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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 26, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from March 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona has six minutes left for his speech.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the House again to complete my remarks on Bill C-19. The last day we were debating the bill, I spoke to some of the content of the legislation with respect to what it proposed and some of the areas for improvement that I hoped could be addressed at committee.

I expressed then, and I will express it again now, my desire to see the bill proceed quickly to committee. While it is important for a number of reasons, it is no secret to anybody in the House that this is a minority Parliament, and things can sometimes move quickly in minority Parliaments. We could end up with an election and it is important we be ready for that should it come.

However, I also emphasized, and I want to emphasize again, the extent to which it really is incumbent upon all members of Parliament at this time to work to avoid an election. As a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, who participated in the study on what a pandemic election might look like, we heard very clearly that there were a lot of risks, and they are not just public health risks.

There is a real risk of disenfranchising people and having Canadians who want to vote either decide that they should not because it is too much of a risk to their personal health or they might face other barriers that do not have anything to do with an immediate risk to their personal health but present barriers nevertheless. That might be around transportation options to get to polling stations and

other kinds of challenges that people have faced as a result of the pandemic.

What is important to bear in mind is that when all of us were elected in the 2019, the pandemic was not on our minds. Nobody saw this coming. However, we were each elected with a responsibility to be leaders in our community and to speak for our community. For as much as there have been disagreements on many things, and rightly so, and I think that is what people would expect in Parliament, there has been, and ought to continue to be, an overriding sense of responsibility to work together.

There is obviously a really important leadership role for government in that, to continue to have an open posture to consult opposition parties. I, frankly, think it did a better job of that during the early days of the pandemic and it issued in better policy. As the government apparently gets more interested in an election, we see some signs of that here and there in the things the Liberals say, both about Parliament and in the way they have behaved in Parliament, as well as some opposition parties.

We also see it in what the Prime Minister has been saying to his national executive and even in some of the speculation about the date announced for the budget, which is later than many people expected. It happens to coincide nicely with the timing of a pre-summer election should the Prime Minister desire it. There are a lot of coincidences happening, and that is the most charitable way to put it.

It would be a mistake for the country to have an election at this time. Different COVID variants are popping up different in parts of the country. We just saw the experience in Newfoundland and Labrador, where an election took much longer to complete than anybody expected because the nature of the pandemic changed mid-election and the date was pushed back many times.

It is disconcerting that the Prime Minister continually refuses to say that he will not unilaterally call an election. He can make that commitment. If we end up in an election, at least let it be because things actually fell apart in the House of Commons. However, the Prime Minister continues to retain his ability and will not pledge not to use it to go to the Governor General and cause an election.

Parliament has already demonstrated that spirit of collaboration. The fact is that we are having a budget in April 2021, but did not have one for the entire year of 2020. The estimates, which are owed to the House under the Standing Orders, were significantly delayed. This is a sign that Parliament has been willing to accommodate the government and recognize the extraordinary nature of the times we are in.

Government Orders

● (1005)

Parliament has shown a lot of flexibility. It has not always been easy and it has not always been a fun process getting there. It has had its fair share of criticisms from people on all sides, which is fair enough. It is a Parliament and that will happen. The point is this. If we look at the outcomes, we have been able to get enough good outcomes for people to ensure that financial distress and bankruptcy was not the overriding narrative of the pandemic for most Canadians. There are other things we can and should be doing and the place to have that debate is in Parliament.

We were all elected to bring those views to the table and to do our best work to advance solutions on behalf of Canadians. I do not see a reason why that work needs to end. I would be reassured greatly if the Prime Minister were willing to say that much himself and refuse to call an election unilaterally. I will believe it when I see it. In the meantime—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, the hon. member's time is up. I am sure he will be able to add to that during questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary ultimately responsible for reaching out and trying to pass this legislation through, I want to extend my hand to anyone who has input and would like me to take any form of action in support of passing the legislation. I have been committed to doing this for quite a while now.

I agree with the member for Elmwood—Transcona that in a minority situation we need to be ready and should be ready. Where I disagree is with the member's assessment of today's Parliament. All we need to do is look at the destructive force we witnessed yesterday from the opposition parties in trying to force standing committees to do certain things.

My question for the member is this. Would he also acknowledge that Elections Canada does have a mandate to be ready, and it will be ready? Hopefully, this Parliament will be able to help facilitate a healthier, safer election, whenever that might be.

● (1010)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, on the first point about what happened yesterday, if we examine the list of Liberal private members' bills and motions, what we often see is a long list of mandated studies for committees. This is not a new thing, and it has been a frustration to many. I invite the parliamentary secretary to look at the Private Members' Business of many of his own members. What he will see are instructions to committees from the House. I find it weird that he would have a principled objection to that. Perhaps the Liberals should have a discussion in their House leader's office or at their caucus, more appropriately, about the nature of Private Members' Business their members ought to put forward.

On the second point, about Elections Canada being ready, we certainly heard at committee during the study on pandemic elections that Elections Canada would do everything it can to run its—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I know there may be two questions, but there is only one minute for a response.

Questions and comments, the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his work on the procedures committee, which studied the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer. I wonder if he could comment briefly on what he thinks of the government tabling this legislation before that committee has had time to make its recommendations.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I have a bit of a different take on that one. In my opinion, it was important that the government table legislation before Christmas. I thought it was important that the bill proceed in a spirit of collaboration and that MPs from different parties needed to know what was in the mind of the government with respect to its initial proposal. Otherwise, it would have tabled it at the last minute and the criticism would have been that it had sat on these changes and nobody had time to give input. It was better that it put its best foot forward earlier so there was some time over the break to think about what it had proposed.

It is unfortunate it took so long to get to the debate on Bill C-19. There are a lot of reasons for that. I acknowledge that it was not just because of the government that this happened. It was been better to have a longer conversation with more information rather than less and that—

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

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

The bill provides for a three-day polling period. However, the Bloc Québécois thinks that two days, Saturday and Sunday, would have been sufficient. As for mail-in voting, that will occur over a very long period, and under the bill, ballots can even be received until the day after polling day, which would delay the announcement of the results and could create uncertainty. All of these things create a risk of electoral abuse, and so I would like to know what the member thinks about that.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I think the biggest risk of uncertainty regarding the election results comes from politicians who say that people should be uncertain about them.

In many countries, the official election results are not known until one or even two weeks after the election, and that is not the end of the world.

We could take the necessary measures to ensure the security of the ballots while they are being counted, which would give a bit more time after voting day. However, that is something that would have to be more thoroughly debated in committee, which is why I want this bill to be sent to committee as quickly as possible.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, what concerns does the member have around this legislation being passed in a timely manner so if the Liberals do call an early election, it is a fair one?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, one of the things that Canadians need to know about this bill is that there is a clause that says its provisions will not come into effect until 90 days after the bill passes through Parliament, which includes the other place not just the House of Commons.

If anybody is thinking about having an election before the summer, it may well be too late already under these rules. I do think the proposed legislation, and particularly after some improvement in committee, will make for a much better election, both from the point of view of public health but also from the point of view of ensuring that people who want to cast their ballots have their voices heard, that their votes count and that they get them in the ballot box.

It is really important that these modifications are made in case we have an election. It is already probably too late for an election that would occur before the summer. I would like to hear the Prime Minister commit to not calling an election before the summer.

• (1015)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, is a real warrior on interesting issues such as the convention for moving from a House to an election.

I really want to ask him about one of the missing pieces, which I was surprised was missing, and that is the physicality and the COVID risk of collecting the signatures. Usually our volunteers go out to collect those signatures, as we have to have 100 signatures on paper. I know from provincial colleagues that this was a problem in the pandemic. Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, this is a really critical issue. The committee should be taking this up as one of its priorities for the legislation.

People in the House will know that I am not a wallflower when it comes to criticizing the government. However, if we look back to Bill C-76, it was a very combative way to change the Elections Act. The approach so far seems to be different, and that is important. It creates the space for the committee to do good work on this and other issues to get some changes on which we can all agree, and then proceed on that basis.

I remain optimistic in respect to this legislation that we should be able to find a path forward and get good rules in place to protect both public health and democracy in the case that we do have an election. The best option is to not have an election right now. It is not a good time.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think it is very clear that the government desperately wants a pandemic election, because it is focused on its own political interest.

Part of the argument the government is making is about Parliament not working. What we have seen is the opposition working very collaboratively to get key spending bills passed, especially in the early phase of the pandemic.

Also, we do see cases where opposition parties are working together to get things done that the government does not like. We saw it with the creation of the Canada-China committee, the Uighur genocide. We have a motion at the foreign affairs committee on COVAX which the government is filibustering.

Does the member have a comment on the fact that if anyone is hurting the work of Parliament, it has often been the government that has been trying to delay things on which opposition parties are actually working together?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that when someone has the floor, it is a bit rude to be going back and forth across the aisles to make a debate.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona has just a little under a minute to respond.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which is currently undergoing a filibuster by Liberal members who do not want to have a vote on a particular motion that has to do with the WE Charity scandal, I am certainly attuned to the ways in which the government is also causing dysfunction when it suits its political purposes.

That is why I reiterate that we all have a responsibility, as MPs, to try to rise above that kind of stuff, do our jobs and keep the focus on people. That includes trying to avoid an election right now, because there are serious risks to both public health and to our democracy. We do not need a political crisis on top of an economic and public health crisis, and the best way to avoid that is to not have an election. We need to think differently about the way we might have approached our jobs in the last Parliament and in the early days of this one.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kings—Hants.

I am happy today to discuss Bill C-19, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response), tabled last December. This is an important piece of legislation that would create more accessible voting options for all Canadians. More precisely, I will outline the ways in which this bill seeks to temporarily enhance mail-in voting for electors should a general election be required during the pandemic.

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We have seen during this pandemic how important accessibility is. We have even taken accessibility measures in the House, through the use of Zoom video conferencing and voting by app. Mail-in voting is a safe and accessible option for all Canadians. According to research conducted by Elections Canada, it is expected that up to five million electors would choose to vote by mail for an election during the pandemic. In comparison, approximately 50,000 electors opted for this during the 2019 federal election. This is only 1% of the turnout that could be expected during a pandemic.

Jurisdictions inside and outside of Canada that have had elections during the pandemic have witnessed a steep increase in the use of mail-in ballots. Many electors, particularly those who are most vulnerable, choose to vote in this manner because it is safe and secure. The existing federal mail-in vote system is no different, and nothing in Bill C-19 would change that.

At the same time, we need to be prepared for an expected surge in mail-in ballots, which is why Bill C-19 includes new mail-in vote measures. These measures would strengthen the current mail-in vote system by facilitating the use of this voting method for all Canadians, thereby ensuring the health and safety of electors who feel more comfortable voting from home.

In my riding of Richmond Hill, we have a large population of seniors who would greatly benefit from an expansion of mail-in voting measures. I facilitated a community council in Richmond Hill that specifically targeted advocating for seniors. One of the major concerns I have constantly heard regards engagement. The pandemic has isolated our seniors from their communities, their social circles and the government. Expanding mail-in balloting and making the process simple would ensure that our seniors do not become more disenfranchised.

Bill C-19 would temporarily establish four new mail-in vote measures: First, electors would be able to register online; second, mail-in ballot boxes would be installed at polling stations; third, electors would be able to use an identification number in lieu of a copy of their ID when registering; and fourth, electors would still have the option of voting in person even after registering for mail-in voting.

The first measure would enable electors to apply online to register to vote by mail, thereby allowing them to avoid in-person voting. This would be a critical option for those electors with significant health concerns. In addition, while online registration would provide electors with the opportunity to participate in the election process from their homes, individuals without access to the Internet would still be able to register to vote by mail. For those who are not comfortable registering online, the option to register by mail would still be available. In this way, we would not be limiting options for electors, but expanding them with an option to register for mail-in voting.

Bill C-19 would also see mail reception boxes installed at all polling stations. This measure would recognize that some electors who register to vote by mail may be too busy to return their ballot kits by mail. To support limited in-person contact, we would be providing electors with a secure and convenient means to deposit their ballots.

The third measure would provide electors with the opportunity to use an identification number instead of their ID to establish proof of identity and residence when registering to vote by mail. This measure would make it easier for electors to register to vote by mail-in ballot, especially our most vulnerable who face significant health risks.

● (1020)

I would note that this, like all elements of Bill C-19, is a temporary measure in which electors must consent to the use of this data when registering with an identification number. To protect against voter fraud, Elections Canada is required to hold relevant data on electors.

Lastly, with Bill C-19, electors would still have the option of voting in person even if they had already registered to vote by mail. Electors who chose to do so would have to return their mail-in ballot kits after registration or sign a declaration stating that they had not already voted by mail-in ballot. We want to help ensure the integrity of the vote this way.

Canada's federal voting system is robust, with measures already in place to safeguard electoral integrity against fraud. Elections Canada has a long history of experience administering the mail-in voting system, with extensive integrity measures and safeguards. There is no evidence to suggest that the current system enables widespread voter fraud or poses concerns for ballot security.

It is responsible to assume that an expected increase in mail-in voting may trigger the need for the chief electoral officer to adapt provisions of the Canada Elections Act during the pandemic. As such, the proposed increased section 17 authorities would allow the CEO to respond accordingly should new challenges or circumstances arise. Taken together, these measures seek to address our unprecedented times by providing extensive opportunities for Canadians to vote. We are building on a mail-in voting system that is expected to see a surge in use.

I would encourage hon. members to support this legislation and send it to committee, as mail-in voting will experience an unprecedented surge that we need to proactively address. The sooner this bill goes to committee, the sooner we will be able to do a substantive review of it, send it to the other place for approval and implement these measures before any election may be called during the pandemic.

The measures outlined in this legislation aim to do so with strength and efficiency and will support electors voting from the comfort of their homes. These measures are imperative in assuring that we do not put vulnerable Canadians at risk while also limiting large election crowds in public spaces such as schools, community centres and religious spaces, where voting booths are usually located.

In closing, in such challenging times, Bill C-19 provides ways to ensure that citizens can safely and widely participate in the electoral process.

I thank all members and urge them to support this bill and send it to committee.

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• (1025)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to go back to a point that was raised just before the member's speech. It was from the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who talked about the act being implemented 90 days after receiving royal assent. There is a provision that would allow the chief electoral officer to do so sooner, at their discretion, through the *Canada Gazette*, which takes me to my point and my question.

This bill is obviously coming forward because of the advice and some recommendations from the chief electoral officer, who is asking Parliament to make some changes if an election were to happen.

How important does the member opposite think it is that we make sure these measures the CEO is asking for are implemented in due course?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Madam Speaker, it is important for us to look at the bill in a substantive way. I believe that Elections Canada has already received input and done extensive consultation, and it is well on its way to making sure that procedures are put in place to ensure that we have an open, democratic and safe election.

There is a legislative piece that we are following, but there is also a preparation piece. With the committee recommendations, and Elections Canada itself doing a lot of consultation, it would be in a position to parallel the process and make sure that if an election was called during the pandemic, we would be able to hold a democratic and safe election.

• (1030)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am proud to be a member of the procedures and House affairs committee, which actually tabled a report just a month and a half ago regarding elections in Canada during the pandemic. I was very concerned when I saw this piece of legislation come out prior to the report. The report provided excellent information, including a recommendation not to have an election during a pandemic, yet we know that Liberal campaign offices are already set up in the GTA.

Can I ask this member of Parliament for his thoughts on when he thinks the election will be called by his government?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Madam Speaker, the most important thing is that our government's focus has remained, from the beginning, on making sure that we are keeping Canadians safe and that we are making sure they have the supports they need.

Our focus remains on making sure that we do that. As we look forward to the budget on April 19, our focus remains on Canadians' safety and on making sure that they have the support they need.

On the other hand, we all have to be ready for an election. That is the nature of a minority Parliament. We are doing our part. As the government, we are making sure that our focus remains on people, on Canadians, on their safety, and on making sure that they have support.

As elected members in a minority Parliament, our job is to be ready. The government is ready, and we have to be ready. Being ready is good.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, we heard several recommendations in committee, including one to hold the election over several days.

Holding the election on the weekend would make it easier to recruit election workers, especially young people, because the older people who usually work the polls may have more concerns about doing so.

What does the member think about the idea of holding the election on weekend days rather than on Mondays?

[English]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Madam Speaker, all the work that was done at the committee is not lost. The sooner we get this bill to the committee, the sooner we can take all of that into account.

Second, the reason we are proposing to extend it over three days is safety. We want to make sure that Canadians have an opportunity to effectively participate in a democratic process while we keep them safe. That is all it is.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I continue, I just want to remind members that whether someone is participating virtually or in the House, when that member has the floor, he or she should have the respect of their other colleagues in the House. Colleagues should make sure that there is no other debate going on in the House. If members wish to debate the issue at hand even if it is not their turn, I would ask them to wait, stand and try to be recognized, or if they want to have side conversations, that they step out of the chamber to do that, out of respect for all members of Parliament.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to speak to Bill C-19, which is an important initiative that would authorize Elections Canada to organize a safe election should one be called during this pandemic.

As we all know, COVID-19 has affected nearly every aspect of our lives. Canadians from coast to coast to coast have made and continue to make big sacrifices to protect one another. We have had to rethink things we once took for granted, things as simple as getting together with family for dinner.

Around the world, events have had to be cancelled or postponed. Nobody is happy about that, but these measures are essential to limiting the spread of the virus and, of course, saving lives. However, we also have to see to the health of our democratic institutions. We have to make sure that, if a general election were to take place during the pandemic, the whole process would be safe for voters, volunteers and, of course, election officials.

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A number of countries held general elections as planned, despite the pandemic, while others chose to postpone them instead. Several of the countries that proceeded with their elections implemented strict public health measures, such as mandatory masks, physical distancing, and the distribution of hand sanitizer and disposable gloves to voters.

Consider the example of South Korea, which was one of the first countries that held elections during the pandemic. This example proves that elections can be held safely during the pandemic, since there were no new infections linked to the election. Still, we must not bury our heads in the sand. Holding an election during a pandemic like the one we are currently experiencing will not be without challenges.

We are fortunate to have a world-class election administration agency here in Canada. For 100 years, Elections Canada has done an outstanding job of providing Canadians with the best possible service so they can choose who will have the honour of representing them in the House. I am confident that, if necessary, Elections Canada would conduct a safe election despite the pandemic. That being said, we have an opportunity to give it additional tools to better ensure the safety and health of voters and election workers.

Bill C-19, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act with regard to COVID-19 response, would accomplish exactly that temporarily and would be applicable only during this pandemic. It would allow Canadians to exercise their right to vote safely while maintaining the integrity of our electoral system.

First, we have to think about the most vulnerable among us, those who live in residences and in many of the long-term care facilities across the country who have been especially hard hit by COVID-19. The bill provides for a 13-day period before voting begins during which time returning officers can work with the facility directors to ensure that the people who live there can vote safely.

Second, the bill would grant an additional adaptation power to the Chief Electoral Officer to allow him to respond effectively to unforeseen circumstances caused by the pandemic. Currently, section 17 of the Canada Elections Act allows the Chief Electoral Officer to adapt provisions of this legislation to allow voters to vote or to allow the votes to be counted.

The proposed temporary measure would broaden the scope of section 17, allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to adapt the provisions of the legislation in order to ensure the health and safety of the voters and the election workers.

● (1035)

Third, to promote physical distancing and avoid overly long lines at the polls, Bill C-19 would create a three-day polling period consisting of a Saturday, Sunday and Monday. These two weekend days would add a total of 16 hours of voting to the 12 hours on Monday, which would allow voters to choose the most convenient time for them to vote. In addition to ensuring the safety of our voters, this measure would maximize opportunities for people to vote.

Last of all, given the success of mail-in voting here and elsewhere, the bill will empower the Chief Electoral Officer to improve access to this manner of voting in several ways.

Elections Canada estimates that up to five million voters could choose mail-in voting if elections were to take place during the pandemic. To meet this demand, the bill provides for the installation of secure reception boxes at the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and authorizes every polling station to receive online applications for mail-in ballots. The identification numbers will be accepted as proof of identity for these applications.

Furthermore, it would allow voters who have requested a mail-in ballot to change their minds and subsequently vote in person. Certain conditions are attached to this measure to protect the integrity of the electoral system.

In conclusion, this bill will give Elections Canada the useful tools required to safely administer an election during the pandemic. I invite my hon. colleagues to join me in supporting this bill.

● (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that we have Liberal members speaking to this bill, because from what I understand, the minister responsible for this legislation has actually sent a letter to the Conservatives saying that they really want this debate to collapse in only an hour.

We feel it is legitimate to have some debate on this issue in Parliament, but there seems to be a dissonance between what the minister responsible wants and what individual Liberal members are doing, since most of the time for debate today is being taken up by Liberal members giving speeches.

How does the member explain his decision to give a speech today at the same time that his government is telling everybody else not to speak because they want this debate to collapse?

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

It is quite evident that Liberal members do not want this debate to collapse. We are here to have discussions and the necessary debate that is required, and of course to move this legislation as quickly as possible to committee. The reason is clear: It is that we want to make sure we have a framework in place in the possibility of an election.

This government does not want an election, but as everybody in the House and all Canadians know, we are faced with a minority government. If an election happens, then we will deal with it, but we will have the framework to make it happen.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberal members keep saying they do not want to call an election in the middle of a pandemic, and of course the Prime Minister has that right. He can actually not call an election if he does not want to do so.

The truth of the matter is that in the middle of a pandemic, we should not be having an election. Will the member support that no election would be called unless there is a crisis situation, such as a budget not passing, for example, and that only on a confidence vote failing would an election be called?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, my colleague knows well that this government, since March 13 of last year, has been fully focused on this pandemic, this crisis at hand. We have focused on individuals, families and the business community. We have focused on Canadians, all Canadians. As she knows, we brought forward the CERB for individual Canadians, the wage subsidy to support not just businesses but also individuals working in those businesses, the business account and the Canada recovery benefit. We have supported various industries that are struggling harder in this pandemic than others.

This has been our focus, and we will continue to support Canadians, as we have done since we formed government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the existing legislation states that mail-in ballots must be received by voting day, but the proposed amendment indicates that the ballots could be received afterwards. Does the member think that this could create uncertainty in the results? In addition, does this provision show a lack of confidence in Canada Post, in some way a rejection?

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

We need to set the process up for success. I think that the option to spread the vote over three days could be a solution. We have learned a lot from this pandemic. We have identified the problems and figured out where to make improvements.

Elections Canada estimates that this measure could apply to five million votes, but it is highly likely that all votes will be submitted and counted on election day. At the very least, everyone will have the opportunity to have their say, and that is exactly what our government wants. We want to ensure that Canadians can vote and give them as many opportunities to do so as possible.

• (1045)

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-19, the election in a pandemic bill.

What I would say at the outset is that Canadians do not want an election in a pandemic. The only people who want an election in a pandemic are the Liberals, because they are putting their partisan interests over the health and safety of Canadians.

The polls reflect what I am saying. The polls on whether Canadians want an election, and when they want that election, show that 47% of Canadians want it in the fall of 2023, as it is scheduled, and 10% would want it in 2022. A full 70% of Liberal supporters want it in 2023.

The Prime Minister needs to listen to Canadians. We have seen the disastrous things that have happened in the country when B.C.

Government Orders

and Saskatchewan had their elections. There were huge spikes in COVID thereafter. I know some people believe that is only related to the Thanksgiving weekend, but the timing of the elections was very suspicious as well. We see what happened in Newfoundland and the fact that the COVID situation can change. We have seen that across the country. Regions can have spikes, and all of a sudden, they are in a difficult situation.

It is incumbent upon us as leaders to listen to Canadians, and to put their health and well-being first. First and foremost, I would say we need to do everything we can to not have an election in the middle of a pandemic. It is ridiculous to think that people cannot travel, but we could have a federal election, or that we would have areas on lockdown, but think it is okay to have a federal election. I cannot make the point too strongly that we must not, as leaders in this country, put people in jeopardy.

In terms of the proposed changes, I thought I would speak to those one at a time. The first change I want to talk about is extending the number of voting days to have voting periods on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The whole purpose of this legislation is to try to protect the people who are working the election and the voters. Every measure we could put in place that would allow more time and more spacing between people would be very helpful.

There was some discussion about whether there would be bus transportation on those weekend days in some areas. However, the fact that the traditional Monday is retained would address that concern.

There were also some concerns expressed about the fact that churches are operating, some on Saturday and some on Sunday, and that this might have an impact on polling locations. I think it would be incumbent on the government to consider changing the time the voting stations would be open on the Saturday and Sunday in order to not eliminate those locations that would have quite a bit of space and would be conducive to COVID protocols and that kind of separation.

The next change would be the granting of additional powers to the Chief Electoral Officer to do a number of things, such as extend vote times up to midnight, increase the number of election officers at a polling station, determine what is satisfactory proof of identity and residence, adjust the timeline of election tasks other than polling days, and do whatever is needed to address health and safety.

I understand that we need some flexibility because the COVID situation is dynamic, but there needs to be some kind of oversight in order to protect a tried and true democratic process. Canadians have confidence in our process, and I think potentially having the oversight of a member representative, for example, one from each party that is represented here in the House, might be a good way to get a balance between giving the electoral officer the ability to be flexible to react to COVID situations and making sure that any changes that are put in place are felt to be fair by all.

Government Orders

In terms of the voting hours being extended to midnight, the only concern I have there is that in some ridings, such as my own, many people working the polling stations are seniors. If they had to be up multiple nights until midnight, that could be taxing on them, especially in this difficult period. That is something to think about.

● (1050)

The changes would go into effect 90 days after royal assent, but the Chief Electoral Officer could accelerate that. In speaking to some of the returning officers across the country, they have already been trained on these changes, even before we have talked about it here in Parliament, which I do not think is acceptable. Certainly a conversation should be held with the Chief Electoral Officer as to how much time they need in order to make sure they would be prepared. That is something the committee could consider when the bill goes back there.

The writ period being slightly longer due to the additional days is not necessarily a bad thing because, with all of the mail-in ballots we expect to see, perhaps an increase from the current 50,000 to five million or even 10 million, we need to make sure there is enough time to get those ballots out to people who request them, and for them to mail them back.

We know with the volumes we see around Christmas that sometimes there are delays with Canada Post, so that is a consideration. I would strongly recommend that we go to the longer electoral writ period. I certainly think that was the testimony of the Chief Electoral Officer and many of the stakeholders that were heard at PROC.

Another change would be that the location of polls could be changed as long as it is published on the chief electoral web page. We need to be very careful with that one to make sure that people do not get confused about where they need to go to vote.

Having reception boxes installed at each of the polling stations to receive mail-in ballots is a very good idea. This is going to make sure that people who have left it too late or are concerned that the ballot may not arrive in time through Canada Post because of the volume can go to the nearby polling station and deposit those mail-in ballots. This is something that was tried in the B.C. election and was very successful. I really think it is a great idea.

In terms of allowing mail-in ballots to be counted after the election if the Monday is a holiday, I would say that we have a tried and true election process. Canadians have confidence in it. We do not have the same issues they have in other places, and we have to be very careful not to make any changes that are not needed in order to protect people from the COVID-19 pandemic. With the measures such as ballot boxes at the different polling stations for late mail-in ballots and things like that, this is really not something that is needed.

Allowing an electronic application for the mail-in ballot is something that people will want. The only thing that needs to be considered is the fact that many people, some of whom are seniors, will not necessarily have a printer with which they can photocopy their ID when they have to mail back their package. Some consideration of how that is going to be addressed from the point of view of capacity would be good as well.

As to long-term care institutions, we heard testimony at PROC that they were looking for the minimum amount of time and the minimum amount of interaction to minimize the risk from COVID. The legislation says that there will be 13 days for voting in long-term care, but not to exceed 28 hours. That is really much longer than what the long-term care folks wanted. They had envisioned people from Elections Canada coming in to potentially administer the vote from room to room to room for those who did not choose a mail-in ballot.

In addition, some of the folks I have spoken to have said that, should there be an election in a pandemic, they would want to make sure that the people working the election could have priority access to getting vaccinated, if they so choose, before the actual voting days. That is another consideration.

Rapid tests was another topic discussed. The use of rapid tests to ensure confidence that those going into the long-term care facilities did not add risk would be something to consider as well.

In terms of things that were not considered in this legislation that should be fixed or added, the sunset clause is in the summary, but it is not in the bill. There should be some statement that says whether we want these changes to be permanent, or whether we want these changes to fade after the pandemic is over, or some kind of provision like that.

● (1055)

I appreciated the point made about collection of signatures by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, with candidates being required to have those 100 signatures, and that in a pandemic it is probably not the best idea. It is going to be more difficult to do.

We should be looking at all the procedures related to candidates. Scrutineering would be another one. It is not clear in the legislation how we are going to do that, but one of the things that gives people confidence in the process is that there are scrutineers. If they have to stand six feet away from people, logistically, will they be able to see the ballots? How will we address that?

Concerning these mail-in ballots, I understand there was an error in the legislation and that the English version says something different from the French version, and that the Speaker clarified that the French version was correct. The local returning office is going to be where those mail-in ballots go. Depending on the volume there, how many people will be needed to scrutineer? Those details are not in the legislation, and so certainly that is a consideration to keep in mind to maintain the high confidence Canadians have in the electoral process.

We want to make sure that the mechanism to prevent double voting is in place. With the local returning offices being involved, they will then have a very easy way to take the voter's list and, once people have requested a mail-in ballot, to make sure that unless the mail-in ballot is returned, they would not be able to vote at the polling stations as well, and that sort of thing. That would be very important.

The main thing about this bill is that we want to protect the workers and the voters, and we want to do that in a way that continues to uphold the confidence that Canadians have in the electoral process in Canada.

I am a little disappointed that the Liberals introduced this legislation without waiting for the report from the PROC committee. That committee heard testimony from a lot of different kinds of people, from the disabled to our first nations people, on a lot of the specific considerations that would be needed to fine-tune this process and make sure it is suitable for every Canadian to have equal access to vote. To make sure that the process is well understood, one of the considerations when it comes to implementing a change is that the changes have to be well understood, or there will be confusion and people may not want to vote.

Let me just summarize again that Canadians do not want an election during the pandemic. They have been clear about that. We need to do everything that we can. I see committees being filibustered and some of the antics that are going on, which slow down the work that committees are trying to do. That is not helpful. We need to work together, as Parliament, and get through this pandemic. That has to be the priority and it behooves us to make that the case.

The additional thing I wanted to talk about was the changes for health and wellness. I do not think we have enough definition around that and the additional powers with the electoral officer. That will need some consideration when this goes to committee.

It is worth hearing from some of the stakeholders again to better define things like the long-term care facilities and how we are going to do that, especially with those on lockdown. What are we going to do in that scenario? There is more conversation to be held, but I see my time is up.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have just a little over six minutes to continue her speech the next time this matter is before the House.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week I had the privilege of being part of a historic announcement in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. Our government introduced an investment of \$56 million in the responsible development of small modular reactor technology, including an investment in Moltex Energy.

Statements by Members

Our government is committed to net-zero emissions by 2050, and this cannot happen without our deep commitment to developing SMR technology across the country. These projects will help us to continue to build a highly skilled workforce at home, in New Brunswick, as well as continue to advance new foundational technology. This is an investment not only for our future, but also for the future of our kids and grandkids, who will ultimately face the consequences of something very real: climate change.

I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes science and invests in it.

* * *

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, mankind has yet to step foot on planet Mars, but thanks to the innovation and work spearheaded by Manitoba's Mark Wahoski, my constituency is leading the way.

Based in the rural community of Minnedosa, Manitoba, Canadian Photonic Labs has been working with NASA on its Mars exploration program. Its high-speed imaging technology has been used extensively for research and development, along with the testing of the mission's critical events. As a result, the Perseverance rover successfully landed on the red planet earlier this year. This successful mission would not have been possible without the technology developed by Canadian Photonic Labs.

I congratulate Mark Wahoski and everyone else who worked tirelessly on this Canadian success story. Their contributions in science and technology are out of this world. Mission accomplished.

* * *

NOWRUZ

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the start of spring signals the start of the new year for the Ismaili community. As an Ismaili Canadian serving in the House of Commons, I take great pride in wishing fellow Ismailis across the country, and indeed around the world, *Nowruz Mubarak*.

With the start of the new year, we obviously reflect on the one that has just passed. COVID-19 has presented incredible challenges not just for Ismailis, but for all Canadians. What I have been most impressed by is their resilience. The Ismaili community stepped up in its commitment to serving others by providing essential medical services, working on the front lines and, most importantly, looking after Canada's seniors. This has been a shining example of the model of *seva*, or volunteerism, that His Highness the Aga Khan teaches about. The arrival of a new year always brings a sense of hope and optimism, never more so than this year as vaccines roll out and we work to build back from COVID-19.

To all Ismailis celebrating this week, I wish them *Nowruz Mubarak*. May the new year bring them and their families health, happiness and prosperity.

*Statements by Members***VICTORIA**

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, through all the immense hardships of this year, I have been heartened to see people in the community of Victoria pulling together to support each other.

The opioid crisis and toxic drug supply have been devastating. This is why the North Park community came together with a free drug testing site. The Vancouver Island drug checking project operates anonymous testing for anyone who needs it.

Many local businesses have been struggling, but through the building back Victoria initiative, Broad Street businesses came together and found a way to thrive by creating a pedestrian zone with outdoor seating where people can gather safely, with hopes it can become a permanent public space.

I am proud to share that last week, the Victoria Admirals U13 team was named champions of the Good Deeds Cup, awarded to the Canadian youth hockey team that does the most to give back to its community. The \$100,000 prize will go to the Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island. I say "Well done" to the Admirals.

The pandemic is not over. We still have difficult months ahead, but these community members show us that we can get through this together.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA-QUEBEC OPERATION HIGH SPEED

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Monday, our government partnered with Quebec to announce something great. A joint investment of over \$826 million will enable us to achieve our ambitious goal of connecting all Quebecers to high-speed Internet by fall 2022.

Canada-Quebec Operation High Speed will funnel \$147.4 million to my region, the Outaouais, to connect 29,000 households across the Pontiac, Vallée-de-la-Gatineau, Collines-de-l'Outaouais, Petite Nation and Gatineau.

This unprecedented new investment signals that regional Internet access is a priority for me as an MP, for Quebec, for Canada and for all Quebecers and Canadians.

• (1105)

[*English*]

The Outaouais region will receive more funds than other region in Quebec, connecting more homes and businesses than any other in Quebec. There will be \$147 million to connect 29,000 homes by September 2022—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam.

* * *

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am deeply disturbed by the recent Atlanta spa shootings that took eight lives, six of whom were of Asian women. Denying

the racial component of this heinous crime undermines the reality of anti-Asian bigotry. With COVID-19 lockdowns, Vancouver alone has seen a 717% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes. Many are unreported for fear of reprisal, but COVID-19 has only exposed the undercurrents of pre-existing prejudice. From the building of the railroad to head taxes, anti-Asian racism has historical roots in Canada, and members of the Chinese and Korean Canadian communities in B.C. have shared with me their frustrations with perpetrators getting away with racist attacks, while they privately deal with anxiety and trauma.

I can personally testify that it can take years to undo the feelings of being an outsider and the turmoil caused by racism, so today I stand in solidarity with all who are struggling because of racism, and I am committed to promoting awareness and helping victims find their justice.

* * *

WOMEN'S SHELTERS

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize the exceptional work of women's shelters in our riding, which offer support and comfort to the people who are victims of domestic violence. We have amazing teams of advocates here and across Canada who are always available and ready to help these victims. It take my hat off to L'Escale MadaVic and Maison Notre Dame for their amazing contribution in helping to fight domestic violence. The constant and immediate needs of organizations that provide gender-based services have been demonstrated, especially throughout this pandemic. Our government has invested \$100 million across the country in support of these services, and for my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche alone, that represents over \$252,000.

Again, I thank L'Escale MadaVic and Maison Notre Dame and their boards of directors, employees and volunteers for offering comfort and security to these families in need of help.

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GILBERT SEWELL

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life and acknowledge the passing of Elder Gilbert Sewell. A highly respected member of Pabineau First Nation, Elder Sewell is an excellent example of someone who dedicated his life to the pursuit and sharing of knowledge.

[*Translation*]

He was a historian, a storyteller and a traditional guide, but his greatest passion was sharing his knowledge and passing it down to future generations.

[English]

He touched many people with his knowledge, from his efforts to organize Mi'kmaq cultural events at local schools to having audiences with British royalty or to being featured on many well-known TV programs. His passion was recognized with several awards, including the New Brunswick Human Rights Award, the Canadian Merit Award and the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Medal. It is no exaggeration to say that Elder Sewell's teaching will help ensure that Mi'kmaq traditional knowledge and language will live on for generations to come.

I thank his family and loved ones for sharing this great man with us, and I hope they know that our thoughts are with them during this difficult time.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, businesses have been hit hard, in particular fitness and martial arts, including two entrepreneurs in Kelowna—Lake Country. Michelle, SPINCO indoor cycling studio's founder, says, "The pandemic has been very tough on our business, as we have been completely closed for the better part of a year, having taken on a lot of debt we did not anticipate. Our franchisees are local female entrepreneurs, and in some cases are not eligible for support programs."

Jordan owns Pacific Top Team Martial Arts academy. At a great loss, he had to close one of his four locations, because it was opened just prior to the pandemic, making it not eligible for government programs. He describes his situation and that of many others in his industry as "suffering". Health orders are provincial jurisdiction. However, there has been a lack of federal leadership on every aspect of the pandemic for a year now.

It was disappointing that the Liberals voted down a Conservative motion this week calling on the government to introduce a data-driven COVID reopening plan to gradually, safely and permanently lift restrictions, as other countries have.

* * *

● (1110)

PASSOVER

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, tomorrow evening marks the beginning of Passover. In my riding of York Centre, across Canada and around the world, millions of Jewish families will observe a millenia-old tradition, retelling the story of Exodus at the Seder table. Some of us this year may be celebrating alone, and others will be celebrating with family members on Zoom, together yet apart. Though we cannot gather this year, the story of Passover, of triumph over hardship and liberation from oppression is a timeless reminder of the lessons that guide us through our challenges today. The spirit of our communities in overcoming the pandemic and working together to protect our most vulnerable gives us reason to celebrate. It is a community that is strong, resilient and compassionate and truly an important part of the rich and diverse tapestry of Canada.

Statements by Members

As we see vaccinations increasing in anticipation of an end to the pandemic, the arrival of Passover, the holiday of spring, *Chag ha'Aviv* reassures us in the hope that perhaps a timely, modern, but temporary rewording of the *Chad Gadya* is appropriate this year. Next year—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

* * *

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, there has been an alarming rise in discrimination and racism against Canadians of Asian descent. Asians have been attacked in public, yelled at, spat at and subjected to online hate and discrimination, just for being Asian.

It is clear that despite the tremendous progress we have made as Canadians in recent decades to combat racism and discrimination and to build a society where Canadians of all races, religions and creeds can live freely, more work needs to be done.

I am proud of being of Asian descent and proud of the contributions our community has made to the building of this country, including the sacrifices made in constructing the railway that laid the basis of the country through Confederation. I am proud of the contributions we continue to make in law, medicine, science, the arts, business and politics.

Let us all in this House and as Canadians come together to denounce this racism and discrimination and build a better Canada.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the agriculture minister pretends to support farmers, but in reality is negligent when needed most.

The minister is complicit in saddling producers with the farm-killing carbon tax and voted against exempting grain drying from the carbon tax, and the Liberals are increasing this tax by 33% next week, which will further devastate Canadian agriculture.

When farm groups asked for \$2.6 billion in COVID support, she offered just \$125 million and told farmers to drain their AgraInvest accounts, money they did not have. This is hard to accept when the Liberals spent \$250 million on the Asian infrastructure bank and \$225 million on quarantine hotels.

Statements by Members

At the FPT meeting yesterday, the minister had a chance to support farmers, but, once again, she walked away and took \$75 million with her. Instead of offering support, the Liberals are hiking carbon taxes and withholding \$75 million from Canadian farm families.

The Conservatives can be counted on to unleash agriculture's true potential and get Canada's economy growing again.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are in a housing crisis in Canada. Many people are finding it very difficult to secure a roof over their heads, and it is often impossible for people who find themselves homeless through mental illness or addiction.

I have been very proud of the hard work and collaboration of various groups in my home town of Penticton to find and build homes for the homeless as well as housing for low-income families and seniors. The Government of British Columbia has really stepped up in the last four years as well. It has been impressive, but it has not been perfect. We have hit a bump in the road as projects for people who need wraparound services have caused concern in the community.

This is not the time for verbal sparring. This is not the time to say that this cannot be done. However, it is a time to sit down with those who know the needs of the homeless community, to listen to neighbourhood concerns and to find the funding and solutions that ensure neighbours feel safe and that no one will be left out on the street.

* * *

[Translation]

INVISIBLE WORK DAY

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, today I would like to draw your attention to an important campaign to promote Invisible Work Day, which was established in 2011 by the Association f eminine d' ducation et d'action sociale, or Afeas.

In 2010, thanks to the work of Bloc Qu b cois MP Nicole Demers, a motion received the unanimous support of the House to designate the first Tuesday in April as a day to reflect on this important issue. Ever since, this day has remained invisible, so to speak. The pandemic was a wake-up call: It exposed the nature of this work as a result of the lockdown, school and work going on-line, additional workload for family caregivers, and much more.

I would like to congratulate Afeas and the inter-organizational committee for everything they have done to mobilize the public and decision-makers to recognize and value invisible work, which adds so much to women's mental load. Invisible work counts.

• (1115)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris-Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, after over two years without a federal budget, Canadians are looking for some security and certainty for the future, especially when it comes to jobs. The Prime Minister seems to think that he and his government somehow know what is best for the people of my home province of Saskatchewan and all Canadians across the country. His Ottawa-knows-best approach to his economic reset will do absolutely nothing to help hard-working Canadians who just want to pay their bills and put food on the table. Canadians want a hand up, not a handout. Thankfully, there are other options.

We Conservatives have put forward Canada's recovery plan, which would enact a comprehensive strategy to put Canadians back to work across the country. We will secure jobs, secure accountability, secure mental health, secure the country and secure our economy. Unlike the Liberals, we will focus on the hardest-hit sectors, such as small business. We will work to ensure that Canada provides the necessary incentives needed to create an environment that encourages investment, rather than hinders it, in all industries for all Canadians.

* * *

PURPLE DAY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today is Purple Day, a day dedicated to increasing awareness about epilepsy, a neurological disorder of the central nervous system, specifically the brain.

My friend Cassidy Megan created the idea of Purple Day in 2008, motivated by her own struggles with epilepsy. Since then, Purple Day has continued to grow and has helped to dispel myths, reduce stigma and help those living with epilepsy know they are not alone.

In 2012, I was delighted when Parliament gave unanimous support to my private member's bill, Bill C-278, an act respecting a day to increase public awareness about epilepsy. The bill became law, making March 26 officially Purple Day in Canada. Now, each year on this date, people on every continent and in over 70 countries wear purple and host events in support of people with epilepsy.

This cause is very important to me, and I am so proud of Cassidy Megan for her ongoing work to grow Purple Day and raise global awareness of epilepsy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General issued a scathing report yesterday. She said she was discouraged by how the government handled matters pertaining to the border a year ago.

What matters most to Canadians right now is vaccine supply. We know that India has cut off the supply. We know that the European Union has tightened measures. Canada needs vaccines.

What is the government's plan? More importantly, what kind of delays can Canadians expect?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, of course we are thrilled to have reached our target of securing six million doses in the first quarter, and those doses are already here. On top of that, we expect another three million doses to arrive next week.

We did experience a slight delay with one supplier due to internal quality control concerns, but we are determined to maintain the momentum when it comes to importing and supplying vaccines for all Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, to be mindful and, more importantly, credible, one needs to be consistent. However, what happened is that the government said one thing and then the opposite in a very short time.

On Wednesday, the procurement minister told the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates that the government did not expect any interruption in the deliveries from Europe. However, yesterday, the same minister issued a press release in which she said that we will not be getting the Moderna vaccines this weekend as expected, but that they will be arriving next week instead. Whom should we believe, Wednesday's minister or Thursday's minister?

• (1120)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the minister did in fact issue a press release yesterday saying that she had just been informed that the company in question was experiencing quality control issues. As a result, there will be slight delay of just a few days in the arrival of approximately 600,000 doses in Canada.

Next week, we will receive three million doses to distribute to the provinces and territories, which will enable us to continue providing vaccines to Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is our answer. The Thursday minister is correct, not the Wednesday minister.

The fact of the matter is that when there are vaccine supply problems, fewer Canadians get vaccinated, which further delays the re-opening of the economy. That is why this issue is so important.

Oral Questions

The government did not negotiate assurances with the suppliers and that is why Canada is lagging behind. Does the government realize that its failures are delaying the reopening?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague by saying that the government monitors vaccine supply and the arrival of vaccine doses.

That is why we were able to move up delivery of nearly two million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, including 1.5 million doses from the United States next week through our agreement with the U.S. government. We have proven that we can acquire vaccine doses and move up their delivery and that is what we will continue to do.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for the government.

At the same time as the trial of Mr. Spavor was taking place last Friday in northern China and at the same time as the trial of Mr. Kovrig was taking place in Beijing last Monday, the government transferred \$40 million to the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China's attempt to expand its influence throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Why is the government not using every tool at its disposal, including the suspension of this payment, to secure the release of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our number one priority at the moment is to secure the release of two Canadians, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig who have been arbitrarily detained on trumped-up charges by the Chinese government, and we will spare no effort to get their safe return home. We will continue to point out that China is practising an unacceptable diplomacy by engaging in arbitrary detention.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government says that it likes to work multilaterally but often does not when given the chance.

In 2015, President Obama and Vice-President Biden asked the government not to join the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Now, several years later, it is clear President Biden was right about China's threats in Indo-Pacific, and Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor are paying the price.

Will the government admit it made a mistake, suspend these payments and withdraw from the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we do indeed work with our allies when we want to bring up extremely serious problems that are occurring with China, namely the issue of arbitrary detention and the gross violations of human rights that are occurring in Xinjiang with the Uighurs and other ethnic minorities. We will work with our partners, multilaterally in a coordinated fashion, to bring these extremely important issues to the attention of China, and we will continue to do so until those problems are resolved.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Canadian Medical Association announced that health care costs for seniors are projected to reach \$490 billion over the next 10 years. That \$490 billion is just for elder care. It does not include care for children, care for people with serious illnesses or mental health care. I could go on all day. That is exactly why, in tabling its budget yesterday, Quebec reiterated that Ottawa needs to increase health transfers to cover 35% of expenditures.

When will the government stop ignoring the fact that health care needs are skyrocketing?

• (1125)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to answer this question.

Members know that the Prime Minister has met with all provincial and territorial premiers. They have spoken about health care. Work is under way.

The federal government has invested half a billion dollars to help seniors and other Canadians get the essential services they need, such as grocery deliveries. We allocated an additional \$20 million for the New Horizons program, \$350 million for organizations and \$9 million for the United Way.

I could go on, but we have been there for seniors and we will always be there for them.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe it. The figure is \$490 billion, yet he spoke about \$20 million and \$500 million. I am not at all reassured.

Ottawa is making cuts to health care, as everyone has pointed out, including the Canadian Medical Association, the Conference Board of Canada, the Council of the Federation, the Quebec National Assembly, the unions, and even the House of Commons.

Quebec demonstrated this once again in its budget yesterday by investing another \$10 billion while the federal share continues to decline. Its share was 50%, but it will dwindle to less than 18% within 20 years. The Liberals must stop repeating that they are there for Quebec and the provinces. Quebec and the provinces are saying the opposite.

When will they do their part?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

As I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister is in constant communication with the premiers of every province and territory. That topic has been discussed. The Prime Minister has made a commitment to work on this file.

We will continue our work on behalf of our seniors, our citizens. We are also taking steps to promptly pay out the Canada pension plan and old age security benefits that seniors rely on. We are investing millions of dollars to process new applications as quickly as possible.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General of Canada unequivocally stated that the Public Health Agency of Canada failed to fulfill its mandate during this pandemic.

Because of underfunding under Liberal and Conservative governments, the agency underestimated the impact of COVID-19 and was not ready to protect Canadians. The agency did not even keep the public properly informed in both official languages, thereby violating francophones' language rights and jeopardizing their safety.

Will the Liberals remedy the situation and give the agency and the public service the resources to protect us from another pandemic?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have a huge debt of gratitude to the civil servants who have worked so hard throughout the pandemic to protect Canadians.

In fact, the Public Health Agency of Canada has expanded by more than 1,000 employees, including 150 new scientists. There is \$690.7 million invested in PHAC over two years in the fall 2020 economic statement.

I look forward to the member opposite's support for passing Bill C-14.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General's report clearly shows that the federal government's pandemic response failed Canadians. Issues were flagged as far back as 1999, and emphasized after the 2003 SARS and 2009 H1N1 outbreaks, yet the Public Health Agency of Canada failed to address these long-standing problems. It is inconceivable that Canada used risk assessment tools for domestic outbreaks when it was clear at the outset that this was an international one.

How can the Liberals justify these kinds of errors, and will the minister assure Canadians that she will fix the many problems highlighted by this report so that Canada is never in this position?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that we can never be in this position again. That is why we are committing over \$690 million in the fall economic statement.

I look forward to the member's support for the passage of Bill C-14. This is, of course, an investment in the Public Health Agency of Canada, to continue its hard work. As I have mentioned, it has added well over 1,000 employees since the beginning of the pandemic, and we will stop at nothing to ensure we have a world-class public health agency.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Defence said he cannot involve himself in investigations, but Wednesday the minister ordered the chief of the defence staff to review an investigation that just closed.

The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service told committee that the minister can absolutely refer investigations to them.

Can the minister appreciate that to many serving women, these different responses could be perceived as hypocritical and inconsistent?

• (1130)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has asked Lieutenant-General Eyre to review how this matter was handled.

Let me be clear, the minister has not directed any investigation. Drawing an elected official, a politician, into the sequence of an investigation would have been wrong and dangerous. Politicizing any investigation threatens a just outcome for those who come forward.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister has said he referred the matter to the Privy Council for investigation. The Prime Minister's national security adviser, who would have handled it, said he was never even made aware of allegations against General Vance.

The minister has said the ombudsman should have investigated, but current ombudsman Greg Lick told the committee yesterday that Gary Walbourne acted exactly the way an ombudsman should.

What lessons has the minister personally learned from this failure to investigate, and what actions has he taken to ensure the same mistakes do not happen again?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we have said, the minister followed the proper processes.

When the former ombudsman came to the minister, he brought the matter to the Privy Council Office, which reached out to the former ombudsman the very next day to obtain the information to start an investigation, but that information was not provided.

The former national security adviser was not part of that process, because if the Conservatives had actually read the entire email, he said that this was not necessarily unusual, particularly if PCO se-

Oral Questions

nior personnel were not able to obtain information that would have allowed and warranted the pursuit of an investigation.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General says the Liberals failed and put Canadians' well-being, safety and the economy at risk.

They delayed closing the borders when they should have, but were still unprepared. The border is in chaos. Agents cannot keep up with changes. The public safety minister still has not delivered training that he promised.

This week the Liberals voted against our call for a data-driven plan to get life and paycheques back to normal. How can Canada reopen safely with this ongoing incompetence and uncertainty?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the Auditor General for her report. The Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, accepts the Auditor General's recommendations and will take concerted action to implement them. The CBSA will continue to examine the findings and recommendations in the Auditor General's report and use them to guide its future activities.

I can assure the opposition member that a number of mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that border services officers have all of the information they need to do their job properly in these unprecedented circumstances.

[English]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the U.S.-Canada border moves \$2 billion a day in goods that are crucial to Canada's economy.

For these essential workers, it is a gamble. They are told they are exempt by public health but are overturned by border agents and could even get a \$3,000 fine, while the NHL and elites get special treatment. An Ontarian who has crossed between auto plants for 20 years says it depends on which customs agent they ask.

I wrote asking for clear answers, but the public safety and health ministers cannot decide who is in charge.

The U.S. and U.K. have recovery plans. Where is Canada's plan to secure our future?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that important question.

I would remind the House that in response to the pandemic and the closure of the Canada-U.S. border, for example for non-essential travel, the CBSA has expanded its support to frontline border services officers beyond what is required by current operational bulletins and guidelines. Officers now have direct access to support services 24 hours a day.

To ensure that officers understand all the border measures in place, the CBSA has also held information sessions to explain the order clearly so that all relevant information is available to officers.

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*[English]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, in a scathing report yesterday, the Auditor General confirmed what the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been saying all along: The Liberal government has no idea what it is doing when it comes to infrastructure. It let \$9 billion lapse and it does not have basic accountability measures in place. It has no idea if its plan is even working. This is bad news for communities looking forward to new, important projects, and the billions of dollars in lost projects due to lapsed funds is bad news for workers who have missed out on three construction seasons.

Why should Canadians believe that the Liberal government will get anything built in the future when it cannot do it now?

• (1135)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, through the investing in Canada plan, we committed over \$180 billion over 12 years to infrastructure that benefits Canadians: from public transit to trading ports, broadband networks to energy systems and community services to natural spaces. Five years into the plan, we have already invested \$81 billion in over 67,000 projects, with 90% of them completed or under way.

My goal has always been to ensure multiple benefits from every dollar spent. That means jobs and growing the economy. That means more inclusive communities and that also means climate change. I certainly hope the party opposite supports that.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General found that half of the Liberal government's \$188-billion program, over \$90 billion, actually comes from the previous Conservative government's plan. The Liberals are putting their name on our homework. They cannot even track the money they have spent, and 20% of the department's funds are not even getting out the door. That is \$9 billion shuffled around the department. Construction workers were counting on those funds to get their jobs back.

Can the minister explain why she allowed \$9 billion to get lost in her own department instead of getting shovels in the ground?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to tell the member opposite that we have been able to approve, through my department alone, close to 2,000 projects over the past year. That is getting shovels in the ground. That is creating jobs. That is getting growth, tackling climate change and building more inclusive communities.

We can talk to any mayor or city councillor across the country to learn how these projects are improving lives in their communities, from Canadian-made electric buses in Brampton to the new McLoughlin Point Wastewater Treatment Plant on Vancouver Island.

What Canadians want to know about is this. During the last election the Conservative Party said it was going to cut infrastructure spending. Will it do that again?

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*[Translation]***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, today Quebec is lifting the lockdown on performing arts. This is our vaccine against despair. Performance venues can reopen, even in red zones.

The Bloc Québécois is therefore making six urgent proposals to ensure predictability and security for the cultural sector. Ottawa needs to create a stimulus fund to guarantee the viability of reopening performance venues and resuming cultural events. Creators need direct support in order to create things to present on stage. Ottawa must help Quebec City make up for the various financial losses experienced in the creative sector because of distancing, including at the box office.

We are reaching out to the minister. What is he going to do?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

We have invested in and are providing support to the performing arts, because we recognize how important they are. We recently provided an additional \$181 million in ongoing support.

We know this is important, and we are here for the performing arts.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, that is not enough. We know that the Canada recovery benefit, or the CRB, does not work for more than 40% of artists.

Ottawa has to support the recovery of the arts. In the meantime, 40% of artists and artisans are considering changing their career or are suffering a major depression. Festivals and events need support for their lost revenue. Federal assistance programs need to be more flexible. Spectators need to be encouraged through tax credits and safer health protocols. Attendance needs to be encouraged. Concert halls are bravely reopening in a climate of uncertainty. The Bloc Québécois is reaching out.

What is the minister—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this year far too many workers in Canada's cultural sector have been denied their work, their passion and the stability they need to create and interact with their audience.

We want them to know that their government understands the extent of their challenges and knows that ongoing support is necessary. We have \$181.5 million in funding. We are acting in the interest of artists and workers in Canada's cultural sector. We will continue to work with them to address the job losses in the sector and stimulate creativity.

* * *

• (1140)

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, the coalition of hardest hit announced that 60% of Canada's hardest hit businesses will not make it to the end of the year if they do not receive extended support in the upcoming April federal budget. The coalition is asking for certainty from the federal government by way of extending both the Canadian emergency wage subsidy and the Canadian emergency rent subsidy to the end of this calendar year.

Will the government commit to these critical measures now, or will these businesses be forced to continue to wait for the clarity and certainty they so badly need?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from the outset of this pandemic we understood that COVID-19 created immense costs for businesses, particularly in some of the sectors that were hardest hit. That is why we moved quickly to establish support programs that would help them keep the doors open and help their workers keep food on the table.

We recently announced that we were extending some of these emergency support programs, such as the wage subsidy, to the end of June, and we will continue to be there for businesses, no matter what it takes and as long as it takes, to see them through this pandemic.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is all well and good to talk about economic recovery, but to make it happen we will have to find a solution to the labour shortage in certain regions of the country.

How can our entrepreneurs produce, build and innovate if they do not have the labour needed to fulfill their orders? When will the government reply to the many employers in Beauce who have been waiting for months to let the foreign workers they recruited themselves enter the country? What is it doing to facilitate the inter-regional movement of workers in Canada to meet the needs in regions such as Beauce?

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government recognizes the integral role foreign workers play in Canada's agriculture and seafood sectors. We have streamlined requirements and introduced priority processing for applications and work permits in these sectors. We have also launched a temporary measure that allows workers already in Canada to start a new job while their permanent application is being processed.

While COVID-19 has presented unique challenges to Canada's job market, we continue to support workers, employers and our provincial partners to ensure the continued strength of Canada's food sector and supply chain.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Madam Speaker, SaskTel is the largest phone company and Internet service provider in the province of Saskatchewan. Last week, the Government of Saskatchewan announced that this Crown corporation will not be using Huawei to develop the province's 5G network. Instead, SaskTel has decided to go with Samsung, a South Korean firm.

If the provincial government of Saskatchewan can say no to Huawei, then why can this government not do so?

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is going to continue to ensure that Canadian networks are kept safe and secure. We have been saying this for months. Canadians can be assured that we are not going to compromise on matters of national security, and while we are never going to comment on specific companies, an examination of the emerging 5G technology and associated security and economic considerations is under way.

We are going to keep relying on our experts. We are going to keep relying on our international considerations with our allies and we are going to make the best decisions for Canadians in due course.

*Oral Questions***SPORT**

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wrote to the Minister of Canadian Heritage four months ago regarding substantiated claims of harassment, verbal abuse and intolerance levied against the Canada Artistic Swimming team's coaching staff by athletes on the team, including Cassie, an athlete and a constituent. It has been four months, and there is no answer. No coaches have been fired and there have been no apologies to the athletes, but Cassie deserves an answer.

The Artistic Swimming NSO is funded by Sport Canada, so what is the heritage minister going to do to fix this awful situation?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been in touch with athletes and I have been in touch with officials, and we understand that Artistic Swimming has taken measures to address these complaints. We are also working very hard on an independent safe sport mechanism, which will be implemented in the coming weeks and months.

Sport Canada has had the opportunity to speak with Canada Artistic Swimming regarding these allegations, and the government is working hard with the sport community to establish these mechanisms as quickly as possible.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, under the Liberal government, Canada is not back. Canada has dropped to 75th place in the list of countries contributing to peacekeeping efforts. Canada's official development assistance is lower than it was under Stephen Harper's Conservatives. Perhaps most shocking of all is that today, on the sixth anniversary of the conflict in Yemen, a humanitarian crisis that has been described as the worst place on earth, Canada continues to sell arms to Saudi Arabia.

Why is the government continuing to fuel one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world?

● (1145)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I had the honour of participating in the pledging conference for Yemen a couple of weeks ago, and Canada actually increased its humanitarian assistance.

With respect to official development assistance, we increased it by over \$1.7 billion last year alone, and we have been stepping up in the fight when it comes to COVID-19. We are responding to humanitarian needs around the world, including in Yemen, and we will continue to do so.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, recently media coverage has revealed that several hate-based anti-LGBTQIA2S+ and 45 anti-choice groups have received the Canada emergency wage subsidy. In 2018, the Prime Minister

stated that organizations with an explicit goal of reversing a woman's right to choose would not qualify for any federal funding.

Will the government revoke funding to groups with goals that are harmful to Canadians?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, at the outset of this pandemic we made a decision to extend supports to ensure that workers remained on payroll, and we did not discriminate as to which kind of employer the employees worked for. We wanted to ensure that families could continue to keep food on the table.

However, from the very beginning of this pandemic, one of the strengths of our response has been our willingness to iterate and consider how we can change programs to ensure they meet the needs of Canadians. I look forward to continuing to see these programs evolve and I would be happy to have a follow-up conversation with the hon. member about this most recent concern.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was joined by the Minister of Canadian Heritage to meet with the Gwich'in Tribal Council recipients of the indigenous language and cultures program to learn about indigenous language projects in the Northwest Territories. Thanks to the funding received, the Gwich'in Tribal Council was able to deliver 2,700 hours of Language Nest programming and 224 hours of language and culture classes in Gwich'in, as well as produce copies of textbooks and teaching guides in Gwich'in and English.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell this House what the government is doing to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen indigenous languages?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member for Northwest Territories for his work in supporting indigenous languages.

Budget 2019 provided \$337.7 million over five years and \$115.7 million ongoing to support the preservation, promotion and revitalization of indigenous languages. When we formed government in 2015, this amount was only \$5 million per year for all languages in communities across the country. With this investment through budget 2019, we were able to fund 337 language activities across communities.

We are continuing to work hard and work in partnership

HEALTH

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals must act on the EU's latest COVID-19 vaccine export measures. Canada is the second-largest recipient of EU-produced vaccines, and we could be a target. Since January, when this first emerged, the Liberals have not obtained a written exemption for Canada, as nearly 100 other countries have done. In his call earlier this week with the European commission president, the Prime Minister failed to receive assurance that Canada is exempt from these measures.

Can the trade minister guarantee that Canada will not see a reduction in our vaccine imports?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out a couple of facts.

The 92 countries remaining on the exemption list for these new EU measures are all low-income countries. There is not a single high-income country on that list. Furthermore, as the member should know by now, not a single one of our vaccine shipments from the European Union has been blocked or delayed because of these new EU export measures.

Anyone familiar with the political situation in Europe at the moment understands that Canada is not the intended target, nor are Moderna or Pfizer vaccines—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

* * *

• (1150)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again, the Liberals are dragging their feet.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer released a scathing report, the costs and delays associated with the national shipbuilding strategy are ballooning and the Auditor General's report is sounding the alarm.

We urgently need a polar icebreaker now because the race to the Arctic for its natural resources and navigation is on.

When will the Liberals award the construction contract for the *Diefenbaker* icebreaker instead of putting it off indefinitely?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague was a member of the government that restricted the national shipbuilding strategy to just two shipyards and knows very well that, since we were elected and unlike the previous government, we have been working on getting ships in the water and building ships at a reasonable cost.

We will continue to do this work, including working on the polar icebreaker. We will have news later about this.

Oral Questions

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday the Liberals voted against a data-driven reopening plan. Let that sink in for a moment.

The United Kingdom has a plan. The U.S. has a plan. Liberals claim it is not within their jurisdiction, but I have heard the same government promote tighter restrictions. The supports can only go so far. Every business owner in my riding I have talked to does not want handouts. They want a plan to safely get back to work.

What does the Liberal government have against small businesses here and across the country?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member opposite knows, we have worked closely with provinces, territories and local municipalities to ensure that Canadians are safe from contracting and dying of COVID-19. That is the priority. We cannot have a healthy, strong economy if people are too sick to go to work. We will be there, as we have been, for small business, for communities and for individuals who are struggling with the effects of COVID-19 and the economic impact it has had on them. We are all in this together.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, the manufacturing sector in Canada and the U.S. has the best COVID protocols in place. They cannot afford to interrupt their supply chain and the flow of goods any longer. The government says it wants to “build back better”. To these business owners and their workers, it feels more like “build back never”.

Enough inaction. When is the government going to give clear and concise direction to CBSA and PHAC before more jobs and contracts are lost because of its inaction? When?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his important question.

It is true that the closure of the Canada-U.S. border to non-essential travel has had its challenges.

Oral Questions

I can assure the House that the Canada Border Services Agency operates a 24-7 service to provide the best information possible to officers working on the front lines, in order to ensure they are making the right decisions with respect to the essential workers crossing the Canada-U.S. border.

We did not stop there. We are making sure that the decisions are consistent all across the country. The work is ongoing.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, thanks to federal cuts, the harbour in Cap-aux-Meules is down to 40% capacity, which is affecting the fishing season in the Magdalen Islands. To put it simply, no wharf, no crab.

We asked the minister and member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine what she was going to do to fix this problem, and she had the gall to blame Transport Canada.

This is a huge problem. The Liberal ministers need to stop playing hot potato and find a solution. How are they going to fix the harbour crisis in the Magdalen Islands?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the minister understands how significant this situation is for Magdalen Islanders. He has discussed it with the member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the mayor of Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine and various local stakeholders.

The decision to make improvements to the wharf in Cap-aux-Meules was made for safety reasons, and we are actively working on solutions. We are in close communication with our partners on the islands and in the fishing industry to keep them apprised of the situation.

• (1155)

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, this is not just about safety. This is about the economic vitality of the Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

It is the federal government's responsibility to make sure ports and wharves are in good shape. The Liberals did not step up, so the Cap-aux-Meules infrastructure is degrading. Now it is the Liberals' responsibility to find a solution.

Officials have to be on site at the port to monitor the situation. Urgent repairs must be carried out immediately if it has in fact gotten to that point. If the federal government cannot make that happen, it has to promise fishers and companies that they will not lose a penny because of Liberal ministers' negligence.

What are they going to do?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague that the Îles-de-la-Madeleine fishing season is not being compromised in any way.

[English]

ETHICS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, several committees have had their work stalled by Liberal obstruction tactics. Yesterday, the procedure and House affairs committee was obstructed by Liberals who have been talking since February 23 about everything from their favourite Christopher Nolan movie to spoiled yoghurt in their office fridges.

The Liberals continue to waste time to protect the Prime Minister from having to explain why he shut down Parliament last August when the WE scandal became too much for him. Why is this government wasting the time of the committees to protect the Prime Minister?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have said many times that we believe in the work of committees. They do extremely important work, which is done by all members, but they decide on their own agendas. My colleague from the Conservative Party knows that. We are always going to be there to participate and help with the work of the committees because, as I said, it is extremely important. I would like the Conservatives to stop playing these games.

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JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been five years since our Conservative government implemented the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. For over a year, victims and their families have been calling on Parliament to examine the strengths and shortcomings of the bill, as a five-year review was written into the legislation.

Six years have passed without action. From expanding assisted death to targeting law-abiding firearms owners, it is clear that the justice minister has his own priorities. Why are the rights of victims not his priority?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the federal ombudsman for victims of crime for the progress report on the victims bill of rights.

With respect to the question presented by the member opposite, I disagree with the foundation of it. We are listening to the call to take more action on victims' rights. We are listening, and we are ensuring that the upcoming parliamentary review on the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights will take place. We are indeed ensuring that victims' rights are treated with dignity, compassion and respect.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been four months since the Court of Appeal of Quebec found consecutive sentencing to be unconstitutional, thereby reducing the sentence of the mass murderer who killed six people and attempted to kill six others at a Quebec City mosque from 40 years to 25 years.

After four months, when will this government do the right thing and join Quebec's attorney general in defending this law so that at least some semblance of justice can be done for the victims?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this case is obviously a troubling one for all members in this House, including Muslim Canadians such as myself.

The finding in the decision with respect to consecutive sentences is a matter that is under review by the Government of Canada and by the Department of Justice. We will make our position known when it is necessary to do so.

We stand by the victims of this heinous tragedy and against all crimes of hate.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, members of the Tamil community in Scarborough North have shared that their loved ones were lost, displaced, injured and went missing during the 26-year Sri Lankan armed conflict. A thorough, independent, international investigation that leads to truth, justice and reconciliation is needed now. The United Nations Human Rights Council plays a key role in preventing future serious violations and addressing those of the past.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs provide an update on the latest actions taken by Canada to address human rights violations and accountability in Sri Lanka?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Scarborough North for his advocacy on this matter.

Canada is part of the core group on this resolution and worked alongside members of the council for the passage of resolution 46/1 in Geneva this week. This resolution mandates the High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect, consolidate, analyze and preserve information and evidence. This is an important step towards accountability in Sri Lanka.

Canada has and always will stand up for human rights in Sri Lanka and around the world.

* * *

• (1200)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, over a year ago, Conservative, Green and NDP caucuses sent a joint letter to the immigration minister calling for a special program to bring persecuted Afghan, Sikh and Hindu refugees to Canada as soon as possible. Women and children are isolated in their homes out of fear, and places of worship have faced terrorist attacks. Innocent men, women and children have had their lives taken away, all for practising their own faith.

Why does the minister remain silent and show no action, letting these Hindu and Sikh refugees suffer at the hands of ISIS?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada has one of the most robust asylum systems in the world, and we will always uphold human rights. I have worked with my hon. colleague across the way, as well as with the community, and we will continue to ensure that Canada is a country where those who are fleeing persecution and violations of human rights will be able to find safe sanctuary.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Madam Speaker, on February 23rd, I wrote the minister of DFO and the CRA regarding the new fisheries regulations that go into force on April 1, just a few days away. There are conflicting rules between DFO and the CRA that need to be addressed.

Many fishing enterprises utilize spousal income splitting to help spread the tax burden, which is allowed under CRA rules, but now disallowed under DFO's new owner-operator policy. This situation is another example of how this government is not taking the fisheries seriously.

Will the minister fix it before the April 1 deadline?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (B.C.), Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is an important question. It is important to know that we respect the tradition of having families participate in fisheries. These new regulations being implemented on April 1 mean that a captain's log will have to record every individual who is active in fishing. It does not have to record individual family members who are not active in fishing.

If the member requires any further clarification for anybody else in their riding, I would be happy to follow up with him.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fisheries department's reinterpretation of regulations completely blindsided spot prawn harvesters in B.C. DFO's reinterpretation would actually force spot prawn harvesters to degrade their catch and accept less money for their work. What was the minister's response? She deferred the harmful measure for a year, creating even further uncertainty. Whether it is this year or next, this policy is harmful.

When will the minister stop slapping the harvesters down and reverse DFO's unwarranted policy change?

Points of Order

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (B.C.), Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government supports a cautious approach to fisheries management, one that prioritizes the health and conservation of stocks. This season, conservation and protection's enforcement posture toward the practice of tubbing will be one of outreach and education, which means tubbing will occur this season.

At the same time, the Pacific region of DFO will engage with industry to discuss and discover possible solutions for the following season and beyond. We will work with stakeholders on this matter.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Madam Speaker, at no point in human history has technology changed as quickly as it is changing today. It is now more important than ever to stay abreast of the most recent developments in cyber-threats.

Even industries that are not normally reliant on technology, such as agriculture, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to malicious actors on the Internet.

Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness inform the House of the most recent measures he has put in place to strengthen protections and Canadian businesses?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her important question.

Our government is well aware that the threat of cyber-attacks is a constant concern for businesses in every sector. That is why the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness announced yesterday that the Community Safety Knowledge Alliance, or CSKA, will receive over \$500,000 in funding for a project to strengthen cybersecurity in the agriculture sector specifically. Through this funding, CSKA will be able to significantly increase our understanding of cyber-threats and help us improve our ability to defend ourselves from them, particularly in the agriculture industry.

Our government will continue to make investments that are essential for protecting Canada's cybersecurity infrastructure.

* * *

● (1205)

[English]

TRANSPORT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, last year off the southern Gulf Islands, a large bulk carrier dragged its anchor and drifted over 1,200 metres to hit another vessel. Luckily, no major damage was done at that time.

Transport Canada's own information reveals that there were 102 occurrences of ships dragging anchor in this area over five years,

raising serious safety and environmental concerns. Residents and local first nations are calling for an end to anchorages in these waters.

Will the minister commit to working with us to end southern B.C. anchorages before an environmental disaster occurs?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. Minister of Transport.

[Technical difficulty—Editor]

The hon. member for Don Valley East.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Ind.): Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago, I met with Helmets to Hardhats, an organization that supports the transition of veterans to civilian life. As the minister is aware, veterans as young as 34 find it hard to transition to civilian life. The organization trains veterans in the building and construction trades. In order to be sustainable, they are requesting a funding of \$785,000 per annum for three years.

Could the Minister of Veterans Affairs please update the House on the organization's request?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Helmets to Hardhats is one of the many excellent organizations across Canada that serve veterans and their families. Our government introduced the veteran and family well-being fund to support these organizations and all the great work they do on the ground supporting Canadian veterans.

In 2019, we proudly supported Helmets to Hardhats through this fund to help veterans seeking careers in construction and maintenance. We are, at this time, in the process of reviewing the applications of the well-being fund, and we will have more information in the very near future.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Speaker has reminded the House on numerous occasions that those members participating virtually are to ensure their backdrops are non-partisan and as neutral as possible. Unfortunately, as we witnessed today during question period, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh seemed to have forgotten this. I kindly ask that you remind all members of the House to keep their backdrops neutral and non-partisan.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the hon. member's point of order and the information he provided. I will remind parliamentarians to ensure that when they are participating virtually, their backgrounds should be neutral to avoid any partisan messages. That will help alleviate having these points of order and having to repeat the same message over and over again.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of my roles, not only as a member of the opposition but as the elected representative for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, is to hold the government to account. I asked a very clear question on an issue that matters to my riding and neither the parliamentary secretary nor the Minister of Transport stood up. I demand an answer to my question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there was an attempt, but we were having some technical difficulties. If we could get the leave of the House, maybe the member could rephrase his question and we would be more than happy to ensure there is an answer.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I did allow for quite a bit of time to rectify the opportunity to answer. I will ask the House for unanimous consent to rephrase the question and to have the answer. Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, last year, off the southern Gulf Islands, a large bulk carrier dragged its anchor and drifted 1,200 metres to hit another vessel. We were very lucky that this time no major damage was done.

Transport Canada's own information has revealed there were 102 occurrences of ships dragging anchors in this area over five years, and that raises serious safety and environmental concerns. Residents and local first nations are calling for an end to anchorages in these waters.

Will the minister commit to working with us to end southern B.C. anchorages before an environment disaster occurs?

• (1210)

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by apologizing to my opposition colleague. I was having problems with my Internet connection, but I am very happy to be able to answer him now.

The government's long-term strategy regarding British Columbia anchorages is aimed at improving the management of anchorages and—

Routine Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize to the parliamentary secretary for interrupting her, but I have to ask her to start over because there were problems with the video.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Speaker, the government's long-term strategy regarding anchorages is aimed at three things: improving the management of anchorages outside of public ports, ensuring the long-term efficiency and reliability of the supply chain, and mitigating environmental and social impacts.

The new interim protocol for anchorages was developed in partnership with the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, the Pacific Pilotage Authority and local communities. In fact, the new protocol was instituted to respond to the immediate concerns of those coastal communities. I can assure my colleague that the well-being of coastal communities is of the utmost importance to our government.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, entitled “Main Estimates 2021-22: Vote 1 under Canadian High Arctic Research Station, Votes 1, 5, 10 and L15 under Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Votes 1, 5 and 10 under Department of Indigenous Services.”

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour today to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-218, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding sports betting.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendment.

[Translation]

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology concerning the Investment Canada Act.

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

ETHIOPIA

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have three petitions to present on behalf of Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

The first petition asks the government to acknowledge the alarming bouts of unrest in Tigray, Ethiopia. The petitioners ask the government to take action.

FALUN GONG

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition is to draw the government's attention to the Chinese Communist regime's persecution of the Falun Gong and to take action to end the persecution and to bring them to justice.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition draws attention to the international trafficking of human organs. Once again, many petitioners, as we have seen multiple petitions on this, are asking the Canadian government to move quickly and propose legislation on this travesty.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to table.

The first is related to the spousal sponsorship application process and the TRV application process.

The petitioners note that as it stands right now, the government has a section called 179(b), which basically prevents people from uniting their loved ones if they have a spousal sponsorship application in place. They call on the government to suspend the use of 179(b) so people will not be denied on the grounds that they have strong ties in Canada. They ask the government to put in a special TRV tailored to family sponsorship, to create an ombudsperson to investigate complaints regarding assessments, and to meaningfully implement the promise to help people of Lebanon and process Lebanese applications with visa officers in Beirut instead of Ankara.

The second petition is also on immigration issues. This one is related to the issue of family sponsorship related to parents and grandparents.

The petitioners note that the government scrapped the lottery system for parents and grandparents reunification and recognized it was particularly flawed. However, without any indication or notice, it brought that system back, one it had acknowledged was flawed.

The petitioners therefore call on the government to explain its decision to return to the previously scrapped system of the parents and grandparents sponsorship program based on lottery, to release documents related to the consultations that led to this change, to immediately undertake an open and publicly available study to create a better and just application process and to recognize the positive benefits of family reunification.

● (1215)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind members to keep the tabling of petitions to short summaries. A lot of parliamentarians want to table petitions.

The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have three petitions to table today. They are from constituents and Canadians all across Canada.

The first one is on the Magnitsky act. The petitioners are asking for the Magnitsky act to be applied to those who are persecuting Falun Gong practitioners in mainland China. They would like sanctioned under the Magnitsky act Jiang Zemin, Luo Gan, Liu Jing, Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Li lanqing, Wu Guanzheng, Li Dongsheng, Qiang Wei, Huang Jiefu, Zheng Shusen, Wang lijun, Zhang Chaoying, and Jia Chunwang for their persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in mainland China.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition draws the attention of the House of Commons to the continued plight of Venezuelan refugees, specifically to an event that happened near the country of Trinidad and Tobago, where that country's coast guard boarded a vessel of Venezuelan refugees fleeing the country in contravention of section 2 of the Commonwealth charter.

The undersigned are asking for the Government of Canada to request that the Commonwealth Secretary-General launch an inquiry into the actions of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard in contravention of the Charter of the Commonwealth and urge the government of Trinidad and Tobago to respect the human rights of Venezuelan refugees.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, finally, I am tabling a petition on behalf of Canadians who are asking that the definition in Bill C-6 be abandoned and fixed to ensure that parents can speak with their own children about sexuality and gender and set house rules about those kinds of relationships.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition today on behalf of constituents concerned about the ongoing crisis of violence against women. The petitioners note that this is particularly a crisis for indigenous women and girls, referencing the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and calling for the Government of Canada to implement all of the recommendations and calls for action, and to ensure that across Canadian society women have rights to leadership positions.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have five petitions to present this afternoon.

The first petition is with respect to Bill C-6. The petitioners are supportive of the principle of banning conversion therapy. They ask the House to fix the definition contained in the bill. They recognize that poor drafting and problems with the definition create significant unintended consequences, including limiting conversations that could happen, and the ability of people to receive certain kinds of counselling that would seek to help individuals who are trying to manage things like sexual addiction. The petitioners ask the government to address these drafting problems and to pass a better bill that bans conversion therapy.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition highlights the situation in Tigray in Ethiopia. Petitioners call for a stronger Canadian government response to that situation, including humanitarian support. It calls for an end to violence, investigations into crimes that have taken place, direct engagement with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, and assistance with short-, medium- and long-term election monitoring.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition highlights the genocide of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. The House has already pronounced on this by recognizing that genocide, but the petitioners want to see the government respond and recognize that genocide. They also want to see the use of the Magnitsky act to hold those involved in this genocide accountable for their actions. The government must go much further on that.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth petition is with respect to Bill S-204, currently before the justice and human rights committee in the Senate. It is a bill that would make it a criminal offence for a Canadian to go abroad and receive an organ for which there has not been consent. The petitioners want to see Bill S-204 passed as quickly as possible. Hopefully, the current Parliament will be the one to get it done, as long as we do not have an election too soon.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fifth and final petition highlights the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. It calls for, among other things, the use of Magnitsky sanctions and for the kind of legislation that I referred to in the previous petition, Bill S-204.

• (1220)

CANADA EMERGENCY RENT SUBSIDY

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

I am presenting a petition focused on the commercial rent subsidy program. The petitioners are concerned about the rules that exclude non-arm's-length holders who conduct their business relationship in a 100% arm's-length manner. The tourist industry has been affected more than most businesses. The petitioners explain that 90% of their income comes from international travellers, and that in this challenging time, businesses are falling through the cracks and may not make it through the pandemic without the rent subsidy.

Routine Proceedings

They are asking the Government of Canada to review the legislation so that businesses like theirs can qualify for support.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, the second petition is regarding the Windsor causeway in Nova Scotia, which was constructed without proper fish passages and impedes fish migration, but most importantly impacts the endangered inner Bay of Fundy Atlantic salmon. Nova Scotia is currently twinning Highway 101, and construction plans call for a test aboiteau to be built near the remaining channel of the Avon River. The petitioners talk about how the environmental assessment study inadequately explored the impacts on fish migration and options for dykes and a partial opening of the causeway.

They are calling on the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to deny their approval of Nova Scotia's request to build an aboiteau at the Avon River until a full and proper environmental assessment study has been completed that addresses the impacts and shortfalls.

FORESTS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions that I am pleased to present today with signatures from across Canada.

The first petition was initiated by constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith. The petitioners are concerned that only a small portion of B.C.'s ancient old-growth trees remain, and they are concerned about continuing logging of these old-growth ecosystems. They note that old-growth forests are instrumental in keeping carbon out of our atmosphere and for flood and fire mitigation.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to request that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change work with the provinces on protecting valley bottom, high-productivity old-growth forests with large trees, and to introduce federal legislation that protects old-growth forests.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, in the second petition, the petitioners are concerned about the erosion of human rights in Poland. They are asking the Government of Canada to urgently condemn stigmatization, violence and persecution of women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQIA2S+ persons in Poland; to raise the matter of human rights in Poland at the ministerial level; to call on Poland's government to uphold its obligations under international human rights law and conventions; to engage bilaterally and multilaterally, including with the Equal Rights Coalition, to protect human rights in Poland; and to support civil society groups defending human rights in Poland, including through Canada's feminist international assistance policy.

Government Orders

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have four petitions to present today.

In the first, petitioners from across Canada want to bring to the attention of the House that Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of Canadian international assistance and that elections were scheduled to take place in Ethiopia this year. The petitioners call for an immediate end to the violence and restraint from all parties involved in the Tigray conflict, and for an immediate call for humanitarian access to the region and independent monitoring. They are calling for the Canadian government to engage with the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean government to end this conflict.

● (1225)

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): The next petition I have to present today, Madam Speaker, is from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about the definition of conversion therapy in Bill C-6. They are asking for the definition to be improved so that members of the LGBT community would continue to have support to be able to limit their sexual behaviour or detransition. They are therefore calling on the ban for conversion therapy and Bill C-6 to be amended to fix the definition.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I have to present is from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about the scourge of organ trafficking. They are calling for the quick passage of Bill S-240 from the Senate. They are calling on this House to pass that as well.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): The final petition I have today, Madam Speaker, is in regard to the Falun Gong in China. The Falun Gong are persecuted people in China. The people who signed this petition are calling on the Government of Canada to recognize this persecution and the mass murder of innocent people for their organs, including and not limited to the Canadian legislation to ban organ harvest tourism and to criminalize those involved, and to take every opportunity to criticize the Chinese Communist Party for its treatment of the Falun Gong.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions signed by Edmonton Manning residents as well as many other Canadians. One petition has 59 signatures and one has 47 signatures. They both state that whereas extensive evidence points to 14 key officials and former officials of the Chinese Communist regime who demonstrate criminal culpability in the human rights atrocities committed against Falun Gong practitioners in China; therefore, the undersigned urge the Government of Canada to deploy all legal sanctions, including the freezing of assets and banning of entry to Canada, against these perpetrators under the Sergei Magnitsky act.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition signed by my constituents and other Canadians who wish to sound the alarm about the systemic eradication campaign being perpetrated by the Chinese Communist regime against peaceful Falun Gong practitioners. In this regard, there is substantial evidence of gross human rights vio-

lations, including torture, extrajudicial killings and massive organ harvesting. The petitioners are calling on the government forthwith to impose Magnitsky sanctions on 14 current and former Chinese Communist officials who bear prime culpability for these atrocities.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

DIGITAL CHARTER IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from November 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am proud to continue second reading of Bill C-11, the digital charter implementation act, 2020. I am proud because our government set out to deliver an ambitious and comprehensive reform of Canada's framework for protecting the privacy of Canadians while fostering innovation amongst Canadian businesses.

That is exactly what we have done. There are strong imperatives for advancing this important package of reforms to our framework for privacy protection. Canadians deserve and expect strong protections, just as businesses deserve and expect clear rules of the road so that they can confidently deliver the products and services consumers want in an increasingly digital society.

Prior to my time in government, I spent 20 years in the business world. I know how critical trust and confidence can be in business: trust between manufacturers and their suppliers, between exporters and importers, and between businesses and consumers.

In today's digital economy, protecting personal information is key to earning and maintaining that trust.

Government Orders

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

In that spirit, Bill C-11 includes robust privacy protections for Canadians, and rightly so.

Harsh penalties could be imposed for violations. This new law will also provide a solid framework for businesses seeking to prosper in the digital economy. These businesses will be well placed to earn and keep their customers' trust, without compromising their ability to innovate and meet the demands of an increasingly well-informed customer base.

Bill C-11 seeks to strike the right balance between these imperatives and the need to boost Canadians' confidence in the digital economy.

[*English*]

There are important reasons to move forward with this legislation, and I hope all of my colleagues in the House will be supportive.

As we have noted in the previous debate and members are well aware, the consumer privacy protection act proposed in Bill C-11 would serve to bring Canada in line with other international jurisdictions. In particular, the CPPA would support interoperability of Canada's privacy regime with that of the European Union, a very important partner for Canada. I will speak more about the importance of that in a moment.

This bill would also support a strong and coherent national framework for privacy so that Canadians and businesses would know what to expect from coast to coast to coast. We are not alone in seeing the urgency of modernizing and strengthening privacy laws in the current environment. The provinces do, too. While Quebec continues to advance proposed new provincial legislation, Ontario and British Columbia are also considering new legislation or substantive amendments to their existing provincial laws.

Moving forward with our legislation now allows us to continue to provide leadership in this area and ensure a harmonized approach to privacy protection across our nation. This is really crucial for business and to encourage investment in Canada. It is also crucial to ensuring that all Canadians can have an equivalent level of privacy protection, wherever they decide to conduct business.

The past year has clearly demonstrated how fundamental digital and data-driven technologies have become in our economy and our society at large. Never before, as a society, have we been more reliant on secure, efficient and accessible technologies as a means of conducting a range of everyday activities.

As I noted previously, the foundation for such a robust digital and data-driven economy is trust.

Canadians have been clear in saying they want strong legal protections for their personal information, backed up by meaningful enforcement and oversight. They have indicated to us these principles are essential to their participation in the digital economy. Businesses also recognize this, and are seeking clear and consistent rules in this area.

Our previous legislation has served us well for almost 20 years, but the digital economy, as we all know, is constantly evolving and we must evolve with it. A modern privacy framework will set the right foundation not only for a post-pandemic recovery, but for many years to come.

[*Translation*]

I noted how important privacy protection is to the various levels of government, including the provinces and our international partners. The federal private sector privacy law is based on one key objective: bringing in national guidelines for organizations that do most of their business on the Internet, a global network that knows no borders.

We want to build a strong, innovative national economy. In order to get there, privacy rules have to be harmonized at the national level. Businesses and consumers are counting on the leadership of the federal government to set national standards in this area.

In the past few years, a parliamentary committee has examined the private sector privacy law, and I thank the committee for its work. During its study, many business representatives and experts underscored the importance of maintaining adequate protection under the European Union General Data Protection Regulation. We must ensure the free flow of data from the European Union to Canada. The same goes for data from the United Kingdom, whose data protection system is comparable to that of the European Union.

The European Commission clearly indicated that Canada had to make changes to its privacy protection regime to retain its preferred status. As a former minister of international trade and minister of foreign affairs, I can say that this is of crucial importance to Canada.

I am convinced that the proposed reforms to the personal information protection legislation for the private sector will help us attain this objective without giving up our singularly Canadian perspective.

Government Orders

• (1235)

[*English*]

My department's mandate for economic growth and development has required that we consider many factors when determining how to modernize and strengthen a privacy law that applies to the marketplace. One of the goals of Bill C-11 is for businesses to understand their obligations so they can build strong privacy protections from the outset in their business. Our current law and the new law that is proposed apply across sectors, businesses and activities. This means the bill must meet a diverse range of needs and be equally easy to follow for any line of work, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses. To achieve this we must first provide businesses with certainty and clarity regarding their obligations. That is why we are proposing to change the way the law is drafted.

PIPEDA, the framework that has been routinely referred to by the acronym, was based on a series of principles. The new law has translated these principles into clear legal requirements. We have also clarified the application of the act in a number of key areas.

[*Translation*]

Second, we must help businesses better understand how these obligations concretely apply to their activities and operations. The consumer privacy protection act would provide businesses with the opportunity to consult the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada without fear of repercussions. Businesses would be able to fully understand the requirements and to comply before problems arose. The bill includes a framework for the recognition of codes of conduct and certification programs. These provisions will specify how the law applies in particular sectors or areas.

[*English*]

These measures are especially important for our small business owners. They need to be able to focus on what matters most: quality products, good customer service and growing their businesses, while having confidence that they are following the rules. We also need to make sure that we do not add unnecessary administrative burdens, particularly on those who may not have the time or resources to invest in complex legal analysis and advice.

Our approach ensures that fundamental protections are established and enforced in a way that is fair and accessible to all businesses, no matter their size. We must provide sufficient incentives for compliance to ensure a level playing field across the marketplace. In recent years, the Privacy Commissioner has called for a stronger enforcement regime under the private sector privacy law. Bill C-11 responds to this.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

The Privacy Commissioner of Canada is at the heart of the Canadian privacy regime. The commissioner and his office help businesses understand the act and intervene to protect Canadians in the event of a breach. It stands to reason that the new legislation enhances the role and powers of the commissioner.

The commissioner already plays an education role, which will continue and be strengthened under the new regime. The commissioner will retain his key research and guidance role, as well as be-

ing assigned the new task of reviewing organizational privacy practices. The commissioner will also review and approve codes of practice and certification programs. This will give organizations and individuals confidence that personal information is being managed in strict compliance with the law.

Clear guidelines help to protect personal information and prevent breaches. This clarity is essential to the proper functioning of the privacy framework. The bill sets out harsh financial penalties for companies that break the law. The fines and administrative financial penalties are a clear demonstration of the government's commitment to ensuring the protection of Canadians' personal information.

That being said, such sanctions should only be imposed following fair and accessible proceedings. That is precisely why Bill C-11 also creates a tribunal to decide on these matters. This means that companies will not have to appear before the Federal Court of Canada. The tribunal will allow all parties to pursue remedies at a lower cost and in a more accessible manner. Over time, the tribunal will also develop a body of privacy jurisprudence.

[*English*]

Let me summarize the approach that the government has taken in modernizing our private sector privacy law. Bill C-11 acknowledges the strengths of our existing law, referred to as PIPEDA, in particular its non-prescriptive, flexible and balanced approach to privacy protection. It reinforces individuals' control over their personal information where it matters most, and it enables innovation.

Moreover, it introduces serious financial consequences for the most egregious behaviour. It ensures procedural fairness and recognizes the role of the federal government in regulating the economy, while respecting the important role that provincial governments also play in private sector privacy regulation. This is the continuation of a made-in-Canada approach that recognizes both the right to privacy and the needs of organizations to use personal information for appropriate purposes.

I am confident Canadians will agree that the law offers them the protection they are seeking, together with all the benefits that a growing digital economy can bring. I am happy to take questions from my colleagues.

Government Orders

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that Jim Balsillie noted with regard to this bill that “the privacy bill fails to curtail [the] surveillance economy or protect Canadians” and that “The government’s proposed legislation would not curb the mass surveillance or behaviour manipulation the tech industry currently engages in with impunity.” In fact, he specifically says that Bill C-11 demonstrates that the Liberal government is not fully aware of the power of the data economy and the impact it has on the lives of Canadians.

This is considered a fundamental flaw in the bill. What can we do in order to address this issue?

• (1245)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raised important issues. I know Jim Balsillie. He is a very important voice in our country when it comes to the digital economy.

I would invite the members to study these issues at committee. We want to send the bill to committee so that different voices can be heard in order to strike the right balance.

As I said, we need to ensure that we have a 21st century framework to protect Canadians’ information, while at the same time helping to bring innovation to our country. My goal and our goal as parliamentarians should be to have the best framework in the G7 and beyond, so that at one end we can assure Canadians that we as Parliament have taken their concerns very seriously, but at the same time put in a framework that will provide for innovation.

I would hope, as the member suggested, that we can hear many voices during the important work of the committee and work with—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner indicated that there are concerns about Bill C-11’s new commercial activity definition and consent rules. The concern is that it would open up the door to new commercial uses of personal information without consent. There seems to be an approach that people are suggesting, and it is to restore the language that was in place previously. Would the minister support such an amendment?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raised an important issue. The provision in the bill on the issue of consent needs to be strong. It needs to be informed consent. That is what Canadians expect from us and that is what we certainly want to ensure in the bill.

If the member and other members of the House, through the work of the committee, want to propose or reduce certain portions, they can rest assured that we will obviously listen to the Privacy Commissioner. He has a very important role in our system. We want to make sure that the consent is informed. As a lawyer myself, I can assure the member we want to look at that very carefully to make sure that when Canadians provide their consent, it is a true and informed consent. We want to make sure it is in plain language and that people understand what they are consenting to.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech.

The Bloc Québécois thinks that strengthening privacy protections is a good thing. However, we are concerned about the massive number of fraud cases related to CERB. That is a government issue, but Bill C-11 does not apply to the government.

Does the minister not think this bill should also apply to the federal government? If not, what does the federal government plan to do to improve identity checks when people apply for programs?

Many members of the House have had to help distressed constituents who were the victims of fraud.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, or my neighbour, I should say, for his important question.

I thank the Bloc Québécois for being willing to work with us to move Bill C-11 forward. As he said, I think that all Canadians want a more tailored and certainly more modern system that will protect their personal information.

As for information and data shared with the Government of Canada, we constantly strive to use the most sophisticated measures to protect Canadians’ personal information. It is a matter of trust—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. minister, but other members have questions.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Bill C-11 references innovation and the strengthening of privacy for Canadians. As he references in his comments, it is 20 years in business. How important is that in the modern-day world?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, privacy is essential. Trust in the digital economy is essential. Together as parliamentarians we need to find the right balance for Canadians to be safe and at the same time have innovation.

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I am so pleased that colleagues have worked together to bring in Bill C-11 so we can offer, as a legacy to future generations, a framework that they will be proud of, that will protect their information, that will spur innovation and that will protect their data, as they expect this Parliament to do in an age where the digital economy and the data economy are becoming more and more present in our lives.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, this is my first opportunity to address the minister since he has changed portfolio, and I cannot start without thanking him once again for the enormous personal effort at rescuing various constituents who were on cruise ships some months ago.

My question is, of course, on Bill C-11. I have read the commentary, as I am sure he has, of Daniel Therrien, our Privacy Commissioner, who is disappointed in Bill C-11's failure to ensure that privacy is recognized as a right. A rights-based approach would deal with a lot of the criticisms that will come up.

I know the government is taking the view that this is a constitutional matter and there are limitations, but the Supreme Court has made important comments on privacy. Is the minister open to changing this? I do not know if—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the member to ask her question very quickly, because we are running out of time.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, will the minister be open to amendments to ensure that privacy is recognized as a right?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, first, let me say how much I appreciate working with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. She is a true parliamentarian. Having been able to repatriate people was a true honour.

To her point, the new legislation recognizes the individual right to privacy. We have listened to the Privacy Commissioner, but the framework we are presenting is striking the right balance. However, I am always willing to listen to the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, because she always provides extremely good feedback to this government in order to serve Canadians in the best possible way.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, what kind of assurance has the government received that the legislation, as drafted, will be GDPR-compliant, because business needs that certainty?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, this is fundamental. The analysis we made and the comments we received when we drafted the bill have provided the right feedback to be compliant. I understand that stability and predictability is important. A number of Canadian companies depend on data to be exchanged with the European Union, one of our largest trading partners. We are confident that this will meet the standard, but I would be happy to listen to the member at committee if he wants to add to that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon on Bill C-11. The bill raises important issues about the privacy of Canadians. It is legislation that seeks to reform aspects of our privacy framework in Canada concerning the use of Canadians' data. I look forward to the debate and the study that is going to take

place at committee because I know this bill raises many important issues. It is a very technical area: Canadians will want to delve into the details, find out what the impacts of the provisions are and whether the bill would do the things the government says it would do.

I have some initial comments about the issue of privacy and some of the main threats facing the privacy of Canadians, but I also have a couple of comments on the provisions of the bill. It would provide the Privacy Commissioner with important new order-making powers, it would bring in fines and give individuals the right to demand that their data is destroyed. It would bring in some new powers and provisions for the privacy protection of Canadians, as well as for the Privacy Commissioner. These are some important things to look at, and some study of the details is required.

Certainly, the Conservative caucus is very committed to protecting Canadians' privacy and ensuring that the details all check out with what the government has claimed. I am looking forward to the depth of conversation that I know is going to happen and needs to happen on a piece of legislation in an important policy area such as this.

I want to flag some concerns I have in terms of the process of this legislation, as well as the broader framework of privacy in this country.

This bill was initially tabled in the fall and it has had very limited debate between then and now. It underlines the confusion we have about the government's legislative priorities. It looks very much like the government is trying to set itself up to complain about its legislation not passing by scheduling a bill for an hour here and an hour there, rather than having the kind of focus we would typically expect from a government that is trying to pass legislation. Generally, if a government identifies a bill as an area of priority, it will schedule that bill for enough time to be able to complete debate and then it will proceed to committee. However, today alone we have had an hour of debate on a pandemic election bill, and this afternoon we have gone on to a completely different topic rather than the government picking one issue to move the debate forward.

On a process point, the other thing that is interesting to me about this bill is the committee the government is planning to refer this bill to. The industry, science and technology committee has an important role in looking at the regulation of business, promoting business development in this country and so forth, and the minister who just spoke and is leading this discussion is the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, but will this bill be referred to the industry committee? No. Once this passes second reading, the bill will be referred to the ethics committee. The ethics committee has a mandate that includes privacy, but I note in particular that there is a lot going on right now at the ethics committee. It is doing important work trying to get to the bottom of the WE Charity scandal.

If I was cynical about the government's motivations, I would think it was interesting that it had decided to bring forward legislation and then refer it to the ethics committee, given the tradition we have in this place of legislation receiving priority at committee. However, we have critical issues of government ethics and scandal that we need to get to the bottom of. It looks like a manoeuvre to try to push the WE scandal off the agenda. It is very striking to see that the government has been so desperate to avoid discussion of its own ethical lapses, around the WE Charity scandal in particular, that it has done all kinds of things to damage its own legislative agenda simply to cover itself on the ethical front.

● (1255)

In fact, the government prorogued Parliament, going back to last summer. There was important information that was coming out as part of the committee studies that were going on in relation to the WE Charity scandal, and the government prorogued Parliament.

Then this issue comes back in the fall, and we are trying to restart the study of it. The government threatens to declare something a confidence issue in order to avoid having a separate committee that could study it. If we had a separate committee, this would not be an issue, right? If we had a separate committee that was looking at these various issues of government corruption, then we would not have an issue with seeing this legislation studied at the ethics and privacy committee.

However, with this renewed discussion and with new information coming out right now as well, we see the government bringing back Bill C-11. It makes me wonder if the House leader thought, "We want to kill this discussion of the WE Charity situation at the ethics committee, but we can't prorogue Parliament again, right?" I mean, I suppose they could, but it sort of gets more and more obvious what they are doing, so they thought, "Let's bring back this bill that we haven't done anything on in months and try to get it sent to the ethics committee."

These are just more of the kinds of games, I think, that we see from the government. If it was serious about our being able to get to the bottom of these ethics issues as well as moving forward with this legislation, it would be a simple matter of either allowing the creation of that special committee to look at the WE Charity issue or having this bill go to the industry committee. Again, it just raises the question: What is the government trying to hide here?

The government's ethics failings are well known, and it seems the next step in its plan to avoid discussion of its terrible ethical record will be to call an election, a particularly extreme step to kill

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all of its legislation and shut down important discussions in Parliament on a wide variety of issues, including government ethics.

If we have an early election, of course we are not going to get anywhere on this bill, so hopefully the government will resist the urge to put politics and its own political interests first and instead focus on the kind of policy work that we are doing and are prepared to do in this place to move important issues forward.

In this speech, I want to also zero in on an important issue of privacy, that being the threat to Canadians from foreign actors who are trying to access our data and who are, in many cases, trying to interfere in Canadian institutions, trying to intimidate Canadians and potentially trying to steal intellectual property. In the interest of Canadians, we need to take the threat to privacy that comes from foreign actors very seriously. It is my view that the defining national security threat of our time is interference and intimidation in Canada by foreign state-backed entities.

I have had the opportunity to work with many Canadians who have themselves been direct victims of this kind of intervention, threatening their security and privacy. We had a press conference here on Parliament Hill when I launched Motion No. 55, which is a private member's motion that I am putting forward with respect to foreign state-backed interference and intimidation. We had four people participating in that press conference who were from different backgrounds, from different parts of the world originally, who are now Canadian. They shared their own stories of foreign state-backed intimidation, and all of them expressed frustration at the nature of the response. They felt they were being referred back and forth among different institutions and that we did not really have the capacity to support them effectively and identify who is really responsible for addressing these issues. Is it CSIS? Is it Global Affairs? Is it the RCMP? Is it the local police? Who do they go to? Who responds to it, and then what is the response from the government?

The response from the government has been quite weak. In the case of this minister who is now responsible for this legislation, we had many of these discussions in his previous role as the foreign affairs minister. I would ask him about what he was doing in response to the likely and in some cases very evident involvement of foreign diplomats in the interference with and intimidation of Canadians, and he would kind of look at the camera and tell the diplomats not to interfere in Canadian affairs.

● (1300)

It is great to say that, but we need to have a policy framework and a strategy in place to protect the privacy of Canadians when it is threatened by malicious foreign actors, which are often state-backed or directed actors.

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It is with this in mind that Conservatives put forward an opposition day motion, which passed, calling on the government to put in place a comprehensive plan to protect Canadians from this kind of interference and intimidation. The government just failed to respond effectively to that.

My private member's motion, Motion No. 55, reiterates the call of that opposition day motion, but it also particularly focuses on the issue of support to Canadians who are victims. My motion is saying that we need to do more to support Canadians who are victims of foreign state-backed interference and that the federal government's approach to privacy in this area needs to involve cross-jurisdictional co-operation.

It also says the federal government should seek to work collaboratively with provincial, territorial and municipal governments on responding to foreign interference, recognizing we do see manifestations of this foreign interference happening at other levels of governments, such as efforts to capture elites, control institutions, misdirect funds to their interest, and so forth. We see those attempts at intimidation happening at other levels of government, and the response needs to involve effective engagement of those other levels of government as well.

This is another area where the government could be doing more, and needs to do more, to respond to this primary issue of our vulnerability in terms of national security.

In the midst of us saying the government needs a plan and a strategy on this, the simple thing it could do would be to take on this principle of first doing no harm. If it really recognized the threats regarding security in this area, the first thing it would do would be to just say no to Huawei, because we know there are threats to Canadians' security and privacy associated with Huawei being involved in our 5G network.

There is really no disputing the close relationship between Huawei and the Chinese state. We know all private organizations based in China have a high degree of vulnerability to influence and control by the Chinese Communist Party, such as the requirement to defer to party committees, the requirement that information be shared with the Chinese military, and the requirement to respond to requests by the Chinese military.

We know the vulnerabilities that exist across the board, but it is especially the case when we look at a company like Huawei. Clearly, there is a long-standing and very close relationship between the state and this company. Nobody else in the world has trouble figuring this out. Four out of five Five Eyes countries have understood the importance of saying no here.

Our own interests are at stake here, as well as the opportunities for ongoing effective co-operation with our partners, who see these risks. We do not want to be perceived in Canada as being a point of vulnerability. If we want to be able to maintain the levels of co-operation that are so important for our interests, we have to work effectively with our allies and give them reason to have confidence in us.

Yes, the government needs to have a comprehensive plan to address foreign interference and protect Canadians' privacy, but why not just start by doing no harm and saying no to Huawei. As well,

the government has just been absent in answering these very basic questions when it comes to the involvement of Huawei in our 5G network.

Going back, we had a previous public safety minister, Ralph Goodale, who said that they would make a decision before the election. We are not talking about the election the government is planning now, we are talking about the last election in 2019. The government said there would be a decision on Huawei before that election. We probably will not see a decision on Huawei at this rate before the next election, or maybe even the one after it, if Liberals stay in government. If Conservatives form government, there would be a decision very quickly when it comes to Huawei, but the government has put it off.

● (1305)

The Liberals have continually said that the decision is coming. Part of our opposition day motion dealt with Canadian intimidation and privacy issues around foreign-state-backed actors. Our opposition day motion included the requirement that the government make a decision with respect to Huawei, but the deadline came and went. The Liberal government, by the way, has a track record of ignoring the motions that are passed by a majority of Parliament.

I think the Liberals' effort to create this narrative about Parliament is not working. The reality is that Parliament is generally working, but sometimes it does things they do not like. Sometimes the opposition works together to pass motions the government does not want to see pass. Sometimes the opposition puts an issue on the agenda and pushes it so much that many government members support it, as we saw with the Uighur genocide, even though the government abstains.

To me, that is a sign of a Parliament that is lively, that is working and that is doing its job because it is holding powerful people to account. That is a big part of what Parliament is supposed to do. The government wants to spin this narrative of Parliament precisely because it is working; it just does things sometimes that the government does not like. Some of that is borne out of the leadership of our party. Some of it is borne out of the very good co-operation that has been on display among the opposition parties.

The point is, we had a motion pass that called on the government to make a decision on Huawei and it still has not. This is a huge issue for Canadian security, for Canadian privacy and for the protection of our national interests at this critical time in global affairs. We are seeing heightened competition, and Canada needs to be clear and principled in terms of standing up for, and standing with, other countries that believe in freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Part of protecting the rule of law, of human rights, is emphasizing the importance of protecting the privacy of Canadians and excluding actors from our systems who we know will not respect that privacy: actors who say they have a legal obligation to provide data to a foreign military when asked.

Regarding Huawei, there is this issue of looking at the kinds of human rights violations that they and other Chinese-state-affiliated companies are involved in. We see, with the Uighur genocide, the technological enabling of human rights violations by companies such as Dahua and Hikvision: companies that the Canadian pension fund at one time invested in.

We are talking about the involvement of Huawei and other companies that are complicit in detailed monitoring, tracking and controlling. We see these horrific violations of privacy taking place inside China right now: horrific violations of privacy that are being enabled by the very companies that the government has not yet refused access to Canada. That should be a huge concern in any privacy debate we are having.

When the same companies are part of things like the social credit system, whereby individuals are tracked in terms of whether the government thinks they are behaving well, and their ability to travel and participate in events is determined automatically by algorithms based on intense monitoring and evaluation, a very Orwellian system is being brought in.

Then we have some of the actors who are involved in developing these kinds of technologies and deploying them. Those same actors are looking to do business here in Canada. That should concern us. The government needs to make some clear choices. It needs to decide where it stands on these issues and needs to start standing with us, in the opposition, who are taking a principled stand in defence of human rights, in defence of privacy and in defence of our national security. We are recognizing and responding to the very real threats that we see from various actors.

One of the other issues that I hope to see taken up at committee is people's privacy in terms of their intimate images, and some of the horrific abuses of people's human rights that we have seen perpetrated through the Pornhub platform. We have heard testimony at committee that people's intimate images, even involving minors, were posted repeatedly without their consent. That is another privacy issue that Parliament must act on urgently, without delay.

• (1310)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in 2019, during the summer, I was very surprised to receive a text message on my government cellphone from a volunteer from the Conservative Party of Canada, asking me if I wanted to vote Conservative and to reply back via text.

Some members from the New Democratic Party and the Green Party would like Bill C-11 to apply to political parties. What does the member have to say about that?

• (1315)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is interesting that we would have been texting the member, asking if she wanted to support the Conservative Party. Hope springs eternal. We can hope that all Canadians will eventually see the value of what we are putting forward. I am hopeful even the member for Kingston and the Islands will see the light at some point and recognize the opportunity he has to support the Conservative Party going forward.

It is an interesting issue for political parties. Maybe it could be further studied at the committee level.

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech on this important bill, which has to do with the protection of privacy.

However, as my colleague mentioned in his speech, there are still a lot of grey areas.

In a recent question, my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé brought up the cases of CERB fraud. Fraud was also discovered at the Canada Revenue Agency last fall. Some people therefore had problems completing their EI claims when many regions of Quebec were in the red zone and people were losing their jobs.

We also need to think about the issue of the separation of powers. The Government of Quebec is already working on Bill 64.

Depending on the location of the business, will responsibility for the protection of privacy fall to Quebec or Ottawa? Would the same business be subject to Quebec law for certain information and to the federal law for other information?

There are a lot of grey areas, and all of these elements still need to be clarified. How can we do that?

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is an important question, a technical one but certainly an important one. It does speak to the need for effective collaboration across jurisdictions.

We have seen, in the life of the Liberal government, a number of cases where the data that the government has on Canadians has been breached. We need to be attentive to those kinds of problems as well as to the issues the member raised, identifying the need for greater cross-jurisdictional support and collaboration. Again, this is an important issue that we need to delve into further.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things I want to talk about today is the importance of privacy.

I know the Conservatives were rightly worried about the federal COVID notification app and what that could mean for privacy. Along with the New Democrats, they asked some really tough questions of the government that got us an app that respects privacy while remaining effective.

Could the member address how there is no need to trade off privacy rights while addressing other priorities.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent point from my colleague. What we have done is push the Liberal government to actually take these issues seriously and to recognize that we can put in place the appropriate mechanisms to protect privacy and achieve other objectives.

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In the context of the pandemic we are in, the reality is that tracing is a very important tool in responding to the virus. We know countries that have put in place effective tracing systems have generally been much more effective in their response overall. It is an opportunity, a strategy that is very important.

At the same time, I have heard a lot of concerns from people every time I talk about it, and I am firm in the view of the value of tracing. Some people push back and say that they do not trust the system. That is why we need to communicate to people that there can be confidence in the system and actually put in place the mechanisms to ensure they can have confidence in the system, so we can provide the support required in the COVID-19 response.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member does tremendous work on human rights, whether it be for Canadians here or people across the world. I am going to quote from the Privacy Commissioner in response to Bill C-11's tabling. He said:

Bill C-11 opens the door to new commercial uses of personal information without consent, but does not specify that such uses are conditional on privacy rights being respected.... [T]he Bill essentially repeats the purpose clause of the current legislation, which gives equal weight to privacy and the commercial interests of organizations. In fact, the new purpose clause places even greater emphasis on the importance of the use of personal information for economic activity.

The previous speaker from Powell River talked about the public uses of information and getting the balance right. What does the member think about the need to have a balanced framework for human rights within Canada, particularly around economic ones?

• (1320)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, my colleague's intervention was excellent. It was a pleasure to work with my colleague previously on the Canada-China committee where we were dealing with some of these issues around foreign actors that I talked about in my speech.

To his specific question, it should concern all Canadians that the government is including in this legislation mechanisms that expand the possible use of data without the privacy protections that we would expect. It is sort of the nature of the bill that they are piling these things into it, while not always fronting those more concerning aspects of those changes in their communications. That just speaks to the importance of the parliamentary scrutiny that is required to get to the bottom of the details and to understand their impacts.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member suggested that he hopes I see the light of the Conservatives, but I can assure him that when 54% of the Conservative Party is against recognizing climate change, it is pretty much a non-starter, although I do admire his interest.

This member keeps saying that the governing party wants an election, but we are not even talking about it on this side of the House. I am pretty sure that member has brought up the word "election" in this House more than anybody who has been speaking for the Liberal Party over the last couple of weeks. As a matter of fact, if the Conservatives are not interested in an election, there were eight confidence votes last night alone, and this member voted against—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I was so enjoying that question, but we have completely lost the sound.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): If he can hear me, could the hon. member summarize that question?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: In summary, Madam Speaker, I believe in climate change and the Conservatives do not, so I could never become a Conservative, and I apologize.

The member keeps talking about an election. We had eight confidence votes last night alone. I asked for a recorded vote on every single one. This member and all of the Conservatives voted against the budget bill, in essence voting down confidence. Therefore, he is actually the one who appears to be interested in an election.

The member talked about a special committee on WE. The Conservatives have a majority, if they go to their friends in the Bloc, to set up that committee. Why did the member not go to his friends in the Bloc and the NDP to set up that committee?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, if the member wanted to join the Conservative Party, his views on climate change would not be the barrier; it would be his casual disregard for the truth that would get him into more trouble if he wanted to join us on this side of the House. I do welcome his joining us on this side of the House, but more in the sort of switch-places type of scenario.

The member spoke about how Conservatives voted last night on the government's spending. Conservatives do not agree with key aspects of the direction of the government, so it is our responsibility in representing our constituents to raise our concerns, to speak about them, and to vote accordingly.

I will note, though, that those confidence votes passed; that a majority of this House supported those measures. Therefore, it would be particularly rich for the government after getting the confidence of the House, which it did not need my support to do, to then pull the plug later.

We think it is important to warn Canadians about the government's plans with respect to an election. The more the member tries to deny it, the more interesting it will be to play back some of those conversations if the Prime Minister does actually do what many people expect him to do in the next few months.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Victoria has time for a very brief question.

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Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his points on how the Liberals have been scheduling an hour of debate here and an hour of debate on another bill there, without giving them enough time to move forward.

I am thinking in particular of Bill C-12, the Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act. It has been months and the government has yet to really schedule enough time to finish second reading. The Liberals either need to admit that climate accountability is not a priority for them or schedule the time. I hope they do not use their own game playing to delay important legislation as an excuse for an election.

On the privacy bill, does the member agree—

• (1325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I did ask for a brief question. There are only 20 seconds left.

I would ask the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan to respond.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is an important point that for those who are following the way legislation is normally scheduled, the government's approach is very different. We agree with some of the bills and some we do not, but the normal thing for government to do would be to prioritize legislation it wants to see passed and schedule enough debate for it to move forward. Liberals are not doing that, and they are very clearly setting the stage for something else. They have no interest in passing their own legislation. It is very evident.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the second reading of Bill C-11, the digital charter implementation act, 2020. I will be splitting my time today with the member for Davenport.

When Canada's privacy law was introduced in 2000, Parliament intended that it would achieve two objectives, which were privacy protection for individuals and the growth of electronic commerce. Over 20 years later, our government is introducing this legislation to provide an updated strategy for protecting privacy in our new digital world.

I have heard loud and clear from the constituents in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills, and they want to see strong privacy laws. These privacy laws not only protect consumers and help build trust in the digital marketplace, but with the consumer privacy protection act, a principled and agile privacy enforcement regime would create a vital safeguard as companies engage in the digital economy.

Today, I would like to provide further insight into a key aspect of the bill that will not only provide guidance for businesses for protecting individuals' personal information, but will also support responsible innovation. I am speaking today about provisions in the new consumer privacy protection act to formally recognize codes of practice and certification systems as a means of demonstrating compliance with the law.

A key strength of our current private sector privacy law, commonly known as PIPEDA, will be maintained in the new consumer privacy and protection act. That strength is a principled approach to rule setting. Our private sector privacy law applies to all organiza-

tions in all industry sectors of all sizes and levels of sophistication. This level of general application is crucial in order to establish a baseline of privacy protection that applies across the marketplace.

While comprehensive, this law must also be flexible, non-prescribed and technology-neutral so that it can be applied in all circumstances. These characteristics have long been recognized as a key strength of the existing law and there is widespread support for maintaining this approach. However, it is sometimes a challenge for organizations, especially smaller businesses without dedicated legal resources, to understand how to implement these high level obligations within their specific context.

For example, consider a situation where an organization is using a cutting edge technology which has not yet been the subject of a finding by the Privacy Commissioner or where an organization must handle complicated data flows with complex accountability, such as in connected and automated vehicles. These challenges are becoming more commonplace in a data-driven economy.

To help address these problems and to provide assurance to businesses and consumers alike, the consumer privacy protection act would allow any entity to apply to the office of the Privacy Commissioner for approval of a code of practice that provides a specific set of rules for how organizations can operate in compliance with the law. This approval would be particularly useful for organizations using a new technology or operating with a new business model.

This type of regulatory certainty is very much needed in today's rapidly developing economy. It gives organizations and their business partners a level of comfort that they are operating on the side of the law. It also supports a level playing field in areas where there is no jurisprudence or specific guidance for organizations. It also makes it more transparent to Canadians how their personal information is being used in these circumstances. To take it—

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on which way we look at it, it is 1:30. The hon. member will have five and a half minutes the next time this matter is before the House.

*Private Members' Business**[Translation]*

It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
*[Translation]***REDUCTION OF RECIDIVISM FRAMEWORK ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-228, An Act to establish a federal framework to reduce recidivism, as reported (with amendments) 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. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in at report stage.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 14, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

It being 1:34 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, April 12, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 24(1) and 28(2).

(The House adjourned at 1:34 p.m.)

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