in P.E.I. We know that the potato industry is important and we have the industry's back.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, fighting for farmers in other provinces has put their livelihood at risk by a political decision by the government.

Does the government also understand that there are other industries at risk? What is the government's position on COOL?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, it is a very important industry, and we will always be there to make sure that we work with the workers and the entrepreneurs in the sector.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, the government failed on potatoes, energy and softwood lumber. What is the next shoe to drop? Has the government spoken with its counterparts in the United States? Has the foreign affairs minister talked to the United States about COOL?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade always raises important questions. She has been on this, as has the deputy minister. It was clearly part of the negotiations of CUSMA that we were able to make sure that we were fighting for it.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, will Canada's beef and pork industries be protected if the United States goes through with trying to implement country-of-origin labelling?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows that we will always be there to defend our entrepreneurs and our workers. We know that when it comes to the U.S., many jobs on the U.S. side and on the Canadian side of the border are dependent on this relationship. That is why we want to make sure that we have a good relationship, but at the same time that we defend our interests.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have not done so with P.E.I. potatoes.

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Is there a retaliation if the United States were to impose country-of-origin labelling on our beef and pork industries? Will the government retaliate, yes or no?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague can trust the government when it comes to negotiating with the United States. Also, he can trust that we have a good deal in CUSMA. That is exactly why we know that our farmers can count on having important access to the American and Mexican markets.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, as part of our agreement, we have a trigger for a billion-dollar retaliation if the United States, as it is looking to do, has put a bill in place to bring back COOL. Will the Liberal government impose that retaliation if the United States goes ahead with country-of-origin labelling, yes or no?

• (1950)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I am not here to comment on hypotheses. I am here to ensure that I answer clear questions from my colleagues. I want to reassure the member that when it comes to a relationship with the United States, we want to work with the opposition, all the opposition, because it is important that we have a team Canada approach.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, will the Liberal government open an investigation under the Canada Transportation Act to resolve the shipping container crisis in Canada?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take the member's question under advisement and get back to him.

Mr. John Barlow: Here is the problem, Mr. Speaker. The United States has already taken action and now shipping lanes are being rerouted from Canada to the United States, bottlenecking agriculture commodities and manufactured products in Canada not having access to international markets.

Will the Liberal government take similar action, as the United States has done, impose fines and name a shipping czar to try to resolve this issue, yes or no?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, transportation and shipping are key elements of recovering from the pandemic. We take this issue seriously. We are working with our trading partners, and shippers and providers of transportation services in the country to get this matter sorted.

Mr. John Barlow: The problem, Mr. Speaker, is the United States is kicking our butt because it is getting these things resolved and we are not.

The United States has also indicated that the Liberal policy of front-of-package labelling is a technical irritant under the barrier of trade. Does the Liberal government agree that its front-of-package labelling policy is a trade irritant with the United States?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, we will always be there to raise any form of trade irritants with the United States and with any other countries with which we have free trade agreements. That is also exactly why we have a mechanism that is very important in CUSMA, which is about settlement dispute mechanisms, which the Conservatives were against.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, does front-of-package labelling violate the CUSMA agreement?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned to my colleague, should there be a trade irritant that violates CUSMA, we will take necessary action.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you have heard a lot of issues we have with the United States and my first question is who is actually in charge of the relationship with the United States. Is it the Deputy Prime Minister, is it the Minister of Foreign Affairs or is it the Minister of International Trade?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague can count on the fact that we have a strong team Canada approach within cabinet, but also the Prime Minister is very much on this issue.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, that is interesting. Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of International Trade, plus two other ministers were in Washington talking about the relationship. However, this past week I was in Washington talking about electric vehicles and they were not even aware of it. In fact, the Minister of International Trade made that comment in Bloomberg.

Why was there no impact in the U.S. when they were down there?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question is false. Many people in United States Congress and within the executive branch, particularly the White House and the different state and trade departments, are very much aware of the issue of electric vehicles.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, Senator Marshall was not aware of it when I talked to him. In fact, his biggest concern was the cancellation of Keystone. He lost a \$1-billion investment in that refinery. His question to us was why we did not fight for it.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, we will always be there to fight for the national interest and work with our workers in the oil and gas sector. I hope my colleague was able to convey the importance of our auto sector while he was in Washington, because that was the goal of our mission there.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know that myself, because I was not included in any of her meetings. The only things I was included in were the round tables with the home builders and labour unions. All four of the labour unions asked why we did not stand up for jobs with Keystone. They said that they lost so many jobs because of the cancellation of Keystone and they asked me where we were.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, the U.S. knows very well that Canada is the first supplier of oil and gas and, of course, Keystone XL is a very important tool to ensure it has access to our market. We will continue to raise this issue with the administration in the U.S.

Business of Supply

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, again, President Biden released reserves of oil and gas to lower gas prices and asked the OPEC nations to supply more fuel. Why would he not turn to Canada, our best friend, to get those resources?

• (1955)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has not raised it yet, but the question of Line 5 is also very important. That is why we have started negotiations with the United States under the 1977 treaty.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, that is a great point. That was not even mentioned in any of the briefings while we were in Washington last week. In fact, we did not even talk about Line 5. This is a line that involves tens of thousands of jobs in Sarnia and it was not even on the agenda.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague did not talk about Line 5, but I did.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, let us back up. Congressman Young from Alaska asked the minister last year about the issue with cruise ships going up the west coast. The Jones Act requires them to actually stop in Vancouver and then move on to Alaska. All they wanted to do was tie up for 10 minutes, not leave the boat and proceed on.

Why did the government not answer his call?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be more than glad to provide an answer for that. At this time, I do not have one.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the honesty from the minister. However, this is actually a foreign affairs question, because it was foreign affairs and GAC that did not relay the information. Now what has happened in that sector is that this congressman has put forward legislation that, in the future, would bypass Victoria and Vancouver and all the cruise ships that are now required to stop there.

What would the impact to the tourism industry be in Vancouver if they did not stop?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, as the former tourism minister, I know that this is a very important industry to Canada. I also know that we have been there to support the industry, particularly with help for its workers and also for many businesses, the small ones and the big ones, which have had access to COVID measures throughout the pandemic.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, the United States is leading Canada on so many things throughout the world, and one is reshoring companies back into North America. Just yesterday, there was a \$240 million investment in Virginia by Toyota. A couple of weeks ago, there was a \$17 billion investment by Samsung in Texas. We were not even in the running.

What is the minister's plan to actually bring business into Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, our employment numbers are even better than those of the U.S. My colleague should look at the figures.

At this point, we have been able to get 106% of all the jobs back since the beginning of the pandemic. That is because we have a great environment for investment in our country and we are also able to attract many companies to invest.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, the minister understands that the \$17 billion investment in one project in Texas is more than all of Canada's investments in the manufacturing sector last year. She must have a strategy for bringing investment into Canada.

What is that strategy and what is she putting forward in resources in our trade commissioner service to do exactly that?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I think the numbers show themselves. The employment sector right now is stronger in Canada than in the U.S. and many other countries. I also know that many companies are willing to invest in Canada and have been doing so. Six months ago, I was with the Prime Minister talking with the aerospace sector, and billions of dollars are being invested across the country in this sector.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, again, the U.S. has a reshoring program in place. It is actively going throughout the world to shore up their supply chains and bring back the critical manufacturing goods into the U.S. When we talked to members of Congress and the Senate, they would love to include Canada. In fact, we talked about critical elements and the development of them. They do not want to buy them from China; they want to buy them from Canada.

However, the reality is that all our critical elements are in the ground and the only way to get them out of the ground is to go through the same requirements as our oil and gas sector.

Therefore, what will the government do to see that critical elements can be developed in Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, we did raise the question of critical elements with the Biden administration. It is very important. It is important that, throughout North America, we believe in the importance of the auto sector and its supply chain, which goes to the critical elements sector. Of course, we will make the right investment to make it happen. Canada can be extremely proud of having these resources in our ground and also the right workers to extract them.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, in promising these critical elements to our best friend and trading partner, the military in the U.S. definitely wants them. They want to work with us, yet there is no game plan in Canada to make it achievable.

What is the game plan moving forward to actually join our supply chains and do things like critical elements together so that North America can benefit?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Innovation is in Detroit right now to talk about just that. We believe that we need to invest in critical elements and we need to make it part of our industrial policy.

Business of Supply

• (2000)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly very grateful to have the opportunity to address the committee of the whole this evening.

I would like to begin with a brief update on the COVID-19 situation in the country, a matter of concern to many Canadians.

[English]

As members know, the new COVID-19 variant, omicron, is now circulating in Canada and in many other countries. Early data suggest that omicron may be more transmissible, but evidence is limited at this time. Data are being gathered and shared around the world to determine how this variant affects the severity of illness and vaccine effectiveness.

[Translation]

As a precaution, the Government of Canada rapidly implemented new measures at the border. In addition, the medical, public health and research communities in Canada and elsewhere are actively evaluating omicron, just as they did the previous variants, to understand the potential impact on transmission, clinical presentation and vaccine effectiveness.

Like everyone else, we have to learn to live with the virus and its variants. One recent decision will definitely help us keep up the fight against COVID-19 in Canada. Of course I am talking about Health Canada's authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine for use in children aged five to 11.

[English]

I am confident the vaccine will help significantly reduce the number of cases in this younger population.

[Translation]

It will protect Canadian children from this virus, and it will also help to further reduce the number of cases nationwide. However, as our chief public health officer, Dr. Tam, said recently, we are not out of the woods yet. We must remain vigilant and continue to meet the challenges of COVID-19 and the new omicron variant.

As the pandemic has evolved, so has our response and the budgetary requirements of the health portfolio. Let me take a moment to provide my hon. colleagues with a financial overview for 2021-22, as outlined in the supplementary estimates (B).

At this time, we are requesting \$185.7 million on behalf of the health portfolio, which includes Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. This increase over the 2021-22 main estimates and supplementary estimates (A) will complement work already under way in a number of important areas.

[English]

As always, our focus is on protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

This means that we must ensure that our health care systems are fully prepared to take care of Canadians for the duration of the pandemic.

From day one, the Government of Canada has been there to support the provinces and territories in their fight against COVID-19. More than eight dollars out of every \$10 devoted to the fight against COVID-19 were invested by the Canadian government. These investments will help our health care system provide Canadians with the procedures and treatments they need to stay healthy despite the backlog over the past few months.

Health Canada is requesting an extra \$181 million to react to the pressures associated with Canada's fight against COVID-19, as well as to address the health care problems that are suffering the consequences of the pandemic.

I would remind hon. members that over the past year, Health Canada has played a key role in the immunization campaign against COVID-19, the biggest campaign in Canada's history. So far, Health Canada has authorized the use of four different COVID-19 vaccines. The Government of Canada has invested more than \$9 billion to procure vaccines and treatments, as well as to provide international vaccine aid.

Last week, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, or NACI, updated its recommendations for the use of booster doses. NACI has made a strong recommendation that the COVID-19 booster dose should be made available to adults over 50 years of age and further recommends that it may be offered to persons 18 to 49 years of age with consideration of individual risks and where they live.

As the Prime Minister said, we have a secure supply of vaccines in Canada and we will receive more early in the new year. The provinces and territories will easily have access to vaccines and booster doses when they are needed.

• (2005)

In the supplementary estimates (B), the Public Health Agency of Canada is transferring \$12.4 million to the Canada Border Services Agency for the ongoing development of the ArriveCAN app. This service helps travellers crossing the border comply with COVID-19 public health measures before, while or after crossing the border, for example by storing proof of vaccination.

In addition, the Public Health Agency of Canada is transferring \$7 million to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to expand research that will lead to an understanding of the nature of immunity following COVID-19 infection and vaccination.

Finally, for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, I am asking for approximately \$23.7 million in voted items and \$495,000 in statutory credits in the supplementary estimates (B).

Business of Supply

These amounts will be used to create the Centre for Research on Pandemic Preparedness and Health Emergencies and to provide training for its highly skilled staff, which will conduct research on pandemics and health emergencies.

The centre's mission is to protect the health of all Canadians by developing and mobilizing research for pandemic and health emergency preparedness, prevention, response and recovery.

[*English*]

In conclusion, I am immensely proud of the careful and coordinated actions of all governments in Canada, which have taken place to protect the health and well-being of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am also proud of how Canadians have responded to public health advice, of the sacrifices they have made and of the resilience they have shown.

[*Translation*]

As I said earlier, this difficult situation is not over. Canada has confirmed new cases of the omicron variant, and we must continue to monitor the situation closely.

I remind the House that vaccination, in combination with public health measures and personal protective measures, help stop the spread of COVID-19 and its variants in our communities.

My colleague and I would be happy to take questions from members.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thoroughly enjoyed the minister's speech and I look forward to supporting his work, of course, as his parliamentary secretary.

Earlier today, I stood up in the House of Commons for an S.O. 31 to highlight some of the work being done by my alma mater, McMaster University. It is establishing Canada's global nexus for pandemics and biological threats. It is especially significant work in this day and age and it is so important to ensure that all of the experts in Canada and around the world are focused on ensuring the protection and resilience of our countries against emerging variants.

I was wondering if the minister could talk a little bit about whether the COVID research fund could support this initiative and how the research of our universities and institutes of higher learning has been tremendously valuable throughout this pandemic.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad to take this opportunity to thank my parliamentary secretary, the member of Parliament for Milton for agreeing to work with me over the next while, I hope, in order to protect the health and safety of Canadians, in a science-based context. I appreciate very much his question. I think he is right on.

Science and scientists have guided us throughout COVID-19. This was a pandemic health crisis never seen in the last century in Canada, so we had to do things very quickly. With the tremendous investments and support of scientists and health workers across

Canada and with the resilience and hard work of Canadians, we have been able very successfully, relative to many other countries, to go through this crisis.

I look forward to working with the hon. member on the issue that he has raised and on many others where he is extremely capable of contributing to this file.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that in Brampton East our frontline heroes were at the front in supporting our community, from our taxi drivers to our truck drivers, nurses and grocery store clerks. They were incredibly gracious with their time, putting their families second and the community first.

I would really like the minister to talk about the importance of our frontline heroes and the value that we place as a government on our frontline heroes.

● (2010)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Brampton East is right. Without the hard work of hundreds of thousands of health workers over the last 20 months, we would not be in the current situation. This includes those working in the typical health care system but also in long-term care, mental health and community centres.

It also includes the scientists and the other workers who were there to provide health advice, and all those who vaccinated the now over 80% of Canadians of all ages who have been vaccinated at least once. This is among one of the highest rates of vaccination in the world.

I repeat that, because we can be extremely proud of what health workers and Canadians have done. We are a country at the top of the league in terms of vaccination. Knowing vaccination is the key to ending this pandemic, we can be extremely proud of what we have done.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituency youth council has identified mental health supports as a key concern and priority for youth in our riding but also for all Canadians. COVID-19 has certainly created anxiety and led to an increased incidence of depression and anxiety, for good reason.

Can the Minister of Health give us an update on initiatives and essential investments the department is making to address the mental health concerns of Canadians?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Whitby is right. We obviously are mindful of the physical impact of COVID-19 in Canada and the fact that almost 30,000 people in Canada died of COVID-19.

If I may open a brief parentheses, I mentioned earlier the fact that comparatively speaking we have done quite well. If we would have had the same rate of deaths as we observed south of the border, we would have ended up in Canada with 60,000 more deaths. Thirty thousand is many people, but we would have ended up with 90,000 people dying of COVID if we had followed the pace and the rate we saw south of the border.

This was obviously a big impact on physical health, but also a big impact on mental health. The member is correct. We will need to invest resources, time and care looking after the people of Canada, those who have suffered mentally.

I think in particular of younger Canadians such as children, students and families. I know for children and students it has been a very hard time mentally speaking as well, so we will need to work together to repair the damage and to build for the future.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things the Prime Minister, many ministers and our colleagues often talked about was building back better and what we have learned from the pandemic. One of those issues is the issue of mental health.

This government has made great strides in recognizing the federal government does have a role to play in the mental health of Canadians. Could the minister responsible for health provide his thoughts on the importance of the issue of mental health today, especially when he reflects on what has taken place during the pandemic?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, we all know mental health affects not only the person but also the family and the community. It also has an impact on productivity and the ability to participate fully in the community and the workplace. It has huge impacts from physical, economic and social perspectives. The member is so right in signalling that we need to invest, in partnership with provinces and territories.

We did that in 2017 with the first-ever investment directed to mental health, a \$5-billion investment, which we are going to renew the terms of with provinces and territories in the next few months. As well, we have added significant long-term investments in the campaign, and I look forward to working with my colleague, the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, to do that.

• (2015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

I have a question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Has Canada always had good relations with the United States, yes or no?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to reassure my colleague that, yes, we still have a good relationship, not only with the Biden administration, but also with Congress and all Americans.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, does this very good relationship mean that we regularly share intelligence with our colleagues, yes or no?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where my colleague is going with his question, but Canada is clearly a member of the Five Eyes, and we co-operate on a range of issues.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Can you confirm that your government knew the date on which the American troops were going to pull out of Afghanistan well in advance, several months in advance?

The Speaker: I wish to remind the hon. member that he must ask his questions through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I was not in office at the time. However, I can tell my colleague that when the Americans decided to leave Afghanistan last August, Canada had long since left Afghanistan, in 2011, and its remaining soldiers left the country in 2014.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the minister is new to the job. Can the people who are with her answer us? Was the Department of Foreign Affairs at least informed by the Americans several months in advance that they were pulling out of Afghanistan?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, of course, conditions in Afghanistan were difficult and have become even more so since the Americans decided to leave the country.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us if she knows how many Canadians were left in Afghanistan after August 31?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, that would be a question for my colleague, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, but with regard to the consular services that were offered and are still available. However, the diplomatic mission in Kabul is no longer—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the minister that 1,280 Canadian citizens and permanent residents were left behind in Afghanistan.

Next question, does the government know how many interpreters currently stranded in Afghanistan or Pakistan are awaiting their turn to come to Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, there are several. Many of them have a connection to Canada. However, because Canada left Afghanistan in 2014, many interpreters also have a connection to several other countries because they were often serving other members of NATO, the military alliance Canada belongs to that was present in Afghanistan.

I also want to let my colleague know that a number of countries are in a situation—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, the government decided to set a target of 40,000 Afghans to be brought to Canada. Why was the number 40,000 chosen?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I would reply, why not?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, do I have to accept an answer like that?

We are talking about resources. Does the minister believe that Canada currently has the resources to receive 40,000 Afghans?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, of course we have the resources. When we welcomed 65,000 Syrian refugees, we were successful and we had the resources.

My esteemed colleagues should be proud, because not many countries in the world would be prepared to receive 40,000 Afghans. We can be proud because we are ready to welcome them and we will be proud to welcome them.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us when the 40,000 Afghans will be welcomed into Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague needs to understand two things.

First of all, the situation in Afghanistan is very difficult right now in terms of safety and security. That is why my deputy minister went to the region to try to find solutions to bring in the 40,000 refugees as quickly as possible. In the meantime, however, my job is to speak with other countries—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, could the minister tell us how many Canadians have been imprisoned by the Taliban?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, any Canadian who is imprisoned anywhere in the world is a priority and has access to consular services.

• (2020)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know how many Canadians have been imprisoned by the Taliban.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, as I told my colleague, we will always be there to protect Canadians, in Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world. That is a priority for our government.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, could the minister explain why the refugee program changed one criterion from “in Afghanistan” to “outside of Afghanistan”?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to tell us why, in their own election platform last August, the Conservatives did not have plans to bring in 40,000 Afghan refugees. Why were they against the refugee program that was proposed by the government?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to refugees and taking people in, this pertains to specific situations and would not necessarily be included in an election platform. It is also a matter of planning and responding. Back in 2015, Prime Minister Harper said that we would take in 10,000 Syrians. Then, during the election campaign, a dead little boy washed up on a beach. The Liberals then said that they would take in 25,000 Syrians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That is what you did, and that is what happened. There is nothing at all distasteful about saying that; that is what happened during the 2015 election campaign. Remember that, everybody: You played politics with that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Again, I must remind members to direct their comments and questions to the Chair and not directly to each other.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear my colleague ask a question. However, the name of that little boy was Aylan Kurdi. He had a name and an identity, and that was a tragedy.

I would like my colleague to apologize to the House for referring to this tragedy as though it were a mere partisan ploy during the 2015 election campaign.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I do not have to apologize for bringing up what was obviously a tragic event. At the time, the Liberals hitched their campaign to that tragic event to boost their numbers in the polls and portray the Conservatives as heartless. That is what happened with that tragic event.

Back to the matter at hand. Let us talk about international relations and foreign affairs, specifically our relationship with the United States and the current issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am starting to wonder what relevance this line of questioning has to the estimates of supply. It seems to me that the member is going back to 2015 and citing something that is not relevant to the budgetary measures being brought forward by the government.

The Speaker: I would like to remind hon. members to keep it as relevant as possible, but I have seen stranger things where people seem to be going off on a tangent and manage to bring it back. I trust wholeheartedly that all members in this chamber will do this with dignity and respect.

I will go back to the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I was answering the minister's question about the fact that our election platform did not say anything about the number of refugees we were prepared to take in. That is where the discussion started.

I will give my colleague the floor.

The Speaker: The Minister of Foreign Affairs has 10 seconds to respond.

Business of Supply

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, we can be proud of the way Canadians responded to the Syrian crisis in 2015. We can be proud that Canadians opened their arms and their hearts and welcomed Syrian refugees. I know that we can count on that same generosity with the Afghan refugees.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be directing all my questions to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In 2018, Parliament unanimously passed a bill that I brought forward on Magnitsky sanctions, holding gross human rights violators who are foreign officials to account. Unfortunately, the government has not used it since 2018. Last week, the parliament the European Union actually did a report and scolded the Government of Canada for failing to hold corrupt foreign officials to account.

When will the Minister of Foreign Affairs finally use the Magnitsky act to sanction those gross human rights violators?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague that we are very much aware that using sanctions against individuals in certain contexts to deter their actions, or to deter the actions they can have on the part of their states, is a very effective tool.

That is why, even recently, we made sure to put sanctions on people in Nicaragua, to make sure that we were sending a clear message about what was going on in the country and its failed elections. That is why we have put sanctions on 440 people within the Russian regime, to make sure we could deter them from taking military actions against Ukraine.

• (2025)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was a member of Parliament back in 2018 when she voted in favour of the Magnitsky sanctions. It was good enough to pass then, but was she just virtue signalling to the diaspora communities here in Canada and in countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and to the people who we are standing up for human rights and democracy around the world? Was she just virtue-signalling to them at that point in time? Why is the minister not using Magnitsky sanctions against all those people who are abusing human rights around the world?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, of course, there are different acts that provide sanctions the Government of Canada can use. I would like to mention that right now there are 1,446 listings under the Special Economic Measures Act. Of those 1,446 listings, Belarus has 77 individuals; Myanmar has 124; China has five; Iran has 202; Nicaragua has 24; Russia has 210; and I could go on.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, after the Minister of Foreign Affairs was appointed, I sent a letter asking her to review all the correspondence and names that were submitted by my colleagues and me about human rights abusers, including those who harvest organs from Falun Gong practitioners in China, those responsible in Iran for the downing of Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752, and those responsible for the human rights abuses we see from the regime in Tehran.

We also want to make sure that we are holding to account those who have been violating the human rights of innocent protesters who have been arrested as political prisoners in Hong Kong, and of the journalists and political prisoners who are being held right now in detention in Belarus. Why would she not use the Sergei Magnitsky Law to send a signal, in concert with the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, obviously, we have many sanctions. I want to continue to list some of them. My colleague mentioned Magnitsky. There are 30 individuals who have been listed under the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, which the member was referring to as the Magnitsky act, upon whom sanctions have been imposed. This system is being used by the government, and we have a rigorous process.

Regarding the downing of flight PS752, we are looking at all the tools in our tool box to make sure the families of the victims are able to seek justice from the Iranian regime.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, one request from the families of the Iranian and Ukrainian communities that lost loved ones in the downing of flight PS752 is that we list the Quds Force and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as terrorist organizations. Why has the minister not listed IRGC as a terrorist organization?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague well knows, the IRGC Quds Force is listed as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code.

That being said, I must say that I have had many conversations regarding the downing of flight PS752, even recently, with my Ukrainian, Swedish and U.K. counterparts. We will act together to make sure we are able to seek justice from Iran on this very important issue.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, we all know that Russia is amassing about 175,000 troops on the borders of Ukraine. President Biden had calls and discussions yesterday with President Putin, France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. Why did he not call Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to talk with Secretary Blinken about this very issue three times over the past three weeks. Obviously, for us Ukraine is a fundamental priority. We will make sure we work with like-minded countries to hold Russia to account and deter any military action on Ukraine.

• (2030)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that we have been able to extend Operation Unifier, which was started by our previous Conservative government. We have 200 troops on the ground there who have been in training missions.

Business of Supply

What else will the minister and the government do to ensure that Ukraine gets the support it needs to push back on a potential Russian invasion?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned many times, we will use all the tools in our tool box to deter Russia from acting. That being said, I want to also say to my colleague that the question of working with the U.S., the U.K., Ukraine, Germany and many other countries is fundamental because we must de-escalate the conflict. That is why we have been able to work with partners on this very issue. I have also mentioned it directly to my Russian counterpart.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, it was reported that the Government of Canada was considering putting in more troops and moving frigates into the Black Sea, as well as moving our CF-18 fighter jets from Romania into Ukraine.

Will the minister put military equipment and troops into the situation in Ukraine? Will they provide Ukraine with lethal military weapons?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the brave women and men who are part of Operation Unifier. Indeed, my colleague is right. We have been in Ukraine for many years training thousands of military personnel for the Ukrainian military. We will continue to do that.

Right now, we are working with many colleagues and looking at all options possible.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[Translation]

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, please wait a moment. My colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, is bringing me a lectern.

[English]

I appreciate this opportunity to participate in today's debate. I have great respect and appreciation for this important democratic exercise. I will be speaking for 10 minutes, and then I will be happy to take questions.

As the world is pivoting and we see a rise of authoritarianism, the Government of Canada is not afraid to stand up for our values. These authoritarian regimes are led by people who do not believe that democracies have what it takes to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Canadians could not disagree more. We believe we are stronger and more equipped to face these issues precisely because we are democracies. This is the message I sent to the world and to our partners throughout my latest engagement, and this is core to Canada's foreign policy.

[Translation]

Now more than ever, in a world where the ground keeps shifting beneath our feet, Canada must stand with its allies and leverage its bilateral and multilateral relationships to confront the rise of authoritarianism.

Canada must show leadership in building and leading coalitions to uphold a rules-based international system. Having the right resources in the right places is critical to achieving this goal. The Speech from the Throne is clear on this point. We need to expand and adapt our diplomatic presence around the world. We need to do this within multilateral institutions and in specific regions.

Multilateralism is at the very heart of Canadian diplomatic culture, particularly since Lester B. Pearson. Thanks to our personal and strategic involvement, Canada was able to play a role in the great advances of the 20th century, such as the Blue Helmets, the end of apartheid in South Africa, the banning of landmines, and so on.

Today, we continue to be instrumental in the great issues of our era, namely fighting climate change, promoting gender equality and protecting our environment.

[English]

Many regions must also draw our attention, particularly as China is growing its influence around the world. No region will be more important to Canada's ability to address its priorities than the Indo-Pacific. As was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, Canada intends to deepen its engagement with Indo-Pacific countries and partners. We will work on all fronts: diplomatic, security, sustainable development and economic.

Diplomatically speaking, we will work closely with our friends and partners to protect the rules-based international order. Canada will promote inclusive and open regional governance, accountability and human rights. Canada also recognizes the need to reinforce our support to Indo-Pacific regional security and stability. We will ensure, with our like-minded partners, the future security environment is favourable to Canada's interests and those of our friends and allies in the region. For example, we will do so by taking part in joint operations in the region, most recently through the involvement of Canada's frigate HMCS *Winnipeg*.

Despite the pandemic, the Indo-Pacific remains a critical hub for global trade, investment, production and supply chains. Canada's post-COVID success hinges upon our private sector's ability to expand market access and pursue economic opportunities in the region.

We need to diversify our trading partners. We all know that, and our supply chains in the regions also need to not be overly dependent on one market. On November 16, 2021, Canada and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations launched negotiations toward a Canada-ASEAN free trade agreement. This potential agreement would help create new market opportunities for Canadian goods and services while supporting a more transparent and predictable environment for trade and investments. Frankly, we owe it to the entrepreneurs at home. They need to have access to every opportunity the world has to offer.

Canada's pursuit of these goals must be done in a way that aligns with our global commitments to act on climate change and sustainability. Indeed, no region will be more consequential than the Indo-Pacific in shaping our ability to meet and exceed our global commitments and targets. A renewed commitment to this issue in the Indo-Pacific will reinforce Canada's standing as a global leader in this regard.

• (2035)

[*Translation*]

Nevertheless, our government remains deeply concerned about China's failure to respect human rights. As a democracy, Canada will not stand idly by when the world exposes serious human rights violations, including the treatment of Uighurs.

Earlier this year, a Canadian resolution on Xinjiang at the United Nations Human Rights Council was supported by 43 other countries. Canada continues to call for an independent, international investigation into allegations of human rights violations and genocide.

In addition, we do not tolerate any form of economic coercion. We must conduct our international relations based on rules. That is what we expect from our partners.

Even so, Canada will find ways to co-operate with China on global issues and common interests such as climate change. To be sure, the Canada–China relationship is complex and multi-faceted. Canadians expect the government to work through these complexities.

More than ever, we need to get away from the partisan politics of debating Canada's approach to the Chinese government and, most importantly, we must stand together. Our national interests are at stake.

[*English*]

The situation in Afghanistan is also of grave concern for this government. The country's humanitarian crisis is worsening, and its social and economic systems appear to be collapsing. I have talked to dozens of my counterparts around the world about this issue and they share our concerns.

As the Prime Minister has stated clearly, Canada has no plans to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. Canadian law continues to list the Taliban as a terrorist entity. A viable way for Canada to try to improve the situation in Afghanistan is through continued collaboration with our international partners.

Our government recently increased its allocation of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan from \$27.3 million to more than \$75 million. Canada has also committed to resettling 40,000 Afghan refugees. We have had the chance to talk about it today a lot. Canada's focus in Afghanistan also includes ensuring the Taliban respect their commitment to allow the safe passage of Canadians, foreign nationals and Afghans, as well as the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

• (2040)

[*Translation*]

Canada is an important ally to the United States. No two countries depend more on each other for mutual prosperity and security

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as Canada and the United States. Millions of jobs on both sides of the border depend on this partnership. It is important to note that the United States sells more goods and services to Canada than to any other country.

The Biden administration recognizes how important this unique relationship is to our two countries. The Prime Minister and I had the opportunity to reinforce that message during our recent meetings in Washington with Biden himself, with his secretary of state, Antony Blinken, and with several other members of Congress. Many of my ministerial colleagues have done the same with their American counterparts.

I still firmly believe in the friendship between Canada and the United States. On the margins of the 2021 North American leaders' summit on November 18, we agreed that we should continue to combat COVID-19, establish a supply chain working group and maintain an Indo-Pacific strategic dialogue.

We are, however, realistic, since recent events have brought some strong protectionist tendencies to light and, of course, we must protect Canadian interests, especially with respect to electric vehicles and softwood lumber.

Lastly, it is also important to defend access to vaccines all around the world.

[*English*]

The virus does not recognize borders, and the harsh reality is that no one is safe until everyone is. That is why Canada will be working with many countries around the world to make sure that there is worldwide access to COVID-19 vaccines. We will continue to provide support to COVAX, which at this point has procured 87 million vaccines for low- and middle-income countries. We will also give nearly 200 million doses to the COVAX facility by the end of 2022.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your patience. I will be—

The Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Brampton East.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's very thoughtful remarks and I am looking forward to working with her as her parliamentary secretary.

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Our government was clear, in the Speech from the Throne, about the need to work on a whole-of-government engagement strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. Allow me to share a few facts about why Asia matters for Canada. It is home to 4.3 billion people, or nearly 55% of the world's population. It has a middle class of 2 billion people, with 1.5 billion more expected in the next 10 years. Twenty-one out of 30 of the world's largest cities are in this region. Sixty per cent of global maritime trade comes through the South China Sea. This region is expected to account for over 50% of global GDP by 2040.

While this strategy is taking shape, could the minister update us on what a more meaningful Canadian engagement in Asia could look like, and what component that would imply?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague not only for his re-election, but also for the fact that he will be parliamentary secretary to a fantastic minister. That is humility and audacity together.

I want to echo the facts that he outlined when talking about the importance of Asia. Canada is a Pacific country. We know that. We have a very important Pacific coast, therefore our engagements in Asia need to be a key priority. As highlighted in the Speech from the Throne, and as mentioned by my dear colleague, we will deepen our engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Canada needs to meet the Indo-Pacific century with a comprehensive and integrated approach. Such an approach will be focused on continuing to advance trade and economic objectives. We also want to make sure that we are protecting Canada's security interests and defending a rules-based international order.

● (2045)

[Translation]

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Chair, this pandemic does not recognize borders. The collaboration between countries during this pandemic illustrates the importance of diplomacy. During the COVID-19 crisis, our government was present on the world stage and our country was an indisputable leader.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us about her recent trip to Europe, as well as her participation in the 2021 NATO summit and the summit of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent question and congratulate him on his re-election and his skilful use of the French language.

I did just get back from Latvia. I had the opportunity to meet Canadian troops who are currently there on a very important mission to send Russia a very strong message that we will be there as NATO members to protect the borders of eastern Europe.

I also had the opportunity to meet my counterparts from other NATO member countries. We talked about a number of things, including, of course, Afghanistan. We discussed lessons learned from what happened in August, as well as the threat that Russia poses to Ukraine.

Lastly, I went to the OSCE, where I also talked about European security issues and even engaged my Russian counterpart on Ukrainian issues.

[English]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member of Parliament for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, and all of my questions will be for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I just heard the minister say that Canada is an important ally of the United States, yet there is a new Three Eyes partnership: a security partnership among the United States and two other partners that do not include Canada. This is embarrassing to Canada.

In the past, we have been part of the Five Eyes, and now there is this new security arrangement. What is the minister planning to do to either engage in this partnership or do something about it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, in order to be very specific for my colleague, I want to know what strategic partnership she is referring to and what two other countries she is referring to.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, I am speaking of AUKUS, Australia and New Zealand. Are you not aware of it, Minister?

The Deputy Chair: The questions need to be posed through the Speaker.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I would like to mention to my colleague that it is not New Zealand. It is Australia, the U.S. and the U.K. That being said, I would also mention that Canada is not in the business of making nuclear submarines.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, I do not think it is limited to submarines.

In any event, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has told us that she is just back from Latvia. Would she be supportive of Poland, Lithuania or Latvia invoking article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty in the face of the Belarus problems and the migrant crisis?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we will always be there to support our allies within the alliance of NATO. That is why I had very important conversations with my colleagues. I had the chance to meet with my Lithuanian and Latvian counterparts, and we are very preoccupied with the security of the Baltics. I want to reassure my colleague, because we have military troops in Latvia doing what the member is referring to, which is making sure that—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, the question to the minister was this. Would she be supportive of Poland, Lithuania or Latvia invoking article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty?

• (2050)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, all allies agree that we need to send a strong message to Belarus, and that the action of weaponizing migrants by the Belarus regime is not only reprehensible, it is unacceptable.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, I take that as a non-answer.

Right now, Canada has 550 soldiers in Estonia and 200 in Ukraine. Is the minister concerned, given the events with Russia's military buildup opposite Ukraine, about what is happening there? In other words, what options, military or diplomatic, is the government considering to safeguard our troops who are already there?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, that is exactly why I had the chance to talk with the Secretary General of NATO. Together, we met with the troops. I was very happy, because they are all from Valcartier, the Royal 22e Régiment, right now.

That being said, we will be there as a steadfast ally leading the mission and showing the world what Canada can do on its military front.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, can the minister tell us if any consideration has been given to the recall of our ambassador from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus for consultation?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I am always in contact with our diplomatic corps. I believe in their work and I am always there to make sure they can operate in a secure environment. I will always defend them as the chief diplomat.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, the question was whether the minister has given any consideration to recalling our ambassador from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus for a consultation.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I am in constant consultation with my ambassadors, with my team and with my deputy minister, who sits in front of me. I must say that the question of Russia is clearly a priority, and we will make every—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, can the minister tell us if the government has given any consideration to further sanctions against either Belarus or Russia?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, yes, we did and we are doing so.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, can the minister describe the strategic importance of the Suwalki Gap and what Canada and our NATO partners are doing to safeguard it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we always work with partners to make sure we improve our alliance and make it stronger. Of course, I have had many conversations with the Secretary General when it comes to that very issue.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, can the minister describe the recent Russian actions to destabilize the NATO Baltic states and the former Yugoslavia, and what the government intends to do about it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, let me be clear. We are concerned with Russia's actions in three specific regions: the Ukraine, with its military buildup; the use, through Belarus, of weaponizing

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migrants to impact Baltic states; and finally the involvement of Russia in—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, can the minister tell us if the government has had any dialogue in the last three months with the Taliban government of Afghanistan with regard to the release of our Afghan friends and allies?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we do not recognize the Taliban as a legitimate government. That is why we have no engagement with them. We work with neighbouring countries to make sure we can repatriate 40,000 Afghans.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, the government has talked about working with our regional partners to get our Afghan supporters out of that country. Who exactly are those regional partners that the government refers to?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, they are NATO, like-minded countries in Europe, Qatar, Kuwait, Pakistan, the U.S., and I could go on.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, the minister will know from our overseas missions that the Ukrainian press is calling us soft on Russia and saying we are reluctant to defend Ukraine from Russian aggression. What does the minister have to say to this criticism?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I do not think we are reading the same Ukrainian press.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, can the minister give us the state of play of diplomatic discussions with regard to Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, it is a top priority. I raise it with all my counterparts. That is exactly why I went to Europe. That is why I am here with my colleagues, talking about different options.

• (2055)

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Chair, a November 2021 NGO Monitor report shows that the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, an organization affiliated with the terrorist organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, also known as the PFLP, has been receiving Canadian tax dollars from Global Affairs as an implementing partner under an existing UN food and agriculture project that ends in 2022.

Why is the government of Canada funding the UAWC, a terrorist-affiliated organization?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I just want to make sure my colleague and I are on the same page, because Canada has listed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the organization my colleague just mentioned, as a terrorist organization under Canadian law.

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Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, of course we all know that, but strangely, a whole year earlier, back in October 2020, Global Affairs actually issued a statement saying it was not funding the UAWC directly or indirectly, and that it had concerns about the terrorist connections of the UAWC. I am speaking of the UAWC, not the PFLP. I know there are a lot of acronyms here. However, they had concerns about the terrorist connections of the UAWC, yet in October 2021 an ATIP request was received by NGO Monitor. That ATIP request confirms that the UAWC is in fact listed as an implementing partner and is currently receiving Global Affairs funding.

Again I ask why Canadian tax dollars are funding the UAWC a year after GAC expressed how concerned it was about its terrorist connections.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, Canadian tax dollars will never be used to fund terrorist organizations, period.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, that is why I am telling the minister of this, because the Canadian government is doing that. I urge her to read the NGO Monitor report from November. I can send her a copy if she has not seen it already, but that is what is happening.

In October of this year, the Israeli government declared the UAWC to be a terrorist organization due to its links to the PFLP. Given that Israel is our strong ally, what steps is Global Affairs taking to finally stop funding this terrorist organization?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, obviously we are a steadfast ally of Israel and friends to the Palestinian people. I raised the question regarding the Palestinian civil society organizations listed by Israel as terrorist organizations with my counterpart, Lapid, when I had the chance to talk to him. Of course, he said to me that he would be giving more clarity on this matter, so I am waiting for him.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, I look forward to that clarification and I hope the Canadian government will follow suit and also declare the UAWC a terrorist organization.

I want to ask about UNRWA. Canada gives tens of millions of dollars to UNRWA. In January, IMPACT-se issued a report confirming that UNRWA was providing anti-Semitic school materials to young Palestinian students. The minister said at the time that she asked her officials to investigate how this happened.

What was the outcome of this investigation, and will a report be tabled?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, of course we will always be there to help vulnerable Palestinians. We would rather see them sitting in classrooms in schools that are funded by United Nations organizations than in the streets fighting. That is exactly why we want to make sure we continue to support UNRWA.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, the minister surely must be aware of what she is saying, because the school materials are teaching these young, vulnerable Palestinian children how to hate Jews.

Will Canada stop providing dollars to UNRWA, given that these materials literally teach young Palestinian children to be anti-Semites?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague must rest assured that we will always be there to denounce any form of anti-Semitism. Of course, we expect neutrality from UNRWA when it comes to the education and schooling material offered to vulnerable kids in Palestine.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, it is clear that the minister is not getting neutrality. In fact, I wish the government would do what the EU is doing and put its money where its mouth is.

In September, because of these very concerns about the school materials, the European Union made its UNRWA funding conditional on immediate changes to the Palestinian school curriculum to promote coexistence with Israel. If such changes are not made by early 2022, EU funds will go to NGOs that promote coexistence. Canada could have been a leader on this.

Will the minister's government follow the European Union's lead?

• (2100)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague referred to neutrality because I referred to neutrality earlier. I want to reassure him, because our funding allowed UNRWA to have a neutrality coordinator, who leads initiatives, responds to allegations and upholds UNRWA's neutrality. Of course, our funding, which is relevant and necessary, must be conditional on neutrality principles, and that is how we are upholding them.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, I hate to inform the minister again, but it is not happening. She should follow up with her contacts and make sure it is.

I want to ask about the appointment of the honourable Irwin Cotler as Canada's special envoy on preserving Holocaust remembrance and combatting anti-Semitism.

What specific government resources have been allocated to the envoy to ensure that he can fulfill his mandate, which was recently renewed?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I am glad my colleague is raising the incredible work of my personal friend, Irwin Cotler, who is a proud Montrealer and very strong advocate against any form of anti-Semitism. He is a bridge-builder between the Jewish community and many other communities. I had the chance to have a good chat with him two weeks ago. He came to my office. Obviously, we will support him in all his endeavours.

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Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Chair, he is an excellent appointment, but the minister did not answer the question. Has the envoy received any resources, funds, offices or support staff from the Government of Canada?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, he does and will continue to do so. Meanwhile, following the meeting we had at GAC, he also had the chance to meet with another of his great friends, Prime Minister Trudeau, who again restated the importance of Irwin Cotler's work as a peacebuilder.

The Deputy Chair: I want to remind the hon. member that she is not to mention the first or last names of individuals who sit in this House.

Debate, the hon. Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Chair, hello, *kwe, tansi, unusakut*.

I want to start this speech by acknowledging that we are here today on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. I am pleased to be here with my colleagues today to discuss the 2021-22 supplementary estimates (B) for the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

Joining me today from the department is my deputy minister, Daniel Quan-Watson. He is not in the House with deputy Lucas, but he is here, in any event, in the corridors, passing me messages furiously as the case may be.

Having spent two years as Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, where we as a cabinet faced daily what is, let us hope, a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, I look forward to continuing this work as Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. This department is at the forefront of Canada's efforts to re-establish a nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown and government-to-government relationship between Canada, first nations, Inuit and Métis.

We are also changing the way we work within the department in partnership with indigenous peoples, in order to better support communities across the country as they assert their right to self-determination. This work is critical to building a new type of relationship with indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

The 2021-22 supplementary estimates (B) include investments of over one billion dollars toward key initiatives that are priorities for our government. Of that amount, \$973.9 million is for Crown-Indigenous relations and \$57.5 million is attributed to Northern Affairs. The majority of these funds for Crown-Indigenous relations will be used to settle claims and litigation, to support infrastructure projects in indigenous communities, and to implement the federal pathway to address missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. We have made these areas a priority and have dedicated substantial resources to supporting them.

Resolving and settling claims that involve historic grievances of wrongs committed by the Crown is at the heart of our mandate, and as a department it is our goal to do so in a respectful manner and in equal partnership across the negotiating table. These claims need to be addressed for us to move forward together. They can often relate to lands that were appropriated by settlers and that hold sacred

meaning for indigenous communities. Returning land is essential for communities to make their own plans according to their priorities.

Settling litigation outside the courts, especially class actions related to historic harms committed against indigenous children, is essential to address the legacy of colonial policies and the ongoing unwritten chapter in taking meaningful steps toward reconciliation with those who continue to feel the impacts.

Too many indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are still being harmed today, and we must continue to do everything we can to stop that now. We are accelerating the work with indigenous partners in provinces and territories to address this national tragedy. The federal pathway is our government's response to the final report of the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It is also part of a national action plan launched this year with partners to address this important issue.

The federal pathway is key to restoring a sense of justice for those who have been lost and have gone missing, for those who have survived, and for families and healing for communities. Our government will continue to work with partners on our collective way forward to address the root causes of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. This includes strengthening relationships with indigenous partners and provincial and territorial governments to bring accountability to this work and accountability for the Government of Canada to uphold this role in Canadian society.

More especially in regard to the claims, the \$412.2 million that is already allocated to the specific claims settlement fund will be re-profiled in 2022-23. This will ensure that these funds continue to be available for the payment of compensation to first nations under specific claims settlements while concluding the outstanding legal obligations of the federal government.

As the pace of negotiations is directly defined by the priorities of each community and group, it is difficult to predict exactly when they will be completed, but it is the need of this government to accelerate things.

● (2105)

The fund was specifically set up with the flexibility to adapt to the evolving time frames of negotiations so that money not spent in a particular year can be moved to a future year, as needed.

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The supplementary estimates (B) also provide \$211.2 million to support the Gottfriedson day scholar settlement. Through this settlement, Canada will provide \$10,000 to each eligible survivor class member for the experience of attending a residential school during the day. This settlement includes a \$50-million fund to the day school revitalization society, which will be a survivor-led organization focusing on healing, wellness, education, language, culture and commemoration activities. Funding sought will include administration and legal costs, obviously for the settlement.

The supplementary estimates (B) also include \$3 million to support the government's ongoing commitment to resolving indigenous childhood claims litigation outside of the courts. The estimates this year provide \$231.4 million of new funding for the distinctions-based indigenous community infrastructure fund announced in budget 2021. The goal of this fund is to contribute to the closing of the infrastructure gap in indigenous communities by 2030, along with other ministries tasked with closing that gap.

This funding also aims to advance self-determination and self-governance, create good jobs and build healthier, safer and more prosperous indigenous communities. It will support the essential indigenous-led infrastructure and development needs specifically of Inuit, Métis, self-governing and modern treaty nations and northern indigenous communities.

I am thankful for the opportunity to share the important work that Crown-Indigenous Relations carries out. What we are doing is important for so many indigenous communities across this country, from addressing the root causes of violence against indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people to settling land claims and closing infrastructure gaps. These activities will build stronger, safer and healthier indigenous communities from coast to coast.

I look forward to answering any questions the House may have.

Meegwetch. Nakurmiik. Marsi cho.

• (2110)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (deputy House leader of the government, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the minister for all he has been doing over the last two years. I know it has been a very trying two years.

He elaborated a bit on some of the investments in the supplementary estimates (B), and I want to give him an opportunity to elaborate a little more on some of the requirements and needs of indigenous communities in terms of mental health supports, given what we have seen over the past couple of years. Can he forecast what we will need this next fiscal year in terms of supporting indigenous, Métis and Inuit communities?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, I would first like to thank the member for her question.

Of course, the impact of mental health issues is doubly harmful because of the pandemic. The opioid crisis has hit hard across the country, especially in western Canada on the west coast. Unfortunately, mental health is something we are not very comfortable talking about as individuals and as a government.

Fortunately, budget 2021 allocated \$500 million to address this issue. Of course, two of the most serious consequences of mental health issues are suicide and the opioid crisis. This can be seen everywhere. This has been particularly true during the pandemic, and the funds we invested in community support will be renewed year after year to—

The Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. member for Whitby.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Chair, indigenous communities have long asked for restitution of land and recognition of rights in Canada. After being sworn in, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations stated, "It's time to give land back." Disposition by settlers contributes to economic inequality and racial discrimination against indigenous peoples.

Could the minister update the House on work to return stolen land to indigenous communities, including settling land claims and implementing self-government agreements?

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, as the member can appreciate, this is not a question that can be answered in a very easy 30 seconds. Clearly, in the work we look at, we state that the relationship is defined by land, has been broken by land and is restituted by land. However, it is not easy to fix from the sole perspective of the federal government. It involves individuals, municipalities and provinces, especially divisions between provincial Crown land and federal Crown land.

Clearly there is work to be done squarely within this department to be a little more creative in how we settle claims. In some cases, where lands cannot be restituted, funds have to be given and appropriated in the proper fashion to communities. That has to be accelerated, and clearly the additional work for reserves has to be done in a better way. This is something we are working on—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Whitby.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I want to thank the minister for his leadership and commitment to giving stolen lands back. The commitment our government made to lift all long-term drinking water advisories and ensure clean water for first nations on reserve is one of the most important promises we have made. We have made substantial progress, but there is still lots of work to do.

The most recent PBO report stated that the government has set aside enough funding to meet the expected capital costs to build water and waste-water systems over the next five years. Could you please provide an update on the state of this funding and current drinking water advisories across Canada?

The Deputy Chair: I will not do that, but I will ask the minister to do it.

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, I am quite happy to announce that I was recently made aware of the lifting of a long-term water advisory in Whitedog First Nation, or Wabaseemoong. That brings us up to about 120. Let us recall that there were a little over 100 in place when we came into power in 2015. We need to stay steadfast in remedying this, and we have made the investments.

We have also settled a historic piece of litigation that provides for restitution and money to the communities that have suffered from not having clean water, and have forwarded investments of several billions of dollars to have a document that can be brought before the courts that is enforceable. We expect that to be settled quite quickly. It will ensure that not only the investments we have made as the government as a policy measure are there, but the commitments we made to first nations are there for the future regardless of government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, previously I talked about the importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the 94 calls to action. I remember when the minister was sitting right beside me, he was one of the first, if not the first, minister to speak Ojibway inside the House of Commons.

I know the preservation of indigenous languages is important to him. I am wondering if he could provide his thoughts with regard to indigenous languages and how important it is that the government supports them.

• (2115)

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, the name for Ojibway in Mohawk is [*Member spoke in Mohawk*], and that was the language I was speaking at the time. It was a 30-second speech to the House. Obviously this is not my language. It is something I have had a lot of support in learning. It has very little to do with me and is really about assisting communities in regaining their identities, which governments such as ours have been instrumental in stripping from them through, for example, residential schools.

As a Quebecker, obviously I know that language is at the heart of identity, and for indigenous communities this is equally so if not more so, given the precarious state of the languages across the country. There are over 90 dialects and languages, if we rely on the census.

This is something we have to keep investing in. We have made historic investments, but it requires investments across Canada from the provinces and territories as well so that we can work with communities to regain identity and culture, which are so important for reconciliation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Chair, we passed legislation to have a statutory holiday at the end of September, and I believe the

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Province of Manitoba is now looking at doing something of a similar nature, recognizing the same date.

I am wondering if my colleague could provide his thoughts with regard to the important role Ottawa plays in providing leadership. Things like passing legislation to enact a statutory holiday are a positive step toward reconciliation.

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, indeed that is an important day for us to reflect on the legacy, particularly these days, of residential schools. It is a day for all of us to focus on. We would encourage the provinces and territories to adopt that day as well. This is a moment for all Canadians to reflect, not just indigenous people, and to let the voices of indigenous people speak and resonate throughout the day and obviously the rest of the year. This year our focus has been on allowing a space for indigenous voices to be heard, and we should continue to do so in the coming years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like to inform you that I intend to use all my time to debate with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister and her cabinet colleagues for participating in this exercise, which is fundamental to the system of responsible government that was hard-won by the Patriotes of Lower Canada and the Reformers of Upper Canada. I thank her very much for participating in this fundamental exercise of accountability.

In the supplementary estimates (B), we see that \$375 million will be allocated to developing countries to make it easier for them to access COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and diagnostic tools. How will that \$375 million that we heard about a few months ago be distributed? Will it be by means of direct transfers to certain countries and, if so, to which ones? Will this happen through COVAX or the ACT- Accelerator initiative?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, I agree with my colleague.

Of course, the Patriotes have often been considered great nationalists. I believe that was the case, but I also believe that, at the time, they called for ministerial responsibility. I thank them for the work they did, and I am pleased to be here on behalf of my government to answer my colleague's questions about foreign affairs.

The \$375 million that my colleague referenced is indicative of our leadership and also our global approach, which seeks to provide equitable access to vaccines in different countries. At the bilateral level, we recently offered vaccines to several countries in the Caribbean. At the multilateral level, we are also participating in the COVAX initiative. Sometimes, we help establish a vaccine production facility, as is presently the case in South Africa.

• (2120)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, I applaud the government's efforts to improve access to vaccines in developing countries.

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The omicron variant has shown us that, until the pandemic is under control in developing countries too, Canada is no safer despite its high vaccination rate, so I applaud the government's efforts.

Those efforts come with a hefty price tag. Would it not have been faster, cheaper and more efficient to just join the movement to waive patents? That would have made it possible to outsource vaccine production to many places around the world.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, my colleague said his questions were for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, so I am a bit uncomfortable answering him directly. However, I do want to give him my regards and congratulate him on being elected.

I would also like to tell him that there are many ways to make inroads against COVID-19 globally. As he correctly pointed out, almost everyone in Canada is vaccinated, but many people around the world are not because of vaccine supply issues. That is why the 200 million doses Canada promised are extremely important. There are also vaccine transportation, storage and administration issues, and we are working on those issues with developing countries.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, I had hoped for a response on waiving patents to help outsource and ramp up the production of vaccines around the world.

Is it possible to get a response on that?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, we are indeed exploring that issue.

Experts on the matter say that there are methods and ways that will help us vaccinate even more people even quicker.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, it seems obvious that these methods have not produced the desired results.

In any event, a few moments ago, the minister noted that some vaccines had been given to certain Caribbean countries. What is more, vaccines were given to Egypt. I commended that donation, which is exceptionally positive.

That being said, what criteria does the government use to choose a country? We have expressed a desire for Taiwan, which is under pressure from the People's Republic of China, to have access to vaccines. We noted the situation in Palestine, where Israel is preventing the Palestinian population from accessing vaccines, even though the vaccination rate of its own population is extremely high. We have also expressed a desire for vaccines to be offered to Haiti.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, of course we want to work on several levels. Our main priority is multilateralism, because we know that this is the best way to provide vaccines quickly to several countries. That is why we were one of the founding countries of the COVAX initiative. We have committed to donating 200 million doses through this initiative. Canada is one of the top donors.

We have also decided to provide \$1.3 billion to different countries for everything from screening tests, to vaccine treatment, to equitable access to the various treatment methods available through the ACT-Accelerator.

This is how the Government of Canada has put—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Montarville.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for her answer. Once again, I reiterate my appeal for the specific cases of Taiwan, Palestine and Haiti, and I hope the minister will be receptive to my appeal.

Now I want to talk about the \$69 million or so earmarked for the Rohingya crisis. Obviously, no one could be against virtue and apple pie. We see this as a very necessary investment, given the serious situation facing the Rohingya population in Myanmar.

This government has even stated that no population, group or community should be persecuted because of its identity.

With that in mind, can the minister talk to us about the situation of the people who are currently being subjected to a veritable genocide in Tigray, while Ethiopia is the main recipient of Canada's international aid, and could she also talk about Palestine?

● (2125)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, coming back to the Rohingya, I want to mention that Canada was the first country to recognize the crimes committed against the Rohingya and to ensure that the situation was recognized as a genocide.

I think that I can commend the Prime Minister's leadership on that issue, and also that of my predecessors.

With respect to Ethiopia, I want to say to my colleague that the government has worked on this file on an ongoing basis. I have made it a personal priority. I have had the opportunity to speak to my Ethiopian counterpart. Furthermore, I raised the issue of Ethiopia at all my meetings, both with NATO and the OSCE, and during different telephone calls I made.

Given that the Prime Minister has a close relationship with the Ethiopian government and Prime Minister Abiy, I believe that Canada can play a special role in fostering a peace process to ensure that Ethiopia becomes a healthy democracy, which is currently not the case.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, I see that the minister is avoiding the question on Palestine.

A few days ago, at the United Nations General Assembly, Canada voted against three resolutions on Palestine. The first was on the peace process, the second was on the Syrian Golan, which is indirectly related, and the third was on Jerusalem. Each time, Canada was in the minority in the international community.

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In the case of the peace process, Canada was part of a select group of nine countries. Other than Australia, the United States and Israel itself, there was Hungary, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru and Palau. We were in distinguished company with nine votes against 148 in favour of this resolution.

Since Canada is against the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, since Canada is against colonization and expulsions, since Canada is in favour of a two-state solution and since Canada condemns the attacks against civilians, including rocket attacks, what did Canada have against motion A/74/L.14, which was supported, I might add, by Norway and Ireland, which were elected to the Security Council?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I am proud that Canada is one of Israel's biggest and strongest allies at the United Nations and in many international organizations. We also know that we are friends of the Palestinian people.

I want to inform my colleague that the government's policy on the United Nations and on votes related to the Middle East is clear. We are opposed to any initiative, within the United Nations and other multilateral forums, that is specifically aimed at criticizing only Israel, since we believe in a much more holistic approach. We therefore reject any unilateral resolutions from these forums that would politicize these issues.

It goes without saying that we expect the two parties to be able to work together through these admittedly difficult circumstances, to ensure lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, I do not believe that going against the entire international community is in any way helpful to the peace process in the region.

I would like to point out that this resolution appeared relatively balanced to me because, among other things, it condemned the rocket attacks against the Israelis and sought to establish safe and secure borders for both countries, including Israel.

I therefore do not understand this situation or why Canada voted against the resolution. Canada voted against all three resolutions whereas, in committee, Canada had abstained on one of the three resolutions. That is rather surprising.

I would now like to address the situation of the daughter of one of my constituents, to whom the minister made a public commitment on the show *La semaine des 4 Julie*. I would simply like to know what is new in the case of Natalie Morin, who wants to leave Saudi Arabia with her children. She was very clear about that, and she is simply waiting to be given the opportunity to finally leave that country.

• (2130)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, it goes without saying that I am deeply concerned about Nathalie Morin. That is why I had the opportunity to speak directly with her mother and with my colleague on this matter.

This is obviously a priority for the government. It goes without saying that Ms. Morin must be allowed to return to Canada. She is a Canadian citizen who is currently in Saudi Arabia. Her children

are there as well. She must be allowed to return to Canada with her family.

I would be happy to work with my colleague on this matter.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, I am sorry, but I must insist. Could the minister share any new developments in this case since our last discussion?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, since this is a consular case, I cannot speak about it in detail in the House.

I know that Ms. Morin has authorized my colleague to speak to me directly, and I would be happy to discuss her case with him in private.

I do want to say that I brought this matter up with Bob Rae, our ambassador to the United Nations. It is obviously important for us to be able to speak to our Saudi Arabian counterparts about it.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, the minister and I discussed the Beijing Olympics, which are scheduled to open in a few weeks, and she told me what was reiterated in the House today: The government of Canada's decision about whether or not to participate in the games will be made in concert with its allies.

We know the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States have announced a diplomatic boycott. What is Canada waiting for? When will it follow suit?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I share my colleague's concerns about the Winter Olympics.

We were informed yesterday of the United States' intention not to send diplomatic personnel to Beijing for the Winter Olympics.

Naturally, I share my colleagues' concerns about allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang. I have been discussing these issues with several colleagues around the world.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Chair, can the minister offer any information about what the Government of Canada is doing to get Canadian children stranded in refugee camps in northern Syria out of there?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, the plight of children is always close to my heart, but I am particularly concerned about the children who are in this Syrian detention camp.

It goes without saying that this is a priority, but I remind my colleague that their parents decided to leave Canada to join a terrorist organization.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would first like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I rise in the House to talk about what Canadian Heritage has been doing to support the culture, heritage and sport sectors since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

The culture, heritage and sport sectors are crucial to Canada's social and economic vitality, contributing about \$63 billion to our economy as well as more than 772,000 jobs prior to the pandemic. In fact, many artists and creators in Canada have gone above and beyond over the last two years finding new and innovative ways to deliver quality entertainment, enriching cultural experiences and meaningful connections that have helped us all to cope with the isolation and stress of life in a pandemic.

They have done all this despite the fact that when the full force of the COVID-19 pandemic hit Canada in March 2020, the culture, heritage and sport sectors took many of the first and hardest blows. Concerts, festivals and sporting events were cancelled. Theatres, museums and cultural spaces were closed. Restrictions on public gatherings made events and celebrations of heritage and culture impossible. Production shut down for many creative works. Financing, distribution and dissemination became much more difficult.

The damage caused to these sectors due to the pandemic has been significant. Between the first and second quarters of 2020, culture sector jobs fell from 656,956 to 530,801, with a fall in sectoral GDP from \$14.04 billion to \$11.9 billion. As of quarter four of 2020, the jobs total and the sectoral GDP figures had still not fully recovered, tallying 596,281 and \$13.3 billion respectively, down 9% and 5% against quarter one 2020 figures.

- (2135)

[Translation]

From the beginning of the crisis, the government knew it had to provide assistance immediately. In April 2020, the Prime Minister announced a \$500-million investment in the emergency support fund for cultural, heritage and sport organizations to counter the devastating effects of COVID-19.

Despite the difficult circumstances that made everyone's work harder, the Canadian Heritage team worked diligently to maintain normal operations, streamline procedures and expedite payments through its existing funding programs, in addition to deploying much-needed support through the emergency fund as quickly as possible.

According to a survey of emergency fund recipients, Canadian Heritage met its objectives. It helped companies stay in business and maintain jobs.

[English]

Seventy-seven per cent of respondents indicated that the fund helped them a great deal or moderately to stay in business. The vast majority of respondents, 95%, expressed satisfaction with the speed with which they received funds.

Implementing the emergency support fund in such a tight time frame was a massive undertaking that relied heavily on the collaboration and commitment of all organizations across the heritage portfolio, thousands of partner organizations and tens of thousands of stakeholders. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we are at our best and our strongest when we all work together.

[Translation]

Only by continuing to work together can all sectors move towards a full recovery and a more prosperous future.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Canadian Heritage has maintained a close relationship with the cultural, heritage and sport sectors in order to respond to their needs and understand their most pressing concerns.

[English]

Additional support measures were initiated, including a \$50-million short-term compensation fund administered by Telefilm Canada to help our film and audiovisual industries resume production activities, and more than \$181 million for the support for workers in live arts and music sectors fund as was announced in the 2020 fall economic statement.

In the fall of 2020, the department organized a series of town hall and round table meetings where roughly 4,000 participants shared their ideas about how the government could work with them and better support them.

For 2020-21, the government also waived CRTC licence fees for all broadcasters to provide financial relief in response to the impact of COVID-19 on advertising revenues.

[Translation]

After such a long time, the recovery is finally in sight. Since the majority of Canadians are now adequately vaccinated, many want to safely resume their cultural and sporting activities. Nevertheless, we know full well that the culture, heritage and sport sectors were the first ones to be hit hard by the pandemic, and they will also be the last to fully recover.

The road ahead may be bumpy. New variants are emerging, and the number of cases is fluctuating. The Canadian culture, heritage and sport sectors will still need us on the road to recovery.

That is why budget 2021 included an unprecedented investment of \$1.93 billion through the Department of Canadian Heritage and its portfolio organizations. These funds will be used to promote the recovery and growth of these sectors now and in the future.

• (2140)

[English]

This commitment includes the \$300-million recovery fund for arts, culture, heritage and sports sectors, which will help organizations still struggling with the pandemic, and help to build resilience and promote innovation. A \$200-million reopening fund will also help Canada's festivals, cultural events, outdoor theatre performances, heritage celebrations, local museums and amateur sports events to restart and re-engage with their communities and return to welcoming visitors from all over Canada and the rest of the world.

Some other examples of the many cultural initiatives named in budget 2021 are \$66 million in emergency support to Canada's six national museums and to the National Battlefields Commission to address the ongoing financial pressures of COVID-19.

[Translation]

An additional \$15-million investment in the Canada cultural spaces fund is provided for to help arts and heritage institutions upgrade their facilities to meet public health guidelines. Note also the extension of the short-term compensation fund and the increase in funding to \$149 million to continue supporting audiovisual productions.

By all accounts, we have a long way to go before we can celebrate the full recovery of Canada's culture, heritage and sport sectors and say that the COVID-19 pandemic is definitely behind us, but we have many reasons to be happy. Thanks to the efforts and collaboration of Canadian Heritage and its portfolio organizations, partners and stakeholders, we are on the right path.

[English]

This is why the government is continuing to work with these economically and socially important sectors to ensure that their future is inclusive and sustainable. Canada's cultural offerings are among the most vibrant and diverse in the world, and I am proud of our government's efforts to lift up these sectors during this critical period. We will continue to be there for them.

[Translation]

The Deputy Chair: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Chair, we make better decisions when employees look like the communities they serve. More than 25.2% of Canadians identify as having a disability. It is important that more Canadians with disabilities be represented in the public service.

What will the funding that the government is requesting for the Office of Public Service Accessibility be used for?

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for asking this very important question.

Accessibility in the public service means ensuring that all employees have the tools they need to do their best at work and to succeed in their careers.

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This involves identifying and eliminating barriers that prevent people from participating, as well as guaranteeing access to all devices, services, programs and information.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Chair, the next question is for the Minister of Tourism. As we know, tourism is very important for our culture and our communities.

Can the minister explain the importance of tourism?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for her excellent question.

Tourism, which represents 2% of our GDP, was slashed in half during the pandemic. It is important to know that 56% of all tourism jobs are created by and for people in rural communities. This is a very important sector for us, and we will support it.

• (2145)

[English]

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Chair, I would like to follow up with the minister. Could he please explain to the House if there will be anything special for Quebec when it comes to tourism?

[Translation]

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, hundreds of millions of dollars will be distributed across the country, and Quebec will get its share. That money will flow to the tourism and culture sectors. Canada's economy cannot fully recover until the tourism sector does.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Chair, what has FedNor done to support jobs and growth in southern Ontario? As we know, without jobs, the economy suffers. Can the minister provide more details?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, it is important to note that, a few months ago, FedNor became a stand-alone agency in northern Ontario. This will enable us to keep increasing the number of jobs in the north and support small and medium-sized businesses that have a lot to offer in northern Ontario.

[English]

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Chair, I would like to ask the Minister of Health a question. As we know, vaccination is going to help our country keep moving forward. Could he explain to us what the plan is in the upcoming months, especially with these variants that we continue to face?

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Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, vaccination is key to exiting definitively from the COVID-19 crisis. We are very proud that 77% of all Canadians of all ages have now received two doses and 80% of Canadians have received at least one dose. We look forward to vaccinating many children between the ages of five and 11 in the next few weeks.

[Translation]

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Madam Chair, I have another question for the Minister of Health.

We know that some people's mental health has really deteriorated during the pandemic. Can the minister explain what the government's plan is for the future?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, all members have witnessed the serious negative effects of the pandemic on mental health in their ridings. We will be making several investments in the coming weeks and months. Unfortunately, I do not have time to say more.

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time tonight with the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

It is about priorities, and Arctic sovereignty is a priority for our party. We talked about a recent buildup of Russian presence in eastern Europe tonight, as was mentioned by my colleagues from Wellington—Halton Hills and Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, but we have also seen a rise in Russian ambitions in the Arctic, as Marcus Kolga mentioned in a recent article. He wrote:

Over the past few weeks, the Russian president's ambitions have converged in the Arctic, challenging Canadian and allied interests and dropping the threat of conflict with the Kremlin directly on our northern shores. Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, recently warned Canada and other Western allies that all the resources beneath the melting ice in the Arctic Sea belong to the Russian government.

Does the minister recognize our claims to the Arctic and the Arctic border and refute the Russian claims?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, when my colleague looks at the throne speech he will see there is a clear mention of the importance of the Arctic as one of the key regions we want to make sure we invest in for different reasons, not only because there is the growing influence of China, but also because we know we have to work with the Scandinavian countries, as well as like-minded countries to ensure that we protect our Arctic sovereignty. That is exactly what I will be doing.

• (2150)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, what is the Minister of Foreign Affairs doing to assert Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic physically?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we know that the Canadian military is often in the Arctic. We also know that we have Canadians who are also living in the Arctic and—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, one thing I will say about our previous Conservative government is that we showed up. Our previous Conservative prime minister went to the Arctic many times to assert our presence physically in the Arctic. What is the Minister of

Foreign Affairs doing to assert Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic diplomatically?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, as mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, obviously the Arctic is a priority. We will deepen our engagement. We will make sure that we have an Arctic strategy.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, to which countries specifically has the minister reached out to assert our claims?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I have reached out to Norway, Denmark, Sweden, as well as Russia directly, and I have obviously had conversations with the U.S. on this issue.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, frankly, talk is cheap.

My colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman stated in a recent article:

“The Russian government is opening military bases in the Arctic and the Chinese Communist regime is expanding its Arctic naval fleet beyond the capabilities of Canada and the United States combined,”....

The article continues:

[The member] slammed the federal government's “naïve and dangerous approach to Arctic sovereignty,” accusing the government of mismanaging the Nani-sivik project, which he says remains vital to Canada's security in the Far North.

Has the minister spoken with the Russian and Chinese foreign ministers to discuss their growing presence in the Arctic?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I have talked to Lavrov, who is my Russian counterpart, on this very issue.

I think my colleague should stop reading his notes, because diplomacy is about talking to people and making sure that we reach out to others to really try to assert our different interests, including Arctic sovereignty.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, the minister just referred to speaking with her Russian counterpart, but I have not heard about her Chinese counterpart. When will that be?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague raises a very important point. In my view and the government's view, we need to be able to talk to everybody, including Russia and including—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, we are not only being affected by our Russian and Chinese colleagues across the way, it is also affecting our relationship with our North American colleagues, namely the U.S.

In another article, dated December 1, 2021, U.S. General Glen VanHerck stated:

The commander of the North American Aerospace Defence Command says China and Russia are developing new ways to attack the continent as he waits for political direction to modernize NORAD's outdated early-warning system.

What message does the minister think it sends to our allies when the government continues to not treat our Arctic border seriously?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, it is not because my colleague continues to read his lines that he necessarily is following what I am saying. I said we would be developing an Arctic strategy. I said we would be asserting Arctic sovereignty. As for NORAD, yes, we will proceed with NORAD modernization, and we have increased the budget.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, six years is a long time. If it is a priority, why has the government not got to it sooner? The minister is talking about getting to it. When is she going to actually do it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague should celebrate that it is in the Speech from the Throne. It will be part of my mandate. We will be working to ensure that we assert our sovereignty. We also recently bought six ice breakers—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, in an interview, a senior Canadian Armed Forces officer, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the changes were long overdue. The significance of this announcement is just another example of Canada's irrelevance internationally.

Does the minister think we are irrelevant internationally?

• (2155)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, of course not.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, what is the minister going to do to make Canada relevant again in the Arctic?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, first and foremost, we will ensure that we assert our sovereignty in different ways by engaging with our partners, by raising it with multilateral organizations and by ensuring also that we have—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, we have heard a lot of words from the minister. We have not heard once about whether she has actually shown up in the Arctic and asserted our sovereignty as a minister.

When will she do that? I think all Canadians are expecting her to do it soon.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, for sure I will be going to the Arctic. I look forward to it. Harper did, indeed, go to the Arctic, but our Prime Minister did also. It is a long-standing policy that we recognize Arctic sovereignty. This is our part of the world and we will—

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Chair, does the minister intend on announcing retaliatory measures against the American government regarding the softwood lumber dispute?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, my colleague, the Minister of International Trade, went to Washington last week for an important mission. There were colleagues from the other side of the aisle present with her.

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Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, the finance minister said that she would be announcing retaliatory measures against the American government regarding the softwood lumber dispute.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs intend on announcing these retaliatory measures in short order?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we will vigorously defend the interests of Canada when it comes to softwood lumber. Coming from Quebec, I am very much aware that it is important to defend these jobs in this very important sector, and that is why we also—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, on behalf of the people of Quebec, will the minister announce retaliatory measures against the American government regarding the softwood lumber dispute?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I will ensure, along with my colleague, the Minister of International Trade, that we raise this issue through chapter 10 of CUSMA, which is the chapter that—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, is the answer “no” when I am asking will the minister announce retaliatory measures against the American government regarding the softwood lumber dispute?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague must know that we will raise it under chapter 10 of CUSMA and also through the WTO.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when will the minister raise retaliatory measures under chapter 10 of CUSMA regarding the softwood lumber dispute?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we need to have a team Canada approach. I hope my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill will support us.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, I love Americans. There is an American in this room tonight whom I love very much.

I would still like the minister to tell the Canadian people when she intends to announce retaliatory measures against the American government regarding the softwood lumber dispute?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we will work with the industry, with workers and with unions, because it is important that we defend the jobs in the softwood lumber sector.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, the minister just said that she would announce retaliatory measures under chapter 10 of CUSMA. When does she intend to enact that provision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, the Minister of International Trade will be able to follow up with my colleague.

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Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when will the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has jurisdiction over this, announce retaliatory measures under chapter 10 of CUSMA regarding the softwood lumber dispute?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, first and foremost, we took a diplomatic approach. We went to Washington. We will ensure that we abide by chapter 10 and the WTO. We will do everything—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, the minister has just said policy. She has said that she will enact chapter 10 under CUSMA. When?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, as I said, the Minister of International Trade will be working on this and I will be supporting her very closely.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when will this be happening?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, in due course.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, softwood lumber workers cannot wait for “in due course” and, frankly, neither can American-Canadian relations. The announcement tonight, I am sure, will make news in the morning; I will make sure of that.

When does she intend on announcing the CUSMA retaliation?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, rather than working to be on the front page of newspapers, we are really working for the softwood lumber sector.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, sometimes we need to get the attention of a foreign government in order to ensure that jobs are protected in this country, so when does she plan on enacting the CUSMA provision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I would remind my colleague that when she does media in Canada, it does not necessarily go to the U.S. That is why what we do is raise it in the—

• (2200)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when I do media in Canada, I am protecting jobs in this country, unlike the minister.

When is she enacting the CUSMA provision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I will take no lessons from my colleague or from Conservatives, who wanted us to capitulate in CUSMA.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, perhaps she should take a lesson, as it was the Conservative government that last negotiated a softwood lumber dispute.

When will she enact the CUSMA provision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we have won every dispute on softwood lumber since then, and we will continue to fight and win.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, we still do not have a softwood lumber agreement. When will she enact the CUSMA provision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, softwood lumber is under CUSMA as well and she should know that as the natural resources critic.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, perhaps I know her job better than she does.

When will she enact the CUSMA provision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I will not take any lessons from my colleague, any form of posturing on the part of my colleague and, of course—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, I would like softwood lumber jobs. I would enact the CUSMA provision at this point. I would also enact better Canadian-American relations than the government has done.

However, when is she enacting the CUSMA provision, as she just announced?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague should work with the government because we will make sure that we put into place chapter 10 of CUSMA and also we will put this before the—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague heard me.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I do not know whether my colleague at this point is doing theatre or actual parliamentary work.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, when is she enacting CUSMA?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I have answered the question, Madam Chair.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, she just had it whispered to her, “I’ve answered the question.” When is she enacting CUSMA, which she has not answered?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague has been asking the same question and, of course, I have answered all of these questions.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, she just announced that she would be enacting chapter 10 under CUSMA with regard to the softwood lumber dispute. When?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, to make sure that we make things work in this democracy and—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, this is frankly embarrassing.

Business of Supply

When is the foreign affairs minister of Canada enacting chapter 10 under CUSMA, as was announced two weeks ago by the finance minister? Who is in charge of our foreign relations?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, of course it is important that we fight for the jobs in the softwood lumber industry. That is exactly what we are doing. We are doing it in a very—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, I think I am fighting for jobs here. She should have a clear answer.

When is she enacting chapter 10 under CUSMA regarding the softwood lumber agreement?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague should also remember what her leader said during the CUSMA negotiations. They wanted to capitulate. We were able to have a strong view and that is why we are able to fight for the jobs right now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, last time we had a softwood lumber agreement in Canada was under a Conservative government. The Liberal government has failed softwood lumber workers for six years.

I have a very simple question for my colleague. She has announced tonight she intends to enact chapter 10. When?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, people watching us right now must know that the government is there for the softwood lumber jobs and we will continue to fight for them.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Chair, on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, I am pleased to rise in the House.

As many members know, the supplementary estimates (B) is the second opportunity for departments and agencies to adjust their 2021-22 main estimates. I am particularly proud to speak to the 2021 and 2022 supplementary estimates for Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Parks Canada Agency because I believe that, when it comes to Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Parks Canada Agency, the value of their work cannot be overestimated and should not be underappreciated. On this point, I am certain that we have broad consensus in the House.

The triple crisis of the pandemic, rapid biodiversity loss and climate change is the greatest challenge of our time. While the current pandemic is more immediate, our recovery cannot be short-sighted. The world is shifting to a cleaner and greener economy, and we know it is necessary. To remain competitive and to ensure a more resilient, equitable and prosperous future, we must ensure that our path forward keeps 1.5°C in sight and aligns with achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Because the current biodiversity, climate and health crises are all interconnected, scientific research shows we must also ensure much more of our natural environment is protected. It is what science tells us we must do if we are to avoid the worst impacts of a changing climate. It is what Canadians expect us to do. The public will for doing more and moving faster has never been more clear.

Working together with all residents of Canada to create the conditions that align our policies and actions toward these ambitions is one of the highest priorities of Environment and Climate Change

Canada. We have enshrined our goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 into law and established an accountable and transparent process to get us there. We have also submitted Canada's enhanced nationally determined contribution with the target to reduce emissions by 40% to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030, reflecting both the scale of the climate challenges and the economic opportunity that climate action presents, and we are certainly making progress.

We have a world-leading carbon pricing and rebate system, and one of the most detailed climate plans in the world. We have methane regulations for the oil and gas sector, regulations to accelerate the phase-out of coal and economy-wide standards for cleaner fuel. We are making record-level investments in public transit, electrification and nature-based solutions. In addition, we are investing in nature-based climate solutions; restoring and conserving ecosystems such as wetlands, peatlands and grasslands.

We are also working in partnership with indigenous peoples to achieve these ambitions, as their participation is key to meeting our target of conserving 25% of Canada's land and 25% of its oceans by 2025, and then working toward conserving 30% by 2030, as well as achieving our climate targets and net zero by 2050.

At COP26 last month, we made commitments to go even further. We committed to put in place a cap on greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector as well as committing to the transition to a net-zero electricity grid by 2035. There is no single, simple solution. Rather, all of these initiatives taken together have put us on track to meet our targets.

There is still much more that needs to be done, which brings us to the supplementary estimates (B) for Environment and Climate Change Canada. The department's submission amounts to a net increase of \$135.6 million, bringing its total authorities to \$2 billion.

From these funds, \$105.2 million will be used to conserve Canada's land and fresh water, protect species, advance indigenous reconciliation and increase access to nature. These funds will help to implement the enhanced nature legacy initiative and respond to the biodiversity crisis and pressures for a sustainable recovery.

Business of Supply

These also include an increase of \$9.9 million to drive a whole-of-government implementation of Canada's strengthened climate plan and lead government-wide efforts to develop further climate actions to advance Canada's international priorities on environment and climate, as announced at COP26.

● (2205)

It also takes into consideration \$2.1 million for Canada's new marine conservation targets to meet Canada's target of protecting 25% of our oceans by 2025. The department's 2021-22 supplementary estimates (B) also seeks \$6.5 million to implement a new, one-year "Our Healthy Environment and Economy" advertising campaign. This will help mobilize the full breadth of Canada's ingenuity and engage and inspire Canadians with a sense of confidence that, as a nation, we can do this. It includes \$6.4 million to support the net-zero advisory body and the net-zero challenge to help companies develop plans to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Finally, it includes \$3.2 million to address imminent threats to the wood bison and \$2.4 million to implement the Wood Buffalo National Park world heritage site action plan. I have actually spent time in the area near Fort Chipewyan, and I can tell members that in the Wood Buffalo National Park, the wood bison specifically is a species that we do not want to lose.

The Parks Canada Agency's protected areas and national historic places play a vital role in conserving natural and cultural heritage, fighting climate change and biodiversity loss, and providing Canadians with opportunities to learn more about iconic cultural and natural settings. As Canadians continue to do their part to limit the spread of COVID-19, we know that spending time in nature and outdoors offers important health and wellness benefits at a difficult time for everyone.

Through the 2021-22 supplementary estimates (B), the Parks Canada Agency is seeking to increase its reference levels by \$131.4 million. The majority of this amount, to a maximum of \$71.7 million, will be available, if required, to support the agency for revenue losses from April 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021. These revenue shortfalls are mainly related to visitor service fees, sales of rights and permits, and sales of services for the first six months of the 2021-22 fiscal year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This amount also includes a request for almost \$47.5 million to conserve Canada's lands and fresh water, protect species, advance indigenous reconciliation and increase access to nature. Included is a request for an internal reallocation of \$42.7 million to support the creation, expansion and designation of new national historic sites, national parks, national marine conservation areas and other protected heritage areas. As well, an additional \$4.4 million in funding will support the implementation of the Wood Buffalo National Park world heritage site action plan. On top of this, the agency is also seeking through this funding just over \$3.9 million to address imminent threats to wood bison. Finally, this funding request takes into consideration an ask for a little more than \$3.6 million to implement Canada's new marine conservation targets.

All of these requests will go a long way in helping to ensure a cleaner, more resilient, equitable and prosperous future for all residents of Canada today and well into the future. I thank members of

this House for their time, and I encourage all to support these estimates.

● (2210)

Madam Chair, small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy, no doubt. These employers must comply with a wide array of rules and regulations. While most regulations protect the public, some have become outdated. We need to keep the rules current to allow businesses to thrive.

How will funding for the external advisory committee on regulatory competitiveness reduce burdens on businesses?

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):

Madam Chair, we need to make sure that we improve regulations, and make sure that they do not have red tape that they do not need, so that they are able to thrive in our country.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, everyone has the right to live free from violence. However, unacceptably, too many people in Canada continue to experience violence every day because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. This issue has only been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic in communities across the country.

How does the funding in the supplementary estimates advance the national action plan to end gender-based violence?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for the important mandate we have been given as a government to continue to put gender equality at the heart of our work. Since day one we have done this, and we will continue, for example, to advance the national action plan to end gender-based violence with more investments in our communities.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, to the Minister of Tourism, in my riding, I have seen many businesses that are essential to the fabric of our local economy struggling throughout this pandemic. I know the minister has been working on this file and listening to many of our small businesses, which are essential in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Could the minister update us on what is being done for those small businesses across Canada?

● (2215)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, we have put \$15 billion into the tourism sector, and 180,000 workers have been supported in tens of thousands of businesses. We can add to that the billion dollars in budget 2021 and the tourism relief fund, which will be distributed through the regional development agencies.

Business of Supply

We are here for the tourism sector. We will continue to be here.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I have another question for the President of the Treasury Board.

What has FedDev done to support jobs and growth in Ontario?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I have a very short answer. As members know, we have increased the number of jobs across the region of southern Ontario. We will continue to invest in FedDev to support small and medium businesses in their different sectors.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I also would like to ask the Minister of Health about research funding coming out of COVID-19 and to give the House an update on any COVID-19 research funding.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, I could talk about that for quite some time, as I have so much to say, but I know you will cut me off soon because I see your stern eyes.

I will take the time to say that we have actually invested around \$25 billion over the past year in the fight against COVID-19 alone. It began with a \$500-million investment starting on the very first week, in March 2020.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I know the restaurant industry has been hit particularly hard. Many of the businesses in my riding are certainly concerned about their revenues not returning for many months to come.

I wonder if the Minister of Tourism could speak to the amount of time we anticipate it will take to recover from COVID-19 and what we are doing for restaurants across Canada.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, 106% of jobs have been recovered. We had 154,000 jobs added in the report from the last week. The recovery across the country is uneven. We know that restaurants and tourism operators across the country need our support, and I encourage the opposing parties to vote for Bill C-2 and support the sector.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, the opioid crisis has been something that has been deeply concerning for all Canadians during this pandemic, and we have seen a rise in the number of deaths as a result of opioid use.

I wonder if the Minister of Health could talk about safe injection sites and give us an update on safe drug supply.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I have two statistics. First, the opioid crisis kills on average 20 people every day. Second, safe injection sites have saved about 20,000 people over the last years because people are looked after, taken care of and provided with safe drugs in a safe environment.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Chair, tonight I will be directing most of my questions to the Minister of Tourism. Tourism is a huge part of the Canadian economy, and it is an even bigger part of the economy in my riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay. In Canada in nor-

mal years we welcome 22 million people, and three million of those visitors come to the Okanagan and the Kootenay area.

A lot of those tourism businesses have really been impacted over the last two years by the COVID pandemic. One of the groups that has been hit the hardest has been independent travel advisers. These are home-based sole proprietorships, and 85% of the business owners are women. Again, women have been hit hardest by the pandemic in terms of their work and their business opportunities, much more than men.

Independent travel advisers are paid by commission under contract with travel agencies. They have a delay in pay of five to 12 months, because they get paid only when that travel actually happens. Lately, a lot of that travel just has not happened. These travel advisers were able to access CERB when it was available, but they were dropped like a hot potato recently when CERB ended. They are simply not eligible for any of the supports that are now being offered by the government, yet because of ongoing travel restrictions and delays at the border, as well as testing requirements, a lot of people just are not travelling. These businesses are really hurting. They are asking for an emergency funding program to bridge that gap until people start travelling again.

I would like to ask the minister this. What support will the government give to independent travel advisers?

● (2220)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, who is the critic for tourism among other responsibilities, for his advocacy, his passion and his decency. We have had conversations about this and other issues. I think we can set the table on the backdrop of the fastest recovery of any recession in Canadian history, with 106% of jobs recovered since the beginning of the pandemic and 154,000 jobs announced just this week.

As my hon. colleague mentioned, the sector recovery is uneven, and we know that. That is why I had the honour, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, to table in the House, to encourage our colleagues in the House to support the tourism sector and the hardest-hit sectors, and to put in new measures as we get to the final stretch of this pandemic. I encourage all members in the House to support Bill C-2.

I can say very clearly that the overwhelming unanimous support of hundreds of people who attended the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's conference here last week was emphatic. They are appealing to every single member of the House to pass Bill C-2, so that the sector can get through what will be another tough winter and into the spring and the third quarter. That is when we believe brighter days will be in place for members of the tourism sector.

Business of Supply

I have spoken to people in the independent travel agent sector, and I know that they are facing challenges. However, I need to put on the record that we have supported this very important group of Canadians and entrepreneurs. When there was a risk of these operators not getting the money they had earned from large airlines and other sectors, we went to the wall for them in our LEEFF negotiations with those airlines and we delivered. We are working through this issue. It is a complex issue. We have heard from many colleagues in Ontario, in B.C. and across the country. I think the message that has been reinforced by the finance minister is that the supports put in place were exceptional. We will be there for the tourism sector.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Chair, the minister says we should vote for Bill C-2, but Bill C-2 does not help the independent travel advisers. He said the recovery has been uneven. Well, Bill C-2 is uneven and leaves a lot of people out in the cold, including independent travel advisers.

I would ask him whether the Liberals would amend Bill C-2 to help them, and also if they would amend Bill C-2 to help the start-ups. Many businesses were starting up just as this pandemic hit. People put in thousands of their own dollars in investments into new companies. They took out loans, signed leases and started businesses, many of them in the tourism and hospitality sector, just as this pandemic hit and they were immediately shut down.

These are restaurants, hotels or whatever, and these businesses have received no supports at all from the government throughout the pandemic because they did not have any business record to compare their losses to. They have plans and mechanisms they are asking the government to implement in Bill C-2, or however the government would do it, to give them some support.

They have struggled along and managed to survive in the face of competition with other companies that have received the supports they needed. They received the wage subsidy, but the start-ups received nothing. They are asking the government to let them access programs like HASCAP in such a way that they can continue on and survive, because they are hanging on by their fingernails.

● (2225)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, it is clear to members of the House that Bill C-2 is a comprehensive piece of legislation that is focusing on the hardest hit sectors. We have heard from the hotel sector. We have heard from the tour operator sector. We have heard from outfitters. We have heard from gun ranges. We have these operators and tourism operators from coast to coast to coast included in Bill C-2.

Why? We listened to Canadians. We listened to entrepreneurs. We listened to people in the sector who needed our help and support. What they need is a bridge through this last toughest time. We are talking about entrepreneurs who lost 50% of their business. We are talking about entrepreneurs who simply could not continue to keep their staff employed because the demand was shut off because we closed the borders to keep Canadians safe.

As I said at TIAC last week, safety first, then travel. What the tourism sector has asked us for is a bridge of supports to get through this winter into the spring. We have heard the appeals from

independent travel agents and we will continue to work on this issue.

We have gone to the wall for Canadians and for entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. We have put Bill C-2 on the floor of this House. We ask for the support of members from all parties to get Bill C-2 passed so we can give our tourism sector, which touches every single riding represented in this chamber, the support and hope it needs to get through the winter into the spring and into Q3.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Chair, again, they are offering a bridge to companies that qualify for the programs they are offering, but the start-ups and the independent travel advisers do not qualify, so they are not helped at all.

There is another issue I have been hearing about from tourism-based operators in my riding, especially some of the ski resorts such as Big White and RED Mountain. These ski resorts hire primarily young international travellers who work in Canada on an international experience Canada visa. Sixty per cent of Big White's employees are in that category.

These people were there working when the pandemic hit. In many cases, they could not leave to go home so they worked out their visa and now those visas have run out. New visa applications to bring new workers in have been stalled. Big White especially has contacted me saying that it expects good business this year but it has no employees. It is down 40% or more of the employees it needs, yet the visa applications are going nowhere.

The ski areas are really desperate for these workers. What is the government doing to get these workers to Canada, where they can help our businesses thrive?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, let me say to my hon. colleague that we have heard from the sector. We have heard about issues of labour shortages in certain specific sectors and subsectors of the tourism industry.

Let me reiterate that 106% of jobs have been recovered since the darkest days of the pandemic, all hours pre-pandemic recovered with 156,000 jobs reported last year. I hope my colleagues will support me as I walk through some of the numbers. We provided \$70 million to support live music venues in our sectors. We provided \$200 million to support major festivals from coast to coast to coast. We provided \$300 million in budget 2021 to establish the recovery fund for the heritage, arts and sport sectors and \$500 million for the tourism relief fund that will be delivered through the regional development agencies, including Prairies Canada and Pacific Canada.

My hon. colleague is welcome to encourage people in his riding and in his region to apply. We are here for Canadians. We are here for the tourism sector. We will do the work.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

● (2230)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Chair, with all of that enthusiasm, the NDP realizes how much support has been put out for Canadians because most of that support, almost all of that support, was our idea that the government took up.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Richard Cannings: What we are pointing out now are some major holes in that support that the government could easily fix. These businesses—

The Deputy Chair: I just want to remind members to allow the member to ask his question. I am sure the minister wants to hear it so that he can respond.

The hon. member.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Chair, I just wanted to point out that we support much of the work that has been done over the last two years in this House to support Canadian businesses and workers because, as I said, most of it was from our initiative on the NDP side. There are still some big gaps that could be easily fixed, yet the minister is just getting up and talking about the other stuff. That does not help these businesses that are going under.

I want to switch now to the big issue facing tourism operators and many businesses in my riding and across the country. That is the labour shortage. In my riding, the big factor in the labour shortage is housing. In my riding the average income is \$30,000 a year and the average house price is \$900,000. It is one of the worst ratios in the country with that disparity between housing costs and wages. Workers come to the Okanagan and the Kootenays looking for work. There is lots of work but they cannot find any housing. They cannot find rental housing and they certainly cannot afford to buy a house.

What is the government going to do to build affordable housing? I am not talking about just getting more housing stock going or helping people to buy their first home. I am talking about real affordable non-market housing. What will the government do to help our workers and our businesses?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, the hon. colleague raises serious matters that this government takes seriously. There is a nexus of demand for services, the labour to provide those services and the housing so that those workers can have a home. Our government will not rest until we make sure that housing is affordable in this country. Housing is a right.

We will boost the tourism sector. We will work on the labour shortage. We will address the very serious questions that the member opposite raised because we take this sector, its entrepreneurs and the workers from coast to coast to coast seriously. We have been there with them through the pandemic. We will continue to be with them to the end of the pandemic.

Adjournment Proceedings

I will share three themes that we want to make sure we undertake as a government. We are going to continue with our partners from coast to coast to coast to lead. We are going to demonstrate leadership in the sector. We are going to engage with partners from coast to coast to coast, including members in this House and with suppliers from around the country and around the world. Then we will inspire Canadians to travel our country and international tourists to come to this country, because I know one thing: When tourists fall in love with Canada, they fall in love forever.

The Deputy Chair: Having reached the expiry of the time provided for today's debate, pursuant to order made Thursday, November 25, the House will resume consideration of all votes under the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, tomorrow, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

The committee will now rise.

* * *

● (2235)

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-2, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, less than a week after the Prime Minister went to Washington to meet with President Biden, the U.S. announced that it would be doubling tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber. The Prime Minister was also unable to win concessions on agriculture, pipelines, threats to our auto industry and, really broadly, the U.S. administration's damaging buy American policies. This has raised serious questions about the ability of the government to negotiate with our closest ally.

American protectionism continues to be a threat to Canadian industry and puts jobs at risk in the Kenora riding, across northern Ontario and across the country. The U.S. is Canada's largest trading partner, and we need a government and Prime Minister who are able to ensure that our workers and industries are being treated fairly.

Adjournment Proceedings

More than that, these are people's lives. These people may not know where their next paycheque is coming from or are consistently stressed with the potential threat of layoffs and job losses. These people and their families need reassurance that the government has their backs, and they need concrete results to continue making a living.

Last week in question period, I pressed the government on its inability to work effectively with the U.S. and received a very unsatisfactory response from the minister. Frankly, it will reassure nobody in the Kenora riding or across northern Ontario.

In response to other questions, including in the take-note debate that we had, the minister has been unable to tell the House how many negotiations the Liberals have had with the U.S. trade representative. They have been unable to really state broadly what their plan is to end this dispute. They have also been unable to talk about what retaliatory measures, if any, the government plans to take or what the path forward will be on rebuilding what is very clearly a damaged relationship with the U.S. administration.

Previously in this chamber, the Minister of International Trade said that the government has done a good job on the file, and I believe that just shows how truly disconnected the government is from what is going on on the ground.

Workers in my riding and across the country need to know the answers to the questions that I have laid out. I hope that someone on the government side is able to answer them tonight.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the softwood lumber industry is a priority for the Government of Canada.

This industry is the economic backbone of many communities across the country and is a key part of Canada's forestry sector that contributed more than \$25 billion to the GDP in 2020 and employed nearly 185,000 workers. We can be proud of our softwood lumber industry, and our government is a strong advocate for its interests.

I must say that Canada is particularly disappointed that the United States decided to unfairly increase the tariffs it imposes on most Canadian softwood lumber producers. These unjust tariffs are hurting Canadian communities, businesses and workers.

My colleague, the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, was in Washington last week to meet with U.S. congressional leaders and stakeholders to advocate for Canadian interests and to raise issues of concern regarding softwood lumber. On November 18, the Prime Minister also spoke to the U.S. President about this matter. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also laid out Canada's position in her meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State on November 12. Meanwhile, senior Canadian officials have been conveying this message to their American counterparts at every opportunity.

I can assure the member that we are working tirelessly with the U.S. government to arrive at a positive solution to this conflict.

We remain convinced that a negotiated settlement is not only possible but in the best interests of both countries. As a Quebec minister, I am shocked that one of our businesses, Resolute Forest Products, is being charged combined duties that are higher than what other companies are being charged. That is just not acceptable.

Canada is asking the United States to stop charging these unfair and unjustified tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber products, but the United States has shown no interest in serious discussions to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Finally, I wish to reiterate that the Government of Canada will continue to vigorously defend Canada's softwood lumber industry by seeking recourse under chapter 19 of NAFTA and chapter 10 of CUSMA and through the World Trade Organization.

In the past, neutral and independent tribunals ruled that the U.S. allegations were unfounded, and we firmly believe that the same thing will happen this time.

● (2240)

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the status quo is simply not working. The government members continue to say that they have raised this issue. They continue to say that they are disappointed with the decision by the United States. What is very unclear at this point is what the government is actively doing to address the situation, and when Canadians can expect to see results.

The workers in my riding need the government to succeed on this. All of Canada needs the government to succeed on this. While we continue to wait for a ruling under CUSMA, each day becomes less and less stable for workers in my riding. I urge the government, and I urge the minister, to go beyond the nice words and show the concrete action they are taking to address this situation.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Madam Speaker, over the last six years, hundreds of thousands of Canadian jobs have been threatened each time, and we have taken action accordingly.

Our position is very clear. No, and I mean no, duties should be imposed on Canadian softwood lumber exports. We will continue to work closely with forestry workers and stakeholders, and I want to reassure them that we will always be there to defend their interests, their families and their communities.

I want to emphasize that we will continue to challenge and press our U.S. counterparts to rescind this unfair and unwarranted trade action.

[English]

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, my riding of Vancouver East has the third largest urban indigenous community in the country. We also had the largest homeless encampment in this country. That encampment has now been taken down, but people are still homeless on the streets and I see tents everywhere. The winter months are here; it is wet and it is cold.

The most glaring omission from the national housing strategy was an urban, rural and northern “for indigenous, by indigenous” housing strategy. As the CHRA indigenous caucus pointed out, Canada’s distinctions-based indigenous housing strategy left a huge gap for 87% of indigenous peoples living off reserve and had called for the government to address this huge housing gap.

The proposal for a fourth strategy calling for specific programs and investments for urban, rural and northern indigenous peoples backed by budget measures was supported unanimously by indigenous and non-indigenous members of the CHRA. That was back in 2018. Despite the Liberals saying that they are committed to a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban indigenous housing strategy, we have yet to see one materialize.

Budget after budget, the Liberals failed to deliver. In response to budget 2021, Robert Byers, chair of CHRA indigenous caucus, said the absence of such a strategy in budget 2021 is a disgrace. Tim Richter, president and CEO of the CAEH, and co-chair of the government’s National Housing Council called it “the most glaring disappointment”.

In this throne speech, there was zero recognition of the need for a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban, rural, northern housing strategy, despite the fact that the core housing need for indigenous households is the highest in Canada. The Northwest Territories is at 22.3%, Yukon at 24.1% and Nunavut is at 44.3%.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer most recently reported that 124,000 indigenous households are in core need, including 37,500 who are homeless in a given year. The annual affordability gap is \$636 million. Winnipeg has the highest number of indigenous households in need of housing estimated at 9,000, and Vancouver is second at 6,000.

We also know that indigenous peoples are 11 times more likely to use a homeless shelter. The latest point in count shows that 7,000 indigenous persons are in shelters or unsheltered across 61 communities.

We need the government to stop with the talking points. It is time to take action. I am calling on the minister to include a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban, rural and northern housing strategy and the creation of a national housing centre designed and run by indigenous housing providers in this fiscal update.

It is absolutely essential for the government to take action. If the government seriously wants the community to believe that reconciliation is the top priority for the government, it needs to take action. I do not want to hear from the government members who get up to pat themselves on the back to say what a great job they are doing. They do not have to look far to know what I am saying is true. All

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they have to do is come to my riding in Vancouver East and I will take them down to the streets. They will see for themselves—

• (2245)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member’s time is up. She will have one minute for rebuttal.

We will allow the hon. Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion to respond.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for Vancouver East for highlighting the deep and urgent levels of housing needs among indigenous peoples.

As the member noted, indigenous peoples are overrepresented among the homeless population. This is the case in virtually all of Canada’s major cities. I can assure the member and all Canadians that we are fully committed to co-developing an urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy. This will include a national indigenous housing centre. With this centre, indigenous peoples will oversee federal indigenous housing programs once fully realized.

In our discussions with first nations, Inuit and Métis partners, they have told us that they want a strategy that will advance reconciliation, a strategy that is for indigenous peoples and led by indigenous peoples. Our government agrees, and that is what is driving our work with our indigenous partners to develop this urban, rural and northern strategy.

Even as we work toward this strategy, we continue to respond to the deep and urgent needs for housing across the country.

For example, we prioritized funding to indigenous peoples through the \$2.5 billion rapid housing initiative. In fact, in the first round of this program, close to 40% of all units created under the rapid housing initiative will benefit indigenous peoples. We will soon be able to share news on the second round of this program, which will ultimately create at least 9,200 permanent, affordable homes for our most vulnerable populations.

We have also responded to the urgent need for more shelters and transitional and supportive housing for indigenous women and children fleeing gender-based violence. Earlier this month, our government announced more than \$724 million to build and support the operation of at least 38 shelters in addition to 50 transitional homes across Canada, including in urban areas and the north. This follows the previous initiative we announced last June to build 12 shelters across Canada.

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In addition to these most recent investments, we continue to track strong progress through our national housing strategy programs. More than \$72.5 billion in investments have been delivered through this strategy, and, as I said, we have prioritized indigenous and northern housing needs across all aspects of the national housing strategy. In addition to that, we have earmarked \$638 million in specific funding to ensure indigenous peoples living in urban, rural and northern communities have better housing outcomes now and for generations to come.

We will continue to deepen and expand our investments in housing. In the recent Speech from the Throne, we have also announced plans for new programs that will be designed to give more access to housing wherever families are on the housing continuum. This includes a proposal to set up a \$4 billion housing accelerator fund to help municipalities clear up development backlogs so that projects can get off the ground more quickly. It also includes a rent-to-own program that would give more families a chance to make their dream of home ownership a reality.

This is an important part of our commitment and we will continue, as I said, to prioritize housing for indigenous peoples through the national housing strategy. In fact, it is through that lens that we make these investments. However, I agree with the hon. member that we have to make more progress to ensure we have a distinct urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy, and that can only be done with and led by indigenous peoples.

• (2250)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, I am sorry, but the fact is that the Liberal government has promised this for four years and it has not delivered. It is not even in the throne speech. He mentioned the need for a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban, rural and northern housing strategy. The measures that the minister mentioned just now will not provide support to indigenous peoples in core need. That is the reality.

If the minister truly believes in what he said just now, that the government is going to implement a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban, rural and northern housing strategy along with a housing centre, will he advise that there will be commitments in the fiscal update coming up on December 14? The minister has to show action, not just talk about it.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Speaker, we have shown action. The hon. member only has to look at the projects that have been approved through the first round of the rapid housing initiative. She can look at the fact that 38%, almost 40%, of all the successful projects under the rapid housing initiative went to indigenous people.

The hon. member chooses to ignore the \$638 million dedicated to urban, rural and northern indigenous housing. She chooses to ignore the fact that we are the government that has invested the most amount of money in affordable housing in the history of the Northwest Territories and unlocked federal dollars for the Yukon and Nunavut.

We will continue to do more, but absolutely we have made a lot of progress as well.

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to be here at this very late hour to be granted an adjournment debate on the labour crisis.

The government's recent economic recovery speech said it was committed to leaving no worker or region behind, yet nowhere in the speech was there a single mention of the labour shortages that thousands of small and medium-sized businesses face. Leaving small businesses adrift is a roadblock to our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. As the member of Parliament for Kelowna—Lake Country, my local businesses are feeling the crunch of not having the staffing levels necessary to offer their goods and services like they are used to.

Jason Davis, who operates the Okanagan branch of a security company, told me that a significant drop in employee candidates has left the company running at a loss. They estimate losing over \$100,000 in contractually guaranteed revenue because of lost staffing coverage. That is in addition to the hundreds of thousands more they have been forced to incur in penalties for not meeting contractual obligations, higher costs of recruitment and the inability to take on any new work. This is similar to stories I hear from many business owners. Working in security, they are able to see how labour shortages have been damaging to their sector and the many other businesses they work with.

However, employers like Jason are not coming to my office just to talk about difficulties. They are coming to me with solutions. He has suggestions on the temporary foreign worker program, and this side of the House has similarly looked at offering solutions to tackling this labour crisis. Along with the chairman of the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, I have already sent a letter to the Minister of Immigration asking him to extend working visas that have expired for people already in Canada. This is an easy fix, yet so far we have received no response and the government is silent. Ignoring our warnings on this labour crisis will not make the problem disappear. It will leave our recovery on the rocks.

Statistics Canada said that in September there were over one million job vacancies. During that same month, there were about a million people on the CRB. RBC Economics reported that one in every three businesses is grappling with labour shortages. A report from the government's own Business Development Bank says that 55% of entrepreneurs struggle to hire the workers they need.

We do not have to let this country run into a growing iceberg. We can choose to take action to ensure our recovery lifts up all businesses and workers. We can ensure that Canadians continue to be employed at good-paying jobs that support their communities with affordable goods and services. We need to get people who are able to work back to work.

We can keep Canadians spending at small businesses by tackling skyrocketing inflation, which is escalating gas and grocery bills. We can strengthen our supply chains by ensuring Canadian warehouses, ports and trucking companies have the staff to meet their needs. We can address the increasing debt that small businesses are currently carrying, with an average of \$170,000 in new debt. We can address rising costs for small businesses by halting federal payroll tax increases.

I urge the government to take note of these and the many more ideas expressed by my colleagues across partisan divides. Rushed legislation like Bill C-2 will not solve staffing shortages. I ask the government to work collaboratively in the House to tackle the growing labour shortage threats that are crippling small business and impeding our economic recovery.

● (2255)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know the hon. member's riding very well, having spent a lot of time there as a business person before entering politics, and from training for an Ironman triathlon in the region, which feels like it was almost half a lifetime ago. It was certainly back in the days when I had more hair.

Moving on to other things, the member opposite raises an important issue. It is a whole-of-government preoccupation for us. I have had conversations with the Minister of Immigration on this. I think if we can set the table with 106% of jobs recovered since the lowest point in the pandemic, 154,000 jobs reported as added to the Canadian economy in the last month, and all of the hours that were lost during the pandemic having also been recovered. Those are important elements to put on the table as we get into the matter.

There is no more important economic policy for Canada today than finishing the fight against COVID. That also impacts who we are able to bring here and how we are able to address the labour shortage. I think Bill C-2 is an important piece of this puzzle, because it contains targeted business and income supports, including the emergency lockdown supports we need to fight omicron.

If we take a step back and look at when the crisis hit, our government rapidly rolled out a full range of effective broad-based programs to support Canadians through our greatest economic shock as a country since the Great Depression. These actions were necessary and unprecedented in our lifetime.

[*Translation*]

All across the country, these programs have been lifelines for workers and businesses. They protected millions of jobs and hundreds of thousands of Canadian businesses through the worst of the pandemic.

However, those emergency measures were always meant to be around just long enough to help people get through the crisis. Fortunately, we are now moving into a new phase that promises to be very different from the dark days of our fight against COVID-19.

[*English*]

Thanks to one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the world, most businesses are safely reopening and employment is now exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

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We know there are still workers and businesses whose livelihoods are being affected as a result of pandemic-related restrictions on their activity. That is why it is important to pivot to our support measures. It is a move to more targeted measures, which will provide help where it is needed most and continue to create jobs and growth while prudently managing government spending.

Some may wonder how we can tell when we have reached a turning point in Canada's economic recovery from the COVID recession. Allow me to highlight the markers of our government's successful economic response plan, which have brought us to where we are today.

● (2300)

[*Translation*]

In last year's throne speech, our government promised to create one million jobs, a goal we achieved in September of this year when Canada recovered all of the jobs lost at the lowest point of the COVID-19 recession. That is a total of three million jobs recovered since the spring of 2020.

[*English*]

Shops and businesses are open, and Canadians are doing their part to make sure we have a safe reopening. They are rolling up their sleeves, getting their shot and following public health advice. This is an important part of the overall plan to get Canadians back to work to fully recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We understand and appreciate the member opposite's concern, and we are working with a whole-of-government approach to address it.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, let me again remind the government why small business labour shortages in our economy matter. Small businesses represent about 70% of Canadians employed in the private sector. Out of every 20 businesses employing Canadians, 19 are small businesses. They are the greatest driver of innovation and prosperity in this country and are the ground level for our economic success.

Statistics Canada's most recent survey of business conditions shows more than one in four businesses expect its profitability to decline by the end of the year. The government's inaction on this labour crisis will only cause more stress to entrepreneurs working longer hours and more businesses folding in the new year. Keeping Canadians employed in good-paying jobs should be an essential priority for the government, but without a small business sector that is thriving, not just barely surviving, those jobs will not be there to go back to.

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Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Speaker, I ran a small business before entering politics, and I ran the same one in between politics. I understand job creation. I understand the challenges entrepreneurs are facing from coast to coast to coast. I understand the particular challenges that operators in the tourism sector are facing.

This government has been there for small businesses. We proved that during the pandemic. We will be there until the pandemic is over. We will ensure a robust economic recovery so that all entrepreneurs, their families and the people they employ understand

that, when the chips are down, the Liberal government has their backs.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:02 p.m.)

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