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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 3, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1000)

[*English*]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that Her Excellency the Governor General has seen fit to authorize this chamber to proceed with the election of a Speaker.

[*Translation*]

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, September 26, the House will now proceed to the election of the Speaker.

Before I begin, I would like to tell my predecessor, Mr. Rota, how much I admire all of the work he did during his two terms as Speaker. He was a great Speaker, and he will be remembered for a job well done. I thank Mr. Rota.

I was very pleased to fill in as Speaker temporarily. My term will end today. I had a lot of work to do, so much so that I still have not found the limousine, the keys to the official residence, the keys to the wine cellar or the form to increase my salary. I will be remembered as the Speaker with the shortest-lived career who spent the least.

All members should have received by email last night the list of candidates for the speakership.

[*English*]

This list is also available at the table and on ourcommons.ca if members wish to consult it before the vote.

[*Translation*]

Before proceeding, I want to invite any member whose name is on the list of candidates but who does not want to stand for election to rise and inform the Chair accordingly.

The member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank you for your excellent work.

Upon reflection, I wish to withdraw my candidacy.

[*English*]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): Further to that statement, the list of candidates is revised accordingly.

Pursuant to Standing Order 3.1, the House must proceed to the speeches from each candidate for Speaker.

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

Notwithstanding any Standing Order, any procedure or any practice adopted by this House, and to help the newly elected members identify the candidates for the office of Speaker, I will recognize in alphabetical order each candidate by name and electoral district.

[*English*]

When the last candidate to address the House completes his or her speech, I will leave the chair for 30 minutes, after which members will proceed to the election of the Speaker.

[*Translation*]

I will now call upon Mr. Sean Casey, the hon. member for Charlottetown, to speak for not more than five minutes.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people who have lived on these lands for millennia. We recognize the enduring presence of first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples on this territory.

[*English*]

It is with great humility that I rise to offer my candidacy as the Speaker of the House of Commons.

I have been in the workforce for 34 years. One half of that time has been spent as a litigator. When I was called to the bar of Prince Edward Island in 1989, the presiding judge, Mr. Justice Gerard Mitchell as he then was, reminded me that as a member of the bar, I was an officer of the court and that my first duty was to the court. It was not to my clients, not to my firm, but to the court. Throughout my legal career, there were professional differences, robust debates and aggressive cross-examinations, but the respect for the administration of justice, the professional code of conduct and the rule of law transcended everything.

Election of Speaker

I offer this comment not to say that we need more lawyers in this House, as for God's sake we have enough already, but to say that the level of respect for Parliament and the office of the Speaker has taken an incredible beating in this session of Parliament, especially in question period, and it does not need to. A vigorous and relentless prosecution of an issue is not made stronger by the repeated flouting of the rules of this place or by defying the Speaker. It denigrates this institution and all of us, its temporary occupants.

I believe it is time for a reset, and the election of a Speaker in the middle of a parliamentary session is a historically unique opportunity to do just that. We can do better and we must. If individual members are willing to be part of a collective effort to restore public confidence in the way we treat each other and the rules of Parliament, then I would be honoured to lead that cause. If, on the other hand, members are comfortable with the current state of decorum and level of respect for the office of the Speaker, please do not vote for me.

[*Translation*]

I was first elected to Parliament in 2011 and proudly took my seat as an MP for the third party. We were in the Centre Block at the time. I spent four years as a member of the third party, then four years as parliamentary secretary to three different ministers, and the last four years as chair of standing committees. This variety of experience informs my perspective and approach to everything I do and makes it less difficult for me to put myself in the position of the MPs I am talking to. I submit this experience to the House.

[*English*]

The events of September 22 were unfortunate, embarrassing and hurtful. A good man, with a deep respect for all of us and for this place, acknowledged his mistake and gave up a role that he took extremely seriously as a servant of the House.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for his service and to welcome him back to caucus.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

It will now be up to the next Speaker to make sure that this never happens again and that the proper procedures and protocols are adhered to. It will also be important that the new Speaker reach out to the communities that were hurt, including Jewish Canadians.

I am ready to accept members' advice on how to lead this outreach.

[*English*]

I want to thank my wife Deirdre and my family for their unwavering support in this pursuit.

I am immensely grateful to the voters of Charlottetown, who have sent me back to Parliament four times to be their voice. Quite frankly, after all the good wishes I received in the riding on the weekend, I really wish they were eligible to vote.

I will bring a breadth of experience, tough love, progressive discipline and a quick wit to the role of Speaker. If hon. members

share my view that these are the key ingredients for Parliament at this point in our history, then I humbly ask for their support.

If I may, tomorrow is my mom's birthday and I know she is watching. Happy birthday to her.

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I will now call upon Mr. Chris d'Entremont, the hon. member for West Nova.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

It is an honour for me to stand before my dear colleagues today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people to say a few words on my candidacy for Speaker of the House of Commons in the ongoing 44th Parliament.

I would first like to express my sincere thanks to the member of Parliament for Nipissing—Timiskaming for all the work that he accomplished as Speaker of the House of Commons over the last four years. It has not been easy any one of those days.

[*Translation*]

I am addressing you, hon. colleagues, for the second time as candidate for the position of Speaker. Since 2021, some of us have left and others have recently arrived.

[*English*]

Colleagues, today I am running to be your Speaker. My last two years as Deputy Speaker of the House has confirmed my deep desire to continue to work as your Speaker. My experience will assist you in the discharging of your responsibilities.

[*Translation*]

Since my election to the House of Commons in 2019, I have gotten to know quite a few of you, from all parties. I have taken that duty to heart ever since I was named Deputy Speaker in 2021. I thank you all for the great talks. I intend to maintain this approach regardless of the vote's result, because friendship must prevail in the House.

Hon. colleagues, I have heard you. Like many of you, I want to restore this august place's reputation. It is the Speaker's duty to put respect for each other, for our Standing Orders, for decorum and for procedures at the centre of our proceedings. I am convinced that I will successfully fulfill the Speaker's duties and make sure that the powers and privileges of the House are top priorities.

[English]

We must carry out our duties with diligence, honesty and respect. You can count on me to lead by example. I will exercise my functions in a fair, non-partisan and firm manner, as it is important for me to protect the right to speak for each one of you in this place.

As many of you know by now, I have a very calm French Canadian demeanour and work well with others. In fact, these are traits that are strongly tied to my deep Acadian roots, as we Nova Scotian Acadians learned, once we returned home from exile, to remain calm and non-confrontational and to continuously strive for consensus no matter the situation we find ourselves in.

Let us remember that the last few years have been difficult, and we have faced many challenges. Last week was incredible. Canadians are currently going through a lot and looking for stability and strong leadership at the core of our country's democracy.

In this regard, I wish to lead an all-party approach and put my skills, ability and experience to work to enable hon. members to navigate the House of Commons in the safest and most effective way possible while you fulfill your very important responsibilities to Canadians.

• (1015)

[Translation]

As we rise to the many challenges we face, I know that I can make a valuable contribution by uniting, rather than dividing, the members of this chamber. The Speaker is responsible for ensuring respect for members of every party as well as their strengths and values.

Canada is a bilingual nation, and the Speaker of the House must also be bilingual. However, beyond the ability to speak both official languages, the Speaker must have a firm grasp of the unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of the people who call these languages their own. I can meet this imperative.

[English]

We know as elected representatives of this chamber, it is our duty to ensure the health of our democracy is preserved and always well-respected. It is up to us to elect a Speaker who will truly be a guardian of this chamber. The Speaker has the responsibility and privilege to lead by example at all times by being a Speaker who has a good handle of the rules, and who can quickly make decisions so meaningful, structured debate can happen.

[Translation]

Whether this Parliament ends in a few months or two years, I want to make sure that the work and values of the House align with Canadians' expectations of the institution at the heart of our democracy. Above all, I want to ensure that each one of you can look back when this parliamentary session is over and proudly say that it was productive, positive and respectful.

[English]

It has been an honour to serve as your Deputy Speaker for the past two years. It would be an honour to become your Speaker, to support you in your very important responsibilities. Colleagues, I humbly ask for your vote today.

Election of Speaker

[Translation]

Colleagues, I humbly ask that you vote for me today.

[English]

I could maybe say that one of the first honours of duty, for whoever becomes Speaker today, would be to bring down the heat, and I mean the temperature because, my goodness, it is hot in here today.

[Translation]

Thank you and have a nice day.

[English]

I look forward to your vote.

[Translation]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I will now call upon the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you.

[English]

Colleagues, today, like all days, we pay our respects to the Anishinabe Algonquin people on whose unceded land we stand.

Regardless of what part of the country we come from, what political party we belong to or what our political ideas are, the fact is that each of us, every one of us in this chamber, frankly, has a lot more in common than we often care to admit.

[Translation]

We all remember the first time we walked through the doors of the House of Commons as newly sworn-in members of Parliament. As I am sure everyone here would agree, it was and still remains the proudest day of my life, after the births of my children and grandchildren.

[English]

It was also the culmination of my lifelong love for Parliament. At the age of 14, I subscribed to and read Hansard. In 1988, I sat right there at the foot of the Speaker's chair as a parliamentary page, where I was awed by the majesty of this sanctum of democracy, and where I learned that every MP, from every party and every region, impressed me with their love for this country and wanting to do better by their people. I still feel that way 35 years later, as I stand here before you asking for your vote to become Speaker of the House of Commons.

What brought us here today requires a response. Words matter. Symbols matter. This I know. As your Speaker, I would restore, and quickly bring back, honour to the chamber.

*Election of Speaker**[Translation]*

The events that bring us together today need to be addressed. The words we use matter. Symbols matter. I know this all too well. As your Speaker, I will act swiftly to restore the honour of the House.

[English]

What motivates me, and what I vow to work night and day to promote and advance, can be summed up in one word: respect.

- (1020)

[Translation]

This is about respect for our democracy and its institutions, respect for our constituents and their intelligence, respect for parliamentary traditions, respect for the rights and privileges of parliamentarians.

[English]

Finally, there is respect for each other, in the way we treat each other and the way we talk to Canadians. In other words, this is all about decorum. I would be a Speaker who was firm, thoughtful, collaborative, consistent and, certainly, fair.

[Translation]

As my record in the House demonstrates, as your Speaker, respect will be my credo.

[English]

It is what would guide me as a steward of the rights and privileges of all elected members in Parliament and beyond the parliamentary precinct; in fostering and supporting open, frank, honest and respectful debate in the House; and in administering the services and employees of the House.

[Translation]

That is why I am committed to vigorously defending and protecting parliamentary privileges. I am also committed to being a tireless advocate of the best ideas, no matter where they come from, to improve the services and resources we need, both individually and collectively, in order to better serve our constituents and everyone who lives in Canada.

[English]

Colleagues, if there is one thing I would ask you to remember, it is that Canadians look to the House to address their concerns, respond to their needs, set the example and show leadership. At its best, Parliament has lived up to and embodied these high principles. Therefore, I ask you for your support, as Speaker, to work with me in making respect our goal in what we do here every single day when we take our seats in this hallowed chamber.

[Translation]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I will now call upon the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for his service as Speaker of the House.

I would also like to thank the people of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing for placing their trust in me to represent them for the past 15 years. I am honoured to be their member of Parliament.

[English]

I begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation. It is important that we, as representatives of the Crown, acknowledge the people whose lands we stand on and the history that this place represents in this context, especially as we just marked the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation this past weekend.

We sit here today at a unique moment in the history of the House. It is obviously quite rare for us to discuss the election of a new Speaker in the middle of a Parliament. This has been done only once before, when Speaker John Bosley, who was coincidentally the last Speaker appointed to the role rather than elected, resigned to sit in the Progressive Conservative backbenches in 1986.

Speaker Bosley, whom you may remember was commemorated in the House last year following his passing, left the position because he was concerned about the erosion of public respect for Parliament and believed he could do more to build that respect from outside of the Speaker's chair. Speaker Bosley was clearly concerned about how the House was being perceived by the Canadian electorate. The erosion of public respect for Parliament is real, and I believe we, the members of the House, all have a responsibility to work toward improving it.

[Translation]

The role of the Speaker, as representative of the House of Commons, is to guide this institution in the debates, to oversee the rules and traditions that are so dear to us and, perhaps most importantly at this time, to maintain order and decorum so as to restore the public's respect for Parliament—something that Speaker Bosley was concerned about nearly 40 years ago.

I believe that my experience as Assistant Deputy Speaker has prepared me for this role. I have held this position for the duration of the past two Parliaments and the first half of this Parliament. During my terms, I have always been fair and reasonable in my duty to maintain order in the House.

- (1025)

[English]

I have made decisions that maybe, at times, were not popular, even with members of my own party, because the duties of the Chair demanded it. I have also heard from some members of all parties that they believe I am fair and even-handed and have been consistent in my application of the rules of the House. When we are here, regardless of what our party affiliation is, the rules are the rules.

Election of Speaker

Speaking of political parties, I know there is more that binds us together than divides us. We are all here because we love our nation and are all dedicated to seeing it flourish. We may have different ideas about how to accomplish this goal, and it is vital that we encourage healthy debate to find the common ground. However, I feel, as I am certain many of you do, that at times members can act in a manner that is challenging for the House. I believe that, in those moments, we do a disservice to the House and to Canadians by allowing unhealthy debate to proceed.

My commitment to each of you is that you will have your moment to engage in healthy debate, and you will allow your colleagues their moment to a healthy debate, without unacceptable interruptions, shouting or heckling. This is how we rebuild the public's trust in and respect for Parliament.

I am also looking forward to following in the footsteps of another of our predecessors, the Right Hon. Jeanne Sauvé, former governor general of Canada, who is to this day the only woman who has served as Speaker of the House of Commons. It has been over 40 years since she last presided over the House, and I believe that we must show young women that they too can see themselves represented in our institutions, including as Speaker of the House of Commons.

In closing, I would like to remind members that Canadians are looking to us to make Parliament work in a way that will deliver results for them. I have shown throughout my years in Parliament that I have the experience, judgment and temperament necessary for this role, which is vital for the functioning of our democracy.

Colleagues, this is why I ask for your support.

[*Translation*]

Your support is greatly appreciated.

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I will now call upon Ms. Elizabeth May, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

She is not here with us today, but we can watch her on the screen.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, it is a great honour to speak today at this unique sitting. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend in person.

[*English*]

Because of my inability to be on an airplane at this point in my life due to having had a stroke, and I am, as you see, recovering quite well, I cannot participate in person, which means I also cannot vote, which is a terrible shame. I am participating this way because I want to make sure this election for the Speaker takes into account what I think are the essential elements for the next Speaker of the House.

[*Translation*]

We must follow our rules.

[*English*]

For me, this is essential. If you walk down the back corridor behind the Speaker's chair, you will see the portraits of former Speak-

ers. I do think you should pause in front of the portrait of Lucien Lamoureux, who served this place from 1966 to 1974. He was the best of all of our Speakers. He personified non-partisanship.

Elected as a Liberal in the government of Lester B. Pearson, when Lucien Lamoureux ran for re-election as a sitting Speaker, he did so twice as an independent. He also applied our rules, which meant he was not always popular, and he was not elected. He was able to enforce the rules.

Everyone who has spoken has said our rules are important, but on a daily basis we ignore Standing Orders 16 and 18, which require that we respect one another and that we treat each other with respect.

[*Translation*]

I completely agree with my colleague, the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer. Respect is of the utmost importance. However, we have made it a habit to flout our rules.

● (1030)

[*English*]

We ignore our rules at our peril. I cite the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for his service, and the tragedy that unfolded in this place could have been avoided if we had followed our rules.

[*Translation*]

There are rules about recognizing visitors in the galleries. In this case, it is clear that the rules were broken in acknowledging that man's presence.

[*English*]

I know that because I tried to convince the former Speaker to recognize someone whom I thought did deserve recognition in our gallery, only to be told that Dr. David Suzuki did not qualify, so I know the rules represent a steep hill to climb to have someone recognized in the gallery. I cannot imagine how this happened, but I also agree words are not enough.

That moment in this House brought back the words of the late Irving Abella, who said that in our history it was easier to gain entry to Canada as a Nazi than as a Jew. I think we have to do more than say we are sorry. I think we have to atone and open up the records of the Deschênes commission. We have to look at our history, just as we do on the day of truth and reconciliation for the injustices and genocide toward indigenous peoples.

[*Translation*]

We must follow our rules.

Election of Speaker

[English]

The Speaker's role is essential, as the Speaker is the only person who can decide who speaks in question period. It has been 40 years that the Speaker has broken the rules every single day, regardless what Speaker we are talking about, by accepting a list from a party whip that tells him or her who speaks and in what order. That abomination has moved the system of rewards and punishments from the Speaker to the party whip. The party whips are not the people we want to please if we want this place to operate with respect and to make Canadians look at the House of Commons and think, "There is a place I respect; that is democracy in action."

[Translation]

We can try harder and we can do better. It is possible.

[English]

All of those running in this election are more than qualified to be good Speakers of the House. If it were my honour to fill that role, I cannot tell you how overwhelmed I would be. However, I think it is not likely, and I encourage you to vote for the person you think will be your best Speaker.

I pledge my support to the next Speaker, whoever is brave enough to go back to following our rule that only the Speaker chooses who speaks in question period. This was confirmed when the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle was the Speaker of the House, in April 2013 on a point of order from the late Mark Warawa. It would no doubt improve our proceedings enormously.

With that, I wish you all the best of luck.

[Translation]

Good luck to all of my colleagues who are hoping to be the next Speaker.

[English]

I miss you all and cannot wait to see you all again. You know I love you all. I really miss you and want to give you a big hug.

Thank you very much. I wish you the best of luck. God bless you.

[Translation]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I will now call upon the hon. member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Chair, colleagues, seeing you again is always a pleasure, despite the unfortunate circumstances, to put it mildly.

I would like to thank the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for promoting a collegial atmosphere here and for accomplishing so much at a time of tremendous change in the House of Commons.

I am not here to stand against anyone. I am here because I have convictions that I believe could help us approach our responsibilities as parliamentarians differently.

I feel it is vital that the House invite diplomatic and community representatives of the Jewish and Polish communities to the chamber as soon as possible so we can express our dismay to them and

offer our apologies. History cannot be rewritten, and I believe that we all share a collective duty of remembrance.

We are 338 individuals among the 40 million Canadians who chose us to make laws for them on matters that concern their present and, now more than ever, their future. I am keenly aware of the incredible honour that the people of Brossard—Saint-Lambert have done me, and of the responsibilities I have undertaken since I was first elected.

● (1035)

[English]

Some of those responsibilities include and depend on the constant quest for truthfulness and the common good.

I also believe that one of our responsibilities is to find joy in the work we do. Loving what we do, this place where we do it and the people who help us do it, for me, is a fundamental aspect of a successful parliamentary life. It cannot and should not be all about insults and accusations, about "gotcha" moments and questionable statements.

I associate some of the most meaningful hours I have experienced in the House with debates where members strove to find shared goals. Emergency and take-note debates, private members' bills and motions, and even some legislative initiatives are often moments where we find our better natures. This is the place where Canada's important conversations should be held, where we seriously debate and where we humorously disagree.

[Translation]

What I take away from those moments is that we are all quite capable of rising above partisan sparring when that is what is called for, and that some of our colleagues' sense of humour seasons what would otherwise be dry or overly technical conversations with a zesty *je ne sais quoi*.

[English]

Holding the government to account is the essential element of parliamentary democracy. No government is immune from the necessary scrutiny of its proposed legislation and its management of the public accounts, but Canadians have told us time and again that they expect us to do this with far more civility than they see in this place every day.

Reject me if you must, but should I be given the honour of being elected to the Chair, I would strive with all my might to bring dignity to our debates by enforcing the rules that we have all chosen to adhere to. I believe in the rules and regulations that govern the House of Commons. I believe in the office of the Speaker that oversees the functioning and administration of this place. I believe in the Clerk and the table officers who guide us and provide us with their knowledge and their independent analysis.

[*Translation*]

Dignity is a principle I care deeply about. The humanity of every person in the House, elected or otherwise, must be respected. That is why I value things like a simple thanks to the page who brings us a glass of water or a lectern, a respectful awareness of the monumental task performed by our interpreters, recognition of the sensitive work carried out by the table officers, and acceptance that, despite our differences, each and every one of us is here for the same reason: to make good laws.

Joy is also a principle of enormous importance to me. The joy of music is an eternal source of wonder. As everyone knows, because I announced it two years ago, I hope to create a parliamentary choir. That has been a dream of mine for many years.

[*English*]

Over my many years in this place I have heard people, including journalists, staff and sometimes you members, suggest that some of the traditions and rituals we observe are silly, arcane or outdated. I tend to disagree, but that does not mean that we should not try to create new rituals that will in turn become traditions.

This is the people's House and we are only the temporary occupants and guardians of it. Our predecessors fought hard for our rights as parliamentarians. If you elect me as your Speaker, I promise to continue that fight by doing everything in my power to ensure MPs have a safe, productive and collaborative environment to do the work that they deserve.

[*Translation*]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I will now call upon Peter Schiefke, the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, to speak.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Chair, right hon. Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, leader of the Bloc Québécois, leader of the NDP, leader of the Green Party, hon. colleagues, hon. candidates, dear friends, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House today as an official candidate for Speaker of the House of Commons.

Colleagues, I am running for this position because I want to follow in the footsteps of the extraordinary men and women who came before me in service of us all. Two of those extraordinary men are here in the chamber with us: the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle and the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

• (1040)

[*English*]

Honourable colleagues, to stand here as a candidate for Speaker means to stand for the candidacy of the custodian and the guardian

Election of Speaker

of this sacred democratic chamber. It is not lost on me that I do so 71 years after my grandfather, Luis Gonzalez, fled Spain under dictatorial rule, boarding a ship called the *Anna Salen* in search of a place where he could speak freely, where he could send a representative to speak on his behalf, arriving on the shores of Halifax on December 29, 1952.

This past weekend, my daughter Ellie, who just turned seven, asked me what I was doing. I told her that I was running for speakership of this place. She is too young to understand what that means. She is too young to fully grasp the significance of the work that we do here every single day, but she will understand it one day. Colleagues, if you are asking me for my two reasons for running to be the 38th Speaker, there they are: to be your servant as we honour those who sought this place out in generations past and to be your servant to help build an even stronger democratic institution for my children, your children and future generations of Canadians.

Colleagues, we are at a pivotal moment in Canadian history. I truly feel that. Through the conversations that I have had with so many of you over the weekend, I know that you feel that way, too. We have the work ahead of us of rebuilding trust in this place among members, of rebuilding trust that Canadians have in this place, of rebuilding trust that our allies and friends around the world have in us. As your Speaker, that will be my primary priority.

First and foremost, I seek to put in place a policy that will ensure due diligence, so that when I rise as your Speaker to ask hon. members to rise on behalf of somebody who is in the gallery, you can do so with trust and with confidence. I pledge to you that within one week of being elected your Speaker, I will invite Jewish community leaders from across the country, as well as veterans groups that are also affected by what happened that Friday, to this place, to apologize as your Speaker on behalf of all members of this House. I pledge that I will send a communiqué within one week of being elected Speaker to the hon. Speaker of the Parliament of Ukraine, informing him of my intentions to apologize to him and the members of the Ukrainian Parliament.

I believe these to be diligent measures and ones that are necessary if we seek to move on and truly reconcile with what occurred on September 22. Just as important will be my work to ensure that your right to speak freely in this place is defended. The story goes that the distance between the Right Hon. Prime Minister's desk and the desk of the leader of the official opposition was measured in such a way to be the distance of two duelling individuals, their swords drawn, with one inch added in the middle, that inch to symbolize that in this place we solve our differences not through violence but through discourse, dialogue and debate.

As your Speaker, I vow to do everything that I can within the powers and the tools available to me as Speaker, to ensure that when you come to this place every single day to do the hard work for Canadians, you are able to do that, to share your gift, the gift that your constituents saw in you and the reason they sent you here: to be able to share that gift unimpeded and without fear of intimidation.

*Election of Speaker**[Translation]*

Hon. colleagues, since 2015, I have had the privilege of working with you as the proud member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, as the parliamentary secretary on four different portfolios and as the chair of a committee. I hope that those I have had the chance to work with could see that I am a fair and transparent person. I come here every day with the intention of working with you, regardless of which party you belong to, to find solutions for improving Canadians' quality of life.

Hon. colleagues, I sincerely thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today.

[English]

Colleagues, I hope you will give me the grand honour of being the 38th Speaker of this House of Commons.

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): Before I suspend the sitting for 30 minutes, may I bring to the attention of hon. members that the bells calling the members back to the House will be sounded for not more than five minutes.

The sitting is suspended to the call of the Chair for 30 minutes.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 10:44 a.m.)

● (1115)

[Translation]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 11:16 a.m.)

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): Pursuant to the provisions of the Standing Orders, the House will now proceed to elect a Speaker.

● (1120)

After the Clerk has unsealed the ballots, I will suggest to the House a procedure that will accelerate the voting process.

We will now prepare to begin to vote according to the provisions of Standing Order 4. Please allow me to outline the procedure for all members.

[English]

The names of the candidates eligible for the election are listed on the ballot in alphabetical order. To vote, you must rank the candidates in order of preference by placing the number “1” in the space next to your first-choice candidate, the number “2” next to your second-choice candidate, and so on, until you have ranked all candidates for whom you wish to vote. Please note that it is not necessary to rank all candidates.

[Translation]

In order to vote, I will ask that members leave their desks, exit through the curtains, and come to the table using the doors on the left and right sides of the chair on their respective sides of the House. The clerk will issue to each member a ballot paper.

After casting their ballots, members are asked to leave the voting area.

The polling booths are now open to vote.

[English]

The polling booths are now open to vote.

(Members were issued ballots and marked their ballots in secret at voting stations)

● (1155)

[Translation]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): All members having voted, I do now instruct the Clerk to proceed with the counting of the ballots, after I have cast my ballot.

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): Before I suspend the sitting, I wish to remind hon. members that, when the counting has been completed, the bells to call the members back to the House will be sounded.

● (1200)

[English]

The sitting is suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 12:00 p.m.)

● (1325)

SITTING RESUMED

(The Clerk of the House having provided the Presiding Officer with the name of the member having received a majority of the votes cast:)

(The House resumed at 1:30 p.m.)

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): It is my duty to inform the House that a Speaker of the House has been duly elected.

It is with great pleasure that I invite the hon. member for the electoral district of Hull—Aylmer to take the chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Louis Plamondon): I now invite the right hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition to escort the Hon. Greg Fergus to the chair.

(The Presiding Officer having vacated the chair, the right hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition conducted Mr. Greg Fergus from his seat in the House to the chair)

● (1335)

[Translation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to humbly thank the House for doing me the great honour of selecting me as Speaker.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge a number of individuals and, indeed, all of you.

Let me begin with the hon. member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, the dean of the House of Commons, who has had a lengthy career in the House of Commons. He has been here for 39 years; that is a great inspiration to us all. For the younger members who came in 2021 and those who arrived quite recently following by-elections, you have before you a man who is an inspiration to us all, a man who with close ties to his voters, to his people. He has served in the House with great integrity since 1984. I congratulate him.

He may not remember this, but I came here in 1988 as a parliamentary page, and I had the pleasure of serving him water and delivering him messages on paper. He was an upstanding gentleman then, just as he is, even more so, now. I hope I will have the chance to beat his record and be in this chair for longer than five days, at least, but we will see. I will start with one afternoon.

[*English*]

I would also like to thank my hon. colleagues who let their names stand to become Speaker of the House of Commons. Let us all give them a huge round of applause. They are amazing Canadians. They have served this House, especially the speakership team. The two assistant deputy speakers and the Deputy Speaker in particular have served the House very well and with great honour and integrity. I hope to continue to count on your sage advice and your support as we move forward for the rest of this Parliament. I really look forward to working collaboratively with all of you.

Thank you for the applause. I know that, in politics, there are only two times when people give strong applause and are happy to see you: the day you arrive and, of course, the day you leave.

The Speaker, to use the old hockey analogy, is nothing more than a referee. If there is one thing I know, it is that nobody pays good money to go see the referee. They go to see the stars: you, the players on the ice.

[*Translation*]

People go to see the men and women who have long been demonstrating their talents in the minor leagues, who practised at home with their families, and who have since found themselves here in the House.

My role as Speaker is to assure you that the rules and regulations will be followed so that you can engage in what I hope will be respectful, friendly, sincere and passionate debates in the House.

[*English*]

As I said earlier, in my speech to all of you, respect is a fundamental part of what we do here. We need to make sure that we treat each other with respect and that we show Canadians an example, because there can be no dialogue unless there is a mutual understanding of respect. There can be no ability to pursue arguments, to make points be heard, unless we all agree to extend to each other that sense of respect and decorum. Therefore, I am going to be working hard on this, and I need all of your help to make this happen, because this is the place where hard debates will happen.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

This is the place to have passionate yet respectful debates.

Election of Speaker

I will soon begin meeting with the table officers. I will be meeting with the Deputy Speaker and the assistant deputy speakers to discuss how we are going to proceed over the next few months to make sure we get things right. We must follow the rules of the House of Commons. By doing so, we can have fruitful and meaningful debates, and we can proceed in a way that promotes mutual respect.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the trust you have placed in me. I hope to prove myself worthy of that trust in the coming years. I hope to have the chance to speak with each and every one of you, to get to know you better. That way, we can set an example and show Canadians that politics is a noble profession.

Thank you very much. I wish us all a very successful session.

The hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you have to say “the right honourable”.

The Speaker: Well, there is my first mistake.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government and every member of this House, I want to congratulate you on your election.

I also want to thank all the other candidates for the speakership. I thank them for answering the call to keep our democracy healthy and strong.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, today, you are the first Black Canadian to become Speaker of the House. This should be inspiring for all Canadians, especially those in younger generations who want to get involved in politics. Congratulations.

The House is the home of Canadian democracy. Members of Parliament come from every corner of the country to represent their communities. Canadians from coast to coast to coast elect us to work hard for them and to be their voices in this place. They elected us to deliver results to help make their lives better. This remains our number one job. The only way we can make progress is by working together and by respecting each other.

[*Translation*]

The House of Commons is a place of debate. It is to be expected that we will not always agree with each other.

Mr. Speaker, we have elected you to help us keep our debates civil and to remind us that we are all here for the same reason: to serve Canadians.

*Election of Speaker**[English]*

These are consequential times for Canada and for the world. We must continue to work together to make life more affordable, to build more homes, to keep our democracy strong, to fight climate change and to power the clean economy of tomorrow.

[Translation]

We must keep working to uphold Canada's promise of a better quality of life for every generation.

[English]

In these consequential times, Canadians expect us all to work together to deliver results. They expect us to behave to the highest standards. I know you will help us rise to meet this moment.

Canada is the best country in the world. Let us keep working all together to make it even better.

- (1345)

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate you.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, are you sure you know what you have gotten yourself into? I know you have strong enough arms for the job because I had the difficult task of dragging you all the way to that chair. We thought for a moment that you had changed your mind when you took a turn to congratulate one of our colleagues on this side, but it is an incredible achievement to serve in the role that Parliament has bestowed upon you.

[Translation]

To serve here, in the House of Commons, is an honour for every member. Each of us should be proud to be responsible for working on behalf of some 100,000 people.

At times, however, we forget the order in which power is exercised. We think that the Prime Minister is at the top, with the House of Commons below, and the people down at the very bottom, but the opposite is true. In a democracy, the people have the power. We serve the people, and the government serves parliamentarians.

[English]

In fact, that is why Parliament was invented. The reason these floors and seats are green is that the first commoners met in fields. They were the peasants and farmers who were tired of having their crops taxed away by an impossibly cruel Crown. They gathered to force King John to sign the Magna Carta, the great charter, which of course restrained the power of the Crown.

Today, we have a similar circumstance, with a government that is excessively powerful and costly. It has overburdened the population and created unprecedented strain, particularly on middle-class and working-class people, who are now forced in many cases to live in tents and who are losing their homes and skipping meals. We have seven million people who cannot afford food because of the inflationary taxes imposed on that food by an overly greedy government.

Now, more than ever, the role of Parliament in restraining the power of the Prime Minister is primordial. We will continue to carry out that role proudly on the floor of this House of Commons because we will always remember that we are servants and not masters of the Canadian people. We will do it with common sense. Why is this important?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I hear that some members of the government do not like the sound of the words “common sense”. We can understand why they would not, but is it not interesting that this is called the House of Commons for a reason? Common wisdom, our common resources, our common heritage and our common future are determined by the people elected to serve in this place. We must always do it with common sense, the common sense of the common people, united for our common home: their home, my home, our House. Let us bring it home.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I cannot begin without acknowledging the person who masterfully held the office of the Speaker of this Parliament for seven days: the member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel. I thank him. He was a model of impartiality.

Mr. Speaker, before I recognize you, I would like to recognize the candidates whose names were on the list today. We had a tough choice to make. I tip my hat to them. They are great parliamentarians who have always created a space for debate and who have been extremely effective.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on behalf of myself and the Bloc Québécois. We are very pleased to see you in the chair. We are very proud of you.

All of the Speakers who came before you were faced with the challenge of moving from a sometimes very partisan role to one where they had to set aside partisanship and become impartial. I am sure that you will be able to fulfill this role and that you will maintain the impartiality required for our Parliament to do noble work for our fellow citizens. They expect nothing less from us.

I, too, want to use a hockey analogy. I really hope that you will be an impartial, effective and respectful referee. On behalf of myself and the Bloc Québécois, my whip and my leader, I offer you our full co-operation. I look forward to working together so that ideas can come first and be the top priority in Parliament.

- (1350)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the entire NDP, I would like to congratulate you on your victory today. I also want to acknowledge the work you have done for your riding as MP for Hull—Aylmer since 2015.

Let me just say—and I know many other members would say it, too—you always offer a wonderful smile and friendly greeting to everyone.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

It is fair to say, without much exception, that you are one of the friendliest members of Parliament, and it is great to see you in the chair now. Congratulations.

I know this has been said, but I want to underline what having you elected means. First of all, I want to acknowledge the humility that you expressed when saying that people do not go to a match to watch the referee; they go to watch the stars. You started off with a message of humility, which is very powerful.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible weight that you now bear and the incredible feat that you have achieved. When people walk the halls of this place and look at the pictures on the walls to be reminded of some of the great achievements of Canada and some of the grave errors we have made as a nation, they are one day going to see your face on the walls of this chamber. What is that going to mean to kids visiting from far and wide who come to the capital city? There are kids who have come here and not seen themselves reflected on the walls, and that is going to change now. That is very powerful.

I know you know how important that is, and it brings me to my next point, which is the incredible role that you will now have to play to restore the honour of this chamber, something you mentioned in your speech as well. We know there is going to be, and rightly so, increased attention on all parliamentarians and on this House. I have no doubt that you will be able to satisfy your responsibilities with the utmost capacity, but it is indeed an increased responsibility.

I also know that there are deep concerns about divisions in politics and the polarization of debate. While vigorous debates are of course important, there is a certain tone and decorum that must be upheld. Going back to kids visiting this place, sometimes when school kids are watching the elected officials of this country engaging in debate, I am embarrassed that they are watching people yelling outlandish things and acting as if it is cool to be yelling at someone while they are speaking. I hope you can restore some decorum. It is important. Everyone is going to have a chance to share their viewpoints, but it should be done in such a way that people are able to express them and then sit down. Then someone else can respond and rebut. I hope you can create that decorum, restore the prestige of this place and restore confidence in the important work that happens here.

I thank you so much for putting your name forward, and congratulations on being elected. I look forward to working with you.

• (1355)

[Translation]

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for this opportunity to offer my congratulations.

First of all, I want to say a hearty thank you on behalf of the Green Party caucus to the member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel for his excellent work as interim Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, turning to you, it is a joy to see you in that chair and to address you for the first time in this way. I deeply appreciate the words you shared with us just hours ago, highlighting how important respect is in this place. Yes, we may have different opinions across the country, and yes, the debate here may be difficult at times, but Canadians expect this to be a place where parliamentarians can come together to elevate the quality of debate and make progress on what they care about most.

I have no doubt that with you in that chair, with the support of all parliamentarians and certainly on behalf of the Green Party caucus, you will be well supported to ensure that continues to be the case. While this may be a toxic place at times, it does not have to be that way. I know you will ensure that the debate is elevated here.

On behalf of the Green Party caucus, once again I wish you all the very best.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that it is the pleasure of Her Excellency the Governor General that the House shall present its Speaker later this day in the chamber of the Senate to receive Her Excellency's approval.

[Translation]

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Speaker: The sitting is suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 1:58 p.m.)

• (1500)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 2:24 p.m.)

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Her Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the Senate.

Accordingly, the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And the House being returned to the Commons chamber:

The Speaker: I have the honour to report that, the House having attended on Her Excellency the Governor General in the Senate chamber, I informed Her Excellency that the choice of Speaker has fallen on me.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS*[English]***SITUATION IN ARTSAKH**

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election.

Today I wish to share the eyewitness account of a humanitarian emergency from an Armenian Canadian and resident of Don Valley North, Rupen Janbazian.

Mr. Janbazian recounts:

Statements by Members

“In the past few days, myself and my wife have witnessed the unimaginable hardships of the people of Artsakh trying to escape the Azerbaijani-controlled region, which has undergone mass ethnic cleansing over the last two weeks.

“The journey from Artsakh to Armenia normally takes under two hours and now took 30 to 50 hours.

“I’ve witnessed families arriving with everything they could take from their homes strapped onto the roofs of their cars, the insides stuffed with eight to 10 people.

“My wife and I are currently hosting a family of 15 who escaped from Artsakh. They are my dear friend’s family; he has been missing since an explosion at a crowded gas station near Stepanakert, Artsakh’s capital, left scores of people dead and injured.

“My people are enduring a brutal ethnic cleansing, and in this era of technical advancements, this atrocity is unfolding in real time on people’s smart phones and computers, yet”—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nepean.

* * *

INDO CARIBBEAN WORLD

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Indo Caribbean World on its 40th anniversary, which published its first edition on September 14, 1983. It has succeeded in its mission to become the voice for an under-represented and largely unrecognized Indo population in the growing Caribbean diaspora in Canada.

I would like to recognize the founder and publisher, Harry Ramkhelawan, and editor, Romeo Kaseram, for their excellent work and achievement. Their team informs and educates not only the growing community, but also all of Canada about Indo-Caribbean, Caribbean and our Canadian subcontinental roots.

Indo Caribbean World plans to stay committed to its 40 years of history and philosophy in bringing the voices from the margin into the centre, and to continue contributing to building a glorious and free Canada.

* * *

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the invaluable work of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, CAMIMH, and to recognize the significance of this week, October 1 to 7, as Mental Illness Awareness Week.

For over two decades, CAMIMH has been a steadfast advocate for those living with mental health challenges, working tirelessly to reduce stigma, increase awareness, and advocate for improved and expanded mental health and substance use health services. Its dedication to this critical cause has positively impacted countless lives across Canada.

Earlier today on Parliament Hill, CAMIMH was proud to announce the 2023 champions of mental health. I am happy to commend and welcome the seven individuals and organizations that

have demonstrated exceptional commitment to advancing mental health in Canada. Their relentless efforts create lasting change in their communities and improve the lives of many. Together, we can create a more accessible and inclusive society where mental health is a priority.

* * *

● (1505)

SEAMUS GREW

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour the life of Seamus Grew, whose life was tragically cut short in July of this year after a long and courageous battle with ALS.

Seamus was born in 1944 in Ireland. Although he was certainly proud of his Irish roots, he was a proud Canadian to be sure, and he made a great contribution to this country. It was here where he worked as a public servant for the City of Toronto. It was also here where he was known to Canadians for his first passion, which was music. He was the founder of the Carlton Showband, which entertained particularly the Irish diaspora, and beyond to Canadians across the country. The band won a Juno Award for its efforts.

I had the opportunity to know Seamus because he was the father of one of my closest friends, Kevin, so I saw the love he had for his family up close. His wife, Maureen, along with their six kids and 10 grandchildren, can be very proud of the man he was.

Canada was better because of Seamus. I thank him very much for who he was. We miss him.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RAYNALD BLAIS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, the Gaspé region lost one of its most stalwart advocates. Former member of Parliament Raynald Blais passed away at the age of 69.

Elected three times as the member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Raynald Blais represented his region in the House of Commons from 2004 to 2011.

I had the honour to work alongside him in the Bloc Québécois. He truly distinguished himself when advocating for eastern Quebec fishers in their dealings with a federal government that was very out of touch with their realities.

The Bloc Québécois remembers him as a real boots-on-the-ground kind of guy, a proud regionalist with deep roots in his beloved Gaspé, a man who stood up for his people, whether here in Ottawa or back home as a radio journalist or union leader. He might have left the House in 2011, but he never truly left politics behind. He was still working as a political adviser up until recently.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I offer my deepest condolences to his loved ones and to the whole region he loved so much.

* * *

[English]

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Congratulations, Mr. Speaker. October is Women's History Month in Canada. It is an opportunity to reflect on and to honour the efforts and dedicated work of countless women in the feminist movement.

One such actor is the Montreal Council of Women. I joined them this weekend to celebrate their 130th anniversary. MCW has played a pivotal role, not only in empowering women but in encouraging them to be vectors for change and progress. In fact, three decades after the inception of MCW, we witnessed the resilience, strength and courage brought on by the Famous Five women: Parby, McKinney, McClung, Murphy and Edwards, who spoke up, argued before the courts and were instrumental in gaining women the right to vote.

[Translation]

Let us use Women's History Month to highlight the immeasurable contributions that these women and many others have made in every aspect of our society, and let us push to make sure that every woman receives the opportunities and the rights that she deserves.

* * *

• (1510)

[English]

BAIE VERTE PENINSULA TRAGEDY

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the morning of this past September 12, Dwayne, Leonard, Brian and Tim left Fleur de Lys harbour for a day of cod fishing, like so many others along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador that day. Little did they know that three of them would not return alive, including Tim, who is still missing.

While the sea gives so much to sustain us, words from a song by the band Simani, who often played in Fleur de Lys, sum it up:

And the Newfoundland story of loss to the sea,
Was told as so often before.

I personally knew most of the boys and their families, as did many on the Baie Verte Peninsula, where the hurt from this tragedy will linger for years to come.

I give a special thanks to those involved in the search and rescue efforts. I express condolences on behalf of the House of Commons to the families of Leonard Walsh, Brian Walsh and Tim Shea. Our thoughts and prayers are with them, and with Dwayne Barrett, the sole survivor.

* * *

DAY OF DEFENDERS OF UKRAINE

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday, on October 1, Ukraine celebrated the

Statements by Members

Day of Defenders of Ukraine, a day that honours the bravery, sacrifice and resilience of the men and women who are defending their homeland against Russia's aggression. Defenders of Ukraine have faced numerous challenges and threats, yet they have remained steadfast in their commitment to safeguarding their nation's sovereignty, freedom and democracy.

As we remember and honour the Day of Defenders of Ukraine, let us also reaffirm our support for a peaceful and prosperous Ukraine. Let us stand together in solidarity, working toward a future of victory and justice, where the principles of democracy and human rights are upheld.

To this end, I would like to invite fellow MPs to join me tonight to celebrate the Day of Defenders of Ukraine at 6:30 p.m. in the Valour Building. May we say thanks to all those in the front lines of Ukraine and those helping them to persevere.

* * *

[Translation]

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your new position.

On October 1, Cyprus celebrated the 63rd anniversary of its independence. It was indeed an occasion worth celebrating, because despite all the tragedies and all the challenges that Cyprus has faced, it has transformed into a model democracy with a high standard of living.

Cyprus gained independence in 1960 after a lengthy battle. Only 14 years later, it was invaded by Turkey, which still occupies one-third of the country. Cyprus is a member of the European Union, the Commonwealth and la Francophonie, and it maintains excellent relations with Canada and all of our allies.

[English]

We should also remember and celebrate Canada's contribution and the 25,000 Canadians who served as peacekeepers in Cyprus, with some continuing to serve to this day.

Close ties and alliances are critically important for all countries. We see what is happening in Ukraine and to the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, and we should work with all our allies, friends and the United Nations to make sure this type of aggression stops.

* * *

LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everything in Canada feels broken.

Canadians do not feel safe in their communities and life is now unaffordable for many. On my recent travels in northern Saskatchewan, I was reminded of this again when I found a \$17 jug of milk, a \$41 bag of flour and a four-dollar can of mushroom soup. Everything on every shelf everywhere has a huge freight cost.

Statements by Members

What will these basic necessities cost if the NDP-Liberal government gets to its 61¢-a-litre tax on fuel? I will tell members. The lives of people in northern Saskatchewan and of all Canadians will not be better off.

However, there is hope on the horizon. Under the direction of the Conservative leader, we can put the pieces back together. He will lead a government that lives within its means, leaves more in one's pockets, protects its citizens and lets us feel safe again in the Canada we know and love.

For all Canadians, let us bring it home.

* * *

WOODBIDGE FALL FAIR

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year, as the leaves change colour and the air turns crisp, Vaughan residents, friends and neighbours gather to celebrate Thanksgiving and the harvest season at the Woodbridge fall fair. This year the fair is celebrating its 176th anniversary. It is older than Canada itself.

Just as every year since the start in 1847, the fair embodies the essence of Thanksgiving. It offers something for everyone. That is why it attracts over 10,000 visitors every year. As people stroll through the fairgrounds, they witness the hard work and dedication of local farmers, vendors and volunteers.

This Thanksgiving I would like to invite everyone to create a new family tradition and visit the Woodbridge fall fair at the beautiful Woodbridge fairgrounds. The annual event serves as a reminder to reflect on the many blessings we have received with gratitude, to appreciate the abundance of the land and to acknowledge the efforts of those who work tirelessly to provide for our communities.

From my family to everyone's, happy Thanksgiving. We look forward to seeing them at the Woodbridge fall fair.

* * *

• (1515)

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if members know this, but monthly mortgage payments on a typical family home are now a crushing \$3,500 per month. When the leader of the official opposition was the housing minister, homes were attainable and affordable. Now it takes 25 years to save up for a down payment in a city like Toronto. Some families have even had to stretch the terms of their mortgages to a shocking 90 years. Some just cannot make their payments anymore.

Let us take Cora Cook, a Barrie, Ontario, woman, who bought a home in January 2022 and was forced to sell when her monthly mortgage payments jumped from \$2,800 a year to just over \$6,000 a year. After selling belongings and holding garage sales, Cora and her husband could not hang on anymore and were forced to sell.

For those clinging on to their homes, time is running out. Our common-sense plan will cut the waste and cap spending so Canadians can once again keep their homes.

ONLINE CENSORSHIP

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the day the online streaming censorship act was introduced, I was free to produce a livestream video on Facebook warning Canadians about this threat to freedom of speech. The Internet gave each citizen the freedom, power and will to become a newscaster, podcaster or independent digital creator.

For nearly a century, the government and a few powerful media companies controlled the flow of information and money in Canada. A free and open Internet represented a threat to the rich and powerful, so on their behalf the Liberals took action to crack down on the free and open Internet.

The online streaming censorship act will force podcasters the Prime Minister does not agree with out of Canada. This urge to censor is rooted in a malignant narcissism that views any opposition as intolerable and deplorable. Only Conservatives will bring home a free and open Internet.

* * *

[*Translation*]

350TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CITY OF CHÂTEAUGUAY

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 350th anniversary of Châteauguay, which has grown from the seigneurie offered to Charles Le Moyne into the city we know today. Our entire shared history is what we are celebrating on this important anniversary. We are celebrating 350 years of courage, solidarity and living in harmony.

[*English*]

This important anniversary represents our many stories and shared history. Many thanks to all those who have contributed to building this magnificent and prosperous community.

[*Translation*]

Châteauguay has a rich past, a present it can be proud of, and a future it can look forward to with confidence.

[English]

BREAST CANCER

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Despite recent progress, breast cancer remains the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Canadian women. Last year alone, some 29,000 Canadians were diagnosed with breast cancer and almost 6,000 died from the disease.

We must act now to improve prevention, early detection, treatment and support for patients and their families. The New Democrats recently pushed the government to launch an expedited review of Canada's breast screening guidelines. Experts have called the current approach outdated and dangerous, and it must change.

I am pleased to inform the House that the health committee has unanimously adopted my motion to study women's health for the first time in decades. This will include a specific focus on breast screening and cancers. Working together we can reduce the number of people diagnosed, decrease mortality and improve the quality of life for all Canadians affected by breast cancer.

* * *

[Translation]

KIM YAROSHEVSKAYA

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election.

Fanfreluce is a centenarian. On Sunday, actor Kim Yaroshevskaya, known to my generation as the unforgettable Fanfreluce and to the *Passe-Partout* generation as the beloved Grand-mère, celebrated her 100th birthday.

Fanfreluce's magical stories, read in her lively, animated voice, captivated and fascinated us while nurturing our love of reading. Kim Yaroshevskaya had the rare ability to awaken the imagination. To this day, I still get a fright when I think back to the episode "La petite hutte sur pattes de poule," which I am sure the older among us will remember.

In celebrating this venerable birthday with her, we get to appreciate the long road she has travelled as an immigrant who made her way to the forefront of our culture, setting the standard in theatre and on television. Kim Yaroshevskaya's entire life tells a beautiful story of its own. To the delight of her loved ones and all of Quebec, the best part is that her life story is still a work in progress. To Kim Yaroshevskaya, a thousand thanks, and happy birthday a hundred times over.

* * *

• (1520)

[English]

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, throughout Atlantic Canada, people are hurting. The soaring cost of living and the never-ending carbon tax increases are eating away at their pocketbooks and their morale. I see it on the furrowed brow of the farmer who has seen input costs go through the

Oral Questions

roof. I see it on the face of the single mom who is trying to put food on her table and get her kids to school and practice. I see it in the eyes of the young couples who have seen their dream of home ownership slip further and further away. I also see it in our seniors, whose incomes are fixed and who are staring down another long, cold winter wondering whether they will have enough to buy food or even keep the heat on.

I see it in all Canadians. They are tired and burdened. That is what happens when the government taxes the farmer who grows the food, then taxes the trucker who ships the food: We end up taxing every Canadian who buys the food.

However, I have hope, and help is on the way. When Canadians elect common-sense Conservatives, we will axe the tax, make life more affordable and bring hope for all Canadians. Let us bring it home.

* * *

BREAST CANCER

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, "I Want You to Know" is a photo essay co-produced by Dense Breasts Canada from Waterloo photographer Hilary Gauld and Waterloo-based breast cancer survivor Ellyn Winters-Robinson. It brings together the images and voices of 31 Canadians affected by breast cancer to drive awareness and action and to send a powerful message to all Canadians that we each must take responsibility for our breast health and be prepared to advocate for ourselves.

We believe this photo essay is one of the most inclusive campaigns of its kind. It features individuals from across the country, aged 26 to 73, at all stages of the disease and from all genders, ethnicities and lived experiences. The photo essay can be viewed in its entirety on the Dense Breasts Canada website, and a portrait will be released on its social media each day of October in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Every Canadian I know has personally or through a loved one experienced this horrible disease. Together, we can do something about it. Please check out the "I Want You to Know" photo essay campaign.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

The Speaker: Before we begin my first question period, I ask my colleagues to please treat me like a new car and not give it a dent on the first day.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will keep the car on the right side of the road.

[*Translation*]

After eight years of this Prime Minister, prices are increasing to the point where it is just not worth the cost. The National Payroll Institute reports that 63% of Canadians spend their entire paycheque and 30% spend more than their paycheque each month. The institute is calling this a perfect storm and a national emergency.

Will the Prime Minister finally reverse his taxes and his inflationary deficits so that Canadians can eat and keep a roof over their heads?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are listening to Canadians' concerns, and that is why we are taking action. Here is what we are doing.

We are making sure that thousands more homes are built by getting rid of the GST on the construction of new apartments. We are creating thousands of good, middle-class jobs. We are taking care of the environment with projects like Northvolt in Quebec. We are making life more affordable for Canadians by working to stabilize the cost of groceries through the grocery rebate. We will continue to work every day to make life more affordable for Canadians.

• (1525)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, this Prime Minister is not worth the cost of food. He has raised taxes and inflationary deficits on food.

He announced a month ago, with great fanfare, that he would bring down the cost of groceries by Thanksgiving. Today we learned that a turkey can cost up to \$120. It is outrageous.

Can he bring down the cost of turkey before Thanksgiving, which is six days away?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry convened a meeting several weeks ago with the CEOs of the major grocery chains precisely to talk about how we can stabilize the price of groceries for Canadians.

We will continue to work with them on this file to ensure that Canadians can buy their food at the grocery store this weekend and every weekend going forward.

We are here to bring in measures like the grocery rebate and reduced fees for child care. We will always be there to help families.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. According to the National Payroll Institute, there is a financial storm gathering. It also describes it as a national emergency, as 63% of Canadians are spending their entire paycheque and 30% are spending more than their paycheque, forced to eat up their savings or go into debt.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his inflationary debt and taxes so Canadians can eat, heat their homes and house themselves?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives were telling us that we should not be investing to have Canadians' backs through the pandemic and that we should not be there for families. They continue to say we should not be sending low- and middle-income Canadians support to send their kids to the dentist.

We are going to continue to be there for Canadians because we know people are facing challenging times because of the global context. That is why we are building thousands more homes by cutting the GST on the construction of new apartments. We are creating thousands of good, middle-class jobs and cleaning our environment with projects like Northvolt in Quebec. We are making life more affordable for Canadians by working to stabilize grocery prices and by having delivered the grocery rebate.

We have lots more to do, and we are going to keep doing it for Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask the Prime Minister to please not keep doing anything he is doing.

In fact, he talks about grocery prices. A month ago, he held a big photo-op where he claimed he would stabilize grocery prices before Thanksgiving. The news is out that a single Thanksgiving turkey now costs as much as \$120. It is now six days until Thanksgiving.

Will the Prime Minister promise to bring the price of turkey back down to normal levels before people eat the turkey on Monday?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of weeks ago, our Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry brought together the heads of all the large grocery chains in Canada to directly address the challenges that Canadians are facing around high food prices. It is not right that Canadians are as squeezed as they are right now, and that is why we are taking action.

We also continue to take action on investing in housing, as Canadians need more and more supply. This is why we have eliminated the GST on new rental construction and why we have incentivized communities to move forward on greater densification.

We are continuing to respond to the needs of Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not his promise. His promise was not to have meetings and to read off talking points. His promise was an affordable Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is now six days away and turkeys are going for \$120 at some outlets. Canadians cannot afford to eat, heat or house themselves.

Can the Prime Minister tell us, given that it was his promise to create an affordable Thanksgiving dinner, how much that dinner will cost an average family of four this Monday?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have seen consistently, Canadians are facing real challenges. That is why we have consistently stepped up with measures to support Canadians, whether it is bringing in a reduction of 50% on child care, which Conservatives campaigned against, that has saved thousands of dollars a year for many families; whether it is moving forward with the grocery rebate; or whether it is moving forward with dental benefits for low-income and middle-income families that cannot offer them to their kids. These are things that Conservatives voted against.

We will continue to be there. We are working with the large grocery companies to increase competition and stabilize food prices.

* * *

• (1530)

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week Statistics Canada reported that there were almost half a million non-permanent residents in Quebec in July. That is 150,000 more than last year, and it is all because of Ottawa.

Quebeckers may well be the most welcoming people in the world and the most open to immigration, but we will have to wake up and smell the coffee at some point. There are half a million non-permanent residents here, and we just cannot handle them all. Public services cannot keep up.

Will the government be reasonable and adjust its targets so they are in line with our capacity to accommodate people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know full well that immigration is crucial to helping businesses find the workers they need and also to growing our economy.

Our plan will continue to strengthen the system and extend the benefits of immigration to communities across the country, including francophone immigration outside Quebec.

That is because immigration is not only good for our economy, but also essential to the future of our communities. We will keep working with the Government of Quebec to ensure we can welcome people, put them to work and build a more prosperous future for everyone.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec immigration minister, Christine Fréchette, is asking the federal government to wake up. She said that these figures “change the game” in terms of the “state of the situation”.

Quebec controls its permanent immigration, but not its temporary immigration; that falls to the federal government.

With half a million non-permanent residents in Quebec alone, the pressure on our education system, our ability to teach people French, our housing supply and, in short, our ability to integrate people is becoming too great.

Oral Questions

Will the government lower its targets?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that my esteemed colleague spend a little more time listening to Quebec businesses, Quebec universities and communities across Quebec who need workers, who want to welcome people from all over the world and who want to help integrate them into French society and succeed in Quebec.

We will be there to continue to work hand in hand with the Government of Quebec to create a more prosperous future for all Quebecers and Canadians.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are struggling to keep a roof over their heads, whether they are seniors being renovicted, people who are unhoused and in an encampment or young families dreaming of owning their own home. The Liberals claim that they want to see more affordable homes built faster, yet they have rejected offers of municipal land and provincial and territorial money from British Columbia and Nunavut to build homes.

Talk is cheap. Empty promises will not house people. Will the Prime Minister commit to funding these projects to build homes that families desperately need?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that, recently, alongside British Columbia and the City of Vancouver, the member for Vancouver Centre announced the groundbreaking for the construction of 154 new affordable housing units close to transit. This new building in the heart of Davie Village will also house QMUNITY, a non-profit organization providing access to safe and secure services for individuals and families living with HIV/AIDS. This is what we can accomplish when we work together, ensuring Vancouverites can live close to where they work and access the services they need.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is yet another answer that is completely disconnected from reality.

Families who have to renew their mortgage soon are headed for a cliff. Negligence by the Liberals and the Conservatives has resulted in the loss of one million affordable housing units in the country. In the meantime, the government has given the Bank of Canada the mandate to increase interest rates without any regard for how that will impact people. That is the Liberals' record: families worried about losing their home. It makes no sense.

Why did the Prime Minister not give the Bank of Canada a clearer mandate to avoid this crisis?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we will always respect the independence of the Bank of Canada, but we know that Canadians are worried about the cost of housing. That is why we are taking action on many fronts.

We are encouraging the construction of apartments by eliminating the GST on construction. We are removing obstacles so that more and more homes are built faster by working directly with the municipalities. We are helping Canadians save up to buy a home with the tax-free first home savings account.

We know that there is still a lot of work to be done. I invite every government across the country to take bold action with us to improve the cost of housing.

• (1535)

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “Interest rates are at historic lows”. That was what the Prime Minister said just three years ago. He told people to keep borrowing, while his government kept spending. Now the number of Canadians saying they are facing financial stress has jumped 20% in a single year.

The National Payroll Institute found that 63% of working Canadians said they had nothing left at the end of the month and 30% spend more than they make. It is calling it a national emergency.

When will they finally balance the budget so interest rates can come down and Canadians can keep more of their own money?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my first answer, let me just congratulate you in this historic role. It is historic for Canada.

While the Conservatives recite trite and misleading talking points, our government is acting for Canadians. With Bill C-56, we would be getting more homes built by lifting the GST on purpose-built rental, and we would be acting to stabilize grocery prices with historic changes to competition law that would bring competition to the grocery sector.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the minister who misled Canadians when she said that interest rates would stay low for a long time, and now homeowners are bracing for the shock of when they have to renew their mortgages. That is what the Canadian banks are saying.

Now there is another former bank governor raising alarm bells. David Dodge warns that the burden of past debts are catching up. Governments cannot spend their way out of the problems they have created.

When the government spends money, the bank raises the interest rates, and when the rates go up, Canadians pay more for their mortgages, so will the NDP-Liberal government finally listen to everyone, or anyone, and stop its spending so Canadians can keep their homes?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only people misleading Canadians are the Conservatives on that side of the House.

The reality is that Canada has the lowest deficit in the G7 and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio. Our AAA rating has recently been reaffirmed by DBRS Morningstar. These are independent experts, not Conservative partisans.

We know we need to get more homes built. That is why we have lifted the GST on purpose-built rental and added another \$20 billion to the financing CMCH has available for rental construction.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should not have believed the finance minister when she said to borrow as much as one wants and that interest rates will be low for a very long time.

She turned around and threw hundreds of billions of dollars of fuel onto the inflationary fire, giving Canadians the worst inflation in 40 years and the most rapid interest rate hikes, which we have not seen in the last 30 years. Anyone who took on a mortgage five years ago at 2% will now have to renew at 6% or 7%. That is an increase of more than 200%.

Will the Prime Minister rein in his inflationary deficits so interest rates come down, or does he want people to start losing their homes?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yet again, these are misleading comments from the Conservatives. The reality is that Canada's AAA rating has been reaffirmed year after year we have been in government. We have the lowest deficit in the G7 and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio.

We also know that we are a growing country, and a growing country needs to build more homes faster. That is exactly what we are doing by lifting the GST on purpose-built rentals and making more financing available through CMHC, with \$20 billion for the financing of new rental construction.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rating she brags about came at the high cost of one in five Canadians skipping meals and seven million Canadians visiting a food bank in a single month. She is completely out of touch, but she is in line with her incompetent government's legacy. The finance minister was doing victory laps two months ago, saying that she stopped inflation. It went up 43% since then. What did she think was going to happen when she added \$1.2 billion of debt in the first quarter of this fiscal year alone?

Will the Prime Minister rein in his inflationary spending, or does he think that this too is not one of his responsibilities?

• (1540)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are hitting new lows in this question period. Not only are they are misleading, they are internally contradictory and incomprehensible.

I think the member opposite just said that our AAA rating is disadvantageous to hard-working Canadians. I beg to differ. Our AAA rating is a foundation for everything our government is doing to build more homes and provide more support to hard-working Canadian middle-class families.

It is time for the Conservatives to get that.

* * *

[Translation]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to a recent National Payroll Institute survey, almost two out of three workers spend all of their net pay and 30% spend more than their pay. We can help them by rejecting the second carbon tax. That tax applies in Quebec, and the Bloc Québécois supports it.

People are suffering. They are having a hard time putting food on the table. This is a serious issue; it should not be a partisan one.

The Bloc Québécois wants the Prime Minister to radically increase the carbon tax. Will he walk back his pledge to do so?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that, during the last election campaign, his party and Conservative candidates, some of whom are now MPs, campaigned in favour of a clean fuel standard. The difference between us and them is that they talk while we take action. We created that standard, and it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is resulting in lower greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and generating over \$2 billion in investments across the country. That is the difference between us and them.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the government being out of touch with reality, this is exactly what we are talking about. The minister is completely out of touch with the reality of Canadians, people who are currently seeking help from food banks that are overwhelmed. Food banks are so overwhelmed that they are not able to provide food to all those who are asking for it right now. There are families in the minister's riding, in Montreal, who are being turned away by food banks because they cannot meet the demand. It is unprecedented. Unfortunately, even in the face of this crisis, members voted to keep the second carbon tax on June 5, 2023.

Can the Prime Minister and the Bloc Québécois set aside their ideology for once and help people in need?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is out of touch with reality

Oral Questions

in 2023 is to be a party that hopes to form government but has nothing to say about climate change. Still today, the party's official position is to deny the very existence of climate change, while, this summer, tens of thousands of people across the country were displaced not once, not twice, but three times, in some cases because of record wildfires. There was major flooding across the country, and the Conservative Party has nothing to say about climate change.

The Speaker: I would simply like to remind members that there can only be one conversation going on at a time. That is very important.

* * *

FINANCE

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Governor General's dry cleaning bill since 2018 amounts to \$117,000. Her laundry must be clean, all right. In addition to this \$117,000, we can tack on another \$2.7 million in travel, \$71,000 in limousines and \$130,000 in clothing, all expenses fit for royalty. The cleaning might be dry, but it is raining cash on the Governor General. Dry cleaning is one of the services included with the office. If she needs extra to cover her laundry, she can always dip into her \$350,000 annual salary.

When is the Prime Minister going to do something about this situation?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, every dollar invested must be spent conscientiously and responsibly. We will make the appropriate checks.

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• (1545)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a report by Radio-Canada reveals that the RCMP hires unilingual anglophone executives for high-ranking bilingual positions. They do not speak a word of French. They are not taking French lessons. In no way, shape or form are these people qualified for their positions, not today and not any other day. It is a blatant violation of the Official Languages Act, a violation that is so commonplace in Ottawa that even the RCMP—the police, for crying out loud—is in breach of the act.

Will the minister do something?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, congratulations on your election as Speaker. As far as my colleague's question goes, the answer is yes. Our government is constantly taking measures to make sure that federal government agencies meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act. That is what we expect of the RCMP.

I will be meeting with the RCMP commissioner tomorrow. I will definitely raise this important issue with him, because we truly believe in the Official Languages Act.

Oral Questions

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this new law was supposed to put an end to these cases of contempt for French at the federal level. Every single francophone will be paying close attention to what the new minister does.

This is the first blatant case of a federal agency thinking it is still okay to undermine French since the new Official Languages Act came into effect.

Will the minister demonstrate to the entire public service that those days are over, or will he demonstrate that it is still okay to undermine French?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your new role in the House.

This year we are celebrating the modernization of the Official Languages Act, but we must also set the record straight and talk facts. The principle of bilingualism is a fundamental principle of both our country and our government. We expected the RCMP to live up to these principles and to fill bilingual positions with bilingual personnel.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the housing crisis is hurting hundreds of thousands of families across Canada. TVA recently reported the heartbreaking story of one Lanaudière family: a single mother and her three children who had to leave their home and move into a garage. We are a G7 country. This is outrageous. It is small wonder that the woman said she was living through “hell” at the moment.

Now the government is proposing to introduce a new tax. Even the Bloc Québécois is sold on the idea.

Does anyone think it is right to introduce a new tax when hundreds of thousands of families are struggling with—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing.

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by offering my congratulations and all the success in your new role.

With respect to the hon. member's question, I will not diminish the very serious challenges that families are facing across this country. In order to address Canada's national housing crisis, we are taking a number of different measures. We are investing in affordable housing in a way that no government has over the course of my entire life. In addition, in order to contribute to the ability for builders to build more homes, we are cutting taxes and changing the way that cities build homes through the housing accelerator fund.

When I compare our plan to theirs, members can trust that we will get more homes built, and that has been confirmed by finance officials at committee.

HOUSING

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal government, the average house price has doubled. The Prime Minister said, “it wasn't me”. After eight years of this Liberal government, the cost of rent has doubled. This Liberal Prime Minister said, “it wasn't me”. After eight years of this Liberal government, it now takes 25 years to save for a down payment for a home. This Liberal Prime Minister said, “it wasn't me”.

This Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the cost. If he is not responsible for anything, will he just get out of the way so that Conservatives can fix what he broke?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is telling in the member's question that no ideas on how we can build more homes have been introduced by the Conservatives.

With respect, we are moving forward with a plan that is cutting taxes for home builders. We are moving forward to increase the amount of money that we are going to contribute to help cities change the way that they build homes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, as I hear members opposite yell, “We put a bill forward”, let us dig in on what it actually includes: A plan to raise taxes on home builders and cut funding for homebuilding. That will not lead to more homes getting built.

We have a plan to address the housing crisis. I hope the Conservatives join us.

The Speaker: I would like to remind members once again that only one member has the floor at a time. If members are patient and wait for their time to ask a question, we will obviously allow members the opportunity to do so.

Even if members look away from the Speaker, I can sort of guess where the voice is coming from.

The hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon.

● (1550)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing, with a government that has accomplished so little, for the minister to be so proud. What he talks about is 5,000 units that are going to be built. CMHC says we need to build three million more units than we normally build. That 5,000 works out to 0.0016%, and he stands here bragging like he has accomplished something. The Liberals' lack of action has consequences and they are not worth the cost. Paula from B.C. is 71 and retired, and she is saying she is facing a 75% increase in rent.

If Liberals cannot actually do anything to fix it, will they get out of the way so the Conservative leader can fix what is broken?

Oral Questions

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with great respect, my hon. colleague deeply mischaracterizes both the nature of the plan and the impact that it is going to have. He is clearly only reading one sub-bullet when he is looking to the measures that will build 5,000 homes. I would point him to the estimates that the cut on GST for apartment construction in this country would have, showing that we expect to see up to 300,000 homes built. I point him to the recent change to the Canada mortgage bond program, which is going to add 30,000 homes a year over the next decade, which is 300,000 homes.

I could continue, but if he reviews the measures we have put together in their totality, he will see it dwarfs the effort Conservatives are putting forward.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Prime Minister, millions of Canadians are struggling to pay the rent. Last month, TVA Nouvelles reported that a single mother with three children was forced to abandon her mould-infested apartment and live in a garage because she cannot afford to pay the rent anymore. She described the experience as hell.

The Prime Minister just is not worth the cost.

What is the NDP-Liberal government going to say to this single mother of three who cannot afford to pay the rent anymore and who is descending into depression?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are going to say to that single mother is that she cannot afford the Conservatives and their austerity that will make her life worse.

What we are going to say is our government has helped to lift 2.3 million Canadians out of poverty. What we are going to say is our early learning and child care program has cut child care fees by 50% across the country already. We are down to \$10 a day in four provinces.

We will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to helping the most vulnerable.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: We are doing very well, but I would ask the member of Parliament for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie to please wait his turn and give the example to all of his colleagues going forward.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yet another report has come out saying that the number of Canadians who are in dire financial situations is jumping dramatically. More than half of all Canadians are now living paycheque to paycheque and are overwhelmed by debt. This is a national emergency. Liberals must help Canadians who are struggling to get by. Conservatives are sure never going to help them. Liberals need to get serious about tackling corporate greed that is jacking up prices

for everyone. Canadians need a crackdown on price gouging and a windfall tax on the biggest profiteers.

When will Liberals finally take action?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the member opposite that the most vulnerable among us can expect nothing but pain and cuts from the Conservatives.

I also agree with him that we need to be there to support Canadians. That is why I was so proud to be there with my colleague, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, when we told Canada's grocers that they have to stabilize prices. We need to be there for Canadians.

That is why our government has imposed a COVID dividend on our banks and insurers: to pay for the price of supporting Canadians in those difficult days.

● (1555)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, young kids are going to experience the worst impacts of the climate crisis, inheriting the mess made by governments today. The Canadian Climate Institute just released a report showing Canada's emissions are going up when we desperately need them to go down. The Liberals like to talk about climate change, but they have been dragging their feet on capping oil and gas emissions, prioritizing the profits of rich CEOs over our children's future.

Can the minister explain to kids who are watching why, eight years in, on the government's watch, Canada's emissions are still going up?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that Canada is the only G20 country that has eliminated fossil fuel subsidies. No one else in the G20 has done that and we have done that two years earlier than all the other G20 partners.

Since 2015, we have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 53 million tonnes. That is the equivalent of removing, from our roads, 11 million gas-powered vehicles. We are the only country in the world that is going to put a cap on the emissions of the oil and gas sector. No one else is doing that. That is how we are fighting climate change and helping Canadians with affordability.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year, the people of Pakistan experienced the most devastating floods in its history, wiping out critical infrastructure. There were 1,739 people who died, including 647 children, and an additional 12,867 were injured. While Pakistan is in the process of rebuilding, it has also helped house refugees fleeing Afghanistan.

Can the Minister of International Development please share with this House how Canada is supporting efforts to rebuild communities in Pakistan and Afghan refugees?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ahmed Hussien (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to take this opportunity, as a member of the Black Canadian community, to really congratulate you for making history as Canada's first Black Canadian Speaker.

I want to thank the member for his advocacy on a really important issue. Pakistan has faced tremendous challenges with some of the most devastating floods of the region. While it rebuilds, it has also stepped up to help Afghan refugees. That is why we announced \$14 million to support it, to provide health and essential services for the refugees and the host community. Canada will always be there.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal-NDP government increases the carbon tax on farmers who grow the food, on truckers who transport it, on manufacturers who process it and on retailers who sell it, but no, these higher taxes certainly do not impact the price of food when Canadians buy it. They do not believe them. They do not believe them when seven million Canadians are struggling to put food on the table. They do not believe them when food bank usage in Alberta is up 70%. They do not believe them when families cannot put turkey on the table.

How many families are going to be relying on food banks for Thanksgiving dinner because of the Prime Minister's inflationary carbon tax?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the poultry association of Canada, the grain growers and the canola growers have all committed to be net zero by 2050. Interestingly enough, every time the member, who I respect, stands in the House to talk about the impacts of climate change, he never talks about the impacts on farmers, and the billions of dollars that droughts, flooding and pests are costing our farmers all across the country from coast to coast. We never hear about that. The Conservatives have no solution to help our farmers fight climate change and help them with affordability.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the impact on farmers: A third-generation farmer from B.C. called me saying in three months, they are going to lose their farm. Four of her neighbours have already done so and another one is selling their cows and their quota. Why? It is because after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, they cannot afford farm-killing carbon taxes and higher interest rates. Farmers cannot afford when diesel goes up 70¢ a litre. Farmers cannot afford to pay more for feed, fuel and higher interest rates. Canadians certainly cannot afford to pay more for food.

If the Liberals really want to defend the family farm and lower prices for Canadians, why will they not cancel their inflationary carbon tax?

• (1600)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to do is con-

gratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the House of Commons.

I think my colleague fully understands what is taking place with climate change. On Prince Edward Island, we had hurricane Fiona. It destroyed barns and it killed cattle. I visited western Canada. Bales of straw are \$300 a bale because of the drought and not far away, there are floods because of climate change. Farmers fully understand the costs of climate change and they are in the front row in order to make sure that we protect the farms and the farmland, and we will continue to do so.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal Prime Minister, here is the sad reality.

The executive director of a food bank had this to say today: "It is an absolute disaster. Six families could not get a food hamper last month...it is the first time in 37 years that we have had to limit our resources."

Nevertheless, this situation does not seem to bother the Bloc Québécois, which supports saddling Quebec families with a second carbon tax. Yes, the Bloc Québécois voted in favour. It had a chance to oppose it on June 5. Instead, the Bloc chose to applaud the new tax. It is costly to vote for the Bloc Québécois.

Are the Prime Minister and his partner proud of wanting to drastically impoverish Quebecers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, I am neither a francophone nor a Quebecer, but I have enormous respect for the Quebec nation, which was the first in our entire country to have a climate plan and to understand the importance of climate action for our environment. That is the reality in Quebec.

Our government is here to support the most vulnerable people across the country. We are working with our colleague, the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know how the Liberals do things. It is obvious: The Prime Minister used the back door to charge a second carbon tax that in the end is going to cost Quebecers 20¢ a litre of gas.

On June 5, the Bloc Québécois had the chance to oppose that tax. The Bloc Québécois MPs chose to vote with the Liberals for the taxes. Tomorrow, the Bloc Québécois will have the chance to vote against the second carbon tax that families back home are being saddled with.

After eight years, will the Liberals allow their Bloc allies in the coalition to have a free vote on the drastic tax increases? Will they choose the Liberals or Quebecers?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that Quebec is not only the first province in Canada to have put a price on pollution, but it is the first state in North America to have done so. This happened under a succession of governments of all stripes, except for the Conservatives who disagree with this. Why? According to their party's official position, they do not even believe that climate change is an issue.

The difference between them and us is that we believe in climate change and we also believe that we must support Canadians during these tough times.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives are standing up for oil companies, we are going to speak on Quebec's behalf.

Federally regulated businesses continue to disregard French. According to the union, CN wants to relocate some 50 customer service jobs in Quebec to western Canada.

That is very bad news for the 50 Quebec workers who could lose their jobs. It is also very bad news for service in French if CN relocates those jobs to unilingual western provinces.

Does the Minister of Transport think it is acceptable and safe for CN to reduce its ability to serve francophones?

• (1605)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to ask the Conservatives to stop attacking the Bloc Québécois, which is having enough trouble as it is.

I want to tell my colleague that the government will always stand up in defence of official languages. There is not just one. There are two: French and English. They are both equal.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport can laugh it up all he wants, but Quebecers are worried.

Every time CN is mentioned in the same breath as official languages, it is because it is going off the rails. In 2020, CN moved about 60 rail traffic controller jobs out west. Last year, it did not have a single francophone on its board. Today, CN wants to move 50 customer service jobs from Quebec to western Canada. Matters of language are also matters of safety.

Does the Minister of Transport agree with these CN cuts, yes or no? Does he think that CN has to offer services in French, yes or no?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois know very well, this year we passed Bill C-13 to modernize the Official Languages Act, including new regulations for federally regulated companies. We will do what it takes to ensure a francophone presence from coast to coast. That is part of the regulations we will introduce. It will then

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be up to CN to comply with the act and the forthcoming regulations.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, mortgages have doubled and rents have doubled, yet the NDP-Liberal government is quadrupling carbon taxes. A report for Parliament on carbon taxes by the Parliamentary Budget Officer states that Nova Scotians will pay \$1,500 more in taxes, thanks to the Atlantic Liberals who voted 23 times for those taxes. The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost.

As Atlantic Canadians are getting their oil tanks filled for the fall, will the Prime Minister axe the tax so that they can afford to eat, heat their homes and house themselves?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect, the hon. member began his question by talking about some of the housing challenges, which are very real. Why is he supporting a plan that is going to raise taxes on home builders and cut funding for homebuilding?

When it comes to the environment, I am curious about why he has yet to put forward a plan that will actually do anything meaningful to reduce emissions. I am curious about why he is aligned with a party that opposed raising taxes on the wealthiest 1% and cutting taxes for the middle class.

With respect to the environment, housing and affordability, we have a plan, and it is on this side of the House.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a recent poll in Newfoundland and Labrador showed that 84% of those surveyed chose the cost of living as the top issue they face. After many conversations with folks in my riding, this comes as no surprise. Most say the inflationary carbon tax is making life unaffordable.

In the last eight years, Atlantic Liberal MPs voted 23 times in support of the carbon tax. Will these Atlantic Liberal MPs vote for our Conservative motion to axe the tax, or will they follow their master?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have 75,000 masters who live in northern Nova Scotia. They are telling me that they want the government to come up with a plan that is going to reduce emissions, so we can protect the environment for future generations. They are telling me that they want me to stand up and support Bill C-49, which is actually going to establish an offshore energy industry in the province where we have the resource.

Oral Questions

We have the ability to do the right thing for our planet and create well-paying jobs at home. I will defend well-paying jobs at home, I will defend affordability and I will not compromise the need to protect our environment as that member would.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that my hon. colleague across the way referenced his masters. I think it is time for the Liberal government to realize that it is the servant and not the master.

If these Atlantic Liberal MPs talked to folks in their ridings as I do, they would not need a poll to tell them how people are feeling. After eight years, they know the Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Common-sense Conservatives have introduced yet another motion to axe the carbon tax. I will ask this again: Will these Atlantic Liberals support their constituents or follow their master?

• (1610)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer I had the privilege of spending some time with some of the hard-working people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can tell colleagues what they need the most: a well-paying job at home for the incredibly skilled, incredibly hard-working people of that province. That is what our green plan will provide.

Newfoundland and Labrador is going to become the hydrogen capital of the world and the wind power capital of the world. The clean nickel from Voisey's Bay will power the Northvolt battery plant in Montreal. That is our—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pontiac.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indigenous peoples have always been the guardians of the lands, waters and ice. It is only natural that they should be at the heart of initiatives to protect nature and meet protection targets by 2030. That is by design, both here in Canada and in many other countries as well.

Could the Minister of Environment inform the House of the benefits that could come from additional investments in the indigenous guardians program?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question, but also for her active commitment, both to reconciliation with indigenous peoples and to the conservation of our environment and nature.

The guardians program is an international model. Requests have come in from all over the world seeking to know how this program could be replicated elsewhere. Thanks to the investment she and I announced last week, there are now indigenous guardians in 25% of communities across the country. Our goal is to get to 100%. We also announced that, from now on, the guardians program will be self-managed.

[*English*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals said Bill C-11 was not about censorship. They said it was simply about going after big tech giants and making them pay their fair share.

Sneaky new regulations were pushed through on Friday. However, people are paying attention, and Canadians are aware that, in fact, their voices are being censored with a podcast registry. Is that not innovative? When it comes to attacking freedom, the Liberal government cannot help itself. It is absolutely committed to censoring what we can see, what we can say and what we can hear online.

I am curious: Why is the government so hell-bent on censoring people's freedom of speech?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is simply false. The bill does not regulate users or people who produce podcasts.

What the bill does is make sure that tech giants, such as Apple, Spotify and Netflix, pay their fair share. It supports our Canadian creators and makes sure that Canadian stories are heard and that our creators have a voice online.

Instead of kneeling in front of tech billionaires, the Leader of the Opposition should stand up for our artists and our creative sector.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election to the chair.

After eight years in power, the Liberal government is trying to control freedom of speech in Canada. Granting too much power to the CRTC will limit the right to disclose what Canadians think and what they want to share on social media. This government is going too far. Most importantly, it is pushing too hard to restrict freedom of expression.

If this is not Liberal control then what is?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not true.

The act does not regulate users or people who produce podcasts. The act does, however, make sure that tech giants like Apple, Spotify or Netflix pay their fair share here in Canada. It also ensures that we are properly supporting our Canadian creators, and that our creators have a voice online. Instead of bowing down to the billionaire tech giants, the Conservative leader should stand up for our creative industries and for Canadians.

● (1615)
[English]

GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian veterans have spent their lives serving and sacrificing for our freedoms, and they were left to watch in horror as a Nazi soldier was recognized in the House.

When veterans ask for basic care, the Prime Minister tells them they are asking for more than he can give. Now, he would have veterans believe that basic vetting for Nazis is also asking more than he can give.

When will the Prime Minister finally be accountable and apologize to veterans?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former page, I would like to congratulate you, another former page, for your appointment and to welcome the new cohort of pages. I do not think we have sufficiently saluted and thanked them for their very hard work.

The former Speaker made it very clear that he alone was responsible for inviting this individual to the House and recognizing him. It was on his initiative, and no other parliamentarians were involved.

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SENIORS

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sunday marked National Seniors Day, an occasion for Canadians to celebrate the profound contributions of seniors in our homes, communities and workplaces. However, for some, the rising cost of living is making it more difficult to make ends meet.

Can the minister of seniors please share how the government is ensuring that all seniors can enjoy a secure and dignified retirement?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would add congratulations from someone who has known you for 35 years, since we were young students at Forum for Young Canadians. We always knew you would go places, and indeed you did.

Although it is a few years off for you and I, it is good to know that we raised old age security by 10% for seniors 75 and older. We raised the guaranteed income supplement by up to \$947 annually for single low-income seniors. We launched the age well at home initiative to help more seniors age in their homes and communities.

Our work is far from done, but as minister for seniors, my priority remains affordability.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of affordability, Canadians have seen what happens when Loblaw's is left unchecked: price-fixing and gouging. Now, Galen Weston is turning his sights to health care by expanding Shoppers Drug Mart private clinics. Experts are warning that huge corpora-

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tions put profits before patients. It is the government's job to prevent this.

What is the Liberal plan to ensure that rich CEOs like Galen Weston do not gouge Canadians for health care like they do with food?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me add my voice in congratulating you. It is wonderful to see you in that role.

I will say this to my hon. colleague: Ensuring that our public health care system remains public and that it is centred on making sure that everybody who needs health care is provided it, regardless of their circumstance, is at the core of everything we do.

We have taken historic action on reducing drug prices. We are going to continue that. In fact, when we look at the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, we have been able to see almost \$3.5 billion in savings for Canadians in reducing drug costs. We have taken historic action on patent drugs—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Monday was the fifth anniversary of the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi officials, yet Liberals stayed silent, and it is no wonder. Under the current government, arms have continued to flow to Saudi Arabia despite the war in Yemen, despite serious human rights violations, and despite the murders of hundreds of Ethiopian migrants. Canadians need to know that their government is not complicit in human rights abuses.

Does the minister even know whether Canadian-made sniper rifles were used by the Saudis against Ethiopian asylum seekers? Does the minister have any idea—

● (1620)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you.

[Translation]

Congratulations, my dear friend. It is nice to see you in the chair.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

To answer my colleague's question, of course we will always abide by a strong arms-export treaty where we respect human rights. We will always make sure that is the case and that end users are also taken into account. I look forward to working with her on this very issue.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. The new broom sweeps clean, so it is said. I am wondering whether now is the time that we sweep clean some of the misinformation coming from that side of the House. We hear references to “Liberal-NDP government” and “Liberal-NDP coalition”, on top of “eight years”, which does not exist. This is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I would like to let the hon. member know that this is sounding very close to debate, unless the hon. member would like to raise a specific standing order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

*[English]***PETITIONS****BUSINESSES IN LYTTON**

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to table a petition on behalf of British Columbians who are calling for more support and better governance in the village of Lytton.

On June 30, 2021, wildfires engulfed the village of Lytton and surrounding areas, destroying the town and displacing hundreds of residents. With rebuilding yet to begin, two years later, the business owners in Lytton who accepted CEBA loans have no means of re-opening their businesses and repaying those loans. British Columbians in Lytton are calling upon the Government of Canada to recognize their extraordinary circumstances and forgive any amounts owed by Lytton area business owners on Canada emergency business account loans.

• (1625)

PER- AND POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of residents of my riding in York Region regarding PFAS, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. They are considered forever chemicals. They are extremely persistent and mobile in the environment, and they last many thousands of years. They have been proven to be a health problem in many different ways.

Petitioners are calling on the government to adopt a class-based approach to address all PFAS, listing them in schedule I of CEPA for complete prohibition; to consider exemptions for prohibition only if time limited and fully substantiated; to adopt stringent drinking-water standards for PFAS as a class; and to require research to identify contaminated sites, expedite the remediation and provide public release of research data. They are also asking for further research into PFAS.

I am presenting this on behalf of the petitioners, who are very concerned about the impacts of PFAS on the health and well-being of Canadians.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present six petitions signed by 204 residents of the riding of Prince Albert. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to delay its expansion of medical assistance in dying.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present a petition on behalf of petitioners who, first of all, recognize that the overdose crisis is one that is a public health emergency. The petitioners note that more than 26,690 people have died of opioid-related causes since 2016. They also note that organizations including the Canadian Public Health Association, the Global Commission on Drug Policy, the World Health Organization and the United Nations have all recommended drug decriminalization.

The petitioners then call on the Government of Canada to, first of all, declare a public health emergency as it relates to overdose deaths from poisoned drugs. They call on the government to re-frame this crisis as one that is a public health issue and not a criminal one. The petitioners go on to list the need for a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach, such as one that has already been recommended by the expert panel to Health Canada, and they call for the decriminalization of poisoned drugs in Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT**

The House resumed from September 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk today about Bill C-56, which is the Liberal-NDP government's attempt at dealing with the affordability issue.

To talk about the legislation itself, we first need to look at where we are in this country, and it is not a very pretty picture. If we look at where we are right now, mortgage payments over the last eight years have virtually doubled in this country from coast to coast to coast. We have a similar issue now with rent all across the country. If we look at the average rents being paid now, that amount has also virtually doubled. This is the track record of the Liberal government, which now suddenly seems to be concerned about affordability for Canadians.

However, the bad news for Canadians does not stop there. It used to take 25 years to pay off one's mortgage. Now it takes the average Canadian 25 years to save for their mortgage. Think about what the difference between those is. Some people might say that is not their problem and that this is a young person's problem when they are trying to get into the market. It is bad enough if it is a young person's problem, but it is also affecting average Canadians right here and right now.

I was recently informed about a person whose mortgage has come up for renewal. Their mortgage was coming from that nice, low fixed interest rate. People will remember those low interest rates the Prime Minister said were going to be there for a very long time, the interest rates the Governor of the Bank of Canada said were going to stay low for a very long time. Based on that, many people took mortgages with a very low interest rate because it allowed them to have a mortgage payment they could afford. However, as mortgage rates have continued to go up, as the Bank of Canada has continued to raise interest rates in order to fight inflation, average Canadians now have to pay the bill as a result of this.

In this particular circumstance, this family has said that it can hold on for about another six months with this increased mortgage payment. They can dig into savings and they can further borrow for about six months, and then they are not going to be able to make the mortgage payments on their home. That is the consequence of eight years of the Liberal government.

Inflation is out of control. I hear it all the time in my riding of Dufferin—Caledon. People come up to me in the grocery store and say to me that they now have to only go to the grocery store to shop bargains. They do not actually have a grocery list, because they can buy only what is on sale. This is all they can afford. After eight years of the Liberal government, this is what people are saying to me in the grocery store. It is a shocking turnaround for Canadians. They are having trouble paying their mortgages. They are having trouble buying groceries. They are having trouble heating their

homes as a result of the carbon tax. All of these things are making life more expensive for Canadians.

There is a simple solution. There are actually two very simple solutions the government could implement right away. Number one is that it could cut the carbon tax. We know that would have an immediate impact, because, as has been said by Conservatives in the House of Commons over and over again, the farmers are taxed on farm produce. As they produce it, they are taxed with the carbon tax. Whether that is for drying the grain, driving the combines or whatever, they are paying a carbon tax. When that crop is harvested, the driver of the truck that comes to pick it up is going to pay the carbon tax. When it goes to be processed, there is a carbon tax. When a truck picks it up to take it to the grocery store, there is a carbon tax. At the grocery store, the carbon tax is heating the grocery store; therefore, the store owner is paying a carbon tax as well.

• (1630)

At the end of the day, Canadians cannot afford to pay for food, and they end up saying that they do not even have a grocery list and just go to the grocery store and buy whatever is on sale. If we would have said this to Canadians eight years ago, they would have said that this was not possible. In a country like Canada, food is abundant. We feed the world because we have the best farmers in the world, who are great stewards of the land. If we had said eight years ago that Canadians would only be able to go to the grocery store and shop bargains, that would have been an inconceivable thought, but here we are.

After eight years of the Liberal government, that is the sad situation that Canadians find themselves in. It is very difficult to pay the mortgage, very difficult to buy groceries, very difficult to pay rent and very difficult to buy a house. That is the Liberals' record. That is the context that we look at when they bring in this bill.

This is not a new problem. Conservatives have been talking about this problem for the last number of years. In fact, the Conservative leader, many years ago, said that the inflationary spending caused by the government was going to drive up inflation, which would then drive up interest rates. He is looking more and more like Nostradamus with that prediction. As for me, 18 months ago, I rose to speak about the impact of the carbon tax on food production. I said that it was going to cause a massive increase in the cost of food, and here we are. The Liberal government cannot therefore claim that somehow this is a new problem, that it was unaware of the problem. It was well aware. It was well forewarned and did absolutely nothing about it.

When we look at this particular bill, what is amazing to me is that Liberal members will get up in this House during debate and during question period and talk about how, as a result of tabling this legislation, one developer has said it is now going to build 5,000 rental units. They puff out their chests and say to look at them, look at the amazing things they have accomplished. Well, let us put that into context.

Government Orders

According to the CMHC, we will need to build three million more homes between now and 2030 than are planned or scheduled to be built. The plan is that we will build two million homes. We will have to build three million more than that in order to get back some affordability.

As I have said a few times in this chamber, I went to law school because I was not good at math. However, what I did before I prepared for this speech is decided to get out my calculator and look at this. I saw that 5,000 units out of the three million we need is 0.0016%. If I had a child come home with a bad grade, and the teacher not only put an F on there but said that my son got 0.0016% on the test, I would not be a proud father. However, somehow these members walk around like they have discovered fire with this plan to build such a small number of houses.

It is even worse. To even come up with some of their plan, they had to take from the Conservative leader's plan. With grocery affordability, again, the best thing they could do is cut the carbon tax, which they repeatedly vote against. We know that this would bring the most relief. They also decided they are going to bring in some Competition Act changes, which they also stole from a Conservative member of Parliament's private member's bill. When a government is completely out of ideas, affordability has gone off the scale and Canadians are deeply hurting, what does the government, the brain trust and all of the political advisers they have come up with? Well, they just take what the Conservatives said they were going to do.

They have only taken some of it. What we have here is a plan that is not going to do anything to address the affordability crisis that is going on across the country, and there is a real consequence. I spoke about this in question period. For example, there is Paula in B.C., 71, who is retired. She is now saying that she might have to move out of her house because the landlord is going to sell it. She is also facing a 75% increase in rent as a result of that. That is their record. They have not provided solutions quickly or ones that are going to address the concerns of Canadians.

• (1635)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very fascinated when I hear Conservatives talk about affordability. I think of Doug Ford, Mr. X, the \$8-billion scheme and the trip they took down to Vegas. They do not remember it, but they were all at the spa at the same time.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about a meeting that was held on June 25, when four Conservatives were flown over to London, apparently paid for by my cousin Dan McTeague, which I find kind of surprising. The total cost of the meal was \$4,690 Canadian. They drank one bottle of wine for \$818, a second bottle for \$265 and a third bottle for \$719, and they topped it off with a bottle of champagne for \$1,791.

I do not know a single Canadian who has ever drunk that wealthily, yet the Conservatives were guzzling it back. Who paid for this trip and why were they there?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, when members cannot debate the ideas that are put forward, members go to where that member went.

I know the member is new, but there is a difference between the provincial government, which he referenced, and the federal government and federal Parliament, which we are actually sitting in right now. The member might want to take some time to read up on the functions of a member of Parliament.

However, I am glad he brought up sponsored travel, because the member took a trip to Germany, and his total expenses were \$10,489.60. This was in 2022, and it does not stop there. In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, he spent 4,300 dollars' worth of sponsored travel to Washington, D.C.

Let us get out the dictionary and look up “hypocrisy”.

• (1640)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that when they ask questions or give answers, they need to make sure they do not interrupt others.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech. He talked about the Nostradamus prediction that would equate to what the leader of the Conservative Party said. I am wondering if he would like to reflect more on comments we have made.

As Conservatives, we have known all the time that living within our means is the responsible way to do government. The previous prime minister, Stephen Harper, said that the deficits this current administration would run would not be small but would in fact be out of control. I think the words were “He has no idea what he is talking about”, in reference to the current Prime Minister.

I wonder if my colleague could reflect on those comments and how true they are.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, it is amazing that all of this was predicted. The affordability crisis we find ourselves in, runaway inflation and high interest rates were all predicted by the Conservative leader.

It is actually a shocking amount of spending. The federal government, under this NDP-Liberal coalition, now spends \$176 billion per year every year more than in 2015. I hear from constituents when they raise that issue, and I ask, “What in your life is better?” No one can answer that. All of this spending has really driven the affordability crisis and has not helped the vast majority of Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, does my colleague think any meaningful measures for social housing could be introduced?

The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly proposed investing 1% of the budget in social housing on an ongoing basis, so that crises like the one we are currently experiencing will be less frequent. Obviously, this measure is less popular because there is nothing spectacular about it. The government could do that instead of introducing half-measures like the one it has presented to us.

I would like to know if this is something my colleague finds interesting and if he would be willing to discuss it.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, I am in agreement that we have to do more to get more houses built, but I think our plan is better. There is a great number of federal buildings that are underutilized. We should convert those units. I think our plan says we are going to allow 15% to be converted into housing, which is better than coming up with some random number and having the government build it.

Let us remove the gatekeepers, unleash the private sector, turn those buildings over and get them built into all kinds of units, like affordable rental units and other units. That is the path forward.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Democratic Institutions; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Electoral Reform; the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I rise in this chamber to debate Bill C-56, which would make several important and timely amendments to the Competition Act. A stronger competition framework is good for all Canadians, ensuring that companies are playing fairly, preserving opportunities for new firms to enter the market and ensuring that consumers benefit from more and better choices in the marketplace.

The bill includes three significant changes to the Competition Act: one, the ability for the Competition Bureau to compel information during a market study; two, the abolition of the efficiencies defence from merger review; and finally, the enabling of the review of agreements between any two parties when the agreement is designed to limit competition. These three important amendments stem from the government's extensive consultations, which took place over the last several months. These measures and others like them have widespread support, particularly from Canadians and small businesses. They reflect the concerns raised and respond to the pleas of many stakeholders from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development has released a report on what it heard during its consultations. I strongly recommend that all my colleagues review it to gain an understanding of the stakes involved and learn about some of the issues under consideration as the government takes the next steps.

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With that in mind, I would like to share some of what stakeholders had to say in support of the measures that ended up in this bill.

Regarding market studies, the consultation drew a significant number of comments on the importance of knowing how our markets function. The majority of stakeholders felt that the Competition Bureau needed access to the best information and that this was the norm in most other countries. The Canadian Anti-Monopoly Project, a think tank dedicated to Canadian competition policy, stated that the lack of formal bureau powers in this area cripples its ability to understand new and emerging markets. It makes the bureau less able to assess if its enforcement decisions have had the desired impact.

OpenMedia, a consumer organization dedicated to an open and free Internet, stressed the need for the bureau to have the power to proactively study new and emerging markets. In markets especially fraught with high levels of concentration, serious and persistent problems need to be detected in order to be tackled.

The importance of a competitive freight transport sector to bring goods to Canadians was driven home during the COVID-19 pandemic and the supply chain difficulties that it brought. A joint submission by the Freight Management Association of Canada and numerous producers and shippers who rely on our transportation infrastructure also came out in favour of a framework for market studies. They highlighted that the international nature of ocean shipping means national authorities need to be even more vigilant in monitoring the behaviour of the companies at their ports. Data collection systems are integral to assessing the impact on Canadian trade and business, and the bureau needs to be able to collect information outside of an enforcement context to properly detect problems.

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute, a national public policy think tank, probably familiar to many members of Parliament, explains how an expanded information-collection power should be supported by traditionalists and reformers alike and serves to fill other information gaps that hinder government.

There was also a wide call for appropriate safeguards attached to market studies. The Canadian Bar Association asked that information requests be subject to judicial authorization and open to challenge by the parties, while the Business Council of Canada insisted that if studies were to be introduced, there must be time limits on their duration and that the responsible minister should provide approval to launch such a study. These guardrails are all provided for in the proposed approach outlined in Bill C-56.

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Now I would like to turn to another amendment to the Competition Act, which relates to the efficiencies defence. Long before the public consultation, the Competition Act's efficiencies exception has been a focus of commentary. This provision allows anti-competitive mergers to survive challenge if they generate corporate efficiencies that are said to outweigh competitive harm, even if consumers pay the price.

• (1645)

There was no shortage of submissions to the consultation on this particular topic. It is the area of concern that received the most engagement, with a strong majority supporting its abolition. The Public Interest Advocacy Centre, a national not-for-profit organization that promotes inclusive decision-making and protection of consumer interests, explained how the original policy intent of creating internationally competitive companies had not been met. It felt that the efficiencies defence has, in fact, served to protect domestic companies from competition, at consumers' expense. The Centre for International Governance Innovation has also come out against the efficiencies defence, which it sees as a mistaken attempt to bring more predictability to the law.

Abolishing the defence is the right thing to do in recognition of the increasing concentration of multiple industries across Canada, as well as the corresponding decrease in competition. These factors create a significant drag on the real efficiency of our marketplaces, and the productivity and international competitiveness of our economy.

Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union, explains how the efficiencies generated are often only passed on to the shareholders at the direct expense of laid-off workers. The cost savings of efficiencies come from a decrease in personnel, resulting in a less competitive industry that can more easily capture value for those at the top.

Moreover, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the National Farmers Union and L'Union des producteurs agricoles, all key players in Canada's food procurement and supply chain, have come out in favour of the abolition of the efficiencies defence as well. Their reasons include a skepticism of the ability for efficiencies to overcome anti-competitive effects and their significant contribution to the ease of unfavourable acquisitions in Canada.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about collaborations as another topic this bill addresses. The consultations also raised the question of whether the bureau should be able to review collaborations between non-competing entities when they harm competition. Currently, the law addresses only agreements or arrangements formed between real or potential competitors, and Bill C-56 would expand that in some circumstances. A majority of those who commented on the matter supported broadening the law.

The Consumers Council of Canada felt that the exclusion of certain agreements from reviewability renders the bureau unable to deal with real competition issues. They explain how commercial relationships established with good intentions by both sides can still lead to unanticipated and unintended consequences, and the bureau should not leave it up to businesses to decide—

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would respectfully ask you to confirm whether we have the quorum required for the business of the House to proceed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will check for quorum.

And the count having been taken:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. member for raising this matter. Right now we do have quorum in the House.

[*English*]

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers has stressed that restrictive covenants in lease or purchase agreements, a form of vertical restraint that is not currently reviewable as a competitor collaboration under the Competition Act, have a serious impact on the food supply for a significant number of Canadian communities. The International Center for Law & Economics also agreed that collaborations between any two actors have the possibility of harming competition, and that the Competition Act should not be limited arbitrarily in the sorts of agreements that it can review.

In conclusion, the consultation process revealed many significant areas of concern for our Competition Act, informed by each stakeholder's unique perspective and valuable insight into the Canadian economy. The proposals that the government has chosen to advance were chosen to carefully target the most critical issues impacting affordability for Canadians in the near term and were informed by the inputs of a variety of actors.

These three reforms represent much-needed updates to the Competition Act. They allow the Competition Bureau to better serve its mandate and will help make Canada a better place to live and do business. I hope all members will join me in supporting this bill's speedy passage.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my neighbour from Whitby for taking an interest in this very important legislation and debate today.

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We were together in Oshawa on the weekend, and I know that he has a strong interest in my community. I received an email today from Christine, which says that she, her fiancé and their two children have been homeless for about five months with nowhere really to go. Her fiancé is on sick leave. She has called every shelter around, from Oshawa to Toronto, Kitchener and back, and from Ajax, Whitby, Bowmanville and Courtice, all the way to Cobourg. Everything is full. Even Cornerstone has a three-month waiting list. Children's Aid is giving them a hotel for a couple of days.

People are hurting, and things are very urgent. I was wondering if my colleague for Whitby could tell us in the House what the act before us would do to provide affordable housing for people in Durham region before the winter.

• (1655)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, it was good to see my hon. colleague out in Oshawa this weekend as well. We share an interest in fighting homelessness and solving the affordable housing challenges that Canadians find themselves in.

Our government, unlike previous Conservative governments, has made a historic investment, through the national housing strategy, of \$82 billion, which has repaired units, built new units and lifted many people out of homelessness across Canada. That is work that is still under way. There is still money rolling out for those investments through the rapid housing initiative, and we have since added measures on.

Bill C-56 would add a new measure, and would be to lift GST for rental construction, which is itself anticipated to help create or unlock 200,000 to 300,000 more units of affordable housing for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I was glad I could provide at least some sort of an audience.

I want to go back to the question that my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé asked another colleague earlier.

Instead of introducing measures that are little more than publicity stunts, that may have some short-term effect but that do nothing to provide a modicum of predictability to address future labour shortages, would it not be better to force the government to dedicate 1% of its budget to building affordable and social housing? That would be a long-term solution to prevent future crises. It would be the responsible thing to do.

What does my colleague think about that suggestion?

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for helping me find an audience for my speech.

I do not think that these are token measures, and adding 200,000 to 300,000 units of affordable housing or rental construction units is not a small feat. It is a significant amount, and we can couple that with the \$82 billion in the national housing strategy and the housing accelerator fund dollars, which are speeding up the process for municipalities to help lead the way on building more affordable

housing. I think that these things are, in total, going to help create a more comprehensive approach to solving the housing affordability issues that we have.

There is much more opportunity and additional measures to consider, and I hope to undertake those conversations and listen to the ideas of my colleagues across the way.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member spoke quite a bit about the Competition Act and some of the new amendments, which are welcomed, but I want to talk about what is already existing there in relation to grocery prices.

We know that Loblaws and Shoppers Drug Mart merged about 10 years ago, but there has not been a review of that merger, which is an opportunity that exists in the Competition Act. The Competition Bureau could certainly move forward immediately and review if that merger has been beneficial to Canadian consumers. Does the member support that initiative?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, I support the fact that the Competition Bureau's powers needed to be amended and strengthened so that it can undertake market studies and look at mergers that may not be in the best interest of Canadians or in the best interest of a competitive marketplace, which is specifically what Bill C-56 aims to do.

It is outlined in the work that we did when I was on the agriculture and agri-food committee. The Competition Bureau clearly cited in its recent report on grocery price inflation just how limited some of its powers were and how much that inhibited its ability to come to conclusions. I think these powers are a great addition.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak to the Liberal government's Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act.

This is yet another half-baked, half-measure bill from the Prime Minister to solve an affordability crisis that he, himself, and his government have created. After eight years of inflationary taxes and out-of-control spending, Canadians have now found that they cannot afford the Liberal government. They cannot afford housing. They cannot afford fuel, and they certainly cannot afford food.

What makes this bill that much more frustrating is that the Liberals are adding more bureaucracy to try to solve a problem that they created, when there is actually a very quick measure they could enact today that would reduce costs for Canadians significantly, and that would be by eliminating the inflationary carbon tax 1 and carbon tax 2. These two carbon taxes and the inflationary aspect of them are making life unaffordable for Canadians.

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Today, we saw in a report by the Financial Post that their new initiative, the Canadian sustainability standards board, is actually going to exacerbate those costs on Canadians, especially when it comes to food costs. It is going to add additional bureaucracy to every industry and every commodity, asking them to identify the impact of carbon on every link in the supply chain. This is going to add so much red tape and bureaucracy, and an onus on every industry, manufacturing every product and growing every commodity, that it is going to make life that much more unaffordable.

The interesting thing is that the Liberals are implementing or imposing these punishing carbon taxes on, for example, agriculture, which is one of the industries that we are a leader in. We are world class in sustainability, in our emissions and in our ability to grow food with the lowest emissions in the world.

The data is painfully clear on the impact the Liberals' carbon tax 1 and 2 is having on Canadian farm families. According to the Canada food price index, a 5,000-acre farm would be paying \$150,000 in carbon taxes every single year. There is not a farmer I know that could absorb those types of costs and still remain economically viable.

That is the question the Liberals always seem to forget. They talk about sustainability. I think they get a quarter every time they say it. However, they never talk about economic viability. When these new regulations and taxes are imposed on industry, agriculture or energy, it is impacting their ability to remain economically viable.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer just published a new report confirming the correlation between inflation in Canada and the suffocating carbon tax on our farmers. Diesel will go up 70¢ a litre. In many provinces, gas has already exceeded two dollars a litre.

When I was in Vancouver a couple of weeks ago, in the GVA meeting with some farmers, it was \$2.08 a litre for gas. It is unbelievable that the government is now expecting Canadians to absorb that and still be able to put food on the table and pay their mortgages. This year alone, the carbon tax collected from farmers, just from on-farm propane and natural gas, was \$50 million.

I find it interesting that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change said in his speech on Thursday that he did not know why we were so excited, that the carbon tax does not impact farming. The statistics from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the Canada food price index and just about every commodity group in the country say otherwise.

This is why we have brought forward Bill C-234, which would exempt the carbon tax from natural gas and propane because they are still paying the carbon tax on those two fossil fuels, and that is because there is no alternative. They need these fuels to heat and cool their barns, dry their grain and power their irrigation equipment. This is not something the Conservatives are tossing around, these are indeed the facts.

Those who think those numbers are bad can hold my jerry can. The newest Parliamentary Budget Officer's report on the impact of the carbon tax on farming said that between this year and the year 2030, agriculture will be paying \$1 billion in carbon taxes alone.

The Liberals are saying that these costs on farmers, which they do not even believe exist, while the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirms they do exist, are not impacting the price of food and not the reason we are seeing these high costs at the grocery store shelves.

● (1700)

I do not know anyone, other than maybe those in the Liberal-NDP coalition, who thinks that adding taxes will somehow reduce prices. However, that is exactly what they are saying. As part of this discussion, the Prime Minister has threatened the CEOs of the major grocery chains in Canada, saying that, if they do not stabilize grocery prices by Thanksgiving, there will be tax consequences. He is threatening to increase taxes on the grocery store CEOs and the major chains in Canada.

Is there an issue with competition in Canada? Yes, I would agree with that. We need to do things to improve competition in Canada, which always brings down prices. However, do the government members honestly think and truly believe that if they increase taxes on Sobeys, Loblaws, Costco and Walmart, the companies are just going to absorb those additional costs? There is no scenario where an industry just says, "The government is right; we are going to pay more taxes, and thanks very much." Of course they are not. They are going to pass them on to the consumers, and that is going to drive up costs even more.

I want to emphasize the real-life consequences these taxes are having on those whom we are relying on to grow the food that we use to feed our families; these growers certainly play a key role in Canada's ability to help feed the world. A fruit and vegetable grower in my riding showed me their power bills for the last few months. They were paying \$5,000 a month in carbon taxes alone, plus \$800 of GST on top of that carbon tax; it is a tax on a tax. The grower has now decided to close their market in the winter months because they simply cannot afford to stay open. That is fresh fruit and vegetables at a nearby farmers' market and grower, which my rural constituents were able to go to without having to drive into the city. That is now going to be closed, forcing constituents to drive even further. It makes a lot of sense if climate change and reducing emissions is their goal.

A farmer in southern Alberta told me he paid \$140,000 in carbon taxes last year, meaning that he could not invest that money in new equipment, which would have been more energy efficient and more fuel efficient. More frustrating for this grower is that he was hoping to have that money to put aside for his daughter, who wants to take over the family farm. She would have been the fifth generation to take over that farm. Now, instead of having that money to invest in his operation, improve efficiency, reduce emissions and help the next generation, where has that gone? It has gone to the Liberal government into general revenue. In fact, again, if reducing emissions and addressing climate change is their ultimate goal, this is doing the exact opposite.

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There is another interesting thing. The Liberals want to increase taxes on the grocery CEOs; however, many of the grocery stores in Canada are actually owned by local franchisees. I went to visit the operator at one of the larger Sobeys operations in my riding, to see how things were going. His energy bill has gone up \$6,000 a month as a result of the carbon tax. He is trying to absorb those costs, because he is a local business owner. However, he says that, eventually, he is going to have to pass this on to the consumers; otherwise, it is going to have an impact on what he can pay his employees or what he can contribute to local community initiatives, service clubs, sports teams, youth organizations and all those things that business owners try to help support.

The Liberals think that these costs are just magically absorbed by those farmers and small business owners, but they are not; of course, these costs are passed on to the consumer. That is why we see apples up 61%, carrots up 72%, and oranges and potatoes up 76%, just in time for Thanksgiving. The Liberals need to realize that when they increase the tax on the farmer, trucker, manufacturer and retailer, those costs are passed directly on to the consumer. Canadians are paying the price for that.

We are seeing that with millions of Canadians. Seven million Canadians went to a food bank last year. In Alberta, food bank use is up 70%. The food bank in Calgary is supporting 700 families every single day. These are numbers that I know the operators of food banks across the country have never seen before.

In conclusion, if the Liberals really cared about grocery prices and family farms, they could do something right now: They could eliminate their carbon taxes and certainly their plans to quadruple the carbon tax. That, not more red tape and bureaucracy, would make food more affordable for Canadians.

• (1705)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member opposite and I served on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, so he knows we have some disagreements on this.

The Bank of Canada Governor recently said that carbon pricing contributed 0.15% to inflation. That is equivalent to about 15¢ on a \$100 grocery bill. The European Central Bank has estimated that climate change contributes as much as 3% to the cost of food per year globally, which is three dollars on a \$100 grocery bill. This means that climate change has 20 times the influence that the carbon price has on food prices.

If the member opposite really wants to fight inflation and is serious about it, then why does his party not have a plan to fight climate change?

• (1710)

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, the Liberals have had a carbon tax in place for many years, and yet I do not see grocery store prices going down. I do not see life becoming more affordable for farmers.

When I talk to farmers, their number one issue is not climate change. Their number one issue is Liberal government bureaucracy, red tape and carbon tax. It is the biggest stress in their lives.

Farmers in Canada do everything they possibly can to reduce their emissions. That is the thing the Liberals miss. They continue to punish Canadian farmers instead of rewarding them for what they already do. Instead of comparing them to Europe and asking Canadian farmers to get to where Europe is, they are thinking about this backward. What they should do is say they will help get Europe to where we are, with precision agriculture, zero till and 4R nutrient stewardship. Those are the things Canadian farmers are doing, and Liberals had better start recognizing that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, when debating access to housing, there is one concern that is not mentioned nearly enough: access to affordable housing, community housing and even co-operative housing—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I hear conversations going on. I do not know who was speaking, but it was certainly not just the member asking the question.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue can start his question over.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Speaker, I was saying that when debating access to housing, the thing we do not talk enough about, in my opinion, is access to affordable housing, especially community housing or even co-operative housing.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague the following question: What could the federal government do to improve access to these types of housing? Could a new law be brought in? What can we do to get more people into affordable housing?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, the first townhouse my wife and I had after we were married was in co-op housing in High River, Alberta. We certainly could not have afforded to start our family if we did not have that option.

Our leader, the hon. member for Carleton, has put forward a plan that will make housing more affordable in Canada, and that is to access 15% of federal buildings that are not being used. These could either be sold to the private sector or developed through a government program. Certainly, the plan would encourage the development of high-density, affordable housing around mass transit.

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Those ideas are there, and we certainly hope to have the support of all parties in the House for the bill the leader of the Conservative Party has put forward.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on the question that was just asked by my colleague from the Bloc.

We had the UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery in Canada, and he spoke specifically about the commodification of housing, where investments concentrate on private housing for wealthy individuals, but similar investments for social housing are non-existent.

The member talked about living in a co-op. Obviously, the New Democratic Party has been calling for co-ops and much more investment in social housing and below-market housing. However, we are not hearing the same thing from the Conservative Party. Would the member support significant investments not only in rental properties but also in below-market housing, in below-market rental properties?

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, we have voiced our support all along. We know that there should be a variety of different options when it comes to housing. However, we cannot impose these things on municipalities, where they are not putting forward land designation and programs in place to do these things.

In fact, there is a town in my riding that has applied to many programs the Liberal government has put forward, but those municipalities that are doing things right do not qualify for those types of programs. These programs are there for the laggards. Therefore, we also need programs in place for those municipalities that have been doing it right and developing programs such as co-op housing.

• (1715)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very proud to rise and speak to Bill C-56, technically an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act.

We need to frame the situation that Canada is in right now as a time when the chickens have really come home to roost after years of economic policies of the Conservatives and the Liberals. They told us that our cities would be better off if we let the market and global capital decide the value of our neighbourhoods and gave up the security that we had with union jobs and defined pension plans, if we turned our nation over to the Morneau Shepell's of the world to decide what kinds of benefits we should have after a lifetime of working. We see the results.

When I go into stores in my region, people in their seventies, who used to be retired, are now working at places such as Tim Hortons, because they cannot afford to retire. I see the results when talking to men in my region who are 68 or 69 years old, who went back to work underground on the drills because they could not pay their housing costs. Working on the drills is hard for a young man, but 70-year-olds are going back underground because they cannot afford to pay these costs.

Another man I knew said he had to go back underground at 70 because he could not pay for his wife's medicine. We have a government that has talked about pharmacare since my hair was dark and long before that, and yet it still has not delivered. Of course, the

Conservatives do not believe in pharmacare, just as they do not believe in the public programs that we and our parents built up over generations, which have been stripped away steadily under the belief in the free market, that we had free market in labour so that people were on precarious gig work. That was Bill Morneau. Members will remember when he told a young generation to get used to it; this would be their new normal. Of course, COVID blew all that away. Young people are saying that this is not going to be their normal, and they have started walking away from these jobs.

We see the situation where people cannot afford to buy their groceries because of the relentless price gouging of the likes of Galen Weston. We will never hear the Conservatives stand up to a CEO. For example, the other day, they were telling us that the price of potatoes in Calgary had gone up 70% because of the carbon tax. Calgary does not get its potatoes from P.E.I. It gets them from Idaho, which does not pay a carbon tax. In Idaho, the reason the price of potatoes went up is because of the climate crisis that is ongoing in the west. This is something the Conservatives will never admit, even in a year where we have lost 14 million hectares of forest lands and where over 200,000 people were forced to be evacuated in Canada, with billions in costs. That is what we get from the Conservatives.

The Liberals talk about it, but emissions continue to go up. The Liberals say they are going to sit down and meet with the CEOs of the grocery chains; hopefully, they will do something. Nobody believes them. We need stronger commitments. I do not know how many announcements and reannouncements I have heard in eight years from the Liberals about their commitment to housing, yet I still do not see those houses being built.

We need to take this issue seriously because of the price gouging that has gone on, the market exploitation and the turning of our cities over to Airbnb, which allowed young people and working-class people to be forced out of the cities they love. In my region, the housing and homelessness issue is at a crisis level. We never saw Doug Ford offer to build any houses in Timmins. He was willing to sell off the greenbelt, but we could use those houses.

This is the situation we are in, so people are frustrated. They deserve a straight vision. They deserve a commitment. How would that commitment look? Certainly, in terms of housing, we know that the market-driven solutions have driven us into this crisis. We know that what worked before, until the 1990s, when Paul Martin walked away on it, was the federal investment with the provinces and municipalities to build housing. The best solution is co-operative public housing that has mixed-income housing. That is what we need.

• (1720)

I need to be able to go back to my communities with a commitment that these houses are going to be built. There is not a quicker driver to build an economy than housing. We could do that today if there was will in this House to do that.

We need to get serious with the CEOs. We have talked about a windfall tax, but we need to actually make them deliver, or we have to start talking about issues like price controls. We know that people are being gouged, and we are in a situation where we cannot allow the oligopoly of grocery chains, because there is no competition, to call the shots, as they are doing. We need to limit their ability to continue to spread their powers as we see Shoppers Drug Mart moving more and more into health care. We simply cannot trust them. We need to protect the public health care system.

These are all the issues that are coming toward us at this time. I mentioned it quickly, but I want to actually really focus on how we are also in the middle of a climate catastrophe. We need to talk about the climate catastrophe. We have the leader of the Conservative Party, the member who lives in Stornoway, a 19-room mansion with his own personal chef, who would make burning fossil fuel free.

We are at an absolute crisis on our planet. We are also at a time when the International Energy Agency said, as of last week, that the end of big oil is imminent because of the incredible investments that have been made all around the world, but not in Canada, on clean energy. There is no place in the world that has more potential for clean energy right now than in the province of Alberta, yet Danielle Smith shut down \$33 billion of clean energy projects and rented a truck to drive around Ottawa, telling us that the power is going out in Alberta.

Most premiers spend money to attract investment or to say their province is an energy superpower. Is that not what Alberta said? They said they were a province that could build energy projects and get them off the ground. Instead, she is paying for the gas to go around saying they cannot keep the power on in Alberta. That is the Conservative vision. They are wedded to big oil, an industry that has made billions in the last few years while we got gouged at the pumps.

We will never hear the Conservatives talk about the price gouging that we know is happening. When we go home on a Friday in northern Ontario, we know the price goes up right across the board on those long weekends at the same time; everybody knows it is price gouging, but the Conservatives say they will get rid of the carbon tax and make it free to burn.

I can ask anyone if they think big oil is not going to, if that tax came up, just Hoover that up and put it into the profits of people like Rich Kruger.

We are at a time when Canadians are looking to Parliament to actually deliver. In the last election I went door to door talking to people about their concerns. I heard, again and again, that people could not afford to get their teeth fixed. People said they do not trust politicians anymore. They asked how they could get their kids' teeth fixed. I said that if they elected us, we would go back and get a national dental care plan. We are going to get that plan. The Con-

Government Orders

servatives announced they would spend all summer going around to try to stop that budget implementation, but we are going to get dental care for seniors and children this year.

The other commitment we made, and I am putting the Liberals on notice, is that we made that commitment to pharmacare. We have two more years in this Parliament. If we do not see pharmacare, it is going to be pretty hard to go back and say that we hung out with the son of Pierre Elliott for two or three years. People ask why we are hanging out with that guy. We are hanging out here on this side to get something done. That is pharmacare and dental care.

If we go back to the Canadian people and say we did that, it shows them how Parliament can work and that we can work across party lines. We intend to make sure we can go back to the Canadian people who said that in a time of crisis, New Democrats were there on the issues that mattered to people.

We will stand up and fight for people who cannot afford to pay CEBA back, when the government only gives them an extra 18 days. We will fight for small businesses. We will fight for a cleaner climate. We will fight for the indigenous communities that continue to be ignored. We will fight for pharmacare, and we will fight for dental care. That is why we were elected and that is why we are here today.

• (1725)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I note that my colleague brought up a really interesting point, which is that Conservatives talk about the carbon tax quite a bit, but they seem to stop short when it comes to trying to explain the rising costs otherwise.

There is a very good graph that was recently posted that shows exactly where the price of fuel has increased. Over the last year, the price of fuel has increased, as a result of the carbon tax, by 2¢ per litre. The price of fuel has increased by wholesale margins, in other words, profits, by 18¢ per litre.

Can the member for Timmins—James Bay provide some insight as to why the Conservatives are so hung up on talking about the increase of 2¢ per litre as it relates to the carbon tax and not the 18¢ per litre as it relates to the profits received by these oil companies?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, the Conservative leader announced he was going to spend all summer during the hottest summer in history, as Canada was burning, promoting burning fossil fuels for free. It was so bad he got choked out of a number of the communities that were facing this. Even as their own communities were burning, like when Kelowna was on fire, what did we have? We had the member for Kelowna—Lake Country bragging about fossil fuel burning being free.

Private Members' Business

The connection between burning fossil fuels and the climate crisis was proven a long time ago, despite the amount of money Exxon spent trying to suppress that. The Conservatives have no plan. Only recently, they said they have something called technology. They do not really know what it is because they are against battery plant investments, solar and geothermal, but they are into burning the planet.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I heard the member talk about palling around and burning fossil fuels.

In 2020, the member took a trip to Washington on sponsored travel, when most Canadians could not travel. In 2022, the member took a trip to Germany and burned fossil fuels worth \$10,489. He talked about palling around with Pierre Elliott Trudeau. On this trip to Germany, he palled around with a group that actually did a joint press conference with Hezbollah, which is now a terrorist organization.

Can he explain to his constituents why he is palling around with Hezbollah terrorists?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, that was pretty bizarre, but I am not surprised. When I was in Berlin, I was actually meeting with the chancellor about clean energy. We met with the chancellor, unlike the four Conservatives—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member had an opportunity to ask a question. If he has other questions, wishes to raise a point of order or table a document, I would ask him to wait until it is the appropriate time.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, it was quite the honour to meet with the German chancellor and talk about hydrogen. It was a real honour to meet with representatives of the German Bundestag on whether Canada can supply clean energy.

That is rather different than the four Conservatives who got flown over to London, apparently by my cousin, Dan McTeague. The one bottle was \$1,791 for champagne and he wants to talk about affordability. I am sure the member gets really high and happy when he gets a little bottle of Spumante Bambino, but they were spending \$1,791 for a single bottle of champagne.

Who paid for that trip? Why were they there? People knew why we were there. We were meeting with the German government because we stand up for Canada. They were over there boozing it up for whatever reason. Let us know who paid for that trip.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order. The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Madam Speaker, I am sure the member would like me to table a document showing who he actually met with in Germany, so there is proof that the meetings I talked about are true.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I would be more than willing to let them table it, if they table all the receipts and who actually paid for—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is becoming a point of debate.

Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Shefford.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, throughout this debate, I will try to bring us back to the matter at hand today, Bill C-56.

Yesterday, at a meeting with entrepreneurs, I was asked what happened to the \$900 million for housing. What does my colleague think of that?

It might be important to release that money as soon as possible. In Quebec, that money is eagerly awaited. It is time to try to stop this procedural wrangling.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, absolutely, the money has to flow. We have so many housing proposals out there and they are getting turned down one after another by the Liberal government or the money is just sitting there. We are not seeing the money flow. We are hearing the words flow but we need to see the money flow.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

FINANCIAL PROTECTION FOR FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-280, Financial Protection for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Farmers Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

Private Members' Business

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division or wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Scot Davidson moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Madam Speaker, we want to get to a vote right away tonight. I know all my colleague are excited to get Bill C-280 passed.

It is a pleasure to rise once again to speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-280, the financial protection for fresh fruit and vegetable farmers act. I am encouraged by the support this common-sense Conservative bill has had so far, but we need to keep pushing. It is all the more important as we look to address the high food prices, rising inflation and strained supply chains we see in Canada today. I will take the opportunity this evening to reiterate the urgent need for the financial protection of this bill and the benefits it will bring, and will address some of the questions raised at committee.

We all know we need a doctor maybe once a year and need a firefighter once in a lifetime if we are really unlucky, but we need a farmer three times a day, every day. That is a fact. Despite their importance in supplying local communities with safe and nutritious fruits and vegetables, there is not enough financial protection for Canadian fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers. In circumstances where buyers become insolvent and fail to pay for fresh fruits or vegetables they were supplied, farmers are out of pocket for those losses.

To address this, Bill C-280 proposes to establish a limited deemed trust that would provide much needed financial protection for the entire fresh fruit and vegetable sector in Canada. This bill would give fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers priority access to the proceeds of sale, limited to the inventory, accounts receivable and cash on hand derived from the sale of the produce, during the bankruptcy proceedings of an insolvent buyer. This will help offset the loss of their sold produce.

For too long, the existing provisions within the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and adjacent legislation have not provided adequate priority for fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers when insolvencies occur, as these provisions do not take into consideration the unique characteristics of the sector. While the act technically allows suppliers to recover their products following a bankruptcy, it provides no rights when the product has been resold, is no longer identifiable or is no longer in the same state, which is to be expected with most fresh fruits and vegetables.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are subject to rapid perishability. Their shelf life can be sometimes measured in mere hours. By the time insolvency proceedings have concluded, the spoiled product is no longer of any value and cannot be repossessed or resold.

The superpriority provision for farmers in the act does not address the needs of fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers, who regularly receive payments 30 days or more after they have delivered the product. These longer payment terms are typical in the industry. They accommodate the rapid pace of trade and complex storage and transportation arrangements that must be made between many parties to get fruits and vegetables to market over the course of a short growing season. As such, the requirement in the BIA that fruits and vegetables must have been delivered within 15 days of bankruptcy to be covered under the superpriority means that most fresh produce becomes unprotected. This lack of financial protection for Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable sector has had devastating consequences, as farmers and other suppliers find themselves as unsecured creditors with little recourse for their losses.

It is well established that bankruptcies are considerably higher in this sector than in any other agriculture sector across Canada. They occur twice as often as those in livestock and are over 10 times the rates of the poultry and grain sectors, which are heavily regulated in Canada. The average net loss from non-payments, partial payments and delayed payments in the Canadian fruit and vegetable trade amounts to at least 1.53% of a supplier's gross revenue. This is a significant amount for those in the fresh produce sector considering their high overhead and capital costs, small profit margins and reduced risk management capability. While this amount is significant, it does not even capture the full extent of non-payment. Many firms simply close their doors and walk away from their businesses.

● (1735)

These losses are routinely absorbed by farmers, but they are not captured in bankruptcy data. These losses are especially devastating considering that three quarters of Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable producers are small businesses with sales of less than \$85,000 per year, many of which rely on a single buyer for the bulk of their crop. These smaller-scale producers do not have the capability to make credit checks on their buyers, negotiate conditional sales agreements or take other safeguards typical in other industries. Their ability to pursue repayment and other forms of recourse when a buyer does not pay is also extremely limited.

Private Members' Business

As one can imagine, bankruptcies within the fresh fruit and vegetable industry can jeopardize farms and livelihoods, and the constant fear of non-payment limits our farmers' ability to invest in their businesses, grow and actually plan for the future. The bankruptcy of Lakeside Produce in Leamington, Ontario, this past winter demonstrated just how wide-ranging the impact that bankruptcy has had on the entire fresh produce industry. When it went bankrupt, Lakeside Produce owed \$188 million to suppliers across the fruit and vegetable sector. There were 17 Canadian produce companies among Lakeside's creditors, which accounted for \$1.7 million in unsecured claims.

The lack of financial protection for the fresh produce industry in Canada also impacts our competitiveness and capacity to trade with the United States. Suppliers are no longer able to access the dispute resolution and financial protection processes that exist in the U.S. through the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, without incurring significant financial costs. This severely disadvantages Canadian produce businesses given the high volume of produce sold to buyers in the U.S. Having a financial protection tool in place in Canada would pave the way for the United States Department of Agriculture to restore Canadian produce sellers' preferential access to the U.S. dispute resolution mechanism for fresh fruits and vegetables.

With the adoption of Bill C-280, we could finally ensure that Canada's bankruptcy laws work for fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers in a form that recognizes the particular needs and challenges of the industry. By doing so, there would be considerable benefits for Canadians.

The financial protection would strengthen a pivotal industry in Canada, increase economic activity and bring economic benefit to the entire fresh fruit and vegetable value chain. With greater certainty and reduced risk, we would see more investment and growth as Canadian farms and greenhouses expand their operations and return operations to Canada that had migrated to the United States when access to PACA was lost. These measures would also result in a reduction in prices for Canadian consumers, which I know is top of mind for all MPs in this House tonight. We would expect to see a decrease in prices for Canadians by as much as 15%, which would save families as much as \$900 million on their annual purchases of fresh fruit and vegetables.

While this bill was being studied at committee, there were questions about why the bill would extend the deemed trust protections to all suppliers of perishable fruits and vegetables, which is perhaps considered by some to be too broad. However, it is important to remember that within the fresh fruit and vegetable industry, the large retail trade, farmers' markets, food service and hospitality trades are far less affected by the lack of financial protection. For the most part, it is the growers and others involved in the first sale, such as packers, brokers and shippers, who are most vulnerable to payment disruption and who would need the financial protection afforded by Bill C-280 the most.

• (1740)

That said, this industry is highly integrated, and bankruptcies involving producers, dealers, shippers, wholesalers, distributors and retailers impact the stability of the market. A bankruptcy at any

point along the supply chain can result in farmers going unpaid, so it is essential that all suppliers receive the necessary protection. Crucially, protecting fresh produce suppliers equally is needed to access the equivalent protection offered by the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act in the United States, which covers all suppliers along the chain.

Another question raised has been the impact of these financial protections on the banking industry. While it is true that by giving priority access to produce suppliers, banks will see their claims receive a lower priority, the benefits of protecting fresh fruit and produce suppliers outweigh the distributional impacts for the banking industry. Moreover, the banking industry would actually benefit from the increased predictability of payments when lending to those in the fresh fruit and vegetable sector. This has been the case in the United States under the PACA deemed trust, which has been reported to be a net positive to the banks, in addition to the produce sector itself.

Canada relies on boots on the ground, hands in the muck and rubber boots on the farm to provide fresh locally grown produce to our citizens. When these farmers suffer losses due to buyer insolvency, it threatens our very food security by reducing the availability of Canadian grown products.

We already know this is happening. Earlier this year, a Statistics Canada report showed that there was a significant decline in fresh fruit and vegetable availability for Canadians in 2022. More than three-quarters of all produce consumed in Canada is imported. As access to fresh produce from foreign markets is increasingly jeopardized by climate change, carbon taxes, trade protections and supply chain issues, our food security becomes more and more threatened right here at home. For much of our nation's history, Canada was far more self-reliant in the fresh fruit and vegetable trade, with production far outpacing consumption, but the failure to reduce risk and provide certainty to the fresh fruit and vegetable sector has seen this decline significantly. This needs to change.

Fundamentally, Bill C-280 recognizes the need to support Canada's produce sector, just as we support other agriculture sectors, by ensuring that Canada's bankruptcy laws recognize the particular challenges and demands of growing and selling fresh fruits and vegetables. Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable farmers should always be paid for the fresh fruits and vegetables they sell. By passing Bill C-280, we can ensure that our food security is protected and that our produce sector is strengthened. By putting this important financial protection tool in place for produce suppliers, we will support the economy and lower costs for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, so let us get it done.

Private Members' Business

• (1745)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend and colleague for his tremendous leadership on this bill. It is important in my riding as well. I have lots of fruit and vegetable growers in Milton, and I want to give them a shout-out because I go to the farmers' market every Saturday in Milton. I love fresh produce, and we want to do everything we can to support them.

One of the biggest threats to growing fresh produce in Canada and certainly throughout North America and getting it fresh in our grocery stores or at our farmers' markets is climate change. Therefore, it is important that farmers continue to be a solution for fighting climate change, as the ones in my riding continually talk about. Can the member opposite talk about some of the climate events in his riding that affect some of the growers we can support, so we can help mitigate them?

Mr. Scot Davidson: Madam Speaker, we all know here in the House that climate change is real and that it is happening. However, when the bill first came up, another external event was COVID.

I met a farmer in the riding, and at the beginning of COVID, everyone was worried about getting paid. He came to me saying, "Scot, I don't think I'm going to plant my field this year because I'm worried about getting paid." He said, "Look, Scott, I'm not asking for any handout from the government. I'm just looking to get paid for the produce I sell."

Thinking about selling to a distributor, whoever that is, and not getting paid, he said, "Scot, it's \$2 million to plant my field. I can sit at home and just pay the taxes and not worry about it."

I said, "Don't do that because that's going to lead to higher food costs for Canadians and all kinds of pressures for Canadians." That is just a little bit of background on how the bill evolved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for York—Simcoe for this bill and for his speech. The Liberal government members just congratulated my colleague for his leadership on this issue. However, the bill before us responds to a request from the sector that dates back to 2014. This Liberal government has been in power for eight years, but, all of a sudden, it is applauding this measure. Why does my colleague think this was not done earlier?

It took a minority government, with a bill from an opposition MP, for this to start moving forward. What happened on the Liberal side?

• (1750)

[*English*]

Mr. Scot Davidson: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and the Bloc for supporting this bill, along with my Liberal colleagues. It took so long to support this, but I think we are talking about it more and more.

I picked up the Liberal budget that came out last fall and leafed through it and thought that it must be missing pages because there

was no vision for the country. I believe that agriculture in Canada should be number one. I know that my colleagues in the Bloc believe that. I think the party opposite on the government side here is finally, with this bill, waking up to how important agriculture is across this great country, and we have to be pushing every day for the people who are out working in the fields. Members can come to Bradford West Gwillimbury any time and look at the hands on these people who are out grinding it out every day.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for York—Simcoe for the bill. It is clearly important that we establish this kind of financial protection for our fruit and vegetable growers.

In the agriculture committee, we learned during a recent study that oil and gas profits had climbed by over 1,000% over the last three years. Would my hon. colleague agree with me that changing the law in this way and offering fresh fruit and vegetable growers this kind of financial protection would help them stand up against the price gouging that oil companies are putting on citizens of Canada?

Mr. Scot Davidson: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that, and I thank the NDP for supporting this bill. I would love to see my Liberal colleagues on the other side here unanimously consent it right to the Senate tonight.

This bill is so important to fresh produce farmers. We have been talking about this since 2014. We were all elected here to get things done for our constituents. We have an opportunity tonight, and I turn it over to my Liberal colleagues now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House to discuss and debate a bill, especially a private member's bill. That is precisely why we are here this evening. We are debating Bill C-280, a very important bill for our farmers, especially for fruit and vegetable growers.

I believe that our agriculture and agri-food sector was very important to all Canadians before the pandemic, but it has become even more important since the pandemic. We think it is important to reinforce the supply chain, and bring in new investments and initiatives for our producers. Bill C-280 is certainly the type of initiative that can ensure their success.

[*English*]

Before I go too much further, I would like to thank and congratulate the hon. member for York—Simcoe for helping to shepherd this bill through the House.

Private Members' Business

As I had the privilege of reporting this bill back before it came to third reading in debate, I know this is a bill that is supported unanimously in the House. This is an initiative that came back from the agriculture committee with no amendments and was widely supported. I would like to not only, of course, recognize the member for York—Simcoe, but also recognize that there are many members of the House, in fact, all of us, who believe in this initiative.

I would be remiss without talking about the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, the parliamentary secretary to agriculture, who has been on the record for supporting these types of initiatives. The member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford in British Columbia has also been a strong champion. Any time we had a report where he could reasonably try to find a way to get “deemed trust”, which were the words that we were using, he would make sure they were included in the report. I would say that all sides of the House see the initiative. I send my congratulations to the member for York—Simcoe for bringing it forward.

For those Canadians who are at home, perhaps watching and asking what Bill C-280 is, and wondering what these guys and gals are talking about in Parliament, this is about creating a priority under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to allow farmers who are shipping product to buyers who become insolvent to have a superpriority to be able to claim.

I think back to my days at Dalhousie law school when we start talking about priority under provincial legislation. It is when one lines up and tries to reclaim some of what one is owed from the particular buyer or creditor who is required to be paid.

It is very difficult, when one is talking about a perishable product, for that product to actually be claimed. It is not like it is a sack of potatoes, although even potatoes are perishable, but this is not something like grain, something that can be recovered and come back to the supplier to be resold or recaptured for the economic value.

The member for York—Simcoe talked about the fact that not only could a perishable product be perishable, it could also be transformed into a different type of product. One thinks about fresh strawberries that are then sliced and put into different fruit salads and things of that nature. It is impossible for our farmers who are selling that product to actually be able to, under the existing legislation, recoup the economic value associated with that.

This is a type of legislation that has no cost. This is not going to cost the Government of Canada one single cent. This is about creating legislative change that prioritizes and empowers farmers to be able to support themselves.

I want to give members an example. The member opposite, of course, talks about the salad bowl of Canada. I do not know if we have the same connotation in the Annapolis Valley, but let me tell members, between our apple producers and our horticulture producers, I am very proud of the Annapolis Valley in Kings—Hants as a growing region.

I have had the opportunity to talk to the farmers about what this type of deemed trust legislation would mean. I will give an example. Andy Vermeulen, a farmer from Canning, Nova Scotia, sells a

variety of vegetables. He would normally look to Atlantic Canada, or maybe Ontario or Quebec, but he also ships to New England.

● (1755)

The hon. member for York—Simcoe talked about the fact that there is no alignment right now between the dispute resolution that is available to the American producers and the Canadian producers who are selling into that market because we do not have an equivalent type of legislation. That is being proposed here in Bill C-280.

This would allow our farmers to have the same access to those tools, such that if Andy Vermeulen sends his product to Boston, he would have some recourse if the seller went bankrupt or does not pay. It would give further teeth to our farmers to be able to recollect the money that is owed to them.

[*Translation*]

With the cost of living and higher costs, including for fuel, fertilizer and materials, it is very important to find a way to help our farmers financially.

[*English*]

This is something that can ensure we have some financial protection. It does not come with a large cost. In fact, there is no cost to the treasury.

I think this is going to be something that is supported by farmers across the country. I will give the example from Nova Scotia. I am sure for my colleagues from Quebec, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia, and everywhere in between, this makes sense. That is exactly why we can see that every member of the House is supporting it here today.

The last thing I want to say is that I think there are more opportunities for this type of thinking. Those of us at the agriculture committee often hear that people would like to see not necessarily new program spending, although those programs are great. I will get to that in a moment about some of the things that I am very proud of that this government has introduced.

Sometimes it is these little legislative tweaks, or a regulatory change here or there, that really empower farmers and our agricultural community to continue to do the amazing work they have been doing. The member for York—Simcoe talked about the hardened hands of the men and women who do really important work, and the fact that we need farmers three times a day. I think those are extremely powerful words, which I would second.

We should all be thinking about little measures that we can do, especially in the environment right now. The Minister of Finance has signalled this. The President of the Treasury Board has talked about program review and government being very smart and wise about how it spends money. I am fully on board with that, but let me also say that there is a lot that can be done on the non-cost side that could make a huge difference. We, all parliamentarians, should be looking at what we can do to build upon Bill C-280 to do even more in the days ahead. It is something that I look forward to exploring with my colleagues at the agriculture committee.

One such idea is the opportunity for an expedited pathway for regulatory approvals around seeds, feeds and crop protection products. I have talked about this at great length, but I will continue to go on the record. I will have, hopefully, even something more to say in a couple of days with this piece of legislation.

There is tremendous opportunity when we look at the applicants who come to either Health Canada, PMRA or the CFIA with existing approvals from what I would call trusted jurisdictions: the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. We know that, if a process was undertaken in one of these jurisdictions, it was science-based and credible. The likelihood of it being approved in Canada is extremely high.

We have to create a model so that, if an applicant arrives at Health Canada in this country and wants to give those tools to our farmers, we can tighten the timelines between when that application is made and when the product can be registered on the basis of using some of the strengths of science in jurisdictions elsewhere. It is a really straightforward policy, and I think it would make a lot of sense. Again, it is another initiative that does not cost money.

I am proud of what this government has done on the agricultural side. I could go into it at great length, but I am proud of what we are all doing as parliamentarians here tonight to advance the interests of Canadian farmers. This bill, of course, has had Liberal support. We look forward to seeing this off to the Senate and hopefully get it into farmers' hands and available as soon as possible.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I feel like starting my speech in a different way. I just heard that the Liberal government is supporting this bill. Everyone is pleased to be pleased, and everything is perfect.

However, we asked if it would be possible to seek unanimous consent to send the bill directly to the Senate. That way, it could move forward and produce growers could finally get some protection when they are not paid for their produce. It seems that some members withheld their consent.

There may be agreement, but some among us plan to take their time. I have a bit of a problem with that, because the request is clear and dates back to 2015. Furthermore, the Liberal government made very definite and public commitments in this file. I mentioned 2015, but the requests started in 2014. During the 2015 elections, the Liberal Prime Minister agreed to fix the problem. Now it is 2023. How is that for efficiency? We will not get far at that rate. For now, people are pleased to be pleased. They support the bill, and good for them, but I would like to see us move forward.

Now I will close that parenthesis and explain what this bill is about. This bill seeks to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act to put vendors of perishable products such as fruits and vegetables at the top of the list. When a perishable product is delivered to a purchaser, the value of the produce is deemed to be held in trust. Why is that necessary? It is necessary because producers of perishable products are in a vulnerable situation. We need to think of every scenario.

Private Members' Business

Not so long ago, we conducted a study at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food on inflation at the grocery store. Grocery store CEOs came and swore to us that their profit margins were thin, just 2% or 3%, and that they were still the same. When we asked them to show us a breakdown of their profits, they refused, claiming that they are competitors. They promised to submit these figures to the Competition Bureau during its investigation. When we saw the Competition Bureau report, we discovered that they had not provided the figures.

When produce growers appeared before the committee, they told us they were seeing lettuce worth 99¢ being sold at a discounted price of \$2.49, which means it normally costs more than that. I am talking about prices from March, and the situation is even worse today. The grower gets only 99¢, so I think the profit margins are over 2%. The profit margins are above 2% because it is a fresh product.

Negotiations are unbalanced. A purchaser can refuse the stock and say they will go and see another grower who has been negotiating for three or four days. If the grower's warehouse is full of fresh produce and they wait too long, their products will no longer be fresh and appealing. Consumers will not want them, and the grower will not be able to sell them. In that case, they will be forced to give in. This is just one example.

Government officials now agree, and that is good, but they told us for a long time that there were almost no bankruptcy filings and that the bill was therefore unnecessary. The truth is that there were no filings because there were no legal protections. Whenever it became clear that a customer was having trouble paying for merchandise or was on the verge of bankruptcy, arrangements could be made, similar to a kind of liquidation. Sometimes half the price, or even a quarter, would be accepted.

If an out-of-court settlement is not reached and the client goes bankrupt and the business owner does not have any protection, then the business owner would lose 100% of the production value. Business owners therefore end up agreeing in a panic to be paid 25% of the production value. These losses are not included in the statistics. Business owners seem as though they are happy to be paid, but they are receiving only one-quarter of the production value. That is why this is important.

I have a hard time not getting upset about this, because I cannot understand why we have not yet passed such a measure. It would be easy to do, and we have been calling for this kind of measure since 2014. It is now 2023 and there is still no legislation. What is more, it is free. It will not cost the government a cent. What it will cost is to perhaps put fruit and vegetable producers first and bank creditors second. I think maybe that is why some members are hesitating.

There are a lot of discussions going on in the House, Madam Speaker. In fact, for the past little while, I have been speaking indirectly to the very people concerned in this matter. I would like them to listen to my speech.

Private Members' Business

● (1805)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is starting to get a bit noisy in the House.

[*English*]

If members are not interested in listening to what is being discussed and wish to have conversations, I would ask them to step out.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, I always love it when the people I am talking to appear to be listening, at least.

What I was saying is that it is essential. I challenge anyone here to accept the same working conditions as those people. Rain in the summer brings us down because we cannot go for motorcycle rides or head to the beach. What do they do when it rains? They do building maintenance. They go place orders. They do their paperwork because they do not have time for that when it is nice out. They have to be in the field 14 hours a day because they have no workers. Why do they have no workers? Because the government is so slow at processing foreign worker applications and because governments failed to see the current labour shortage coming.

I would like to say a thing or two about the labour shortage. I was a high school teacher. I was not an internationally renowned scientist. I was a high school geography teacher and, in the early 1990s, I taught my students that we would have a labour shortage now. Nobody did anything to avert that, and now people are stuck in this situation. They have no workers. Locals do not want to get their hands dirty, so people have to find other workers.

These folks are facing a labour shortage. They have to mechanize a lot of the production, and that means thousands if not millions in investments that generate debt. These people are heavily in debt. They called for help in spring and early summer, when torrential rains just about wiped out their harvest. Why did they call for help? They called for help because the crop insurance programs we have, the ones currently in place, the ones that the good old ministers refer us to whenever we ask them a question, do not work. Growers are not being adequately insured because the programs were designed 30 years ago in a more stable climate.

Yes, global warming exists. At the very least, I can tell the House that there is so much climate disruption that the last three years have been a disaster for produce growers. First, there was a drought. Then there were aphids. Why aphids? Because the hot season lasts much longer. The aphids moved further north. As they ran out of soybeans to eat, they moved on to fruits and vegetables. That happened last year. This year, there has been non-stop rain. We broke all-time records, particularly in the Eastern Townships, but just about everywhere in Quebec. It is all over the board. During the same period, there was a drought in Abitibi—Témiscamingue and northern Quebec as we tried to navigate our way through the smoke from the forest fires.

All these things are real. As a society, we are going to have to sit down with these people and discuss how to share the risk factor. We cannot just keep asking growers to put \$2 million, \$3 million

or \$4 million into their fields in the spring and get nothing back but us thanking them for feeding us and telling them that if they run into issues, they will need to figure it out on their own. We cannot do that.

I am digressing a bit from the subject of the bill to illustrate the fragility of this sector. I am a bit tired of hearing politicians talk about food sovereignty and how important it is to buy local. For 10 years now, we have been talking about this kind of simple, free measure that will not cost the government a thing, and yet it still has not been done.

I wish there could have been unanimous consent to send the bill to the Senate this evening. I am angry and upset because people who are celebrating and congratulating the member for York—Simcoe on his outstanding leadership, who say they are so happy to be voting this way for farmers, did not give unanimous consent. That means we will have to spend who knows how much more time on this in the House before sending it to the Senate. We also have to hope that place will deal with this efficiently so it can come back here and be made law.

Bills like this can be hard to implement. There are jurisdictional challenges that mean negotiations with other levels of government. That is important. We have to move quickly. Our fresh fruit and vegetable farmers are looking to us. They feed us now, but for how much longer? I think they are going to get sick of it and go find something else to do. Maybe grow field crops. Maybe sell their land. That is what we are up against. Let us pass this bill pronto.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am extremely proud to be standing in the House on behalf of the fruit and vegetable farmers in my region of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. My region and the Cowichan region have a long and storied history in agriculture. I would like to remind all members that the Cowichan Valley is in fact Canada's only Mediterranean climatic zone. The Halkomelem language is the language of the Quw'utsun; the Cowichan name is the anglicized version of that, and it roughly translates into the "warm lands".

We are an agricultural powerhouse in the Cowichan region. I have been proud to call that area my home for over 30 years, and I am proud to be standing in this House in support of Bill C-280. This is a measure that has long been talked about in this very chamber, and we now have an opportunity to actually change the law. As many colleagues have pointed out, this is going to be of no cost but of huge benefit to the people it directly concerns.

Private Members' Business

I want to thank the people who have spoken before me: the sponsor, the member for York—Simcoe; the member for Kings—Hants; and the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. I have the pleasure of serving with two of those colleagues on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I have been the proud agricultural critic for the NDP since January 2018, so I know this subject very well. This is my third Parliament on the agriculture committee, and this subject has come up time and time again.

I do not want to delve too much into the details. We know that this issue matters because of the nature of the product we are talking about. Fruits and vegetables only have a tiny bit of shelf life before they have no more value. This is a unique product, and that is why we need to have this kind of a deemed trust.

It is not as though farmers, who are taking all the risk, can recoup losses by taking the product back; it is perishable in nature. We know that farmers deal with high costs. They have high input costs. It is expensive to buy machinery and erect greenhouses. In fact, almost all farmers' money is tied up in infrastructure, whether that is machinery or land. They are, in other words, land rich but cash poor.

This is a business model that is based on the tightest of margins, and anything the Parliament can do to ease up and make the payment process more guaranteed is something we should look at seriously. I am happy to say Bill C-280 would do that.

I would argue that, instead of this being just a Conservative bill, this bill is expressly non-partisan. I know the NDP has been fighting for this, as part of our electoral promise to Canadians, since 2015. Moreover, it is non-partisan by virtue of the fact that the second reading of this bill was unanimous. It sailed through committee. We had three meetings; we heard from a variety of witnesses. However, we decided as a committee to report this bill back to the House without amendments. It has the committee's stamp of approval, and I hope members in this chamber take note of that and seek to give it rapid passage.

This bill has been the subject of many committee studies. I have almost lost count of how many times, at different committees and different parliaments, we have seen a recommendation for this type of measure to be enacted by the House of Commons.

The time is now. I would like to see this bill pass through third reading, get to the Senate and start getting the traction it needs. The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association and the thousands of people they represent are watching us. They are waiting for action.

I will conclude my remarks by proudly saying that I will be supporting this bill, along with the NDP caucus. We look forward to its speedy passage to the other place; hopefully, it will eventually find its way to the Governor General's desk and receive the royal assent it deserves.

• (1815)

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from York—Simcoe for putting Bill C-280, the financial protection for fresh fruit and vegetable farmers act, forward. It is a very important bill, and it has been a long time coming. I was elected nearly four years

ago and we have been talking about this through the last two Parliaments, and I know it was talked about long before then. It is great to see all parties come together to support something that will help our Canadian produce growers, packers and shippers immensely.

During a Zoom call with The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada, I heard that 52% of perishable product sales to U.S. customers from Canadian suppliers await payment from the United States. California producers and suppliers have a similar problem with their Canadian customers. On October 1, 2014, the United States Department of Agriculture revoked preferred treatment for Canadian shippers under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act. This was taken in retaliation for an action on the part of Canada with regard to establishing some type of trust protection from bankruptcy for all fresh produce shipped into the U.S. Under that status, Canadian companies did not have to post surety bonds when trying to collect payments from delinquent buyers. No other nation had such status.

Without the special status, a Canadian shipper must now post a bond for twice the amount they are seeking to collect. Taking action to recover \$100,000 would require the purchase of a \$200,000 bond. Current rules severely limit the ability of produce growers and sellers to collect payment in the event that their buyer declares bankruptcy.

While products like electronics can be reclaimed by the seller, highly perishable produce is lost because of the obvious. It spoils and rots very quickly, costing Canadian and U.S. firms that operate in Canada an average of \$19 million per year, but there is a policy solution to this. In 1984, the United States Congress established “deemed trust” provisions through the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, also known as PACA, and that protected shippers in the event their buyer became insolvent. The PACA trust helps suppliers of perishable products ensure prompt payment by buyers.

The trust gives suppliers interest in a debtor's assets. Creating a reciprocal legal framework in Canada by federal statute for a PACA-like “deemed trust” would not draw on federal or provincial public treasuries but would offer Canadian producers and suppliers the means to collect on accounts payable from U.S. customers and give U.S. producers and suppliers the means to collect on accounts payable from Canadian customers.

My colleagues have gone into a lot of the details of this bill and I would like to take a bit of a different approach. I would like to give some personal perspective and a little history of my experience in the fresh produce sector to provide some personal context on how this legislation would benefit growers and shippers.

Private Members' Business

I grew up on a produce farm. I am a third-generation farmer and my grandparents on both sides of my family were essentially pioneers in the produce industry in the area that I grew up in, which is my hometown of Grand Bend, Ontario. My dad's parents, my oma and opa, immigrated from Holland and were one of the first five families to start farming in what is called the Klondyke marsh. My mom's parents immigrated to Canada from Poland via Germany and moved to Grand Bend after living in the Chatham area where they first started growing vegetables.

They cleared their land and began farming in the Grand Bend bog, which used to be a shallow lake that was drained to become rich farmland. They grew potatoes, onions, carrots, lettuce and onion sets over the years. Eventually, my dad's parents retired and the family farm that my grandparents started, which now involved two families, took over growing some of the vegetables that my oma and opa used to grow. Farmers are innovators, and I would like to give one example from personal experience.

When I was growing up, it would be time to harvest our potatoes and my dad would go out to the field and hand-dig potatoes to see what stage of growth they were at. There are many things that farmers can automate, but this is not one that can be automated. This is still done by farmers putting their hands in the dirt and digging those little nuggets out of the ground by hand. When my dad would do test digs, he would bring all these little potato nuggets home, and we would never waste them. We would cook them up and eat them for supper. I can tell everyone that those were the most absolutely delicious potatoes.

● (1820)

To provide some context, back in the 1980s when I grew up, the CFIA regulations stipulated that undersized potatoes could not be packaged, and so all of those small undersized potatoes that we harvested would either be discarded for cattle feed or put in a compost pile. There was an enormous amount of perfectly good eating potatoes that became food waste because of packaging regulations. There came a point where my mom thought, "Well, jeez, we're always throwing these undersized potatoes out and they're the most delicious thing ever. Why are we doing this when they taste so good?" These little mini nuggets were so delicious that we wanted to share them with everybody else. Our farm made an application to the CFIA asking that we be able to bag these mini potatoes and sell them. So, the mini gourmet potato bag was born, and our family farm became the first farm in Canada to bring mini potatoes to market.

Now, members are probably wondering why the short history lesson on my family farm. Well, I wanted to provide context from the unique perspective that I hold as the only parliamentarian who is still involved in the fresh produce industry and produce farming.

Before my parents retired from farming, their farm was growing over 1,000 acres of potatoes in southwestern Ontario for grocery retailers. To meet grocery store expectations, we also relied on local smaller farms as well as smaller farms from across Canada in different provinces to supply us with Canadian product in our season. If we could not supply the grocery stores with the product they wanted when they wanted it, then they would not even consider us as a farm to be a supplier. However, the grocery stores had to sup-

ply year-round, and so we had to grow potatoes around North America in order to keep the supply going to supply grocery stores. We had farms contracted to custom grow for us in California, Florida, Idaho, North Carolina and Michigan. Our packing facility in Grand Bend used to process anywhere from 5,000 to 6,000 acres through it per year.

Members can imagine the coordination that it would take to keep everything going when we have farms across North America supplying us. There would be a constant flow of trucks coming back and forth from all over the United States into Canada and from Canada into the States. The potatoes would be coming for us to process and package in our plant so that we could then give Canadians fresh potatoes on the grocery store shelves. We had to do this year round. With bringing upwards of 4,000 acres of fresh potatoes across the border to Canada from the United States every year, members can imagine the dollar value that would be for that product.

However, not only did we pack potatoes from the U.S., we also exported our excess crop during harvest season to the United States. The growing season in the United States is different from Canada's growing season in many parts. Being neighbours, we rely on each other to ensure a fresh food supply year-round. Canadians grow an abundance of fresh, perishable food, far greater than what we consume, and we are blessed to live in a country to be able to do so, but with that comes a huge amount of risk.

In this industry, it is standard practice to be paid 30 to 45 days from the time a product is received. As members can imagine, the shelf life of fresh produce is far less than the payment terms that sellers are working with. The intricacies of our supply chain for fresh food are far greater than anyone could ever imagine. When farmers are exporting millions of dollars in perishable food from the United States without a reciprocal agreement to ensure that they have a mechanism to be paid in the event of a dispute or a bankruptcy, it becomes a risky business. One bad deal or one dispute could literally bankrupt a family farm, especially since most companies could not afford to put up a bond worth double what they are disputing. Produce farmers work on such tight margins that one sale of a quarter of a million dollars or a half million dollars could be three to five tractor-trailer loads of goods to one customer in the States, which they might not get paid for. This could bankrupt a smaller farmer. While this might sound extreme, I have seen this happen to a young farmer first-hand.

In Canada, when there is a dispute between growers and sellers in this country, we have a mechanism to resolve those disputes, but without the deemed trust, we have no mechanism to resolve disputes between growers and sellers in the United States and Canada that is affordable for growers to access.

I am very passionate about this industry, because it has literally been my family's bread and butter my entire life. I have friends across the industry who would welcome this important change, because it would help protect the livelihoods of families, their farms and their businesses. Creating this deemed trust and having that reciprocal agreement with the U.S. would protect farms from having to bear those losses in the event of a dispute.

• (1825)

This will save family farms. I will always fight for Canadian farmers, their livelihoods and their legacies. At a time when food security and food sovereignty are top of mind, this is needed to protect this industry in Canada, and that is why I support this bill on behalf of my constituents and consumers.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today about Bill C-280, a private member's bill introduced by the member for York—Simcoe. Allow me to extend my congratulations to the bill's sponsor on this important work as it aims to protect our fresh produce farmers and sellers who provide Canadians with access to fresh produce for their families.

Bill C-280, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (deemed trust – perishable fruits and vegetables), addresses the need for payment protection in the fresh produce industry through insolvency law amendments in cases of buyer bankruptcy, receivership and large commercial restructuring.

The bill would create a special legal mechanism known as a “deemed trust” to pay the unpaid bills of fresh fruit and vegetable sellers ahead of all creditors if a buyer becomes insolvent. The deemed trust would provide important protection in insolvency proceedings to the sellers of fresh fruits and vegetables against unique payment risks faced by the fresh produce industry, such as the perishable nature of fresh produce.

Members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food studied the bill with the assistance of testimony from representatives of the fresh produce industry and the bill was reported back to the House with unanimous support. With our support of Bill C-280, we hope to increase the likelihood that the United States will restore Canada's preferential access to the formal—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order.

The hon. member for Shefford.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I apologize, but I am rising to ensure the safety of the interpreters. They have just indicated that there is a telephone too close to the microphone. I am thinking of them. We know that this can sometimes cause acoustic shocks, so it is important to be careful.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do not know if the hon. member's phone is perhaps on her desk.

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[*English*]

I will ask the hon. member to move her phone. It may be vibrating at some point, I do not know. There may be some static there.

The hon. member has 30 to 40 seconds before I interrupt her.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, we hope to increase the likelihood that the United States will restore Canada's preferential access to the formal dispute resolution process under the United States' Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, PACA, which regulates the fresh produce sector and provides financial protection for sellers.

I know I am about to be cut off, but PACA is a U.S. legislative and regulatory regime that regulates the fresh produce industry. I will continue at a later time.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians have seen a very tumultuous year when they look at the cornerstone of our democratic system, Canada's Parliament. I found myself going back over the questions that I had put to the government that needed more exposition, further review and another opportunity for the government to answer.

I was speaking with two great members of our team: Leah Young and Jordan Johnston. They do a great job. They are great Canadians. We were a little disappointed when we looked at the series of issues that Canadians had to witness in the news on a daily basis with respect to foreign interference and with respect to a failure to act by the government to address the real and present threats that our country has faced.

The question of the Trudeau Foundation and the foreign influence operation that targeted the Prime Minister through the foundation that bears his family's name is incredibly concerning. It gave rise, of course, to calls and demonstrated the necessity for Canada to have a foreign agent registry. This is a tool that is used by our allies and it is very effective, but there is no tool like it in Canada's tool box right now.

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What happened in this particular case? We saw cut-outs acting on behalf of the dictatorship in Beijing give \$140,000 to the Trudeau Foundation in an attempt to influence or gain influence with Canada's Prime Minister. This is obviously incredibly concerning. What we saw in that same time period were two occasions where these individuals acting on behalf of the dictatorship in Beijing did get access to the Prime Minister, raising a question for Canadians: Is that the price it is going to cost foreign regimes to get access to our head of government?

The individuals pulled in the Prime Minister's brother. It was the first time in his involvement with that foundation that he was directly linked to donor activity like this, taking in this large six-figure donation. The question about whether or not the influence was effective and whether or not this operation by a foreign government was effective is what undermines Canadians' confidence and creates concern about the health of our democratic institutions.

Therefore, Canadians want to know this from the government, and I am looking to the parliamentary secretary for a response: On what date can Canadians expect to see the foreign agent registry, which is one of the critical tools necessary to help restore Canadians' confidence in our democratic institutions?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity today to, for the sake of accuracy, remind the House of a few things in response to the hon. member's question.

First, I want to point out that the agreement for the donation in question, to the Trudeau Foundation, which he raises, was made in 2014, prior to the 2015 election. Let us remember that at that time, the Liberals were the third party in standing.

Second, I will remind my hon. colleague of Mr. Alexandre Trudeau's testimony at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics on May 3 of this year, in which he stated:

I must insist that there was no foreign interference, no possibility of interference and no intention or means of interference at or through the Trudeau Foundation.

No state or individual ever attempted to influence the Canadian government through the foundation.

We know that foreign interference and attempts by foreign actors to influence Canada's democracy are not new phenomena. That is why combatting potential threats to our democratic systems has been at the heart of our government's priorities, and we have maintained a clear and ongoing commitment to protecting Canadians democracy.

We are aware that threat actors have sought to erode trust in our democratic institutions and stoke tensions about government policies and decisions by targeting politicians, political parties and media outlets. Threat actors do this to influence public opinion and ultimately advance their interests, and that is why our security and intelligence agencies continue to support an integrated government response to those threats. Every day, Canada's security agencies, including the RCMP, undertake the work Canadians expect of them in order to ensure continued protection of Canadians and our democracy. Attempts to interfere in Canada's domestic affairs

should not and will not be tolerated. We will continue to protect our sovereignty and our democracy.

On September 7, 2023, the government announced a public inquiry into foreign interference in the federal electoral processes and democratic institutions. This announcement followed extensive consultations and agreements with all political parties represented in the House of Commons. The hon. Justice Marie-Josée Hogue was given a mandate to examine and address foreign interference by China, Russia and other foreign state actors or non-state actors, including any potential impacts on the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. Justice Hogue is also mandated to assess the capacity of federal entities to detect, deter and counter foreign interference targeting Canada's democratic processes, and to make any recommendations she deems appropriate to better protect Canada's democratic processes from foreign interference.

I would like to note that the government has, in addition, announced that it supports, as the member has raised, moving forward with a foreign agent registry.

● (1835)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, the saying goes that one eats an elephant one bite at a time, and I am happy to hear from the parliamentary secretary that we have convinced the government to take a small bite, but what we need to know is when. When is it going to implement that foreign agent registry?

One needs to be registered in this country to lobby for the food bank, but we do not register, or require registration of, people who are paid by foreign governments and are operating on our soil with the interests of their foreign government, like the dictatorship in Beijing. It took the Liberals the better part of a year, with all kinds of time wasted on their special rapporteur process, to actually name the justice who is going to be responsible for the inquiry into foreign interference.

What I would like from the parliamentary secretary this evening is for her to reassure Canadians. On what date will they introduce legislation for the foreign agent registry?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak once again on this important issue. We have already identified that we will be moving forward with a foreign agent registry. We have mentioned many steps we are taking to protect our democracy, as it is incredibly important to us. It is not new to Canada.

What I find interesting about the member opposite's speech is that just some weeks ago, we had a very serious presentation by the Prime Minister on very serious allegations about questions of democracy and about the murder of a Canadian taking place on Canadian soil. We had a take-note debate, and on those grounds of an attempted foreign interference in our democracy, why were Conservatives silent in that debate? Why has the member opposite not even mentioned what has happened here or the potential impacts of India's involvement in that murder?

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• (1840)

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise virtually this evening to pursue a question I initially asked on May 8, 2023. That question related to electoral reform, and specifically, I was picking up on the fact that, just in the previous weekend, at the Liberal Party policy convention, the Liberals had adopted a resolution very close to a motion that had been put forward by my Green colleague, the hon. member for Kitchener Centre. Now the NDP has put forward another motion that is very similar, from the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, calling for a citizens' assembly.

The Liberal Party gathered in Ottawa and voted for holding a citizens' assembly to investigate electoral reform. The Prime Minister's initial response to the media was that there was "no consensus", in his language, to pursue a citizens' assembly on electoral reform. When the hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions, the member of Parliament for Beauséjour, responded to me on that day back in May, he reiterated this notion that there was no consensus for a citizens' assembly, so let us just frame tonight's debate around this central point.

I do want to stop and thank the grassroots campaigners, who are non-partisan citizen activists of Fair Vote Canada, for pursuing this matter and demonstrating that the majority of Canadians want to see a citizens' assembly.

To say there is no consensus around getting rid of first past the post, as the Prime Minister says, I think is debatable, but it is a move to a different voting system. To say there is no consensus and that therefore we will not pursue a method to find consensus is absurd. A citizens' assembly, a non-partisan citizens' assembly, on electoral reform is for the very purpose of finding consensus.

Bringing Canadians together who are chosen randomly, citizens' assemblies are a really fascinating tool in democracies. Canada has used them on this topic but only at the provincial level. There is great support for moving to a citizens' assembly on electoral reform.

By the way, eight times since 1921, this House or various law commissions have studied first past the post, and in every instance since 1921 no body, as in a group of people, a House of Commons committee and so on, has ever found that first past the post is an appropriate system for Canada. That is because ever since the early 1920s, we have not been a two-party system. We have had three, four and, now in this House, five parties. Therefore, in an electoral system with a first-past-the-post system, inevitably and invariably the vote is distorted between the popular vote and the seat count.

Especially, as I said, since 1921, every authority that has studied the matter has said that first past the post does not work for Canada. However, to find the new system, to develop consensus, a citizens' assembly is an excellent tool. I found it bizarre to be told in question period that we did not have consensus on the tool to find consensus. I note parenthetically that it appears to me the Prime Minister will not think there is consensus on anything until everyone agrees with him, and that is not a tool for consensus. We absolutely must have fair voting so that Canadians have confidence that the way they cast their vote has an impact on the result.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know that my hon. colleague is incredibly passionate about this topic, and I enjoy listening to her. I take her feedback very seriously. I also wish her well.

We are committed to strengthening Canada's democratic institutions. Our electoral system, along with the fundamental rules that determine how votes are translated into seats in the House of Commons, is one of the most foundational pieces of our democracy. Among many things, it provides Canadians with a direct connection to their members of Parliament, who must work with each other to develop national policy and make political decisions, while engaging with and remaining accountable to their constituents in an increasingly digital and connected Canada.

Our current first-past-the-post system is not perfect, as the member acknowledges. She raises crucial points. However, no system is perfect. Ours has served Canada well for over 150 years, and it continues to advance the democratic values that Canadians want reflected in their system of government. This includes strong local representation, stability and accountability. How Canadians vote and how we govern ourselves are fundamentally important points that impact us all. Given that, the government's view has been very clear: Any major reforms to the electoral system should not be made without the broad support of Canadians. We consulted very broadly with Canadians, and a clear preference for a new electoral system, let alone a consensus, did not emerge. Therefore, the government decided not to proceed.

However, the government has continued to work to improve Canada's federal electoral process. Notably, in 2018, the government introduced the Elections Modernization Act, which represented a significant reform of the Canada Elections Act. Parliament passed this important legislation, which modernized the electoral process, making it easier for Canadians to participate in elections and further bolstering Canadians' trust and confidence in Canada's world-class and independently administered electoral system.

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For example, these changes made the federal electoral process more accessible by reducing barriers for persons with all types of disabilities, Canadians living abroad and Canadian Armed Forces members, so they can vote and participate more fully in the electoral process. It has also made it easier for Canadians to vote by giving the chief electoral officer additional flexibility to run elections more efficiently, thereby reducing wait times, and to extend the hours for advanced polls and use mobile polls to better serve remote and isolated communities.

I would also note that the supply and confidence agreement established in March 2022 between the leader of the NDP and the Prime Minister included several commitments aimed at maintaining the health of Canada's democracy and removing potential barriers to voting and participation.

We will continue to work with Elections Canada to explore ways to expand people's ability to vote, including by improving the mail-in ballot process. These are just some of the important issues that the government is focused on to deliver for Canadians.

• (1845)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary claimed that first past the post has served Canada well. I had the honour to serve on the all-party select committee that studied the matter of electoral reform, and we heard from many experts that first past the post has not served Canada well. These experts included a former chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, and a professor emeritus from the University of Toronto, Peter Russell. First past the post distorts results and leaves frustrated, unhappy voters.

When the parliamentary secretary says that they are committed to strengthening democracy, I would urge her to reflect on how that contributes to public cynicism and hurts Canada's democracy. When the Liberals leapt from third place to win a majority in 2015, it was largely because they promised 2015 would be the last election under first past the post. I note they have resurrected the 2015 election promise to get rid of GST on rentals. It is time to bring back the promise to fix our voting system.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, once again, I appreciate my colleague's input.

During the time when Canadians were being consulted, I too held consultations in my riding. Those meetings were very difficult, as everybody has very different opinions and is passionate about what is the best electoral process for Canada. As I stated in my earlier remarks, the government felt very strongly that unless we had widespread consensus, changing such a significant tool of our democracy would not be able to move forward.

We are deeply committed to making the electoral process better and fairer. I know the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is also looking at this, and we welcome additional comments and conversations on how we can make improvements to our electoral system.

• (1850)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Madam Speaker, on June 9, 2023, I asked the Minister of Immigration, Refugees

and Citizenship if Canada was operating an apartheid era visa process in our high commission in South Africa. Canadians are proud of our country's role in contributing to the end of apartheid, and I think they would be shocked to know there are high commission staff who are perpetuating the racial injustices of apartheid in our name.

Canada's immigration system has been facing challenges in recent years and has been overwhelmed with visa applicants experiencing really long processing times. While there has been improvement in some countries, it seems it has worsened in South Africa. My office has been inundated with calls from family and friends of South Africans who have faced visa wait times well beyond what applicants elsewhere face.

In India, a very busy mission, Canadian officials can turnaround a visa request in a month. In the Philippines, it is done in only 29 days. However, the current processing time for a visitor visa in South Africa now stands at 115 days, or nearly four months. There is something clearly wrong. Weddings and funerals are being missed. Children are fighting illnesses without their parents. This is unacceptable to me and the diverse constituents I represent.

There are also real economic consequences, as visa delays and denials impact work and study permits. Canadian employers are losing critically needed South African talent. A health authority with a long backlog for surgeries lost a new surgeon it had vetted and wanted to hire and is being forced to transfer patients for treatment to the United States.

Immigration insiders have referred to this as Canada's Africa problem. Indeed, accusations of systemic racism have been levied at various visa posts around the world, including in Pretoria. Sadly, systemic racism among Canadian institutions is real, and IRCC is not immune to this often invisible disease.

In May 2022, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration released a parliamentary report that revealed "systemic racism" within IRCC that actually resulted in discriminatory results against people of colour. That is unacceptable. Immigration, like everything else, should be merit-based. It should not matter what the colour of one's skin is.

Canadian media has widely reported on visa issues vis-à-vis South Africa, and the Government of Canada has undertaken anti-racism training, which is great. However, we do not know the impact of the new training. One inconvenient truth is that some Canadian missions will delegate visa decision-making to locally engaged staff at non-priority visa posts. In the case of South Africa, I was told Canada relies predominantly on white local staff to accept or refuse applications from predominantly Black and Indian South Africans.

On September 12, 2023, on my own personal expense, I met with Chris Cooter, Canada's high commissioner, in Pretoria, South Africa, to ascertain the reason for abnormally high visa refusal rates among Black and Indian South Africans. Unbelievably, the high commissioner informed me that he was not aware of racism issues.

Understandably, I was disappointed by his response. Indeed, why would there be global anti-racism training, including in South Africa, if such training was not needed? Why would a parliamentary report talk about systemic racism within IRCC if it did not exist?

The Canadian government must get to the bottom of this. Canada stood up for Africa during the dark days of apartheid, and as a son of refugees, I feel a duty to ensure that future generations of new Canadians receive the same warmth, compassion and equity that my family did.

Who am I to believe, the government, an IRCC committee report or an out-of-touch high commissioner?

• (1855)

Mr. Paul Chiang (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

I want to make it clear that any instance of racism or discrimination at IRCC is absolutely unacceptable.

Following the hon. member's question in June, we investigated the selection practices within the South African High Commission and determined that discrimination and racism should not be taking place as the filtering of visa applications by race does not occur. IRCC neither requests nor collects information on the race of applicants. These protocols were established to ensure maximum oversight and minimal risk of systemic discrimination in all operations.

Indeed, the team in Pretoria has approved nearly nine out of 10 temporary resident applications filed by South African nationals since 2018, with the exception of the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Approval rates in Pretoria are higher in 2023 across all temporary resident lines of business compared to 2019.

We recognize that addressing systemic racism and discrimination, whether overt or covert, requires constant and ongoing vigilance. We have a moral obligation to address institutional racism and end discrimination across government. Though we continue to make progress on this front, there is more work to be done. IRCC hired the independent research firm Pollara in 2021 and 2023 to examine the department's anti-racism efforts and how we can do better to serve clients of all backgrounds. While the results from Pollara's latest study published in August show progress, there is still

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more we can do to prevent discrimination and promote equity and inclusion in our staffing and procedures worldwide.

We have also created action plans for each area of programming to help identify and eliminate racism in program and service delivery. We are currently analyzing disaggregated data on race and racism in our workforce collected through our surveys. We have created new impact assessment tools, bias identification methodologies, guidance and training to address racial disparities across our programs and procedures.

We also announced in August the creation of an equity secretariat, with an ombudsman's office that will support safe and independent channels to report instances of racism and discrimination. This will be an accessible, neutral and respected resource for our employees worldwide.

Finally, all IRCC employees receive training on inclusion and diversity. Our staff in Pretoria completed not only this comprehensive training, but also training adapted to include a specific focus on their clientele in April. The migration program manager in Pretoria additionally participated in workshops in Canada in January that included training on anti-racism.

As outlined, we are taking various steps to address systemic racism within IRCC and ensure that we are promoting diversity and inclusion in all our efforts. Though there is more work to be done, IRCC takes seriously our responsibility to our employees, clients and everyone we serve.

Mr. Kevin Vuong: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary talks about training. That is great. The issue is this. What is the result? I will tell him what the result is.

In May of 2022, Canada was host to the world AIDS summit. There were African delegates invited to our country on Canadian government letterhead who could not get visas, which were immensely delayed or outright rejected.

In October of 2022, Toronto, my home city, was supposed to host the Gabon-Canada trade investment forum. Not a single delegate from Africa who had been invited on Canadian government letterhead was able to secure a visa. How does the parliamentary secretary reconcile these two?

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There is a clear problem and if the government does not act it is going to be escalated. We as a country cannot afford any more international embarrassment. More importantly, what is happening is not living up to our standards or values.

What is the government going to do to address this issue before it gets worse?

• (1900)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Madam Speaker, recent investigations of the Pretoria office determined that visa applications are not and cannot be filtered by race. Its diverse selection team has, in fact, been approving nearly nine in 10 temporary resident applications filed by South African nationals since 2018, with the exception of the pandemic years of 2020-21. Approval rates are now higher across all temporary resident lines of business compared to 2019.

However, IRCC is constantly working to eliminate systemic discrimination and racism and promote equity in our staffing and procedures worldwide. It is doing this through independent research, training, a newly created equity secretariat and other measures. This work remains ongoing. We will continue to address systemic racism within our institutions and ensure transparency in our progress.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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