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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 10, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

[*Translation*]

Prayer

AN ACT TO CHANGE THE NAME OF THE ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF CHÂTEAUGUAY—LACOLLE

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.) moved that Bill S-207, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Châteauguay—Lacolle, be read the first time.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this morning, I am very pleased to introduce to the House the hon. Senator Dalphond's Bill S-207. I thank him for all the great work he does for our region.

Essentially, this bill seeks to correct a serious error that is unfair to my constituents. Three years ago, I got my bill passed to change the riding name of Châteauguay—Lacolle to “Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville”.

I do not have time to repeat all of the reasons why this change is so important for the people of my riding, but I think that the fact that the beautiful municipality of Lacolle is not even located within the riding should be enough to convince my hon. colleagues of the legitimacy of our request to change the riding name.

The ball is now back in the House's court, and I humbly ask all of my colleagues to vote in favour of Bill S-207, to vote in favour of “Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville”.

(Motion deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table this petition signed by Canadians from across the country concerned about the issue of forced human organ trafficking. Those signing the petition are looking for Parliament to move quickly to pass legislation: Bill C-350 and Bill S-240.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 2021 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, as required under section 192 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. I would like to thank the Correctional Investigator for his continued good work.

I am also tabling the response to 20 recommendations directed to the Correctional Service of Canada, Public Safety, Treasury Board Secretariat and the Prime Minister for permanent referral to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, four reports of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group. The first concerns the U.S. congressional meetings, held virtually from March 15 to 18, 2021. The second concerns the Western Governors' Association Annual Meeting, held virtually from June 30 to July 1, 2021. The third concerns the National Conference of State Legislatures' Base Camp, held virtually from August 3 to 5, 2021. The fourth concerns the Canadian American Border Trade Alliance Conference, held virtually from December 6 to 7, 2021.

I want to commend the work of colleagues. It is obviously not an ideal situation to meet virtually, but we do the best we can under the circumstances.

Business of Supply

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the petition I am presenting and tabling today has to do with something terrible. It is the harvesting of human organs from individuals who have not given their consent. Let us think about it. This means somebody taking any organ within our body without our consent. We can understand the implications of that. In Canada, we still do not have any criminal legislation that would ban the practice of going abroad and paying for organs that have been harvested from individuals who have not given their consent.

The petitioners are urging the Parliament of Canada to move quickly on the proposed legislation that is before the House to amend the Criminal Code to prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs removed without consent or as a result of a financial transaction, and to render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who have participated in this abhorrent trade in human organs.

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of many Canadians who are seeking an end to the mandates. Vaccines should never be used as political tool to wedge, stigmatize or divide Canadians. The petitioners state that they are opposed to the vaccine mandates and want to ensure that people are not forced to decide between their job and a jab. The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to end all vaccine mandates.

• (1010)

CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition on behalf of 17,874 Canadians from every corner of the country. They note that Canadians with disabilities are disproportionately living in poverty across the country and that the Canada disability benefit, a guaranteed livable income for Canadians with disabilities, is already supported by 89% of Canadians. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to fast-track the design and implementation of the Canada disability benefit and to involve Canadians with disabilities every step of the way.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL COVID-19 MANDATES AND RESTRICTIONS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC) moved:

That, given that provinces are lifting COVID-19 restrictions and that Dr. Theresa Tam has said that all existing public health measures need to be "re-evaluated" so that we can "get back to some normalcy", the House call on the government to table a plan for the lifting of all federal mandates and restrictions, and to table that plan by February 28, 2022.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

I rise today in the House to support our Conservative motion to end the lockdowns and restrictions that the Prime Minister and the federal government have placed on Canadians. The Conservatives believe it is time to follow the science and evidence. We believe the government must present a plan to quickly end the lockdowns and restrictions. Other countries are doing it, the provinces are doing it and the Liberal government needs to do it.

The Prime Minister has used the pandemic to wedge, divide and stigmatize Canadians. This must stop. As parliamentarians, we must all come together and work together to transition to a post-COVID society as quickly as possible.

Before I go any further, I want to speak directly to Canadians who are demonstrating here in Ottawa and across the country. Their protest began with truckers and it has grown into an international phenomenon. Men and women, children, and the young and old, from every walk of life and every community of this country, have been rallying to have their voices heard. They want their freedom back.

To all of those who are taking part in the protest, I believe the time has come to take down the barricades, stop the disruptive action and come together. The economy they want to see reopen is hurting. Farmers, manufacturers, small businesses and families are suffering. I believe this is not what they want to do. We must all work together. They are protesting because they love their country and they want their freedom back.

The protesters here in Ottawa came bringing a message. That message has been heard. The Conservatives have heard them, and we will stand up for them and all Canadians who want to get back to normal life. We will not stop until the mandates have ended. Today, though, I am asking them to take down the blockades and protest peacefully and legally. It is time to remove the barricades and the trucks for the sake of the economy and because it is the right thing to do.

• (1015)

I now want to get to what I want to say to my fellow parliamentarians because we have something to do. We have something we can do here in the House, and we have a responsibility. Every one of us has a role to play in ending the impasse, restoring peace and order, and at the same time, allowing Canadians to get back to their normal lives.

We have faith in science and evidence, and we also have faith in our fellow Canadians, faith in them to protect themselves in a way they feel is appropriate, not the way government tells them to. Dr. Tam, Dr. Henry, Dr. Moore, Dr. Hinshaw and Dr. Shahab all agree it is time to transition from these restrictions back to a normal life. I know they have faith in science, and so should the Prime Minister. Science is not a prop. It cannot be pulled out and then put away only when it serves the Prime Minister's political interests.

Canadians have sacrificed so much. We all know that. Every member of Parliament in the House has heard and seen first-hand the sacrifices all of our constituents have made. It just seems that it is not enough for the Prime Minister. In a country more divided than ever, the Prime Minister has decided to purposefully politicize the pandemic for his own gain, so much so that he has been called out by members of his own caucus for, in their words, wedging, dividing and stigmatizing his fellow Canadians.

We all know that, as British Columbia was burning, Afghanistan was falling and we were in the fourth wave of this pandemic, the Prime Minister called the election, a \$600-million unnecessary election, to capitalize on the pandemic. Despite what the Prime Minister says, our country, our beautiful Canada and our true north strong and free is divided. Canada is suffering. Canada needs some hope, and the blame rests squarely on his shoulders.

Conservatives are ready to work with the government to resolve this impasse. I have asked the Prime Minister to meet with me and leaders of the other parties to come up with a resolution to the impasse. Unfortunately, he has ignored my request, but this problem is not going away. Now is the time for us to act, and so I call upon the House to do what the Prime Minister will not do.

I am asking the House to pass our motion, which we are debating today and which we will be voting on. This motion calls on the government to table a plan for the lifting of all federal mandates and restrictions and to table that plan by February 28. If the Liberals would do it sooner, they would have our full support. The sooner, the better, is what we believe.

● (1020)

This should be a time for hope in our country. This should be a time for healing in our country. This should be a time when Canadians can excitedly look to the future, knowing that the pandemic will be behind us, that they will have their freedom and lives back. Instead, they are feeling stigmatized, divided and ridiculed by the Prime Minister.

To my fellow colleagues, let us act. Let us not just talk. Let us bring that hope. Let us bring that healing. Let us bring inspiration to our fellow Canadians, and we can do that by passing this motion. Let us get it done for the Canadians we represent.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very glad to hear the Leader of the Opposition encouraging the protesters to disengage in their activities and go home, but I cannot help but remember the fact that she, not too long ago, actually said in an email that she did not want them to leave and that she wanted this to become the Prime Minister's prob-

lem. As a matter of fact, according to Politico, she actually told truckers, "Don't stop, it's working."

I do appreciate her change in tone today, but I am wondering if the Leader of the Opposition can inform the House at what point along the road did she make the decision to change her mind and change course on this.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, this is just typical of, obviously, the Prime Minister's direction to many in his caucus. They keep stigmatizing, dividing and calling names.

We believe our job on this side of the House is to listen to all Canadians, represent them and hear them. It is not to call them names or try to divide them. In addition to that, we hold the Prime Minister to account. We are not here to hold Canadians to account; we are here to hold the government to account.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, this morning, we got some good news from the leader of the official opposition. She is finally asking the protesters to leave. Will she also ask her MPs to stop taking thumbs-up selfies in support of the truckers? I do not know.

My question is simple. What will she do if the protesters do not leave?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, I am going to ask that member a question: Will he support this motion so that not only the people who have been rallying across the country, but also all Canadians, including those in Quebec, will know that there is hope in the end of the federal restrictions and mandates?

He has a job to do. We have a job to do, and as I just said, our job is not to tell Canadians what to do. Our job is to hold this government to account and provide some hope and inspiration to the people we represent. I respectfully ask that colleague and his caucus if they will support our motion and do the job that Quebeckers have sent them to do. Will they stand up for Quebeckers, and stand up for freedom, not only in Quebec, but also across the country?

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, I am from Alberta, and Alberta has chosen to lift, or will be lifting, almost all of the restrictions. I just want to share something from a University of Alberta Hospital—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I will ask hon. members to pause because I cannot hear the member. I will also ask that we allow members to ask questions without applauding in the middle.

Could the member please start again?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I am glad that my colleagues in the Conservative Party find my comments so enthralling.

Dr. Stephanie Smith, a University of Alberta Hospital physician and infectious disease specialist, has said:

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All those poor Albertans, there are many still waiting for their elective surgeries and to have all these restrictions removed with the possibility of having some increased transmission and maybe more hospitalizations, that's just pushing those surgeries further down the line, which is not what we are trying to achieve.

Would the Leader of the Opposition believe that it makes sense for us to be more reasonable about how we evaluate these public health restrictions and recognize that, as more than 3,500 Albertans have died from COVID-19, we need to not be using a political lens but using a health care lens to make the decisions on restrictions?

• (1025)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, my colleague highlights what is actually a very clear problem in Canada, and that is a health care problem. We do have issues with our health care. It is a provincial jurisdiction, but the federal government has a role to play, which includes providing the provinces the resources that they need. We do not believe that Canadians' restrictions should be limited based solely on whether health care can provide what is necessary.

Canadians follow the rules. Canadians, for two years, have followed the restrictions. They have gotten vaccinated. They have done what governments have asked them to do. Now is the time for governments, right across the country, to step up and provide the health care that is needed.

The federal government needs to play its role. It needs to do it quickly in terms of providing proper health care funding to provinces, but it is time that we end the mandates federally and support Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are two years into the pandemic, almost two years into public health measures and lockdowns. Canadians have been taking it on the chin for two years. Travel is virtually impossible. Small businesses have had to close their doors. Restaurants have opened, closed, opened and closed their doors. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians suddenly found themselves jobless.

Everything is more expensive now: gas, groceries, restaurants. Many people are having trouble making ends meet. The pandemic has affected Canadians' mental health too. Times are tough. Some people did not get through it. Seniors, certainly among the most vulnerable, were isolated, kept apart from their family, their kids, their grandkids and their great-grandkids. Despite all that, despite the sacrifices that were asked of them, Canadians stepped up.

I am proud of the people of Mégantic-L'Érable, Quebec and Canada. Faced with the threat of a disease that was unknown in March 2020, we heeded public health advice. We stayed home. We physically distanced. Everyone did what had to be done in an effort to get rid of COVID-19, protect ourselves and protect our loved ones and everyone around us.

Frontline workers stood firm and faced COVID-19 head on, while most of us were afraid of this new, unknown virus. They took care of people who were sick. Others stayed on the job to ensure a steady supply of food, water and essential services, so everyone else could get on with their lives without fully understanding what was going on.

However, the pandemic has changed. The situation we are in today is very different from that of March 2020. We knew nothing about the virus two years ago. There was no treatment. There was no vaccine. We did not know how to detect the disease. We used to fear it, but that is not the case today. Many of us have had COVID-19 by this point. I have had it. My children have had it. Many of my colleagues have had it. Many Canadians have had COVID-19.

Dr. Boileau, who is with Quebec public health, estimated yesterday that 2 million Quebecers have been infected with COVID-19 in the fifth wave brought on by omicron, and that nearly half of Quebecers have had COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Still, the overwhelming majority of Canadians have stepped up to follow the chief recommendation made by public health officials to end COVID-19. First, we had one dose of vaccine, then two, then three, and officials are even thinking of offering a fourth dose to the most vulnerable. Over 80% of Canadians have had at least one dose and 86% have received a second dose. We were promised a return to normal life, but unfortunately, the virus is both stronger and weaker at the same time: more contagious, but less dangerous.

The virus is still contagious, even to people who are vaccinated, but vaccinated people are less likely to become seriously ill or have complications. The virus has changed. We have changed. Provincial health measures are beginning to be lifted, but unfortunately, the federal government is not changing its position.

I rise today to support our Conservative motion to lift all federal mandates and restrictions for Canadians. The Conservatives think that it is time to follow the science, the evidence and the experts. We think that the government needs to present a plan to quickly lift all restrictions and all vaccine mandates.

Other countries are doing it. This Liberal government must also do this immediately. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister used the pandemic to divide and stigmatize Canadians. That has to stop now. As parliamentarians we must stand united. We must work together to help our society learn to live with COVID-19 as soon as possible with the tools and knowledge we have today.

I want to address Canadians once again, as my leader addressed all these Canadians who are protesting here in Ottawa, in Ontario and across the country. These protests started with truckers and have now become an international phenomenon. Men, women, children, young people, the not-so-young from all walks of life and all different communities in the country have come together to be heard. They want life to go back to normal. To all those taking part in the protests, we believe it is time to tear down the barricades and stop engaging in disruptive behaviour. It is time for us to come together again as Canadians.

The days of division and stigmatization are over.

• (1030)

The economy that the protesters want to reopen is hurting. People are protesting because they love this country and want their country back. The protesters here in Ottawa came bringing a message. That message has been heard. The Conservatives have heard the protesters and will stand up for them and for all Canadians who want to get back to life as we knew it. We assure them that we will not stop until the lockdowns and vaccine mandates have ended.

Today, we are asking the government to present a plan. We are also asking protesters to immediately remove all the barricades and to protest peacefully and legally. It is time to remove the barricades and trucks for the sake of our economy. That is what must be done.

I would like to repeat what our leader said. As parliamentarians, all of us in this place have a role to play to end this impasse, restore peace and order and, at the same time, allow Canadians to get back to their normal lives. We have faith in science and evidence and in our fellow Canadians. Let us have faith that we will protect ourselves. Let us have faith that we will do so in a way that we feel is appropriate, not in the way the government tells us, without any change since the beginning of the pandemic.

The Leader of the Opposition sent a letter to the Prime Minister this week requesting a meeting to discuss how this dire situation we are in can be resolved peacefully, a situation that developed as a result of the Prime Minister's regrettably misguided comments.

In writing her letter, the leader of the official opposition is calling for the Prime Minister to co-operate, collaborate and work together and for all party leaders to meet and discuss how to get through this crisis and come up with a plan to get back to normal.

There has been no response, not a peep, from the Prime Minister. We have not seen a single sign that he is willing to work with parliamentarians to find a solution to this impasse. The problem will not go away. I hope that the Prime Minister will agree to work together with all party leaders in the House and will respond to the letter from the Leader of the Opposition to try to find a solution to this urgent problem.

It is time for the Prime Minister to show leadership. Ever since the pandemic started, he has been slow to acknowledge the pandemic, to close borders, to sign agreements for vaccines and rapid tests and to respond to the fifth wave. Now, he is once again slow to adapt to the new reality of the virus.

The Liberal government is the only level of government in the country that is refusing to give Canadians any hope. The Liberal government is the only one not recognizing Canadians' efforts and sacrifices of the past two years. The Prime Minister is the only one, out of all the governments in Canada, without a plan to learn to live with the virus despite his own scientists' recommendations.

The Prime Minister has no plan to get us out of this crisis. On the contrary, he is contemplating even more restrictions. This has to stop now, as do the blockades and demonstrations. The message has been heard. The opposition leader is asking the Prime Minister to meet with all party leaders so we can find solutions.

We are asking all the other parties, even the Liberals, to support today's motion calling on the government to present a plan to the

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House and all Canadians by the end of February. As the opposition leader said, the sooner, the better. We will support it because we all want out of this situation.

• (1035)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in so many ways, the deputy leader of the Conservative Party is wrong.

Let me talk about leadership. Leadership is when we take a look at Canada and the issue of vaccination. Canada leads the world in terms of vaccination. It is not division when 90% of a population is vaccinated. My question for my friend, the deputy leader of the Conservative Party, is that the last prime minister that was—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Can we show some respect?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, this is what the last Progressive Conservative prime minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, had to say about vaccination. The former prime minister told CTV News *Question Period* on Sunday that the Conservative leader should go further and “show any...unvaccinated MPs the door,” removing them from his caucus. That is leadership. So said Brian Mulroney.

The Liberals, the New Democrats, the Greens and the Bloc have demonstrated leadership. Will the Conservatives today commit to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, we notice that there is a tendency on the Liberal side to want to add fuel to the fire. While we are putting our heads together with all members of the House to come up with a solution, while we are trying to invite all party leaders to work together, the member who just spoke continues to add fuel to the fire, just like his Prime Minister.

Unfortunately, we are far from having a Prime Minister for all Canadians, as he promised. Even members of his own caucus acknowledged that this week.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I hope I am not adding fuel to the fire. God forbid. I can let my colleague know right away that we support the motion.

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However, the leader of our party asked the Leader of the Opposition a question earlier that she did not answer, and I would like a response. What will the Conservatives do if the protesters do not leave?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the members of the Bloc Québécois for supporting our motion.

Like us, it seems that the people of Quebec have done their part. They have worked hard, they have made a lot of sacrifices to get to the next stage and learn to live with COVID-19. The Government of Quebec has done it. It has announced measures, it has announced a plan with specific dates for lifting restrictions—

Mario Simard: I want an answer to my question.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, my colleague wants to know what the Conservatives will do. Unfortunately, the person responsible for this situation and this crisis is the Prime Minister. Given that we are in the opposition—

• (1040)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I agree with him on some things, but not so much on others.

I think that the Conservatives have hit the nail on the head with this motion in that Quebecers and Canadians have had enough, particularly with the yo-yoing on some measures. They are frustrated and fed up, and that is understandable.

However, I find the wording of the motion rather ideological and close-minded, and it seems as though the conclusion has been written in advance. Could the motion not have stated that some restrictions might have to remain in place longer than others based on the science and public health recommendations?

We get the impression that the Conservatives want to lift all the restrictions at once when a more nuanced approach is needed.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I would invite my colleague to read the motion carefully. It is very clear. We are calling on the government to table a plan for lifting all of the restrictions. We are asking the government to give us exact dates, and to tell us what is going to be done and when it will do away with the vaccine mandates and PCR testing at the border. That is what we are asking for.

Our motion gives the government a lot of flexibility. We have even given the government until February 28 to table a plan that it should have presented many months ago. That is the reality.

I therefore invite the members of the NDP to read the motion carefully and vote in favour of it because it represents what Canadians want from their government and their MPs here in the House.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated our daily lives, both in Canada and around the world, for the past two years. It has overloaded our health care systems, disrupted our economy and transformed the way we communicate and live with one other every day.

As pandemic waves have come and gone, all levels of government have responded with various measures, from federal border measures to municipal, provincial and territorial mask mandates to protect Canadians and the health care workers who have been caring for us for 22 months now.

These measures, based on the latest evidence, have been constantly evolving throughout the pandemic as we learn more and more about COVID-19 and how we can ensure the safety of everyone in the country.

[*English*]

For many of us in Canada, this is the hardest event we have lived through. We are all tired. Health care workers are exhausted. Businesses have struggled and closed down. Our mental health has declined, and there is no doubt that the most vulnerable among us, children and the elderly in particular, have suffered disproportionately. There are real consequences. That is why the decision by provinces and territories to impose restrictions has always been considered carefully and responsibly, based on scientific evidence, and has constantly been re-evaluated.

[*Translation*]

Today, we are in a very different position than we were in March 2020. We know more about COVID-19, we have safe and effective vaccines, and vaccination rates are high across the country and around the world.

As everyone knows, the vaccines in Canada are now not only effective but widely distributed across the country. They protect us from serious illness and hospitalization caused by the omicron variant. We also have testing and monitoring tools to help us detect infected individuals and monitor the trajectory of the pandemic.

In addition, in recent weeks, new treatments have become available that can help prevent certain patients from becoming seriously ill.

After two years of following individual public health measures such as getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, physical distancing and staying home when sick, everyone knows what to do to protect themselves and those they love. That has been Canadians' contribution, and we have all learned a great deal. Our efforts have paid off.

As we know, the new year ushered in a spike in COVID-19 cases with the omicron outbreak in Canada and around the world. An unprecedented number of Canadians have been infected in recent weeks.

As Dr. Tam stated in her most recent update, although the omicron variant has peaked, it is still widespread throughout the country.

• (1045)

[English]

Many hospitals across Canada continue to be under intense strain, even though COVID-19 hospitalizations are slightly and slowly declining in some areas of the country. Looking forward, we need to build on the measures we have used to address the omicron wave to strengthen the approach to managing COVID-19, while ensuring that we are prepared when a challenging new variant emerges like omicron. Fortunately, we now have a number of tools at our disposal that we did not have in March, 2020, to help us with this transition and to do so as safely and responsibly as possible.

[Translation]

Testing is a key part of our efforts to contain the pandemic and is another essential tool in our tool box for mitigating the effects of the pandemic. These tests identify who is infected, which helps us stop the transmission of the virus.

Throughout the pandemic, the Government of Canada has worked closely with its provincial and territorial partners to ensure that all of these tools, including rapid tests, are available and used to manage and mitigate outbreaks, thereby protecting the health and safety of all Canadians.

The federal government started buying rapid tests in October 2020 and supplying them for free to the provinces and territories. So far, we have bought more than 490 million rapid tests, which cost a total of nearly \$3.4 billion.

In December alone, the Government of Canada delivered more than 35 million rapid antigen tests to the provinces and territories, and 140 million additional tests arrived in Canada in January.

[English]

We have also introduced Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19. This legislation would provide Health Canada with the statutory authority to purchase up to an additional \$2.5-billion worth of rapid antigen tests to help significantly increase access to rapid testing across the country. This would allow schools to stay open and would protect our children, as well as their parents and grandparents in long-term care. With this funding, the Government of Canada would put in place critical contracts in a highly competitive global market to purchase efficient and sufficient quantities of rapid tests to meet the anticipated demand across the country.

[Translation]

On a positive note, we are also monitoring waste water, which helps us and others understand how COVID-19 is spreading in our communities. By sampling and testing a community's sewage, we can determine whether the virus is spreading or diminishing in that community. For example, COVID-19 can be detected in waste water before a large outbreak, which alerts public health authorities in advance to the presence of this virus and its variants.

Government of Canada scientists are collaborating on a community waste-water surveillance program that is operating in 65 locations across the country. Samples are sent to the Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg to be analyzed, so that any instances of the virus causing

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COVID-19 and its variants of concern are detected as quickly as possible.

• (1050)

[English]

Waste-water testing is conducted in collaboration with communities and local health authorities to inform public health action and decision-making. Waste-water surveillance alerts public health officials regarding where and how COVID-19 and new variants of concern may be spreading on a community-wide scale. Waste-water testing provides a real-time COVID-19 community health picture, especially in situations where clinical testing resources may be limited.

[Translation]

These screening tests and monitoring tools help shape our public health measures, which, at the national level, include border measures.

The Government of Canada continues and will continue to evaluate the latest evidence. It is constantly monitoring the situation to determine how to relax and adjust border measures according to that data.

Like all other elements of the Government of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, border measures are based on existing data, scientific observations, and the results of our monitoring of the epidemiological situation across the country.

In conclusion, vaccination is the best tool we have to protect us and our loved ones against the serious consequences of COVID-19. Vaccines are safe, effective and free for all Canadians who have stepped up to protect themselves by getting vaccinated.

[English]

More than 88% of eligible people in Canada have already received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and at least 83% are now fully vaccinated. More than 50% of eligible people have received an additional booster dose. Also, just over 55% of children aged five to 11 have now received at least one dose.

[Translation]

It is because of all those who have rolled up their sleeves and complied with public health measures that Canada has been able to manage the omicron variant wave and will be able to manage the next waves when they come.

[English]

While vaccination continues to be the best protection against severe outcomes, we also know that treatments that can help prevent a severe illness for those infected with COVID-19 will be important.

Business of Supply

For example, just last month Health Canada authorized Pfizer's antiviral treatment called Paxlovid, paving the way for the distribution of this potentially life-saving medication.

[*Translation*]

This treatment will help adults with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms at high risk of developing a serious form of the disease.

Now that Paxlovid has been authorized, we are making every effort to supply the provinces and territories as soon as possible. The first shipment of 30,000 treatment courses went out a few weeks ago and was allocated based on the number of inhabitants of each province and territory. These treatment courses are now being administered across the country.

I will point out that each treatment course is designed for one person. More of the one million treatment courses we have procured will arrive this month.

Despite the high vaccination rates and robust and responsible monitoring of new, innovative treatments, the actions of every Canadian still count.

[*English*]

Vaccination, treatments and border measures are just a few layers of protection. Well-fitted masks, physical distancing, proper ventilation, rapid testing and staying home when sick are just as important. It is because of these responsible actions by Canadians and their governments that we are now moving forward on the transition to sustainable and responsible management of COVID-19.

We are at this point because of our collective actions, including the difficult decisions made by all provinces and territories, the federal government, communities, businesses and all Canadians. Most importantly, we have arrived at this point because of the tireless work of health care workers and the support and actions of individual Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I would like to be clear, however: We are still in the middle of a pandemic. As we have seen in the past two years, COVID-19 can still surprise us. There will be ups and downs, as well as new variants. We need to be prepared and responsible.

In the short term, that means getting our shots, including the booster. Around six million eligible Canadians still have not received their first or second dose of a primary series of vaccine, and many others are eligible for the booster, which considerably reduces the risk of contracting a severe form of COVID-19.

We must continue to increase our individual and collective protection against the variants and against COVID-19. Canada must be prepared to face future waves of infection that might be weaker or more severe than the current outbreak of the omicron variant.

COVID-19 will continue to be a threat to many of our family members, friends and neighbours. We must continue to act responsibly and to co-operate in order to protect the vulnerable, including children under the age of five who cannot receive the vaccine and people who are immunocompromised.

Over the past two years, people have shown their concern for the health of their loved ones and their community, as well as for the health and safety of their businesses and their society. These people know that it was not easy, but together we did what we had to do to protect ourselves during this difficult period.

The provinces and territories are making their own assessments of how and when they will lift their health restrictions. The Government of Canada is there and will continue to be there to support them in the coming weeks and months.

• (1055)

[*English*]

Our approach has been, and will continue to be, based on the best scientific evidence available and the lessons we have learned over the past two years. Everyone in Canada has sacrificed so much to protect each other during this exceptionally difficult time. They should expect nothing less from us than a thoughtful, responsible and evidence-based approach moving forward that continues to protect everyone as we prepare for the next phases of the pandemic, and we will deliver on those expectations.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the minister mentioned, Canada now has vaccines, therapeutics and tests. We are beyond the stage we were at in March of 2020, and in fact, we are in year three. The reality is that many restrictions are still in place as a stopgap because the government has failed to use its convening role to address a fundamentally broken health care system in Canada, where a few hundred patients can overwhelm an ICU. As well, the government needs to address the fact that it shuttered the early warning system, which left our borders in a state where it is trying to justify continued restrictions.

This motion asks the government to table a plan. It could address these two issues in it. Will the minister support this motion?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased and proud to receive this question. The member is correct when she speaks about working collaboratively and looking forward. That is why we need to be both collaborative and responsible in our actions.

The member speaks about timing. I am rarely political and I try to resist the temptation from time to time, but I would point out that if there is an issue on which we should be speaking more clearly about timelines, it is about when we are all going to get vaccinated. The member for Calgary Nose Hill said last year that we would have to wait until 2030 before we had enough vaccines to vaccinate all Canadians. We are in 2022. It is time for all members of Parliament to be vaccinated.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his speech.

I agree that vaccination is our main ally, since there will be other variants, and that will pose a risk. However, the variants are coming from developing countries. We are starting to talk about a fourth dose, which some people in Quebec and Canada have already received, but there are still three billion people around the world who have not had their first. Based on profit and the law of supply and demand, pharmaceutical companies are prioritizing the countries that can pay the most, namely the wealthy countries.

I know that there is COVAX and that Canada has shipped out doses, but it is still a competitive market, meaning that we keep the lion's share of the doses for us and send out our surplus out of generosity. There is still no strong international strategy for resolving this issue.

My question for the minister is the following: What is Canada's position on waiving the patents?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for his question. He represents a lovely riding I know well, since I have friends who live there.

He is right. For us to be done with this pandemic one day—and that is not today—it will have to be over everywhere. That involves vaccinating and protecting everyone in the world. The good news is that the Canadian government was one of the first countries to support and help establish COVAX and it is still today one of its largest contributors, sixth in the world, in terms of getting everyone vaccinated.

• (1100)

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was going to ask a different question, but listening to the minister's response to my colleague from the Bloc, I feel compelled to ask more and push him a bit further on global vaccine equity.

We know that Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna, the three major developers of vaccines, make about \$65,000 a minute. We also know that they developed those COVID vaccines with \$8 billion of public funds. We also know that the Liberal government has not agreed to the TRIPS waiver and has continued to kick that down the road. We are going into our third year of this pandemic, and the Liberal government still will not support something that would allow other countries to create their own vaccines.

Realistically, saying that none of us are done until all of us are done does not work if the Liberals are not prepared to do any of the work. Why will the government not take those very simple steps that would protect people over big pharma?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Speaker, the member is correct. Canada should always and will always need to be open to talking and working with international partners on precisely that topic of TRIPS and the patent-related agenda.

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However, in relation to the previous question, I am going to add that Canada committed 200 million doses of vaccines in 2020, and half of those vaccines have already been delivered.

In addition, we committed to \$2.5 billion in additional assistance, because it is not only the vaccine product itself that is needed, but also the technology, the infrastructure, the health care resources and the communication campaign where there is vaccine hesitancy. Therefore, it is a combination of being strong on the products, being strong on the international agenda and being strong on the supports that are needed to make sure that everyone in the world gets vaccinated and is protected against this serious disease.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member could respond to an article in today's Winnipeg Free Press. It is from the public health officer, and it states:

Dr. Jazz Atwal, deputy chief provincial public health officer, said Wednesday restrictions will only be lifted in Manitoba when it is safe to do so.

"A handful of individuals who protest have no bearing on what public health recommends," Atwal said at the COVID-19 media briefing. "It is as simple as that."

I wonder if the minister could provide a comment on why it is so important that we listen to health care professionals.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Speaker, there are three things.

The first is that health care workers have been burdened and stressed over the last 22 months. When we discuss these things, we should always have them in mind. We need to look after them because they care for us.

The second thing is that we need to understand that the only sustainable way to end restrictions and lockdowns that are decided upon by provinces and territories is through vaccination.

The third thing, therefore, is again inviting the new Leader of the Opposition to ask all members of her caucus to get vaccinated.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, first and foremost, I say unequivocally that it is time to end the blockades, especially at our international borders. They are hurting our communities, our farmers and our businesses, and our economy needs to recover. I know that none of the people involved with the blockades wants to hurt their fellow citizens, but it is starting to be that way, and I ask them to remove those blockades.

I would also say unequivocally that it is time to end the mandates and the restrictions. As the minister knows, this has been hard on the mental health of many Canadians. It has divided families and it has discriminated against people's personal health choices, and we know that this is not good for our recovery.

Business of Supply

The minister spoke for 20 minutes and never once talked about having a plan to end these very punitive restrictions, as well as the divisive and discriminatory mandates. When will there be a plan?

• (1105)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Speaker, my colleague demonstrated a sense of leadership that the Conservative leader also showed earlier. Asking for the blockades to be taken down is the right thing to do now and was the right thing to do since they started.

The second thing the member mentioned is mental health. About half of Canadians report that their mental health has deteriorated over the last months. He is right that it is a sign of the tension and fatigue that comes with moving through COVID-19.

The third thing I would mention is that as we work together, we need to recognize that no politician is able to declare that COVID-19 will end at a particular point. That is not possible. Science will tell us that. Until science tells us that, we need to keep being responsible and protect ourselves from future waves and variants in the pandemic.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question about the minister's recent statements.

Can you add some predictability to your measures? Look around you. Almost all of the provinces are starting to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to remind the hon. member to address her questions and comments to the Chair.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you for your reminder, Madam Speaker.

That is basically what is being called for. Everyone must agree that vaccination is a means to an end and that the measures in place have helped. In fact, the vaccination rate here is pretty high.

When will the federal government be able to relax certain measures, and how predictable will that be? What indicators is it using? I feel like I am hearing—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must give the minister time to answer.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Speaker, one thing is certain, and one is totally uncertain. The uncertainty is what COVID-19 will surprise us with next. COVID-19 has had a huge number of nasty surprises for us in the past 22 months, and there are undoubtedly more to come.

What is certain, on the other hand, is that of all the tools we have, vaccination is the safest and surest way to prepare for future waves and the almost certain prospect of future variants.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today. I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Let me get one thing straight right out of the gate: We will support the Conservatives' motion, but with certain reservations, which

I would like to discuss today. To begin with, I would like to address the current political climate.

This week, there were two events that summed up the current political climate. We saw the member from Louis-Hébert speak out. I would like to thank him, because I thought he had a measured, non-partisan tone. He made a lot of people feel better.

We also heard from the member from Carleton. I heard him yesterday in the debate on Bill C-8, and he barely spoke about the bill. His speech sounded like some kind of rallying cry pitting freedom against the pandemic. In my opinion, when a public decision-maker draws murky comparisons between freedom and a pandemic, there is something wrong. I say this because it reminded me of U.S. politics.

I do not know if my colleagues pay attention to that stuff, but there is one particularly despicable Republican, Ms. Taylor Greene, who made a problematic association between what is happening in the United States and the Nazi regime. Instead of saying "Gestapo", she said "gazpacho". Perhaps we appreciate culinary delights a little more than she does. Perhaps we are a little more cultured; we know what it is.

I mention this because it seems to me that Canadian politics are becoming more and more Americanized. That is what scares me. When I read the Conservative motion, I saw it as an attempt to unite the discontented. I can understand why people might be discontented. I have family members and people around me who are not happy about the current situation. Even if they are looking for someone to blame, they can see that the government is responsible for its actions, but nobody created the pandemic. I think it is irresponsible to unite the discontented who are proposing solutions to the crisis that are even worse than the current measures. Unfortunately, people's positions are very polarized right now, and I think that is the worst thing we can do during a crisis.

I am a great admirer of Camus, and this reminds me of something he wrote, "Servitudes de la haine", or slaves to hatred, which was published in *Actuelles II*. To put it in context, it is from the end of the Second World War. I will read the passage, and then I would like to unpack it. Camus wrote:

...the truth is something that must be constructed, like love, like intelligence. Nothing is given or promised, but anything is possible for those who take initiative and take risks. That is the wager one must make when one is being suffocated by lies, when one's back is up against the wall. The wager must be made with equanimity [that is worth emphasizing] and implacability, and doors will open.

Camus was a great proponent of moderation. There is a concept in Greek philosophy called "hubris". It is essentially about excess. It seems to me that there is a little too much excess in Canadian politics. People are using the pandemic to score political points. As I said, I found the comments from the member for Louis-Hébert interesting because he was trying to be reasonable and rational and point out that his party might need to make some changes.

What I would like to see from the Conservative Party is reasonable and rational people who are willing to say that they cannot support all of the protesters' demands because the pandemic is still affecting our health care system. I would not be surprised if the protesters I saw flouting physical distancing rules this week put additional pressure on our health care system in the coming weeks.

● (1110)

I think it is irresponsible to appear alongside the protesters and take photos with them, to use them for political purposes and commend them for what they are doing, while knowing full well that this is not the way out of the crisis. It demonstrates a certain level of political excess that is becoming increasingly common. Not to be unkind, but I could not help but notice some degree of excess in some of the statements made by the member for Carleton.

I am talking about excess because the motion moved by my Conservative colleagues refers to something Dr. Theresa Tam has said. We have heard from her quite a bit throughout this crisis. During the first wave, she provided some guidance that I heard several of our Conservative colleagues question. Now they are using Dr. Tam's words to call for the various measures that have been put in place to be lifted.

Over the past few weeks, we have once again seen plenty of examples of this ideological excess. Protesters demanded that all measures be lifted, but half of the restrictions do not even fall under the jurisdiction of the federal Parliament. They are provincial responsibilities. It is the provincial health departments that decide to impose lockdowns. In the House, the specific measures do not necessarily concern lockdowns or restaurant closures. The provinces deal with that.

What is more, all of this is being done for political purposes. Unfortunately, I have repeatedly heard some colleagues from the Conservative Party talk about lifting all measures because that would please the protesters outside. I talked about the current climate. All of this makes me think of that ailment of democracy called populism.

The definition of populism is to propose very simple solutions to complex problems. A pandemic is complex and is not something that can be resolved by honking horns, reopening restaurants or yelling about freedom. To overcome the pandemic, we have to rely on science. The worst thing a public decision-maker can do is try to exploit science and use it for partisan purposes. Science implies a form of truth and does not mix well with ideologies.

In the motion moved by my Conservative colleagues, I get the impression that they are attempting to use science for ideological purposes by referring to Dr. Tam. They did not listen to her when she said that unfortunately, we needed to impose certain restrictions on our individual freedoms because of the pandemic. Now, however, they are listening to her when she says the opposite.

The worst thing a public decision-maker can do is use science for ideological purposes, which we are seeing increasingly today. I look forward to seeing my Conservative colleagues rely on science when it comes to climate change, which they have not done so far, unfortunately.

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I think using science for ideological purposes is one of the worst things a politician can do, because it fuels public cynicism. Populism feeds off that cynicism, rejects the elites and breeds skepticism of institutions. Populism is on the rise in Canada, and I do not think my Conservative colleagues are too upset about it.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that the Bloc Québécois might support the Conservatives' motion, with some reservations. The main reservation is that our Conservative colleagues seem to be trying to use Dr. Tam for their own purposes. We will see where that ends. I look forward to hearing my colleagues' comments.

● (1115)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be honest. I was a little touched by the member for Jonquière's comments about moderation, accountability, nuance and combatting extremism and populism. I completely agree with him.

I think he chose the right words to express the idea that, because we are going through this crisis together, it is important for us to stick together, listen to each other and respect one another, while we also listen to scientists and respect what they are saying.

I am also a fan of Albert Camus, and I am not looking for a quote here, but I would like to ask my colleague what Albert Camus would have to say if he were here in the House today.

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, that was a fine way to turn it over to me, but I will decline. The minister will understand why.

I am pleased that it is the Minister of Health who asked me this question, because what the pandemic has shown us is that our health care system was ill prepared.

If we want to be honest and set ideology aside, the best thing to do is to reinvest in our health care system.

I am reaching out to the Minister of Health. A 35% increase would be fantastic, and I believe that Camus would agree with me on that.

[English]

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his remarks, and I want to thank him and his colleagues for his support of our motion today. I also join him in condemning anything Gestapo, but as a former tomato farmer, I have to say gazpacho would be the way to go.

Chatham-Kent—Leamington is the home of tomato production in Canada, a huge greenhouse sector with half a billion dollars of annual farm gate production a year. It is being interfered with dramatically by the blockade. I will join my colleagues' voices today in calling for both the end of the blockade and an end of the mandates.

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The mayor of Windsor, yesterday morning, called for federal leadership to resolve this. I would ask my colleague to comment on what he is looking for in the federal government's leadership to end the situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

In my opinion, there are two positions that should be avoided. The Conservatives roundly criticized the government for insulting the protesters. I agree with my colleague that we should perhaps avoid that, but we should also avoid flattering them.

By using “freedom” as a rallying cry, my Conservative colleagues are trying to flatter certain protesters, to encourage them while doing nothing to resolve the crisis. I believe that what we should do is take a measured position. We should not insult the protesters, but we certainly should not flatter them either.

• (1120)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, his words and the tone he used.

I am not very familiar with the works of Camus, but I listen carefully to Dr. Theresa Tam's statements. I appreciated my colleague's comment about how the Conservatives sometimes criticize what Dr. Tam says, but then support her at other times.

Dr. Tam stated that we should re-examine all mandatory measures and federal restrictions. However, today's motion does not propose a re-examination of restrictions, it comes to the conclusion that we should lift them immediately.

Does my colleague believe that the motion truly reflects what Dr. Tam said, or did the Conservatives jump to conclusions about what she was proposing?

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I understand what my colleague means. I have some concerns as well. The decision to lift the mandatory measures must be based on the circumstances. If there is a new wave or problems that we did not foresee, unfortunately, we will have to leave the measures in place to limit the spread of the virus.

My Conservative colleagues could have been a bit clearer in their motion by saying that we would take circumstances into consideration. That could be worth adding, particularly since my colleague raised the same concern.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are here today to debate a very important and interesting motion. However, this debate should not even be necessary. It should not be necessary to debate today's topic because it should have been part of a plan from the beginning. Unfortunately, Canada did not have a plan for dealing with the pandemic, despite the fact that epidemiologists had been telling us for 20 years that a pandemic was coming.

That is why we are debating a motion asking the government to table a reopening plan. I will talk briefly about the current situation,

and I will try to answer two questions: Why is it important to have a plan, and what should be in that plan?

Earlier this week, I was saying that it is important to know where we are so that we can know where we want to go. The current situation is not great. No one is going to be surprised by what I am going to say in the next few minutes.

People are discouraged. They do not know which way to turn, who to believe, what to do or why certain things were or were not done. Some 35,000 families in Canada have lost one or more loved ones. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs, sometimes more than once, particularly in the hotel, restaurant, transportation, tourism, and arts industries, all of which have been hit especially hard.

It is understandable that people would feel discouraged about the current situation and would rather not feel discouraged about the future. Discouragement is totally understandable. The elastic is stretched to the breaking point. All the elastics, actually.

Let us start with the elastic that represents people's resilience. Throughout the pandemic, Quebecers and Canadians have been very resilient and very understanding, as we can see from vaccination rates. People believed things would go back to normal once they were vaccinated. That is the message that went out from coast to coast to coast, as English-speaking members are fond of saying.

Despite laudable vaccination rates, the situation has not gone back to normal, and we can see why people would be upset about that. Nobody can make heads or tails of all the measures. Everything is so contradictory, and it is so hard to understand everything on the news from one day to the next. The authorities say one thing one day, and the opposite the next, it seems. How are people supposed to figure it all out?

There is also the condition of the economy, which is not much better. People have had to make temporary or permanent career changes. Entire sectors of the economy are still in tatters. I referred to them earlier: transportation, arts, culture, tourism, hospitality and restaurants. These days, people tend to choose jobs they enjoy. When someone loses their job, it feels like something dies inside, and people have been dying inside for the past two years. It is not easy, and their anger, sorrow and distress are understandable.

Lastly, let us take a look at health. The current situation is complex, and the reasons behind some decisions being made right now revolve around the ability of Canada's health care systems to withstand the additional burden of the pandemic. Even if Canadians are vaccinated, the health systems are not doing well. Workers are exhausted, if not sick. The health care systems need predictable and recurring investments.

The party in power keeps telling us that it has injected billions of dollars into the health care systems of Quebec and the provinces since the beginning of the pandemic. That is true, we have never denied it. However, it is the constitutional role of the federal government, in times of crisis, to increase its support to Quebec and the provinces. The crux of the problem is that, for the past 30 years, the federal government has made cuts to health care funding, while costs have increased year after year because of inflation and the ageing population. That has made health systems very fragile.

However, let it not be said that the federal government has not held up its end of the bargain; it is far better to stigmatize people and say that health care systems are vulnerable and failing because people are not vaccinated. I am being sarcastic, of course. Although I do encourage people to get vaccinated, it is a personal choice.

• (1125)

It is certainly not by stigmatizing people that our health care problems will be solved; the systems are fragile because the federal government has been underfunding them for 30 years.

In short, taking stock of the situation involves seeing with clarity and understanding what state our society as a whole is in, as well as admitting our mistakes. In the past, I was told to never admit my mistakes, because that was a sign of weakness. No. It is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of clarity. It means that we are prepared to work to improve a situation caused, in whole or in part, by our mistakes. That is what we must do, and that is what must be in a plan to lift restrictions.

When it comes to health transfers, mistakes were made not only by the party currently in power, but also by all parties that have been in power for the past 30 years. It is by clearly seeing our mistakes that we will be able to fix the situation.

Now, why make a plan? It all comes down to one word: predictability. We all need predictability. It is nice to look ahead, past the tip of our noses, even if some have longer ones than others. It lets us start planning for the future again, because it clearly outlines the steps needed to get through an unwanted and undesirable situation. It is so simple and makes so much sense, that it is surprising we have to ask for a plan and explain why it is needed. It is just common sense.

Is the motion calling for a full lifting of restrictions on February 28? No, because fully lifting all restrictions and mandates with no projections, no planning, is not a plan, it is a recipe for disaster. We need a plan with clearly defined steps. This leads me to talk about what a plan should contain, and that is a lot of things.

First, it should take stock of the current situation, including what works and what mistakes need to be corrected. Second, it should set identifiable and quantifiable goals and ask questions about the present and the future that need to be answered. Then, it must include milestones and concrete, verifiable measures for achieving those milestones, and there must be identifiable and quantifiable conditions for moving from one milestone to the next. Individuals responsible for carrying out and validating these actions must be appointed. In addition, this plan requires some form of responsibility and accountability to the public, as well as effective communica-

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tion, evaluation and validation tools. Lastly, it must address possible obstacles and provide solutions for dealing with them.

In this particular case, we need to assess the measures currently in place, their rationale and effectiveness, and then determine when they should end. We also need to think about the conditions for ending the pandemic, which involves having Canada play an international role, not only as a supplier of goods and services, but also of education and intelligence. This role must be included in the plan to lift restrictions.

In conclusion, having a plan to lift restrictions will help determine what needs to be done for us to get back to some normalcy and what steps are needed in order to get there. Some steps will happen quickly and others will happen less quickly, but they need to happen. It is important. We are all fed up.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Bloc supports this motion, and I can understand the opposition and the public wanting some kind of plan and timetable. When exactly are we going to open the borders and no longer have to do tests? When can we get on a plane without having to wear a mask?

However, is the problem not uncertainty? What is going to happen with respect to variants in one month or two months? There will be other variants, but how virulent will they be and how contagious? How new will they be? In one month how full will our ICUs be? In two months how full will they be? We cannot say.

Does it not make sense to dial up or down the public health restrictions according to the risk at the time, not according to some preconceived timeline?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, that is exactly why I did not talk about a timeline in my speech, but instead about conditions to be met and steps to be taken. We are indeed living in a period of uncertainty, and it is difficult to force a timeline on uncertainty. However, having identifiable and quantifiable objectives and conditions lets us see what we are accomplishing and what we are able to do together.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, countries around the world with lower vaccination rates than those in Canada are easing their COVID-19 restrictions. The trend continues in North America, where several American states are about to lessen their restrictions. Of course, we now know that several provinces are doing the same.

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The World Health Organization recently stated that some countries can carefully consider relaxing the rules if they have high immunization rates. Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, opined that all existing health measures need to be "re-evaluated" so that we can "get back to some normalcy".

Canadians have done their part. The good citizens of my riding of Brantford—Brant have done their part. They are frustrated. They are angry. For the last two years, they have had their lives impacted by job loss, economic uncertainty, isolation and depression. Now it is time for the government to do its part. It is time for the Prime Minister to be a Prime Minister—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, for a response to the question.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, I agree with some of the points raised by my colleague. First, vaccination is important. Second, we need a phased reopening plan, as suggested by the WHO and Dr. Theresa Tam.

However, we need to avoid the trap of comparing ourselves to other countries, because we must first answer this question: Have these countries' health systems been underfunded for the past 30 years? If the answer is no, then Canada cannot compare itself to those countries.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion today about who is covering the burden of this pandemic, and I cannot help but remind people about the thousands of health care workers right here in Hamilton Centre and hospitals across the country. Decades of health care underfunding and neglect under successive federal governments have left Canada without the surge capacity necessary to meet the current crisis. I reference what is happening right now in Denmark and Sweden, which have lifted their restrictions.

Does the hon. member agree that the federal government should commit to providing the provinces and territories with significant new, long-term funding to Canada health transfers to expand Canada's health care system capacity?

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes. That is what we have been saying for a very long time, and we will keep saying it until this happens. Long-term recurring funding is needed. We are asking for 35% when the agreements call for 50%; that is a reasonable compromise.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, on February 7, 2011, the member for Papineau said, "Enough of a Prime Minister who will not listen to anyone, anytime, anywhere." Two years ago, the Prime Minister sent cabinet ministers to Smithers, B.C., for a dialogue with the hereditary chiefs, helping to end what many would consider disruptive nationwide protests.

Does the member recognize that the Prime Minister would do well to respect the science and support our motion to regain the trust of over half of Canadians, giving them a light at the end of this long tunnel?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, that is what I was saying in my speech.

We need to move forward and have a plan. Having a plan to lift restrictions does not mean that, on February 28, everyone will be free to do as they please. It means that we will know where we are going, step by step, condition by condition. It makes sense to support this motion.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to address my colleagues in the House of Commons today to talk about the opposition motion. I will be splitting my time with the very articulate and intelligent member for Vancouver Kingsway.

I want to start off by saying what I know we all are aware of: The actual enemy, the enemy we are all trying to fight, is COVID-19. It is not each other; it is not convoys or individuals. It is a disease. It is a global health pandemic. We know that this global health pandemic has been incredibly hard for so many people. In this place, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that people have lots their loved ones. Almost 35,000 Canadians have died, and that is 35,000 families, parents, children, brothers, sisters and friends.

Over three million Canadians have become sick, and we still do not know what the implications of that will be for the future. We are hearing some specialists say that one in four Canadians will have long-term impacts from COVID-19. Three million Canadians have been sick. That is just to date and those are just the ones we know about. It is important to remember some of these things in this place.

People's livelihoods have been deeply impacted too. In my riding of Edmonton Strathcona, a number of entrepreneurs have tried to start businesses and they have not been able to get the support they need. There are the workers and people in the artistic community. Edmonton Strathcona is the heart of the artistic community. It is where the Fringe Festival is and where the Edmonton Folk Music Festival is. All of these artists have not been able to earn an income and have not been able to do what they do for a living.

As terrible as that has been, we also need to consider what has happened to our teachers, who we are asking to go online and offline, and consider the difficulties they have had to deal with if they have families at home they are trying to protect while also trying to protect our children. We have put an immense pressure on health care workers and other essential workers. We have an overwhelmed health care system. We have the opioid crisis and our mental health challenges. All of these things are terrible and we really do need to look at them, but we cannot lose sight of the real enemy here and the real enemy is COVID.

I understand the restrictions have been hard, but I honestly believe they have been necessary. A personal hero of mine is a doctor in Alberta named Dr. Vipond. He keeps saying that we are using the wrong word. These are not in fact restrictions; they are protections. Maybe that is how we need to look at this. Maybe that is a way we can look at this going forward, that these are protections.

We do not know how successful these protections have been. We do not know how many more people might have died if these protections had not been in place. We do not know how many more variants we would have had or how much longer we would be in COVID-19 if these protections had not been there. We know masks, smaller social gatherings, vaccinations and PPE help. All of these things make it easier for our health care systems to continue on and make it easier for us to keep our loved ones and ourselves safe.

As many members know, Alberta will be lifting all of the protections. Some of my Conservative colleagues enthusiastically cheered this earlier today. However, before people get out their “best summer ever” hats or “best spring ever” hats, I want to remind members in the House that since the best summer ever, thousands of Albertans have died. That is thousands of Albertan families that have been devastated.

Why is Alberta lifting restrictions? Alberta is lifting restrictions because a handful of angry men have blocked our border and the premier cares more about what those “truckers” think, and I use quotes very deliberately, than about the health and wellness of the people of Alberta. We have a premier who is more concerned about his polling numbers than he is about enforcing the actual laws that he put in place. Bill 1 was the first law Premier Kenney put in place. He is not interested in using it because that law was never intended to be used against people who vote for Premier Kenney. That law was intended to be used against indigenous people. That law was intended to be used against people protecting our climate.

• (1140)

COVID-19 does not have to be a death sentence, yet a person in Alberta is now more likely to die of COVID than heart disease, lung disease or any other single cause except old age. Why is that? In a word, it is because of politics. It is because we have a premier in Alberta who cares more about his poll numbers than about the health and well-being of Albertans.

Public health should not be subject to the whims of politicians. Public health must be guided by science and the science on COVID is very clear. Vaccines work. Masks work. Restrictions on indoor gatherings work. We should be using every tool we have to prevent the loss of life and the long-term impacts of COVID. Knowing that

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long COVID is with us, knowing that the impact will be with us for a long time, our health care system is going to be spending resources on COVID long after this virus is gone.

There are other solutions we can look at. I have stood up in the House many times and talked about vaccine equity. I have talked about how important it is for Canada to play a role. We all know there is no way we are going to get out of this pandemic in Canada while we fail to ensure that people around the world are able to get the vaccines and the protections they need. We know that, yet we have a government right now that refuses to donate the doses that are required.

The Liberals are proud of the fact that they have not even met the 50% mark of their promises almost three years in. They have continually failed to work with the WTO to have the TRIPS waiver signed so that countries around the world can access the recipes to make those vaccinations. It is so important to think about the fact that they do this to protect the profits of the pharmaceutical companies. These pharmaceutical companies are making tens of thousands of dollars a minute, and they developed these vaccines with public dollars.

I saw a quote yesterday on Twitter where someone made the point that having pharmaceutical companies be in charge of a vaccine rollout is the equivalent of letting oil and gas companies be in charge of climate change. Think about that for a minute. We are giving the ability to make vaccines that save people's lives to pharmaceutical companies whose entire reason for being is a profit margin.

We need the government to act more on this. We need it to change the CAMR, Canada's access to medicines regime. We need it to sign on to the TRIPS waiver. We need it to do more on COV-AX, to actually care about those vaccines and care about getting them out the door. We need to support people around the world to have syringes, to have cold supply chains and to have PPE. It is not the same thing to try to vaccinate someone in a rural community in Uganda as it is to try to vaccinate someone in downtown Toronto. We need to support countries as they go through that.

In addition to what we can do around the world and the role we have to play there, we need to do more here. Our health care system in Canada has been decimated year after year. We should be having federal transfers that are 50% of the cost of health care. We do not have that anymore. That is not possible anymore.

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I look at what the Conservatives are doing with this motion. They seem positively gleeful about removing all health restrictions, all the things that will ensure our ICUs can continue and all the protections for our doctors and essential workers. I try not to be cynical in this place and sometimes that is very difficult, but I do wonder: Are the Conservatives trying to destroy our health care system? Do they want to see our health care system crumble so that they can bring in the two-tiered American-style health care we have seen Jason Kenney and the UCP try to bring to Alberta?

We need to use science-based decision-making. We need to listen to experts. We need to see this pandemic as a global pandemic that requires a global solution. It is time to stop making this political. It is time to stop the empty words. It is far past time for us as parliamentarians to do the right thing for Canadians, for ourselves, for our children and for our parents.

It is way past time for us to do the right thing for people around the world.

• (1145)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was somewhat comforted by the fact that the Leader of the Opposition said that the truckers should go home, having given, in the last two weeks, aid and comfort to lawlessness in the name of freedom.

I wonder what the member's thoughts are on this spread of lawlessness, from Quebec to Toronto to Windsor to her own province, and the aid and comfort that has been given by the Leader of the Opposition and her colleagues, which has unleashed something that is counterproductive to any sense of who we are as Canadians.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I am deeply ashamed that the first border crossing blockade that was in place was in Coutts, Alberta, and that our premier did not stand up and shut that down. What that did was empower people to shut down Windsor and to start to protest the Ottawa airport. If we had used the tools that we had in place to say that this is infrastructure that needs to remain open, that this is for the good of our country, our province and the people in our communities, if the leader of the UCP, Jason Kenney, had actually had the bravery to do that, I do not think we would have seen these convoys on other borders. I think that folks were watching to see what the response would be from the government, and it was non-existent. It was to roll over and lift the mandates. To be honest, I hold Jason Kenney to blame for a lot of this.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for bringing this back to the impact that this COVID-19 pandemic has had on people, and for changing the language to “protections”. I really appreciate that. However, I see in the motion before us today that there are no solutions for protections, and there is no talk of protections for people.

I wonder if the member could share a little more on the comments around privatization. I would note that, in the House earlier this week, there were some comments from across the aisle about the potential for private health care support in this kind of a fight. I would ask the member what her thoughts are on our health care system.

• (1150)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, my colleague has been a tireless advocate for the care community and for workers across this country, and I thank her for all of her efforts in that regard.

In Alberta, this is not something new for us. We have been seeing some very serious attempts to privatize large swaths of our public health care system. Right now in Alberta, for example, we regularly do not have an ambulance that is available to respond to emergencies in Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary and many rural communities. The testing systems that we have in place are becoming privatized. So much of our health care system is under attack, and I think Canadians need to understand how dangerous that is.

I do not believe that Canadians want a two-tiered health care system. I do not believe they want an American-style system that leaves so many behind. We need to be very vigilant as we go forward to ensure that we increase our health care transfers to the provinces, that we ensure that the Canada Health Act is improved and that we have things like mental health care, pharmacare—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to allow time for other questions.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

There is something a little odd about what we are going through. Obviously, like my colleague and all members, this morning, I cannot help but notice how frustrated people are. People are frustrated, fed up and tired of all the health rules and everything else.

What is especially odd is that Canada is one of the most highly vaccinated countries in the world, with the most stringent health regulations, and yet the number of cases was quite high until recently. Many countries are lifting health measures.

Quebec's health system is about to implode, despite all the measures brought in and the high vaccination rates. Clearly, increasing health transfers is crucial.

Does my colleague agree that it is time to hold a summit on health and health care, considering their importance, and increase health transfers to the provinces accordingly—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for a short answer.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, my colleague is a member of the international human rights subcommittee with me, and I look forward to working with him on many of the global issues we will be tackling in that committee.

In terms of his question, I think there is a real need for a conversation, a serious, non-political, science-based conversation, on how we reduce restrictions and protections. As we move forward, we all want to get out of COVID-19. I want my children to go back to school. I want my daughter to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, we stand at a pivotal time in our country's history. Canadians in every corner of our land have been profoundly affected by what has been described as a once-in-a-century global pandemic. I think it is uncontroversial to assert that no one could ever have envisioned the sweeping and dislocating health, economic, political and social ramifications of COVID-19.

Over three million Canadians have been infected. Some 35,000 Canadians lost their lives, all too frequently suffering and dying alone. Families have been separated. Important celebrations and markers in people's lives have been cancelled. Workers have lost their incomes, and small business people their enterprises. Culture, education, travel and friendships have been negatively impacted. Mental and physical health have been seriously tested.

It is fair to say that Canadians are exhausted and have been challenged, not only by the virus but by the severe disruptions they have had to endure to respond to it. I also think it is fair to acknowledge that policy-makers at all levels of government have had to act in unprecedented circumstances. We have all had to improvise at times and make the best decisions we can based on an imperfect understanding of the facts and the vicissitudes of an uncertain future. It is a stark reminder that Mother Nature is bigger than all of us and impossible to outsmart.

As such, I think some grace and generosity of spirit would be helpful for our country at this time. However, it is also imperative that we acknowledge that mistakes have been made, important responsibilities have been breached and circumstances have been exploited, and I believe that blame is shared by every institution in our country.

Government leaders have seized upon the pandemic as a political opportunity to engage in wedge politics and to seek partisan advantage. Political parties have exacerbated divisions and irresponsibly fanned the flames of insurrection. Public health agencies and officials have failed to adequately prepare our nation for this emergency. This is particularly unforgivable when we had previous warnings and blueprints to do just that. Numerous policy reversals and errors were made, and certainty has been inappropriately expressed when data was unclear and developing. Large corporations have used shortages and economic vulnerabilities for excessive profiteering, and Canadians themselves have, occasionally unwittingly and sometimes deliberately, spread misinformation or hateful rhetoric online.

The result is that division among citizens has rarely been so sharp. An unfortunate and irresponsible oversimplification of issues has developed. Perhaps most alarmingly, a lack of transparency has stifled scientific debate, impaired legitimate questioning and al-

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lowed errors to persist when they have occurred. This is unhelpful, it is unscientific and, most importantly, it does not serve to improve Canadians' health or public confidence in our institutions. I believe it is time to recognize all of this and make changes where possible.

We are now fully two years into this pandemic. Times have changed, and so have our citizens. People are much better informed and have access to data and different practices from around the world. In many cases, they can now draw upon their own experiences. They have a much sharper notion of what works, what makes sense and what does not. They can spot inconsistencies and identify policy reversals, of which by now there are a myriad.

It is time to recognize that many Canadians have legitimate questions about the health policies and mandates they have been asked to observe. After two years of the pandemic, Canadians are understandably tired and frustrated. People have been making profound sacrifices, and they want to see their federal government take leadership by telling them there is a road map moving forward.

Let me be clear. Nothing justifies the spread of disinformation or the denial of science. Nothing justifies intimidating health care workers or holding cities hostage. While assembly, protest and expression are cherished values in our country, we do not and cannot make policy by mob rule. Equally, we cannot abandon vulnerable people to COVID by dropping all public health restrictions overnight, as some provinces propose. That would be irresponsible and driven more by politics than by science.

We know that seniors and those with vulnerable health conditions are at greater risk of becoming seriously ill if they contract COVID, and we must ensure that evidence-based public health measures are in place to protect them.

● (1155)

While COVID is still circulating in Canada and internationally, a vaccines-plus approach continues to be essential to the pandemic response. This includes layering vaccinations with timed and targeted public health measures and individual protective practices. As Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, has recently acknowledged, it is important and timely to re-examine public health measures to determine what the next step should be.

New Democrats agree. We believe it is both healthy and necessary to review our current policies based on data, science and evidence, both to confirm that we are on the right track and to make course corrections where we are not. We must not hesitate to ask searching questions and follow the science. Indeed, the very essence of science is questioning. We question giants such as Newton and Einstein. Surely, we can question the Prime Minister and the Liberal government. Frankly, given their performance failures to date, we must do so.

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However, it is important to note that the motion before the House mis-characterizes what Dr. Tam stated. At a news conference on February 4, Dr. Tam responded to questions on vaccine passports and travel restrictions by noting that the federal government is looking at a “whole range of public health measures” and policies with the provinces and territories to determine what the path forward might be for a whole suite of these measures.

Importantly, Dr. Tam also stated, “maintaining layers of protection remains important to reduce spread, particularly as we continue to spend more time indoors over the winter and as public health measures begin to ease in areas of the country.”

This is prudent. We must recognize that as very high infection rates continue to challenge or exceed testing capacity, reported case numbers underestimate the true number of infections in Canada, and the ongoing high volume of COVID cases across Canada continues to place a heavy strain on our health care system because of increased hospital admissions and high illness among health care workers.

This motion is fundamentally flawed. It prejudices the science by coming to a conclusion before the investigation has been completed. While all Canadians, of course, look forward to a return to normal and the elimination of extraordinary public health measures, it is completely irresponsible to call for such before we know it is responsible and safe to do so.

In any event, some things are very clear. In order for us to move out of the pandemic better prepared for the future, the federal government must increase health care transfers to the provinces and territories. This kind of federal leadership will help it address staff shortages, increase capacity in hospitals and make sure that Canadians can get the care they need when they need it. This is a lesson of COVID that cannot wait to be implemented. We have to ensure that more beds are available in ICUs and general wards, and that surge capacity is better planned. Canadians must be able to get surgeries in a timely manner, and have quicker access to life-saving diagnostic tests and screenings for things such as cancer.

The federal government also needs to improve access to PCR and rapid antigen testing and personal protective equipment for all Canadian health care workers, frontline workers, educators and households. Testing and tracing remain core parts of dealing with COVID in any scenario, as we cannot manage what we do not measure.

Further, it is essential that the Liberals stop protecting the pharmaceutical industry and support waiving intellectual property rights on global COVID-19 vaccines and technologies to get the world vaccinated. Immune escape variants will continue to emerge and threaten our hard-won gains unless everyone in the world has full access to vaccinations and other health technologies as they emerge. This is not just a matter of equality. This is a matter of self-preservation and self-interest.

One thing is certain. New Democrats consider ourselves to be the party of health care. It was through the vision, hard work and determination of New Democrats across this country that our public health care system was conceived and built. New Democrats will never stop fighting for Canadians to have effective, evidence-based

public health measures and the strong, resilient and comprehensive public health care system they and their families deserve.

• (1200)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member suggests that he supports the TRIPS waiver on patent protection for COVID-related products. This is something that I know many members of the House, from all parties, agree on. Could he perhaps speak a bit more to that issue and its importance?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his leadership and support across party lines for a better policy for the Canadian government to ensure vaccine equity around the world. It is also a delight to serve with him on the health committee.

He is exactly right. It is true that billions of dollars of taxpayer funds went into the development of vaccines. In Moderna's case, I believe \$2 billion, 100% of the funding for its vaccine, was paid for by taxpayers. Similarly, when Pfizer partnered with its German partner, it received I believe half a billion euros from the German government. It means this technology is publicly financed. It should be available for the public good.

Moreover, we all stand to benefit by unleashing the ability of every country in the world to obtain the ability to manufacture, distribute and vaccinate its own population. Any measure that works against that, by definition, is not only unfair but counterproductive. The Liberal government, at the World Trade Organization, still refuses to throw its support behind a temporary waiver of the TRIPS regulations to ensure every country can obtain access to vaccines and technology free of patents. The United States have said they would do it. I do not understand why the government will not do so when it is so important not only to help the world's population, but to help Canadians deal with the next omicron escape variant.

• (1205)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just last night, I spoke again with people in riding: a family who has made so many sacrifices and faced so many hardships. The financial, social, moral, physical and mental health of Canadians continues to suffer. Being stigmatized, ridiculed and divided by the government is wrong, and clearly Canadians have had enough. We need to listen to the science and the voices of the people who put us here, and provide some hope and inspiration. That is our role as parliamentarians.

Does the member acknowledge that we need to move past this ideological, rigid and divisive government and aspire to a reasonable, scientific and thoughtful exit plan for this pandemic?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my hon. colleague on the health committee as well.

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I agree with much of what she said. I also talk to my constituents and share not only their fatigue, frustration and desire to return to normalcy, but also a desire for a more mature discussion of the issues in this country. I spoke to that in my speech. It is time for us to recognize that there are legitimate questions about the mandates and policies that have been implemented by all levels of government, and we need to create the space for Canadians with those questions to ask them. We also have to examine these questions based on data and science. That should be our guide.

Finally, I very much share my opposition colleague's desire for an evidence-based, thoughtful government that does not exploit this pandemic, as I think the Liberal government has been accused of doing by its own caucus. It is why I am a member of the New Democratic Party, because that is exactly the kind of government we will bring Canadians when we are elected.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway on his speech.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with several parts of his speech, including the issue of health care transfers, which should be dealt with immediately. The government must act now to come to an agreement with Quebec and the provinces.

Everyone certainly is fed up right now. My colleague said it well during his speech. However, we in the Bloc Québécois agree that the best tool for getting us through this pandemic is still vaccination and, of course, listening to public health.

I would like my colleague's opinion on patents. We know that this is a global pandemic, so even if we have a plan to manage the borders, which is a federal jurisdiction, we are no further ahead if other countries do not have access to vaccines. I would like my colleague to share his opinion on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to that very important question about patents. I agree with the member that the position of the Canadian government is unconscionable, in that it continues to be a barrier to waiving the TRIPS waivers at the World Trade Organization. We are standing in the way of other countries being able to vaccinate their citizens.

I want to speak for a moment about patents in this country. At one time, the Liberal government boasted that we had the widest portfolio in the world. Now, we have one of the narrowest. There are four kinds of vaccines: whole vaccines, gene therapy vaccines, composite vaccines and another type. We only have one type of vaccine, the gene therapy vaccine, that is really only made by two manufacturers. I do not know why Health Canada is not approving other vaccines, such as whole vaccines that are being used very effectively in countries with COVID, because that would give more choice to Canadians who may have concerns about mRNA technology. They should have access to whole vaccines, as Europeans do and as people in Asia do.

A Canadian company that has received money from the government, Novavax, has had its vaccine approved in over 24 countries, and it is still not approved here. We need to—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

We have in front of us today a motion. The House of Commons is calling upon the federal government to table a plan to lift all federal mandates and restrictions.

What I want to do with my time today is outline why I believe the initial rationale for restrictions is perhaps no longer particularly pertinent and that there are better solutions to deal with those problems, and also outline why maintaining restrictions is coming at a sizable cost. I will then suggest some things other than restrictions that the government could be doing to address some of the challenges that we are facing.

On the first point, most restrictions in Canada were put in place to do five things: figure out what COVID was, contain COVID, give us time to get vaccines and therapeutics, incent people to get vaccinated and ensure that we had enough capacity in hospitals to deal with acute urgent-care patients.

I will run through each of those points very briefly.

First, we now know what COVID is. Sure, we need to do some research on long COVID and the impacts, and we absolutely need to make sure that we are detecting emerging variants around the world, but we know what it is and we have a good body of research on it. Therefore, I do not think that continued restrictions are giving us any gain or lead on that particular issue. Certainly the government has not presented any data to the effect that somehow continued restrictions are needed for us to conduct additional research. I would argue that would be very bad public policy.

The second thing is that the restrictions were put in place to contain COVID initially. Anybody in this House would be hard-pressed to say that COVID is containable. It is not. We are in an endemic state. Yes, there are variants that are emerging and we should be in a place to monitor those variants and communicate that to frontline professionals and ensure that our vaccines and our therapeutics are matching those, but COVID zero is not possible. In fact, many Canadians who were vaccinated have contracted the omicron variant, and so we cannot be operating in a COVID-zero situation.

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The third point is that restrictions were put in place to get us vaccines and therapeutics. I am fully vaccinated and boosted. I encourage anybody who has not been vaccinated to consider getting vaccinated. Doing that is the best way to prevent severe illness from COVID.

On the fourth point, arguably—and we need to have this conversation in the House—further restrictions are not going to incent any more Canadians to get vaccinated at this point. If Canadians have not gotten vaccinated after all of these restrictions, they likely are not going to do so. Certainly the political polarization of the narrative on vaccination did not help with that cause. As my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway offered, some additional solutions we should be looking at include ways to understand why vaccine-hesitant persons are that way and then incent them in other ways, but restrictions are not going to move the needle on that any further. I have not seen any data to that effect.

The last point is to ensure that we have enough capacity in hospitals to deal with acute urgent care patients. We are in year three of COVID. If the federal government has not used its convening role to urgently bring the provinces together to say how the federal government can support additional capacity within our health care system, additional restrictions are not going to do that. It is completely unfair to ask the Canadian public to continue to restrict their movement, their freedoms and their access to certain areas because the federal government has failed to address this critical point. This has been a problem decades in the making. The pandemic laid it bare for every Canadian, and every member in this House has a duty to push the federal government to address the brokenness of our health care system, not only on behalf of all of our constituents but also for our frontline health care professionals. Let us not kid ourselves: Additional restrictions and asking Canadians to sacrifice are not going to address this issue.

If that is why restrictions were put in place and we do not need those anymore, what should we be doing? I am supporting this motion is because the government does need to provide a plan on how to fix the rest of these issues, but it cannot be through continued restrictions.

• (1210)

First, I call on the federal government to give us what is in the motion today: a firm plan on when all restrictions in their scope will be lifted, and that includes vaccine passports for air travellers, PCR testing requirements for international travellers and on-arrival testing. As well, I believe the government also has a duty to look at federal employees who have been dismissed because of their vaccination status.

Second, I ask the federal government to reinstate the pandemic early warning system that it shuttered, leaving Canada without a coherent system to detect emerging pathogens, and feed that into our public health system. That should have been done a long time ago. Restrictions are not going to solve that problem; only political will would get that done.

I call upon the federal government to use its convening capacity to ensure that there is a conversation among provincial governments on how we can fix the brokenness of our health care system. That should have started months ago. We should have been seeing

the results of that by now. That needs to be started today. The government needs to lift the provincial governments up and ensure that we are adequately funded, and frontline health care professionals need to be leading that consultation, and not just a consultation, but an emergency plan.

I ask that the government, at all levels, recognize that it is wrong to use the removal of freedoms as a permanent fix to gloss over the brokenness of our health care system. We cannot keep saying that we should be removing freedoms to address a problem that the federal government has been loath to address. We have to move forward.

I also ask the federal government to realize that the way it has communicated information to the public over the course of the pandemic has been a disaster of epic proportions. At a time when the federal government was asking Canadians to trust implicitly in public health institutions, we had flip-flops on different advice and we had the national advisory committee on immunization suggesting one of the vaccines was not safe. At the end of the day, all that did was give fertile ground for conspiracy theories.

I have stood in the House of Commons many times and asked for the federal government to address the communication failures. That needs to happen right away. It is one thing to say, “We do not know right now, but here is what we are doing to find out.” That is the type of language that engenders trust. Going back and forth and calling people names if they are questioning why flip-flops occurred actually reduced trust in public health institutions, and that is something that needs to be immediately restored in a non-partisan way.

I ask all sides to de-escalate the rhetoric on the pandemic. Vaccination became a political wedge issue during the federal election. That has to stop. We should have been focusing on ways to understand why people were vaccine hesitant and then providing solutions to their questions and concerns, as opposed to calling them names. Conservatives always, throughout the pandemic, pushed to ensure that the government would deliver vaccines, because we understand they are a key tool in fighting COVID. However, the government chose to play politics with it.

To those who may be blockading public infrastructure today, you also have a duty of care to de-escalate your rhetoric and stand down as well. The word “rhetoric” is not the right word, and I rescind that, but certainly when it comes to blockading public infrastructure, I have opposed Occupy movements in Vancouver and Toronto. Ten years ago I opposed blockades on pipelines, and this is no different. We have to ensure that public infrastructure is accessible. That does not remove someone's right to peacefully protest, but what is happening on the Ambassador Bridge today needs to end.

I also ask the government to understand that the cost of maintaining restrictions at this point is greater than any other cost. We are seeing civil unrest and the loss of jobs, and the fact that restrictions are being used as a band-aid to deal with some of these larger problems is actually making things worse in the country. We have to move forward.

I have two more quick points. I would suggest that the government should have an emergency committee of Parliament that is all-partisan to figure this out. We should be doing that immediately and getting to solutions on some of these bigger issues. We should also be ensuring that we have vaccine production in this country. We still do not have adequate vaccine supply production.

There are so many things that the government could be doing. That is why we are asking for a plan and for restrictions to end. I would hope that all colleagues in this House understand that restrictions will not fix these problems in and of themselves, and they need to stop.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was quite encouraged when the Leader of the Opposition made it very clear that the blockades need to stop. The member herself has also talked about the end of the blockades. I see that as a positive step forward.

I also think of the members of Parliament in her own caucus who actually encouraged the people in the blockade by using social media to pay tribute virtually to them.

Would the member suggest to caucus colleagues that they should be promoting what the leader of their party said today through their social media and maybe even take down some of the pictures that have been posted?

• (1220)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that my colleague will not commit to coming up with a plan to lift restrictions. I mean, this is probably the most serious issue our Parliament has been faced with in a generation, and today that type of a question is not going to address any of the issues I brought forward. He did not comment on any of the proactive solutions I suggested.

Give your head a shake—not you, Mr. Speaker, but my colleague across the way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill for her speech. I found some of the points she raised very interesting, particularly when she said that we should have the humility to acknowledge that we cannot know everything and that we will continue to learn a great deal during a pandemic.

There is a young medical student in Quebec known as the doctor from TikTok. He frequently posts short videos that refute certain claims by movements that are anti vaccines and health measures. His approach is to educate and communicate with people. As my

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colleague was saying, I believe that it is by using that approach that we can convince people who do not want to get vaccinated to do so.

In the same vein, does my colleague agree that the government plan to lift restrictions called for in the Conservative motion must be prepared based on scientific data provided by Dr. Tam and the Public Health Agency? Does my colleague also agree that there must be flexibility because uncertainties and unknowns may arise along the way? Does she agree that this plan should meet these criteria?

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I am having a sense of déjà vu, because it was basically a year ago when we all stood in this House and debated whether we should have a plan to end restrictions.

A plan to end restrictions is not saying that we do not want Canadians to be healthy and safe. What we are saying is that the impositions on Canadian freedoms and the impacts on our economy and on our mental health as a country are things that need to be weighed in the course of public policy, and right now, those costs are too high. That plan needs to ensure that we have input from average Canadians so that people who are sitting in corner offices or working at home on laptops are not the only ones providing that information. Yes, it needs to be science-driven, but it also needs to be driven by a population that is tired and fatigued and wants hope. The end goal has to be to end the restrictions.

We cannot solve these problems with restrictions any more. We need better public policy. We need to end the poor choice of restrictions. They should have never been normalized and they should never actually be normalized as ways to solve these larger systemic issues. They need to stop, and we need better solutions.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Conservative colleague for her speech and for trying to lead by example in terms of de-escalating the rhetoric in the House of Commons. I think that even where there continues to be disagreement, we are well served by de-escalation, and not just in the chamber but across the country.

I want to zero in on something. My colleague used the phrase “public health restrictions” when perhaps she meant “public health measures”, the difference being that I think “measures” incorporates vaccine mandates as well as lower capacities, mask wearing and things of that nature. I am interested in some clarity on that.

I would say this on the other side. It is important to let public health officials lead this conversation, although I think it is a conversation that we should try find a way to have within our politics as well. In places where public health restrictions have been lifted prematurely, we have often seen a sharp increase in the rate of hospitalizations. That speaks to the issue that a lot of families are going through right now as their family members face a surgery backlog in the hospital. Restrictions are important in that context.

I wonder if the member wants to speak to that other side of the equation, which is how hospitals fill up when we do not have public health restrictions.

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Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I believe that public health restrictions should be informing our decisions as legislators. At the end of the day, we are charged with making these decisions, as are the ministers, and public health officials cannot make these decisions for us. Their opinions can inform our decisions but not make them for us, right?

As for the second thing, hospitalizations, we are in year three of COVID and we have not figured out how to fundamentally fix what happens when there are an extra 300 people in a hospital in a certain area, rather than continuing with lockdowns. We cannot continue this way. Our health care system needs to be reformed. We cannot expect society to shut down every time we have a surge of health care patients. That is just the reality. We are beyond that. If we do not get this, we are never going to fix Canada's health care system. It is going to be a tough conversation and we do have to de-escalate the rhetoric in it, but I have to say that the restrictions are not going to fix that.

I will close with this: I encourage anybody who has not gotten vaccinated yet to do so, but continued restrictions are not going to change their mind after six months. We have to look at other ways to incent people to get vaccinated, and we have to fix our health care system.

• (1225)

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the seriousness of the situation that Canada as a whole is facing. This nation is facing a crisis that continues to escalate, and I am very glad that we are having a democratic debate in the House on the path forward.

Over the last couple of weeks, Conservatives have begun to speak out for the citizens who have been suffering in silence for the last two years, all those who have been severely harmed by many of the public health measures that were put in place to keep them safe, as we repeatedly heard from the Prime Minister and the governing party of this country. These measures were put in place first and foremost to keep Canadians safe, but we are finding out, as the outpouring continues to flood our inboxes and our offices, that there have also been significant consequences because of the measures put in place. Many of us have been outlining these for a very long time, particularly in the last couple of weeks.

Last week, I drew attention to a number of the very real consequences of public health measures that were designed to keep people safe but have severely harmed them. We have to remember that not all homes are safe. It is not always safe to be locked in our home. We may have a parent who is not stable or a spouse who is not stable. Some people are coping with isolation, drug dependency and alcohol abuse, and we have seen drug overdoses and suicides. The impact of employment loss is significant and has long-term damages. The impact of having children in and out of school will have long-term damages.

We are hearing this repeatedly. That is why Conservatives have brought forward this opposition day motion, which is one of the democratic tools we have, to call on the federal Liberal government to bring forward a concrete plan for hope, to give Canadians hope that they know what they are doing and that they have a plan. It seems like the Liberals do not know what they are doing. They are

losing the plot. We are seeing that escalate every day across this country on television and it is incredibly serious. I hope the Liberal government is taking this seriously. I hope that they are meeting behind the scenes to discuss how we can move forward and find a peaceful resolution to this, a hopeful path forward for all Canadians.

On Monday night we had an emergency debate initiated by the NDP and I gave a speech. I have to say, the outpouring from across the country has been astounding. My office has not been able to keep up with the calls and messages from every corner of this country. What is interesting is that these are from people from every political stripe, and they are the first to say that they did not vote for me, but what I said resonated with them. That is significant. That rarely happens. People are saying they are double vaccinated or triple vaccinated and that they have supported all the measures up until now, but now they are suffering and we need change. We need a path forward.

Following our important debate on Monday night, the very next morning a Liberal MP, and this is fairly rare, called a press conference. This is more unprecedented than people realize. A Liberal MP from Quebec City reiterated the point that Conservatives have been making for a long time, that the governing party is using the politics of COVID to divide Canadians. We are finding out that, during the last election, there was an effort to use politics to divide Canadians on COVID policies, which I find extremely shameful. When I was door knocking, I saw the impacts of that concentrated division, that calculated decision to divide Canadians on COVID has harmed people.

The very next day, another Liberal MP from Quebec said that he agreed with that Liberal MP, and that more in the Liberal caucus agree as well. It is not just Conservatives. We are also hearing the NDP, the Bloc and the Greens saying that the citizens they represent are harmed by this, and that they want a plan for a path forward.

What I want to say to the people outside who are demonstrating is that we hear them, but we also need them to be peaceful and lawful. The temperature in this country is rising to an alarming degree. We are seeing illegal blockades. As a Conservative, I support legal, lawful, peaceful protests, not illegal blockades. That is a very important distinction to make, and I empower all those who are peacefully protesting to stay vigilant in their peaceful, lawful actions, but those who are illegally blockading are harming the economy and their communities. They need to go home.

We hear them, and we are fighting for them. Earlier today, our brave and courageous leader of her Majesty's loyal opposition said that we are not going to stop fighting for them until all public health restrictions are finished. We will not stop until we can move forward peacefully and safely, and we have a permanent end to what has been dividing Canadians for too long.

• (1230)

The world is watching us, including the American news and news in the U.K. I have heard from the B.B.C. They are watching us.

Monday night, our Prime Minister had the opportunity to come forward and address the nation with a plan. What did he do instead? He doubled down. He doubled down on his decisive rhetoric, on what he has been using for six months to divide Canadians. He turned Canadians against each other. He went to this base level of fear and used that against Canadians to divide our country.

The world is watching. We have an obligation, as elected officials, to stand up for the marginalized and stand up for those who have been harmed by this. When I was walking to West Block today, I saw a woman pushing a baby carriage engaged in the peaceful aspect of what we are seeing across the country, the lawful aspect. She stopped me and asked if I was the one speaking on Monday. She had tears in her eyes, and she thanked me for standing up for her.

I was just speaking up for people and I have received thousands of comments. People were saying they were in tears, that they could not even get through my speech and thanking me. This is unprecedented. All parties have to pay attention to this. These are Canadians of all political stripes, all demographics, all religions, and all economic backgrounds. Instead, the Liberal government and the Prime Minister doubled down on the division.

This division is real, and we can see it in the polls. A poll that came out last week is showing that over 50% of Canadians want an end to all restrictions and they want a plan. That is new. It was not like that a couple months ago. Around the same time, a poll came out that said 27% of Canadians want those who are unvaccinated against COVID put in jail. That is 27% of Canadians wanting unvaccinated people to be put in jail. How far are we going to push this? How far is the Liberal government going to push this?

Canadians are turning against each other and the Prime Minister is just doubling down, when he should be a leader and come forward with a plan for a peaceful resolution, to give Canadians hope and so all these people can go home. That is what they want. They just want a plan to move forward. That is what our opposition day motion is calling on the government for. It is more than reasonable. We are giving weeks of time to call the best experts in the country, put them around a table and talk about solutions.

I have said this before. We are seeing so many other highly advanced countries from around the world opening up. They have all the tools. They have done all the work, and they are listening to their citizens. The Prime Minister can pick up the phone. He is the most powerful man in the country. It is in his control to do this, and to me, it is shameful that he is not. He is not moving forward, he is not showing unity.

I have talked about building a bridge. Now it is time for him to step forward and build a bridge. He can call a press conference today and end this all. I think all Canadians, regardless if they agree with what we are saying or not, want to see a peaceful resolution to this. We have journalists talking about bringing in the army and all the Prime Minister has to do is call a press conference and say that

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we pushed this too far. We are bringing forward a plan to move forward like other countries have.

That is what Conservatives are asking for. That is what Canadians, in the millions, are asking for. This is not some fringe, unacceptable, un-Canadian, racist, misogynistic thing, or any other names he has been calling people. That is not what I am seeing. I am seeing women with baby carriages on the streets of Ottawa thanking me for standing up for them. Why can he not stand up for her?

I am calling on Liberal MPs, and I know there are more of them, to stand up, do what is right and have courage. It is scary to talk about this. I was terrified the first time I walked up to the House past the protesters knowing I was actually going to talk about this for the first time in two years. Politicians have all been intimidated. Every time we open our mouths about this, we are getting intimidated with vitriol, but we have to have courage.

I ask the Prime Minister to have courage and have a heart. He can bring forward a plan and he can end this. He is the most powerful man in the country. He can do this alone. He can unite us for the first time in two years. I ask all members of Parliament to have courage, feel the fear and do it anyway.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

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

We agree on two points. Yes, people are fed up and we need a plan. However, the motion moved by the Conservatives today is a straightjacket. There is no nuance and the conclusion has been written in advance. The motion calls for all restrictions to be lifted, no matter the circumstances or context, with no accounting for science or public health recommendations.

Does the member not think that this motion is exactly what the people outside want? We are talking about the same people who are blockading city streets, who threatened to overthrow an elected government and who are funded by Donald Trump supporters.

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to read the motion. We have actually quoted public health experts in Canada. As our leader has pointed out, Dr. Tam, Dr. Hinshaw, Dr. Moore and many of the top public health doctors in this country have said that it is time to re-evaluate these harsh measures, the lockdowns and mandates. It is time now.

Everything is about timing. Politics is about timing. There is a groundswell happening in this country, and people are looking to members of Parliament to be leaders and bring forward a plan. So many doctors on mainstream television are telling us that we need to learn to live with this. It is time for a path forward, a peaceful resolution to this.

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As I said in my remarks, I do not support the illegal blockade. They need to come to an end. For the peaceful, law-abiding citizens out there who are expressing their peaceful right to protest, we hear them and we are not going to stop standing up for them until we see an end to these harmful mandates.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Conservative colleague for her speech.

The Bloc Québécois has said that it will support the Conservatives' motion, not because of the concerns and rhetoric invoked on both sides of the House, from both the official opposition and the government, but because it makes sense for the Canadian government to come up with a plan to gradually lift the lockdown measures.

It is unfortunate that the government is so preoccupied that it cannot come up with a plan or even plan to come up with a plan. This is what is happening everywhere. The science is allowing for some predictability, and we can start this process.

However, I am concerned about the Conservatives' call for all public health measures to be lifted. I think measures should be lifted gradually and in accordance with the science. This issue must not be polarized. That certainly would not get the protesters to leave.

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, I served on committee with the hon. member, and I appreciate that Bloc members are supporting our motion. I understand that they do not think it is perfect, but they understand the value in having a path forward, a peaceful resolution out of this and a plan for Canadians who are at the end of their rope. That is what we want to see. That is what we are asking for.

Our motion is more than reasonable. The date to bring forward a plan is February 28, which is weeks away. We would love to see a plan today. We would have loved to have seen a plan months ago. Conservatives have been asking for a plan for over a year. Our motion gives this government so much time. We have given it an off-ramp to save face, move forward and present a plan. The Liberals have weeks. They could pick up the phone and call every expert in the world to develop a plan, yet they are digging their heels in. I do not understand it.

• (1240)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could reflect on whether or not she feels there is any sort of hypocrisy within the Conservative Party when its members were actually out promoting and encouraging the convoy.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy I am seeing is a Prime Minister who yesterday said, "Canada has never been as strong and together as we are now."

Does the Prime Minister not own a television? Does he not drive by what is going on in our nation's capital? That is hypocrisy. A man who, for years, said that diversity is our strength and who has

now won votes off dividing Canadians, on their health choices of all things. That is hypocrisy, and Conservatives are going to continue to stand up for Canadians who have been marginalized by this government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will start off somewhat differently by referring to an email I received just moments ago. It is from Ambassador Romualdez, the Philippine ambassador to Canada. There is a promotion about Filipinos in the field of science. It is about the health care sector and, as the member referred to diversity, how people of Canadian Filipino heritage have contributed to the health care field during this pandemic and beyond. I want to express my appreciation. I thank that community as a whole and want to recognize that I received the letter. It is an excellent message that I hope to promote.

Having said that, let me get to the debate at hand. It has been interesting thus far today listening to the comments. The leader of the official opposition started off by talking about the blockades and appealing to those participating in them by saying it is time to end them. I could spend a full 20 minutes talking about the protesters and the blockades. I have been a parliamentarian for many years and witnessed many forms of protest. What we are seeing today is not a protest that I believe Canadians support. There are many aspects of this protest, whether it is the preaching of hatred or the racism, and the extreme right that offend not only me, but Canadians as a whole.

The blockade here is impacting Ottawa, and now we are seeing, ironically, as the Prime Minister pointed out yesterday, truckers preventing truckers from doing what is so critically important to the Canadian economy, which is keeping the supply chain going. The Liberals understand what is important, and as a party, unlike the official opposition, we have consistently had a plan from the very beginning. We have said from the very beginning that we need to listen to science and health experts and act accordingly. The Conservative Party, depending on the day or the week, has been all over the bloody map. Sometimes the Conservatives say they support science, and some days I do not know where they get their numbers from. I will expand on that as I get further into my comments.

I have been in Ottawa in the last few weeks, but I stay in touch with what is happening in Winnipeg North and my home province. I would like to read from the Winnipeg Free Press. Members and anyone following the debate can get a copy of it online. This is what the Winnipeg Free Press said: "The Manitoba government will stick to following COVID-19 indicators, not protesters' demands or neighbouring premiers, in deciding when to lift vaccination and mask requirements."

Dr. Jazz Atwal is a health care expert who is there to ensure that Manitoba is healthy. I say that so hopefully the Conservative Party can appreciate the value of our health care experts. What is he saying? He is the deputy chief provincial public health officer. The Winnipeg Free Press article goes on:

Dr. Jazz Atwal...said Wednesday restrictions will only be lifted in Manitoba when it is safe to do so.

"A handful of individuals who protest have no bearing on what public health recommends," Atwal said at a COVID-19 media briefing. "It's as simple as that."

The province was able to safely begin lifting public health restrictions Tuesday—not because of noisy big-rigs causing a ruckus by the legislative grounds, but—

I really want to emphasize this:

—thanks to “the vast majority” of Manitobans who “have done what they’ve been asked to do.”

● (1245)

I am going to pause there for a moment.

When I talk about leadership and we look for leadership from within the House of Commons, there is only one party that has consistently failed to step up to the plate. We have seen leadership from the Bloc, the NDP, the Green Party and obviously from the Prime Minister. We have seen it from even previous Progressive Conservative members of Parliament.

I will move to another quote, which deals with the issue of vaccination. We should be applauding not a divisive country but one that has come together, where 90% of people are fully vaccinated. That is not division. If only the Conservative Party could be 90% together. It think that would be a dream for any Conservative leader. At the end of the day, this is about vaccination.

What does a former Progressive Conservative, Brian Mulroney, have to say? I say Progressive Conservative because I do not see Progressive Conservatives on the other side. What I see are Reformers. I see the far right wing in Canada when I look across the way. This is what Brian Mulroney said during CTV's *Question Period* when referencing the former leader of the Conservative Party: The former leader “should go farther and show any unvaccinated MPs the door, removing them from his caucus. ‘That’s leadership.’” This is a direct quote from former prime minister Brian Mulroney, a Progressive Conservative. He goes on to say, “Who am I to argue with tens of thousands of brilliant scientists and doctors who urge the population desperately to get vaccinated?”

The point is that members of the Conservative Party do a disservice to Canadians when some days they feel one way and on other days they feel a completely different way. They do not base their policy decisions on sound science and public health recommendations. They seem to want to cater to those individuals who, for whatever reasons, want to take them off the course of the public good in general here in Canada.

Health care professionals recognize the true value of vaccinations. I would like to think that the Prime Minister, the caucus and other members of the House have gone out of their way to encourage people to get vaccinated. I challenge members across the way to tell me another country, in particular in the G8 or the G20, that has had as much success as Canada in getting a population vaccinated to the degree we have in Canada. It is not the Government of Canada that has done it. It is the people of Canada who have responded to what health care experts are saying and what science is telling us, yet the official opposition wants to go in the wind.

A week ago, members of the Conservative Party were going out on the protest lines, taking pictures and snapshots and encouraging protests. They had no problem with the blockades. At least that is what the wild Reformers from the Conservative Party who sit across from me today have said. They had no problem with them.

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In fact, they were putting this on Twitter. They were doing all sorts of activities on social media to continue encouraging them.

● (1250)

Now, as some members in the chamber have talked about, we see the blockades have grown. Now we see border issues in Canada that are affecting trade, like at the Ambassador Bridge. About \$400 million a day of economic trade occurs between Canada and the U.S. at that one bridge alone. That is hurting Canadians. It is hurting our jobs. It is hurting our coming back from this pandemic.

That is why I suggest there is some reason to be optimistic: We finally have the interim Conservative leader saying it is time for the blockades to go. I am glad she says it here on the floor, but she should have the courage to go outside and tell the people she told to stay that it is time for them to go. Why will she not do that? It was the Conservative Reformers who were out there snapping pictures and talking up the convoy and the blockades—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Edmonton West is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, while I am engaged in the gentleman's screaming, I am trying to learn French. I have been trying to listen on the French channel, but I cannot hear the interpreter over the gentleman's screaming. I would ask you to advise the member opposite to tone it down a bit so we can hear the interpretation.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that and will remind the member for Winnipeg North to maybe bring it down just a bit to allow the interpreters to hear his speech so they can translate it into the second official language and the Bloc can follow along.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the nice thing about technology is that if someone finds it a little too loud, they can turn down the volume. That might—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The request is for the interpreters to hear your speech.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I do not want to take time from my ability to contribute to this debate, but I have never heard in the past, whether in the Manitoba legislature or in the House of Commons, that the level at which I expressed myself is an issue. I do not believe it is an issue at this point in time, and I would ask that you retract the comment that was put on the record because I do not think it is appropriate. If I am wrong, I hope the interpreters will provide me with something. They know my email. I know other members who speak just as loud, if not louder.

The Deputy Speaker: I do recognize that we spend a lot of time on Zoom and spend a lot of time listening to interpretation. I think this is a valid issue, but I will allow the member to continue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

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The Deputy Speaker: I will say to the member that there have been some challenges with our technology. I take it, from the intervention on this side, that there was a challenge. I will retract what I said if I have offended the member in saying that he was speaking too loud and we might be having trouble. I did not have my interpretation on either.

I apologize, and we will continue on. The hon. member for Winnipeg North has eight minutes left.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it is important. I have witnessed many speeches over the years, in the House of Commons on this floor, and often we will find members who will express themselves in the manner in which they have. I can appreciate that the Conservatives are very sensitive on this issue, but the bottom line is that members are afforded the opportunity to express themselves, whether it is in a higher tone or in a whisper, and I would expect the same courtesy that has been provided to parliamentarians over the last 20 years that I have actually witnessed, if not first-hand, then indirectly.

There is a serious issue before us today. It is an issue of how we continue to build the consensus that is necessary. We should be recognizing the fine work that many jurisdictions have done. Prior to the interruption, I was using a quote from the Winnipeg Free Press that was printed today. I will continue on with that quote. It states:

The province was able to safely begin lifting public health restrictions Tuesday — not because of noisy big-rigs causing a ruckus by the legislative grounds, but thanks to "the vast majority" of Manitobans who "have done what they've been asked to do."

That is what we have been asking, and the Prime Minister has demonstrated exceptional leadership by encouraging people to get vaccinated. That is the way out of the pandemic. It is not just the politicians who are saying it. We are also talking about the health care experts who are responsible for the general well-being of our population.

The story goes on to say:

"The vast majority of people have followed the orders. The vast majority of Manitobans have gotten the vaccine," said Atwal. "That's basically why we're in the position now where we can loosen things." Capacity limits at venues were relaxed, with 7,500 hockey fans allowed to see the Winnipeg Jets win a game at home on Tuesday instead of only 250, for example.

The relaxation of many of the rules and the mandates taking place in our provinces today is because the vast majority of Canadians have recognized the value of getting vaccinated. That is what we continue to need to emphasize. That is the reason why, as members of Parliament, we have a role of leadership to play within our communities.

That is why I asked a question earlier today in regard to the Conservative Party and its consistency. Why is it that the official opposition members cannot stand in their place today and say, as a caucus, "We are 100% fully vaccinated"? Looking at that, I do not believe it is much to ask for. In fact, if we look at other political entities inside the House, that is what we will see. That is the reason I highlighted what Brian Mulroney, the former Progressive Conservative party leader, had to say.

The motion talks about a plan, as if the Conservative opposition has it within its ability to declare the coronavirus an absolute non-

issue. No matter what the Conservative Party members might think and believe, I prefer to listen to what science and health care experts are saying, and will continue to do so.

There has been a plan right from the beginning. We saw that plan put into place by the government and those working with the government. At times, even the Conservative Party, to its credit, supported a number of initiatives that we brought forward. It was a plan that was put into place to ensure that Canadians would be supported.

● (1255)

Whether it was direct support like the CERB, or supports such as the wage subsidy, these types of programs played a critical role in Canada being in a better position to rebound out of the coronavirus. The economic indicators that really matter, such as employment, clearly show that the plan is working. We will continue to work with the many different stakeholders, provinces, territories, indigenous communities and leadership, non-profit organizations and others to ensure a higher percentage of vaccinations and to ensure the provinces are in a better position.

We talk about rapid testing. The Government of Canada acquired millions of rapid tests. Members have asked where we are hiding them. There has been no hiding of the rapid tests. That is part of the Conservative spin we often hear about. In the months leading up to November, 2021, 85 million tests had been directly shipped to the provinces and territories. The population of Canada is 37 million, and we had 85 million tests by November, 2021. A very small percentage were actually utilized. Then omicron came and changed the page significantly. The Government of Canada ordered 140 million more rapid tests, which were brought in in January.

We recognize the importance of governments working together to ensure that the population, as a whole, is best protected. Whether it was supporting our seniors, people with disabilities, people who became unemployed or businesses that would have gone bankrupt, the Government of Canada was there from the very beginning, as it is today. Therefore, if they try to imply there is no plan, I can tell the members across the way that part of the plan is to be consistent in listening to the health care experts and the science. That is something we will continue to do.

● (1300)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to questions and comments, I want to again retract what I said earlier. As we get into discussion in this chamber, it gets echoed on this side as well. I just wanted to make sure the temperature was ratcheted down, so I do apologize to the hon. member.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North talked about the plan from the very beginning in his comments. Recently, the member for Louis-Hébert revealed what the Liberals' plan was when they made the conscious decision before the last election to wedge, divide and stigmatize Canadians who were unvaccinated or skeptical of vaccines for political gain, no matter what the cost. I can definitely agree with that statement.

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In northern Saskatchewan, leaders of indigenous communities have been working for over a year at eliminating vaccine hesitancy among their residents. For very legitimate historical reasons, indigenous people have a distrust of vaccinations.

Do the member for Winnipeg North and his Prime Minister really believe it is right to continue to marginalize indigenous people by continuing to disparage the unvaccinated?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments. Thank you.

At the end of the day, I think we need to continue to promote, encourage and educate on the importance of vaccination. That is the best way out of this pandemic. A vast majority, 90%, of the population is onside and are double-vaxxed. That is why it is so upsetting when the opposition talks about the vision. That is why we have been able to relax some of the mandates.

• (1305)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm and passion of my colleague from Winnipeg North. I am sure that he is a reasoned and reasonable man.

In his speech, he spoke at length about the divisions that we are currently seeing. I know that it is always easier to see the divisions caused by others than the ones that we cause ourselves, but let us leave that aside.

Something interesting happened today. The leader of the Conservative Party offered to have all the leaders of the recognized parties meet to discuss the situation. I think that this is a pretty interesting offer. Would the Liberals be willing to accept it?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I know there are many different ongoing discussions that take place between critics, shadow ministers, ministers, leaders, offices, house leadership teams and so forth. I would always encourage that.

I was pleased with the member's idea of ending the blockades. I would think that the member would agree that many of those Conservatives who went out to promote the blockades should be returning to those same people in a public way on their social media to say that it is time to end the blockades.

I look forward to seeing those tweets.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue the member identified was with the Conservatives going one way and then the other: going back and forth. Obviously, in the last two weeks the Conservative Party has identified itself with the blockade, and now it is standing up and saying, "End the blockade."

It is not women and baby carriages. It is far more serious than that. Having encouraged the blockade, this expression of lawlessness, across the country, there is an element of hypocrisy in Conservatives now saying, "End the blockade."

The other issue is that this has unleashed a wave, and even the Conservative Party will not be able to get this genie back in the bottle.

How would the hon. member respond to Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition encouraging lawlessness from one end of the country to the other?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right in his overall assessment. That is one of the reasons I really believe it is one thing for the Leader of the Opposition to stand in the chamber today and say, "Okay, blockades are bad and it is time for people to go home." I welcome that and thank her for those comments; however, I would like to see those Conservative reform members of Parliament who did the tweeting and all the social media posts, who went out to the protesters shaking hands, patting backs, posing for pictures and applauding the blockades, to now start reversing them.

Maybe they could delete some of the tweets they put out. Maybe they could put, "Listen to what the new Leader of the Conservative Party is saying today," on their social media.

There is a lot they could do to put some action to the words of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 7, 2011, the member for Papineau said:

Enough of a Prime Minister who will not listen to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

We are about to enter into a third week of sustained and growing public outcry for change across this country. I think it is important we all recognize that one of the major reasons this is the case is because our Prime Minister immediately dismissed any opposition to his mandate as fringe, racist and misogynist.

I hear the same coming from this member today. These people are our constituents. They are hard-working, honourable, decent, intelligent people. They are proudly Canadian, and they reflect the vaccinated and unvaccinated, all ethnic backgrounds and everyone in this country. Many have done what they were asked to do, and those same Canadians, over half of Canadians, are calling for a plan to end COVID restrictions.

This member has honourable, brave Liberal colleagues who have challenged the Prime Minister's statements and actions as politically motivated. Canadians today, across this nation, are hoping and praying that they and more of their colleagues will support our motion to simply table a transparent science- and data-based plan.

Will the member encourage his leader to support the motion today?

Business of Supply

• (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member said the Prime Minister needs to listen. However, just last week, I was on a Zoom conference with the Prime Minister and teachers in the province of Manitoba. I have had many opportunities to be present on virtual meetings where the Prime Minister is listening. I would like to assure those who follow the debate that not only do we have a Prime Minister who listens to Canadians on a daily basis but on a weekly basis and beyond. There are caucus members such as me who constantly share our concerns and thoughts with the Prime Minister, as does the cabinet and even members opposite. This is a government that listens to the population.

However, what we should really be talking about is the wonderful work that Canadians have done to get us to the point we are today. They are the ones who should be applauded. Those are the types of things we should be recognizing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member for Winnipeg North says that his government is listening to the public.

Here in the House, we are in fact the representatives of the people. I think that it is perfectly legitimate, to get back to the request of the motion before us today, for Quebeckers and Canadians to know what to expect and to be provided with a plan to lift restrictions fully based on science and events, which are evolving very quickly. It seems to me that a plan is the least we can give them.

Does my colleague agree that it is completely legitimate for Canadians and Quebeckers to want to have an idea of what the government has in mind going forward when it comes to the reopening that we are all waiting for?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, again, I will read specifically from today's Winnipeg Free Press. This comes from Dr. Jazz Atwal. It says:

"A handful of individuals who protest have no bearing on what public health recommends," Atwal said at a COVID-19 media briefing. "It's as simple as that."

The Prime Minister, members of our caucus as a whole and I suspect members of the Bloc, NDP and Green parties, and maybe even some Conservatives, recognize that we need to listen to our health professionals. That is all a part of the plan: science, health care professionals, the economy and people.

I listen to my constituents. Every day I am reading emails, as I know my colleagues do. We all have that responsibility. I can assure the member that members of the Liberal caucus take that seriously, and every day of the week we work to reflect the interests of our constituents.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time with the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

I have thought long and hard about my comments today. More importantly I took the opportunity to think about the values of empathy, compassion and understanding, and I think those values are missing from this debate. I think those values are missing from this

conversation. These are values that I think members on the other side have neatly tucked away into a corner, because it is politically convenient for them.

I am not the first one to say this in the House, but we are a country divided. We are east against west, urban against rural, those with powerful unions to protect them and those who are independent and have no such voice, the vaccinated against the unvaccinated. I think we are families divided. I think we have friendships ended and co-workers who are stripped of that workplace bond. We have a government whose tired talking points and ideological drive to engage in wedge politics has paralyzed our nation, and we do not have to look further than out the front door of this place.

I think our political discourse is devoid of any respect and any nuance. I think there is no nuance in this place or in this debate, and if we ignore the nuance, then we run the risk of ignoring the trauma Canadians have faced over the last two years. By every indicator and every single measure, things are actually worse than they were before this pandemic, before the lockdowns and before the mandates.

Regarding mental health, there are kids in my riding whose parents are telling me they have not left their bedrooms and are not socializing. There is a growing addictions crisis. There are regions in this country where there are more deaths from opioids than from COVID. There is domestic abuse because of the circumstances of some. Depression, loneliness, economic hardship and class warfare are all worse, all driven by a lack of leadership, a lack of nuance and a lack of managing this pandemic in a way that accounts for changing science and the virus changing.

There are those who have not been able to see their families, those who have been restricted in good times and those, like me, who have been restricted in their worst times of grieving, because of restrictions, lockdowns and mandates. If the government ignores nuance, it risks further polarizing and politicizing a debate they have already done that to.

The government has othered three million Canadians, and more. It has forced many more who are vaccinated into a dead end of frustration of a population with one of the highest vaccination rates in the world; a dead end of frustration of a dependence on restrictions and mandates devoid of any real data or debate; and a dead end that has led tens of thousands into the streets of our downtowns and in front of our legislatures and this place because they do not feel heard, and the government continues. I have heard it today continue to ignore what is going on out there.

Business of Supply

Our ultimate goal is figuring out how we can best control COVID-19 in our communities and then learn to live with something that every scientist has agreed is here to stay. Provinces are dropping restrictions. Provincial health officers have said it is time to move on. Our chief public health officer here in Canada has said it is time to look at and revisit these restrictions. All of these people have given government the advice to manage the pandemic differently and to put forward a plan, but when it is politically inconvenient to do so, the government ignores it. We know that. We know that from members on the other side of the House this week.

I want to take a moment to speak to the specifics, because I do not think we have done that. I want to give members on the other side of the House the opportunity to explain themselves without disparaging Canadians and without othering them. I want them to not rely on the repetitive refrain of vaccination, which we have heard over and over again, to answer every real question coming from this side of the House.

• (1315)

I want to give the government the opportunity to answer this because, in this case, the case that I am going to talk about, the constant refrain does not explain the restrictions on travel. I want to give the government the opportunity to remove the unnecessary, unscientific obstacles to international travel. I want it to do it today. I want it to do it right now, because that is what I hear about when I go home.

The predeparture, on-arrival PCR test for fully vaccinated travellers makes no sense. It is not science. Canada's current COVID-19 travel restrictions are obsolete. They are out of step with the rest of the developed world, like the lack of a plan we have seen. In fact, they are entirely out of step with the G7, our allies. These are countries that we trust in military engagement and in law and order. These are countries we share values with but apparently not science.

Other countries have acknowledged this nuance. They have put forward a plan. They are in a different phase of pandemic management and that is what we are talking about. They have articulated a plan for their citizens to give all of those who are frustrated, who have lost hope, who are in dire circumstances, a plan to get out of this. We have not heard that from the government. We know that travel is no more risky than other activities and there is no scientific reason to single it out. I am tired of hearing the same talking points about vaccinations because I am asking very specific questions in this debate.

Canadians are subject to a PCR test upon arrival. They are fully vaccinated. They are tested on the other end. We know it is wasteful. We know that it is ineffective, and we know that it is not keeping us safe, yet we have a government that has dug in and engaged in this performative COVID theatre to do something in the absence of nothing for the sake of prolonging a pandemic for political purposes. That is what we are seeing.

We know there is a positivity rate of less than 1.5% for those who have tested. We know there is a forced quarantine leaving people at home, leaving them to make plans for their kids because they cannot return to school, and leaving them out of work. We know we have labour shortages all across this country and this is the kind of

policy that needs to move with the science. We know that this is not science.

These restrictions have singled out our travel and tourism sector, the hardest hit. It is just one of the many examples that Canadians have questions about, and the government has no answers. Like many others, I got vaccinated so I am tired of hearing that refrain. I believe that it was in my best interests. I believe it was in the best interests of my family. I believe it was in the best interests of my community, and I have encouraged others to do it. I did it because it was my choice, but I will not ignore the frustration of so many who are protesting in the streets.

I will not stop demanding a plan to end these restrictions and these mandates that have torn Canadians apart because the government found it politically convenient to do so. I will not ignore the significant negative health effects of having people unemployed, underemployed and living in poverty as a result of a partially functioning economy for the benefit of a political cheap shot from the government.

The process of gradually reopening can be done in a safe manner and the time to do it is right now. We have heard that all across the country and we have heard that beyond our borders. If members of the House want to engage in a conversation about the values I talked about at the beginning of this speech, the values that I think we have tucked away into a closet in order to politically divide Canadians and pit them against each other, to change their tone and to engage in a nuanced conversation, that will have support from this side. A plan will have support from this side and it will have support from the member of Parliament for Thornhill as well.

• (1320)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Thornhill's desire to seek common ground to have conversations. I think that is important.

However, I did take exception to her comment about wedge politics and her suggestion that this side is trying to score cheap political points. We know that, a week ago, it was leaked by an obviously concerned Conservative staffer that the Leader of the Opposition had actually encouraged her side of the House not to ask the protesters to leave and to make this the Prime Minister's problem. As reported by Politico, the Leader of the Opposition had conversations with truckers and said, "Don't stop, it's working."

For them to suddenly come out here and try to be the saviours of both the "freedom convoy" and the residents of Ottawa seems very hypocritical, given the context in which the Leader of the Opposition has been participating in the dialogue over the last week and a half. I am curious if the member can explain to me how she thinks she can support both sides of this, given the comments of the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member did say one thing. I think this is the Prime Minister's problem, and it is a problem of a lack of a leadership from the Prime Minister.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister can talk to anyone he wants. He can call a press conference. He can pick up the phone. He can dial down the rhetoric. This is wedge politics, and it is being played by the members opposite.

We have heard it from members on the other side, those within their own caucus. They are not only hearing it from this side of the House, and they are not only hearing it from other opposition parties. They are also hearing it now from inside their own caucus.

I would encourage members on the other side of the House who feel the same way to say so, as today is Thursday, and we can use a third.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her passionate speech. She is very eloquent. Bravo.

However, I do have some nagging doubts about my Conservative colleagues' true intentions. On the one hand, they are proposing, indeed, demanding that the government present a plan to remove public health measures. On the other hand, they oppose Bill C-10, whose purpose is to provide rapid tests to Quebec and the provinces, which is what will enable us to lift those restrictions.

I am trying to understand the connection between providing the tools to help us get out of this faster and demanding that restrictions be lifted.

[*English*]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure which direction my hon. colleague is going in his speech. We talked about the ineffective, costly travel measures when it comes to testing, and I will stand by those comments because I do not think they make a lot of sense.

We are asking the government, through this motion, for a plan to get us out of this pandemic. We are asking them to stop the restrictions, stop the mandates and stop dividing Canadians based on their wedge politics and their rhetoric. I think that a plan is a good first step.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's intervention was very interesting. One of the concerns that I have, though, is that we know the protective measures put in place across the country have saved lives. It is always difficult to know how many lives have saved because, of course, prevention is prevention. We do know that those measures that have been in place have protected Canadians and saved Canadians' lives.

No health expert I have heard from is saying we should be lifting all of these protections. We have heard that we can examine them. We can look at which ones are appropriate and which ones we could ease, but no one is asking for all protections to be stopped and lifted, except the Conservative Party.

I am just wondering why Conservatives are asking for that when they are not the health experts. They are not the scientists. They are

not the doctors. It does not seem very safe or reasonable, and it seems like it will cost lives.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, we have seen provinces across the country lift restrictions. We have seen public health experts and those in the provinces, and Dr. Tam in Canada, say that it is time to move on, that it is time to have a reopening and drop these restrictions, or at least evaluate them. What we are asking for is a plan for the government to move forward and have us live with COVID, just like every health expert has said we should.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to discuss this important motion. It comes as we approach the start of the third year of dealing with COVID-19. We have heard a lot of discussion today about why it is important that the government table a plan for us to exit the COVID-19 restrictions and end the mandates.

We all know what Canadians have had to sacrifice over the last two years. Most importantly, we know that Canadians have lost loved ones to COVID-19. Canadians have sacrificed a great deal, missing out on time that they will never get back. Some of them did not get a chance to say goodbye to the loved ones they lost, not because they were dying of COVID, but because of COVID restrictions.

Early in the pandemic, governments rightly used all the tools that were available, to restrict movement and implement masking everywhere. Governments around the world got to work on developing vaccines. Now we know an awful lot about COVID. We learn more every day. Vaccines have been developed.

I made the choice to get vaccinated, and I have encouraged people in my community to do the same. Many have been concerned about the vaccine and had questions about it. If my saying that I am vaccinated is not sufficient encouragement for them, I accept that and encourage them to talk to medical professionals. The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit has had, and continues to have, one of the highest vaccination rates in the province and in the country.

One of the really interesting initiatives was one for folks who had questions during a shortage of doctors and nurses and when our health care system stretched to the limit. My community made doctors available to stand in parking lots outside of vaccination clinics, not to vaccinate people, but just to answer their questions and talk to them. That was it. They were there to have conversations. Did all of those folks convert to people who ended up getting the vaccine? I am sure they did not, but having conversations is so important.

Over the last number of weeks, we have seen the frustration that Canadians are feeling grow. Over the last several months, Conservatives and I have been saying that nobody should lose their job because they have not been vaccinated. We need to use the other tools that are available.

Business of Supply

People wonder why, if they got vaccinated, why will other people not. There could be a number of reasons, but let us play this all the way through and have the conversation with them. Let us look at what it will be like for those individuals if they lose their livelihoods because of a vaccine mandate. What is the broader societal implications of people being put out of work because of that choice? We have other tools available. None of them are perfect, but neither is the vaccine. It is not a cure, but it is one of the very important tools that we have.

We are now at a point where experts, trusted figures, are saying that we need a plan to exit. I want to reference a few of them. I do not think three years ago the majority of Canadians could have named the chief public health officer for the Public Health Agency of Canada, but now we know it is Dr. Tam.

Just two weeks ago, Dr. Tam said, “We need to be able to address the ongoing presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in a more sustainable way.” She went on to say that all COVID measures must be re-evaluated and stated, “I think the whole concept is, we do need to get back to some normalcy.”

• (1330)

In Ontario, Dr. Kieran Moore, who is the top doctor responsible for the province, said, “we have let our lives be controlled for the last two years in a significant amount of fear and now we are going to have to change some of that thinking.” He went on to say, “I think we have to start to understand we have to learn to live with this virus.” Those are two very important points.

What are we asking the government for today? We are asking for a plan to end the mandates. I am positive Drs. Tam and Moore offered those comments knowing the situation on the ground, and knowing the examples of other countries, such as Sweden, Norway, Greece, the Czech Republic, many states in the U.S.A., the U.K, France, Portugal and Switzerland, dropping those mandates. The evidence those doctors used to make their decisions is some of the same evidence used by Drs. Tam and Moore.

That is what we are looking for. We know the World Health Organization has said that countries should not require proof of vaccination against COVID-19 for international travel as the only pathway or condition permitting international travel. We have the World Health Organization saying that. We need to take a look at these. What is the plan? What benchmarks will the government use to exit us from these mandates and restrictions?

They were absolutely important tools, particularly in March of 2020. We are a long way from then. We know so much more. The conversations we need to have include talking with people we do not agree with. It is so important. We certainly should not be calling them names.

People who disagree with us, who are concerned and who have questions are not unacceptable. They are not deplorable. It does not make them misogynistic or racist. They are our neighbours, community members and people's family members. This compassion is part of the fabric of our country. We cannot forget it, and we cannot lose it. It is part of our off-ramp out of this thing.

There has been so much damage done to our country with the impacts of all the restrictions. We are going to be feeling that for many years, particularly with our children. Let us not make it worse by not talking to each other. Part of that communication and talking comes from the government presenting a plan to Canadians to end those mandates. That is what we are talking about today.

It is incredibly important everyone recognizes the role they have to play in doing that. We have a job in this place to talk to people. We have our role as the official opposition to challenge the government. It has the tools and the resources, and it is the authority to tell Canadians what it is going to take for us to exit from these restrictions.

We are going to be that voice for Canadians. We are going to be that voice, and we are calling on the government to end those mandates. In fact, we asked for a plan a year ago. The situation certainly has changed a lot in that year, but this is a new opportunity, a fresh opportunity, for the government and the minister to provide that information to Canadians.

Instead of pointing fingers about who was the strongest advocate for these public health measures, let us just recognize we can always do better. The government has had time to produce this information to let Canadians know when it is going to end the federal mandates and what needs to be triggered for that to happen. Let us do that. Let us move forward together. Let us have those important conversations. Let us talk to our friends and neighbours and make sure we come out of this stronger.

We have heard all along that we are in this together. Let us make sure we all get out of this together.

• (1335)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see a lot of very smart people on the other side, but my daughter asked me the other day, “What is this trucker convoy? What is this protest about?”, so I explained it to her. She is 12 years old. She is studying the divisions of power within this government in this country.

I said, “The truckers cannot go across to the U.S. without being vaccinated.” She said, “Well, isn't that the American government's rule?” I said, “Absolutely.” She said, “Shouldn't they be protesting in front of the U.S. consulate or the U.S. embassy?” I said they are upset about putting masks on in grocery stores and going to other places. She said, “Isn't that provincial?” I said, “Absolutely.” She said, “What about travel?” I said, “Travel is the one that, yes, is federal.” In fact, the member opposite just said that they were asking for these restrictions to be ended over a year ago, but the member for Durham, when it was flights from India or Pakistan, which have 1% or 2% of COVID cases coming, said to shut them down and then said to shut them all down.

I want to hear what their stand was at that time.

Business of Supply

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the question, we are going to assume that the hon. member misspoke and that he was not misleading the House.

As we know, what we asked for a year ago, and what I articulated that we asked for a year ago, was a plan from the government. Instead, what we get from it is finger pointing. If we want to point fingers, we will point fingers at the Liberals for their absolute failure. They are doing nothing but moving goalposts and dividing Canadians. They are calling people racists and misogynists. They are saying people are un-Canadian. They are saying they are deplorable because they have opinions different from those of the Liberals.

I want to remind the hon. member about my example about having those important conversations and encouraging people to get vaccinated. That is the example we demonstrated in my community. That is the spirit in which I offered those comments. If the hon. member wants to play silly games, he should talk to those of his hon. colleagues who had the courage to stand up to the government's failed policies of division.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's comment just now put a bit of a damper on what I was about to say. I was going to congratulate my Conservative friends on the surprisingly nuanced tone of the discussions we have been having since this morning, but partisanship once again reared its ugly head during that last remark. That is kind of a shame.

I want to comment on statements by the opposition leader and some of our other Conservative friends this morning about how it is time to follow the science. At what point in the last two years did we not follow the science?

Vaccines? That is science. Social distancing? Science. Masks? Also science. Border controls? That is science too.

Canada has very high vaccination rates, almost 90%, but most countries around the world do not have that. We talked about that earlier. A friend was telling me about Uganda, where just 1% of the population is vaccinated. The government's border measures make sense.

I would like to know at what point in the last two years we did not follow the science.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is a great question from the hon. member.

What we are looking for from the government are the benchmarks it is going to use to exit us from the COVID restrictions that the federal government has put in place. That is what we asked for a year ago. What are our targets? What are the metrics the Liberals are using to end the travel restrictions and to end all the federal mandates they have put in place? "Let us just wait and see" is not a science-based approach. Identifying the efficacy of vaccines and encouraging people to take a look and talk to experts, as I mentioned, is following the science. We have not seen that from them up until this point. I encourage them to talk to Dr. Tam and Dr.

Moore to find out what metrics they should apply to end the federal mandates.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to check something. The member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes talks about the quote from Dr. Tam in which she says that she thinks we should be re-evaluating these protections. However, re-evaluation is not the same thing as lifting.

In the summer in Alberta, Jason Kenney was the very first premier to lift all the restrictions, and we saw the consequences. We saw thousands of Albertans protest against the lifting. They were afraid for their children, people under five who could not be vaccinated and people who were more prone to COVID.

How does the member come to terms with the fact that lifting all of the restrictions is maybe not what many, many Canadians would like?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, this motion is calling for the government to table a plan. That is something that it has failed to do at this point.

Yes, if we are looking at other countries and modelling what is going on in other countries, it may result in those mandates being lifted. It seems it is high time, but the Liberals are not providing us with the evidence; they are providing us with the politics of fear and division.

Canadians deserve better. End the mandates.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague and friend, the hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

I wish to start off in today's discussion with a very simple statement. I want to start by thanking Canadians. I wish to thank Canadians because we have asked much from Canadians for the last two years, and Canadians have been resilient. They responded.

What have we asked from Canadians for the last two years? We have asked Canadians to wear a mask. We have asked them to socially distance. We have asked them to reinforce their hygiene standards and wash their hands more frequently. We have asked them to refrain from being with family on the holiest of holy days, whatever their religion, and not to be with family members. We have asked them to remain, as our family has done, among one or two families. We have asked businesses owned by Canadians to stay shut down. Obviously, our government stepped up and had their backs, whether it was workers, seniors or entrepreneurs, and helped them during this time.

Why have we asked this of Canadians? We asked it because we are in a pandemic. Canadians provided us the time to receive the vaccines, which we received. They provided us the time to protect our health care system, because we needed to do so, and I wish to thank Canadians for their resiliency, because that is what this debate is about. That is why we were elected to serve as 338 parliamentarians. It was not to be in the weeds, but to look at the big picture.

Business of Supply

We are making much progress. Ninety per cent of the residents of York Region are vaccinated. The number of boosters being given continues to rise. Our hospitalizations are down. Surgeries, many of which had been cancelled, are being rescheduled. A new normal is returning, but it is due in part to the sacrifices of Canadians, to Canadians' following not the government's advice but the advice of our public health officials. We cannot lose sight of that fact.

Many lives have been delayed. Many lives have been disrupted. Many Canadians have passed away from this pandemic. We cannot lose sight of the big picture. We are going the right way. We are making progress as a country, not individually but together.

As a parliamentarian, I believe in doing what is right and communicating to my constituents the public health advisories on what we should do to protect our families and loved ones so we can get to a better day. It is coming, absolutely. We are seeing changes on restrictions, especially at the provincial level, and that is the right thing to do. Ninety per cent of Canadians are vaccinated with their double dose. That is wonderful. We should be proud. We should be proud that we are protecting our health care system. We should thank the frontline workers for what they have sacrificed for the last two years. That is what we should be doing.

We should continue, yes, to re-evaluate the science. We cannot put an arbitrary date on when we can lift this or lift that. That does not work. We have seen that. We have seen it in province after province. If they lifted prematurely, their hospital system became overwhelmed, their ICU capacity became overwhelmed, their supply chain became disrupted and they were back at square one. Let us go 10 steps forward at a time and maybe one step back, instead of four steps forward and 20 steps back. That is what our government is doing. We are there to assist Canadians and we will continue to do so.

As I stated at the beginning before going to my formal remarks, I want to thank Canadians today. I wish to thank them for doing the right thing, for getting us through this pandemic as we continue to go forward. Yes, I believe the light is at the end of the tunnel. I completely have confidence in that. Why? It is because of vaccines, because of the science of vaccines, because we have done the right thing and because Canadians have been resilient.

● (1345)

I understand that the official opposition has come on side now, although kind of late, to say that the blockades should stop. We should not be interrupting the lives of auto workers, farmers or our agri-food business. Many of the opposition members represent rural ridings that have a lot of farmers. I do not think it is very impressive that we are blocking borders so that we cannot ship our farm products to the United States. I do not think it is very impressive that auto workers are being forced to stay home because of blockades, which up until three days ago the Conservative Party was in favour of. That is not reasonable leadership; I would call it otherwise. We need to do what is right for Canadians day in and day out. We are in a pandemic, a once-in-a-hundred-years event. It requires maturity and it requires leadership.

It has been more than two years since our border measures were put in place to help keep Canadians safe and protected. As the most serious public health crisis in the last century unfolded, the Govern-

ment of Canada acted quickly to put in place emergency border measures to reduce the risk of the importation and transmission of COVID-19 and new variants into Canada through international travel. The border measures that have been implemented are informed by data and available scientific evidence, not just by pulling dates out of thin air. They also come from monitoring the epidemiological situation in Canada and in other countries. Measures are adjusted as required to respond to the evidence while continuing to protect the health of everyone in Canada.

Starting in January 2020, enhanced screening measures were put in place for passengers who were arriving from areas where the COVID-19 virus was rampant. As the virus spread to other countries and became more of a danger, these screening measures were further enhanced with additional questions and referrals of incoming passengers to the Public Health Agency of Canada. Eventually stronger measures had to be put in place to protect our country and its citizens, such as the ban on the entry of foreign nationals into Canada. Canada was not alone in closing its borders for discretionary travel at that time. Many other countries also put in place severe restrictions on travel, including other G7 countries and our neighbour to the south, our largest trading partner.

As the pandemic wore on, the Government of Canada never lost its focus on the health and safety of all Canadians. Decisions around protocols and measures were taken to reduce the effects of COVID-19 on our citizens and on our economy so that our Canadian economy could quickly recover, and it was great to see that our output is larger than it was prepandemic. It is great to see that employment levels are above where they were prepandemic. Why? It is because we did what was right for Canadians. We had their backs, we put in place proper measures that we all know about and we invested in Canadians. It was the right thing to do.

In June 2021, the government announced the first phase of its approach to easing border measures for travellers entering Canada, and the Government of Canada continues to make cautious adjustments to its border approach by using the latest scientific evidence and data. These changes are possible thanks to our vaccine adoption rate and our adherence to existing public health measures. The overwhelming majority of Canadians adhered to protocols and measures and got vaccinated not only once but twice, and for many there was even a third booster. They have shown courage, resilience and compassion, and, yes, they have sacrificed. I thank them, as their actions have been crucial in giving us, the Government of Canada, the leeway to reduce and even remove some of the measures that were put in place at the beginning.

Business of Supply

Earlier measures have been adjusted. In August and September 2021, the government continued to reopen Canada's borders, allowing fully vaccinated leisure travellers from the U.S. to enter Canada starting on August 9, followed by fully vaccinated travellers on non-essential trips from all other countries on September 7. The government also eliminated the requirement to stay in government-authorized accommodation upon arrival.

As I quickly conclude my remarks, I want all parliamentarians to take a step back and look at the big picture of where we are and where we have been and see that we are in a much better place. There is work to be done and progress to continue to be made, but we must follow the science.

I do ask, and I have asked this on national television, that the blockade stop and that the protesters outside, with the utmost respect to those individuals protesting, go home and allow the citizens of Ottawa to regain their normal lives.

• (1350)

The Deputy Speaker: I know we have been trying really hard to get everybody an opportunity, but a lot of the questions and answers have been very long. I am going to give the floor to the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to ask a question.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am enormously grateful. We seem to be debating in the House how we stop a pandemic as though the borders of Canada comprise the challenge. We are in a global situation where I think the virus is maybe laughing at all of humanity for thinking we can handle it, while leaving much of the developing world without access to vaccines.

When will the Government of Canada support the requests from India and South Africa to have a waiver under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, the so-called TRIPS agreement, so that developing countries have access to vaccines?

• (1355)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, Canada has been at the table in providing funds, resources and vaccines as part of the facility to developing countries. Obviously, we will work in unison, as we always do, with the WTO and all our trading partners. That is who we are as a people and who we are as a country.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I met with one of the largest sound companies in British Columbia. It was ranked the number one sound company in North America, Kian Sound and Universal Show Services. Two years ago, it had to lay off 280 people. It has lost 99% of its revenue. It has taken advantage of every single government program and said to me that our government is helping our private industries into oblivion. They asked me what the plan is. When will the government give them any indication that they can get shows happening again?

For the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge, when will the government release a plan to get private industries back to making money again?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, the restrictions in place preventing that business from operating are actually provincial re-

strictions as they deal with capacity, whether it is going to a basketball game or seeing a concert. With regard to my hon. colleague's question, I would refer him to the Province of British Columbia, but at the same time, I would encourage all his residents and all Canadians to get vaccinated so we can again go to a concert or a basketball game with full capacity.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is simple. Why do we have to put so much pressure on the government to convince it to take action, get out of the shadows and come forward? That was the case for the borders in 2020. It is now 2022.

When will the Prime Minister and the government make regular announcements about what we can expect and present a plan?

I do not get it. The Liberals seem to be stuck in 2019. To hear them talk, it seems as though we will be under lockdown for a long time to come.

What is the problem?

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, of course, we continue to re-evaluate the scientific evidence as it comes in, working with our public health partners, and we continue to make adjustments. That is what governing is about. That is what making decisions and showing leadership is about. That is what we have done for the last two years and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we have seen throughout the course of the last two years in my opinion is continuous flip-flops from the Conservatives on various issues. We are never going to have enough vaccines and we are never getting vaccines, and then suddenly, where are all the vaccines and why do we not have the vaccines yet? The same thing goes for closing borders. Why are the borders not closed yet? Close the borders. Then suddenly, why are the borders not open? Open the borders.

Conservatives do everything based on reactions and the emotions they happen to feel that day rather than actually following the science. What they cannot seem to wrap their heads around in my opinion is actually following the science.

I am wondering if the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge could provide his input into the importance of following the science as opposed to the day-to-day political emotions one might have.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, very simply, Canadians want leadership, not flip-flopping. That is the first point I will make. On procuring vaccines, we have delivered. On rapid tests, we have delivered. On personal protective equipment, we have delivered for Canadians. We have assisted Canadian businesses and workers through the pandemic. We will continue to be there. We will get through this pandemic and we will get through this stronger than ever.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

HEALTH

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has made it abundantly clear that the health of our communities must be at the centre of our work as parliamentarians. If there is one lesson that I hope we learn from this, it is that the pursuit of health must be a collective effort. We know that the worst of this storm has been weathered by low-income, marginalized communities and those who face the greatest health risks. To come out of these difficult times stronger, we must combat inequality, promote inclusivity and look to the social determinants of health for our answers.

I often hear about amazing community health initiatives led by my constituents in Fredericton, and it is their voices and advocacy that shape my priorities and my understanding of what it means to truly take care of our neighbours. It means affordable housing and eliminating homelessness. It means adequate free mental health supports, pharmacare, fully accessible infrastructure and a universal basic income to lift people out of poverty and allow everyone to reach their full potential.

By implementing policies that ensure we take care of each other, our government can lead by example and promote healthy resilient communities across Canada.

* * *

STEPHEN RAYFIELD

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that today I rise to honour the memory of one of my constituents.

Stephen Rayfield was a firefighter from Castor, Alberta, who tragically lost his life this last week while responding to a call. While many run from danger, firefighters run toward it, and Stephen was a shining example of the selflessness that defines those men and women who serve in our fire departments across Canada, departments both big and small. General Norman Schwarzkopf once described courage as being fearful of something and going ahead to do it anyway. Stephen made the choice to serve, even though the conditions that night were treacherous. He served his community, because his community needed a hero.

Not only did Castor lose a firefighter, but a loving wife also lost her husband and his kids lost their dad. We pray God's blessings and peace for his wife Cheryl and his children as they grieve and

Statements by Members

navigate this difficult time. Heaven may have gained a hero, but Castor lost a piece of its heart and soul.

We will never forget.

* * *

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, four hundred million dollars' worth of goods and services travel across the Ambassador Bridge each and every day: auto parts, fruits and vegetables, medicine. It is the largest border crossing in North America, facilitating 25% of all trade between Canada and the United States.

The blockade is putting thousands of jobs at risk. Auto workers are on shutdown. Parts manufacturers are closing down. Farmers cannot get their goods to market. More than goods, the blockade impacts cross-border nurses and truckers who do not get paid if they do not deliver. This is hitting jobs, workers and our supply chains that stock grocery stores from Windsor to Quebec.

My community's message to the protesters is to end this blockade today.

My question for the Leader of the Opposition is this: When will the Conservatives stop pandering to the protesters and start standing up for the workers of this country?

* * *

[Translation]

FILM LAURENTIDES

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Film Laurentides, also known as the Bureau du cinéma et de la télévision des Laurentides, was created in 1997 to serve film producers from Quebec and abroad seeking to shoot a film in the region. It has since become a leading authority in the industry. The agency is in its 25th year of providing film support and promotion services. Over the course of the year, this success will be acknowledged with the broadcast of a retrospective of the key highlights that helped make the Laurentians region shine.

Film Laurentides generates enviable economic, tourist and cultural benefits in all three of the RCMs in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle.

We wish Film Laurentides and its team many more years of showcasing our region and providing artists and technicians with a workplace that is worthy of their creations.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is an important opportunity for us to recognize the diverse history of Black communities across the country and the contributions they have made.

Statements by Members

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of some inspiring Black women and men in my riding of Hochelaga and throughout Montreal. I am thinking of people like Dominique Ollivier, the first black woman to chair an executive committee in the city of Montreal, and Yvette Bonny, a pediatrician-hematologist at Maison-neuve-Rosemont hospital and the first doctor to perform a bone marrow transplant in Quebec in 1972. I am thinking of Steve Joseph from the Fondation des aveugles du Québec. I want to recognize Cyrille, Doro and Willy at SmartLab, a community hub and studio space located on St. Catherine Street in Montreal, in Hochelaga. I could go on and on.

These people of colour have broken glass ceilings and are always contributing to the fight against systemic discrimination. Today they are models of resilience.

I wish all members of the Black community in Hochelaga and across the country a wonderful Black History Month.

* * *

• (1405)

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES SNOWBIRDS

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is known as the land of the living skies. This is especially true for the riding of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, home of the Canadian Forces Snowbirds. On July 11th, 2021, the Snowbirds celebrated the 50th anniversary of their first public air show. Still fresh in my mind and on our hearts is the tragic loss of Captain Jennifer Casey in 2020 while she was on a mission to raise the spirits of Canadians enduring this pandemic. Undeterred by this tragic loss, the Snowbirds persevered to complete the mission in honour of their fallen comrade in their 50th year.

This iconic team represents true Canadian values. The Snowbirds inspire Canadians who have been isolated and alone. They reached out to those who have been shut out. They lifted up the spirits of Canadians while leaving their own families at home.

On behalf of my colleagues here, I salute the Snowbirds and wish them the best in the next 50 years.

* * *

ORDER OF CANADA

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Mr. Ralph Chiodo of Etobicoke—Lakeshore on his recent appointment to the Order of Canada. Honoured for his community engagement, generous philanthropy and leadership in the automotive industry, Mr. Chiodo came to Canada as a teenage immigrant from Italy, landing in Halifax at Pier 21. Through hard work and dedication, he became a successful entrepreneur, fulfilling a childhood dream to work with cars. He has done that in spades. He is the president of a top Chrysler dealership in Canada and is CEO of Active Green + Ross auto centres.

Mr. Chiodo's business success is eclipsed only by his big heart. He is past president of the Rotary Club of Etobicoke, served as

chair of the ever popular Rotary Club ribfest in Toronto and sits on the board of many other organizations, including Trillium Health Partners Foundation. Thanks in part to his endless generosity, Pier 21 has become the Canadian Museum of Immigration.

I thank Mr. Chiodo for all he does and congratulate him for this well-deserved recognition.

* * *

AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the mother of a young child in the Peel District School Board system, I know how much teachers have stepped up to make sure our children receive a quality education despite the challenges of the pandemic. All of our teachers deserve to be commended for their incredible work.

I want to give a special congratulations to Jason Bradshaw, a Brampton North resident and teacher at Castlebrooke Secondary School. Jason received the 2021 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence, the highest award a teacher can receive in Canada. These teachers are chosen for their remarkable achievements in education and their commitment to preparing their students for a digital and innovation-based economy.

Jason has been a teacher for over 14 years and strives to empower modern learners through innovative and unique approaches to learning. He encourages his students through discussion and debate, while also running an after-school program called Counting on You to provide science support and programming to students in need.

I thank Jason for everything he does for our students and thank all of our teachers helping the next generation develop.

* * *

CALGARY FOREST LAWN

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, I joined in recognizing the Aisokinakio'p's partnership with the Dashmesh Culture Centre to provide vaccines to our northeast Calgary communities. In the spirit of reconciliation, these clinics have been a huge success and have created a unique partnership between the indigenous and the Sikh communities to serve the community at large. At the heart of these communities is a common goal and the values of seva, sharing and taking care of others.

I would like to recognize this extremely successful initiative by the Dashmesh Culture Centre under the leadership of Amanpreet Singh Gill and the entire executive committee, in partnership with the Siksika Nation, Siksika Health Services, Calgary Homeless Foundation, Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary and Okaki Health Intelligence.

I thank all the frontline health workers for all their hard work. We are stronger together. God bless these communities so that they may continue serving and God bless a united, free Canada.

• (1410)

JULIAN REED

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a sense of sadness but also profound gratitude. Last month, we lost a political giant. Julian Reed, a long-time Liberal MPP and MP for Halton, passed away at Georgetown Hospital on January 6 at the age of 85. With a career in politics that spanned nearly three decades, Reed was a larger-than-life personality and a hard-working, dedicated public servant. Although most knew him as a politician, he was much more. He was a salesman and a pig farmer and even worked in show business as an actor.

Mr. Reed was a pioneer. He was talking about renewable energy, cannabis decriminalization and greenhouse gas emissions over 20 years ago. His fierce advocacy for environmental protection has certainly been an inspiration to me, and I will continue his work and honour his legacy by fighting to protect the green spaces here in my riding of Milton.

Like my dad, Julian lived with Parkinson's disease. His life and legacy strengthens my resolve to be a better advocate for Canadians fighting Parkinson's disease.

Reed is survived by his wife Deanna, his children Chris, Rob and Melanie, his four grandchildren and his brother and my friend Laurie.

I thank Julian for his service. May he rest in peace.

* * *

VACCINE MANDATES

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for two years Canadians have been living with COVID-19 restrictions: restrictions on travel, restrictions on visiting loved ones and restrictions on worshipping. Children have been restricted from playing with other children or taking part in sports and other activities. These two years of isolation have inflamed Canada's mental health crisis and hurt our most vulnerable populations.

Canadians just want their lives back. The Prime Minister needs to stop using the pandemic to wedge, divide and stigmatize Canadians for his own political gain. It needs to stop.

The Conservatives are calling on the Liberal government to follow the evidence and science, and table a plan to quickly end all federal mandates and restrictions. Canadians deserve a plan on how they are going to get their lives back. It is time the Prime Minister delivers that plan.

* * *

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what started with a message from truckers has turned into a cry from Canadians from across this country. They have had enough of lockdowns and restrictions, enough of mandates and job losses, and enough of the government's overreach. Canadians want their lives and freedoms back.

The Conservatives have heard the message. We will take up that fight and will continue standing up until all the federal mandates

Statements by Members

and lockdowns have ended. The time has come for the blockades, like those in Coutts, in my riding, to come to an end. The Liberals have damaged our lives and economy enough. Let us not cause further harm.

It is time for the Liberals to stop politicizing this pandemic and stop wedging, dividing and stigmatizing Canadians. They need to follow the science, follow the current advice from experts, follow the many other countries and the leadership of some provinces and end the mandates and restrictions.

Today, the government has an opportunity to provide a clear plan for reopening our country, as Canadians deserve. The only question is, will the Prime Minister and his government give them one?

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[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month.

As the member for Vimy, I am fortunate to represent a riding committed to racial equality in our community and across Canada. This commitment will be showcased this month as the city of Laval is hosting a wide range of activities and events that honour the Black Canadians who have shaped our city. From art exhibitions to musical performances, short films and guest speakers, there will be something for everyone, so we can all learn about and reflect on the contributions of Black communities throughout our history.

I encourage my constituents and the people of Laval to join me in taking in these incredible events. I look forward to enjoying Black History Month celebrations throughout the month of February.

* * *

[English]

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the cost of the TMX jumped from \$4.5 billion to \$12.6 billion, based on cost updates from two years ago. In the last two years, there have been significant delays in construction because of COVID-19, forest fires and floods, failed HDD river crossings in the Thompson and Fraser rivers, and numerous environmental law violations. The commercial viability of TMX was on shaky ground before, and now things could not be worse.

Oral Questions

Using the 2018 construction costs, the Parliamentary Budget Officer noted that a 10% increase in construction costs would reduce the net present value of the TMX by \$453 million to over \$1 billion, and a one-year delay would reduce its value by \$693 million to \$888 million. There is no sugar-coating this. The white elephant is staring us in the eye.

I am calling on the Liberals to come clean and provide Canadians an updated cost estimate and schedule. Full transparency and accountability are required for this boondoggle.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

BERTHIER—MASKINONGÉ

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to dedicate my speech today to Douglas Blanchet and Les Pliages Maskinongé, a business in my riding run by the amazing Monia Lacasse.

Mr. Blanchet and the team at Les Pliages Maskinongé have worked together to put smiles on quite a few faces. Mr. Blanchet shared the design for the sled he adapted for people with disabilities with Les Pliages Maskinongé, which was able to manufacture them in greater numbers.

This team was able to meet the growing demand from parents wanting to make sledding, a fun winter pastime, accessible to their children, big and small.

This initiative even has an environmental component, since Ms. Lacasse recycles old skis and wood.

I thank all those involved in this project for sharing some joy during these difficult times.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are saying, “Enough is enough”. Every day new protests spring up here in Canada and around the globe.

Today, we are facing the fourth day of a blockade at the Windsor-Detroit bridge, the busiest border crossing in North America. About \$450 million in goods cross the border every day. A prolonged closure will continue to cripple our economy. We need the Windsor-Detroit border to reopen today, not weeks from now.

Canadians want their voices to be heard. Meanwhile, our Prime Minister doubles down. Two Liberals are calling him out for his divisive rhetoric and for using the pandemic for political gain. These protests and the consequences fall squarely on the Prime Minister. After two weeks of dithering, the solution will not be simple. The Prime Minister must accept to meet with all leaders on Parliament Hill to find solutions to end the COVID mandates and the blockades of our critical border infrastructure, and to restore peace, order and good government.

Why will the Prime Minister not listen?

NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is International Development Week, a chance for all of us to come together and celebrate our achievements in international development. Today, I am particularly pleased to draw attention to Nutrition International, an international organization headquartered here in Canada, which this year is celebrating 30 years of making a difference for millions of people living in vulnerable situations.

Nutrition is the difference between attending school and learning. It is the difference between fighting a disease and surviving it. It is the difference between giving birth and giving life. Every day, Nutrition International works hard to create this difference and to bring improved nutrition to the people of the world who need it most. Thanks to investments from Canada and other generous donors, Nutrition International reaches millions of people each year in more than 60 countries. Canada's contribution to Nutrition International's world-class vitamin A program alone has helped save five million children's lives worldwide.

As Canada seeks to advance its commitment to champion gender-sensitive nutrition initiatives to support the most vulnerable, particularly women and girls, I hope that my colleagues, both in government and across the aisle, will continue to support organizations like Nutrition International in their fight to give people fuller, healthier and better lives.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost two weeks since the beginning of this impasse. We all want the protests to end and for these Canadians to feel like they have been heard and respected, but now critical infrastructure is being restricted. Why? It is because of the Prime Minister's failure.

I have asked the Prime Minister to meet with me and the other opposition leaders in good faith to try to find a way forward from this impasse. He did not answer yesterday. He has not answered today.

I am going to ask him again. Will he meet with us?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada has spent the last two weeks endorsing and enabling these blockades across the country. The leader of the Conservative Party and her team have been their biggest champions, even promoting their fundraising. The consequences of these actions are having dire impacts. They are impacting trade, they are hurting jobs, they are threatening our economy and they are obstructing our communities. I am focused on ending them.

I hope the Leader of the Opposition will maintain her current position and continue to call for an end to these blockades.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to blame others for things that he is responsible for. Today he actually has a chance to do something for Canadians. We have a motion before the House telling the government to let Canadians know when it is going to end these restrictions. We are two years into this pandemic, and given the current circumstances, it is not an unreasonable request. Canadians deserve a prime minister who is willing to follow science and lift the restrictions. Even his own Liberal MPs agree with us.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister. Will he and his fellow Liberal members of Parliament support our motion that is on the floor today?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone in this country is sick and tired of lockdowns and, quite frankly, of COVID-19, but Canadians also know that the way through this pandemic is by listening to science, by following public health advice and, indeed, by getting vaccinated. That is what we have been focused on from the very beginning, and that is why we are continuing to encourage Canadians to please get vaccinated.

About 61,000 Canadians got their first dose just last week. We need more people to continue to step up, get vaccinated, get their kids vaccinated and get their booster shots. That is how we stay safe. That is how we support our frontline health workers.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. He is talking about vaccinations. We all support vaccines and, as he has said, 90% of Canadians have been vaccinated. Is he suggesting that unless 100% of Canadians are vaccinated, he is not even going to consider opening up and lifting restrictions? Is that what he is trying to tell us? Ninety per cent is good for us and, I would say, for other countries in the world that have less vaccine uptake.

Is he saying he is not going to do anything until 100% of Canadians are vaccinated? Really?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only are Canadians tired of this pandemic and of the challenges we are facing, but they are also, of course, tired of the restrictions, tired of the rules and tired of the lockdowns. That is understandable, but do members know what helps to lift restrictions? Do they know what helps to move beyond lockdowns? It is vacci-

Oral Questions

nations. When Canadians get vaccinated, including with our vaccine mandates that ensure federal public service workers and anyone getting on planes or trains is vaccinated, it helps us move forward, keep Canadians safe and, most importantly, keep our frontline health workers, who have been heroes during this pandemic, from being overwhelmed.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the Prime Minister answer the question.

As he said, Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world. Almost 90% of Canadians have been vaccinated. Is he waiting until 100% of Canadians are vaccinated to start thinking about presenting a plan to reopen our economy and putting an end to vaccine mandates?

The question is clear: Is the Prime Minister's objective to have 100% of Canadians vaccinated to start giving people hope, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada has spent the last two weeks endorsing and enabling these blockades set up across the country. The leader of the Conservative Party and her team have been their biggest champions, even promoting their fundraising.

These actions have dire consequences for jobs, trade, obstructions in our communities and families. I hope that the Conservative Party will maintain its current position and continue to call for an end to these blockades.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Prime Minister will not hide again, like he has done for the past two weeks, and that he will be there to talk, to listen, and to bring these protests to an end.

We want the protests to end. We want them to end, but we also want the Prime Minister to commit to presenting Canadians with a plan. We want this Prime Minister to do what all other levels of government here in Canada have already done: present Canadians with a reopening plan.

Why is he stubbornly refusing to listen to Canadians, to present a plan and to offer them some hope?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear the honourable member condemn these blockades and call for an end to them today in the House.

I hope that he will be able to persuade his Conservative Party colleagues to stop supporting and encouraging these blockades and protesters who are hurting businesses, jobs, supply chains and Canadians in communities across the country.

It is time for these blockades to end, and the Conservative Party needs to send a strong and crystal clear message about this.

*Oral Questions***COVID-19 PROTESTS**

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us elevate the debate a little bit.

I asked the Prime Minister for a meeting. The leader of the official opposition asked for a meeting with all the party leaders. There may be extremely troubling developments in Ottawa and elsewhere in Canada right now, and they may have a significant impact in terms of the economy, public health and, increasingly, public safety.

Will the Prime Minister invite the party leaders to an emergency meeting?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning of this crisis around blockades, I have been in close contact with our partners at other levels of government, and I have been talking to other parliamentarians. I would be very happy to do a briefing with the Bloc leader to update him on the situation people here in Ottawa and elsewhere in the country are dealing with.

We will continue to focus on ending the blockades and on the work we need to do to protect our economy and support our communities across the country.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am calling for a briefing that would bring together the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the third opposition party, myself and the Prime Minister.

Emergency call services in Ottawa are being jammed. Traffic around the Ottawa airport is being obstructed. A movement is taking root, and it is going to be extremely difficult to pull it out. A friend of my father's used to say that I was not crazy enough to start a fire and not clever enough to put it out.

Does the Prime Minister want to put this fire out?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is working with our partners every day to reduce the impact these blockades are having on the economy.

We are working with the Ottawa police and the Ontario government. I spoke at length last night with Premier Ford. We will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that Canadians across this country are not inconvenienced or affected by these illegal blockades.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the second week of the siege in Ottawa. We have borders that are shut down across the country, including Coutts and the Ambassador Bridge. This is hurting workers, truckers, small businesses and families.

We have a Prime Minister who is more focused on debating whose jurisdiction it is. Clearly, making sure our borders are open is a responsibility of the federal government.

Will the Prime Minister stop hiding behind jurisdiction and fix this mess?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, we have been there to support all levels of government in the work they needed to do—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would like the Prime Minister to start over. Members were applauding so much for his answer that they could not hear it.

The right. hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning of this crisis around blockades in Ottawa and elsewhere, we have been working closely with partners on the ground. We have been furnishing resources, we have been furnishing RCMP officers and we have been furnishing tactical supports as we move forward through this.

We understand how important it is to put an end to these barricades. We understand how important it is for people to be able to get their lives back and to be able to get their livelihoods back. That is why we are calling upon the Conservative Party, which has for the past two weeks been enabling, supporting and cheering on these blockades, to stay consistent in saying that the blockades have to end and that we have to get our lives back, all of us as Canadians.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is second week Ottawa has been under siege and now the borders are paralyzed because of the convoy protest.

Instead of solving the problems that are hitting families, workers and truckers hard, the Prime Minister wants to have a debate over jurisdictions. There is no debate to be had. That is clear. It is the federal government's job to ensure that our border crossings are working properly.

Will the Prime Minister stop debating jurisdictions and solve the problem?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this crisis, we have been working hand in hand with the various authorities, providing them the necessary resources, whether that means RCMP officers, resources, or technical support.

We will continue to respect the jurisdictions, but we will be there every step of the way to do what it takes to end these blockades.

Unfortunately, we cannot say the same about the Conservative Party, which for the past two weeks has been cheering on the blockades, encouraging these protesters and even promoting their fundraising.

The reality is that it is time for this to end, because it is hurting Canadians.

Oral Questions

[English]

HEALTH

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current Liberal government continues to use vaccines as a political weapon rather than a tool. Unlike other governments, the Liberals cannot seem to figure out how to move forward. We do not need more job vacancies or supply chain issues. Canada and Canadians need to get back to normal.

Instead of creating new vaccine mandates for federally regulated workplaces, will this minister listen to the science and his MPs, and move toward lifting these mandates?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to answer this question about vaccination. The Prime Minister mentioned just a moment ago that 80% of Canadians of all ages had received their full doses. Every day, about 10,000 more Canadians are getting their first vaccine, and 55% have received a booster dose. Every day, 180,000 people in Canada receive a booster dose. We have approximately 50% of children between five and 11 being vaccinated. About 6,000 of them every day receive their first dose.

The Speaker: Before we go to the next question, I just want to remind all the members that if they are not speaking and they are in their seats, to please wear their masks. It is the rule of the House. For those who cannot hear me, do I have to say it again? There we go. I think we have their attention. Good.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

[Translation]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 98% of federal employees have received at least one dose of the vaccine. They are not the enemy. Even Canada's public health authorities have said that it is time to re-evaluate existing measures and not blindly keep current restrictions.

Does the minister agree with Dr. Tam's recommendation or does he prefer to ignore the science?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right to congratulate the 99% of public servants who have been vaccinated.

Vaccination is not a punishment. It is a protection. When we get vaccinated, we protect ourselves, our colleagues, our family, our children, our community and our friends.

It is not a punishment. In fact, it is the only means to get through the current wave and all the other waves and variants that will emerge in the coming months and years.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been misled. Our travel restrictions are not symmetrical with those of the United States. Our requirement for an arrival PCR test is the only one in the G7, and the minister knows that.

PCR arrival testing is wasteful, it is punitive and it is ineffective. Canadians want to know: On what day will the government drop these ineffective and costly travel restrictions?

● (1435)

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of science, I want to remind every member of the House that we are still in a pandemic. We still have thousands of people in hospitals. We still have thousands of surgeries being cancelled. We will follow the science and, as conditions change, we will change our regulations and we will change our rules. However, we cannot take advice from a Conservative Party that has not even been able to convince Canadians of vaccination. We will take advice from scientists and from our public health workers.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, can somebody update the minister's talking points? Across the country provincial governments are listening and they are presenting plans. The chief public health officer of Canada, as well as provincial health officers, have all said it is time. We have 90% of Canadians who are vaccinated, so I am asking the Prime Minister when he will stop traumatizing Canadians and give us a plan to live our lives with COVID.

What is the threshold? What day will he lift the restrictions?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to bring my colleague back to earth. We are in the middle of a pandemic. We have thousands of people in hospitals. We have surgeries being cancelled. We will adjust our measures as the circumstances change, and the way we change our measures is by listening to scientists and by listening to experts.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am having a hard time hearing the response. The noise is too high. I am going to ask the minister to start again so I can hear the full answer.

The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, Canadians understand that we all need to follow science to protect our loved ones and to protect our health care workers. Canadians will do whatever it takes to protect their loved ones. I can assure everyone our government will do what is needed to protect our health and to protect our economy.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, diapers, baby food, groceries, fresh produce and manufacturing in our auto sector are all at risk. The Essex-Windsor border brings the necessities of life to Canadians. It can also bring our country to its knees. We must have open, honest dialogue with Canadians.

My bags are packed. Will the Prime Minister commit right now to fly with me to Windsor and then to Washington to give Canadians their lives back by ending the mandates once and for all?

Oral Questions

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of honest dialogue, can we be honest here? The Conservative Party, for the last two weeks, has been justifying blockades and protests. For the last two weeks, it has been absolving the responsibility of lawbreakers and those cutting off our supply chains. We will stand firm. These blockades are illegal. They must end today. They are having an impact on our economy.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, traffic over the Blue Water Bridge, which is a direct link to my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, is backed up because the Liberal government will not lift the mandates. Our Prime Minister's divisive words only add fuel to the fire and encourage the blockades. There are tractors parked on the 402 right now. The Prime Minister is doing nothing to stop the division he has created and give hope to our nation, which is beautiful but weary.

What is the Prime Minister doing today to end the mandates and restore Canada's supply chains?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of fuelling the fire, these Conservatives, for two weeks, have been providing excuses for lawbreakers. They have been providing justification and saying people are above the law. They may have changed their leader, but they continue to flip-flop. The Conservative Party must condemn the blockades and call on all of them to go home so we can restore order in our supply chains.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a crisis, but I unfortunately cannot ask the Prime Minister a question.

Based on his behaviour and the government's answers, one would think they are campaigning against the Conservatives. That is not what this crisis is about. Every single one of us here was elected by our constituents.

We have the right to receive real, serious answers to our questions about the very real crisis we are facing. I even offered to keep anything said in the meeting a secret.

Since the Prime Minister will not behave responsibly, could the Deputy Prime Minister tell him to call a meeting with the party leaders?

• (1440)

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely prepared to talk with the other parties. We are holding discussions on the current situation every day, and we will try to work with each party.

Allow me to make it clear to the Conservative Party that these protests are unlawful and it is time for them to stop. We must work together to put an end to the protests going on outside.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, “we must work together”. The last time I checked, the government House leader is not the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister needs to take responsibility.

The Liberals seem to be having fun. Have they started to think about how they will respond on Monday after a third weekend of siege and blockades affecting airport traffic and emergency communications? Have they thought about this or are they still having too much fun?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day for the past two weeks, the Conservative Party has supported the illegal protests happening outside. The Conservative Party has been taking pictures with protesters and bringing them coffee and other things. This is unacceptable.

We are here every day trying to reduce tensions and find a solution. We need to set aside partisan games. It is time for the protesters to leave Ottawa so that life can get back to normal.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the blockade at the Ambassador Bridge, the siege of Parliament Hill, threats at the Ottawa airport and border blockades in Alberta and Manitoba are not isolated incidents. It is not up to any particular city or province to deal with this. They are targeting Canada.

That is why the Prime Minister of Canada needs to take the lead. We are witnessing an organized occupation by experts in police and military tactics targeting the federal government. When will the government find a way to deal with the crisis happening right before its very eyes?

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

From the start, we have been supporting the City of Ottawa and the communities of Coumts and Windsor by offering them additional resources. A number of officers were deployed in Ottawa, Windsor and Alberta to put an end to the convoys. It is time for the members of those convoys to leave and go home in order to end this crisis.

* * *

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Russia supplies almost half of Europe's gas. President Putin has threatened to cut off those gas supplies if Europe comes to Ukraine's defence. People will freeze. Industry will shutter. Europe's economy will grind to a halt.

President Biden has been rallying natural gas producing countries around the world to secure additional supplies in the event that happens. Can the government explain to the House why Canada, the world's fifth-largest natural gas producer, cannot export liquefied natural gas from our east coast to assist our European allies?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, conversations with our European allies and America are happening. Of course, we are coordinating our response and we know that, in the event of any further invasion of Ukraine by Russia, we will make sure Russia is met with severe sanctions. We will always find a way to help our allies. My colleague the Minister of Natural Resources and I, and many other cabinet ministers, are involved in this question.

• (1445)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Putin is inching closer and closer to invading Ukraine with every passing day, but the Liberal government is ignoring their pleas for help to fend off the attack. Ukraine does not need our binoculars. It needs our RADARSAT images. What good was it to send scopes for rifles without actually sending them the rifles to put the scopes on?

Why is the foreign affairs minister abandoning our friends and allies in Ukraine and saying they are on their own?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not because my colleague talks about Ukraine that necessarily the Ukrainian government agrees with what he is saying. I think the member should look at what President Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, and the foreign minister of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, mentioned. They said “thank you” to Canada for the deterrence measures, including a \$120-million loan, and also for extending and expanding Operation Unifier.

On our side, on the diplomatic side, we are actively engaged, and we will make sure that all deterrence measures are in place to make sure that there is no further invasion.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a disturbing development last week, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping met and jointly called on NATO to rule out expansion in eastern Europe, denounced the new security formation in the Asia-Pacific region and criticized the AUKUS trilateral security pact, all three fundamental to the rules-based international order.

Given Russia's aggressive posture on Ukraine and Xi's on Taiwan, can the minister advise on what date specific sanctions will be used to combat this new and very troubling alliance?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for this important question, because we both agree that it is extremely important that strong economic sanctions be imposed should there be a further invasion of Ukraine. I want to make sure that the member understands that we are ready to impose these sanctions. Meanwhile, we are working in lockstep with our allies to make sure that we have the maximum impact with, obviously, the United States, the U.K. and also our EU partners.

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SENIORS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many seniors have been struggling as part of the working poor for their whole lives.

Bill C-12 proves that the Liberals made a colossal mistake with the GIS clawback, and still these seniors are being told that they have to wait until May for help to come. We are hearing heartbreaking stories about seniors with only \$70 left a month to cover food and medication, and this while the cost of living skyrockets.

Will the Minister of Seniors please explain to seniors who are receiving and living on \$2.30 a day why they do not deserve an advanced payment?

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague very well knows, we have been there to support seniors, particularly those vulnerable seniors, during this pandemic. As announced in the economic and fiscal update, we will be delivering a one-time payment to fully compensate those affected in 2020.

This week, we introduced Bill C-12 to exclude any pandemic benefits for the purposes of calculating GIS going forward. I hope that we can all get behind this bill and quickly pass it to prevent any future reduction in GIS for the low-income, vulnerable seniors who took these benefits. I think we can all get behind this.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past two years, Canadians have relied on the news more than ever for updates, health guidance and accurate information, but now members of the media are being targeted by convoys, experiencing harassment and even death threats while they work hard to keep Canadians informed. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has been practically silent. Yesterday, CTV Edmonton said that it will no longer display logos on its vehicles in order to protect its staff.

What is the government doing to protect members of the media who are so vital to Canadians and to our democracy?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to echo the concerns that were expressed by my colleague. I hope all members will join us in condemning any kind of intimidation, violence or hate expressed towards the media, who play a fundamental role in reporting on current events.

Right now, it is important more than ever to ensure that the Canadian public is informed about the ways in which we are going to get out of this pandemic, which means peacefully, respectfully and by getting vaccinated. I just hope that the Conservatives would finally join us in asking the members of the convoy to go home.

Oral Questions

● (1450)

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is International Development Week. Reducing extreme poverty, advancing gender equality and increasing access to education and health care for the most vulnerable are some of the many global initiatives that Canada has moved forward.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of Canadians in many ways, globally the pandemic has a pressing impact on people elsewhere and hinders the progress of Canadian initiatives abroad. Can the Minister of International Development update the House on what Canada is doing to help other countries in their vaccination campaigns?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this International Development Week, we must recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the most vulnerable and low-income countries. This is why our government committed 200 million vaccine doses, and approximately 100 million doses have already been made available.

Our contributions have supported vaccination campaigns in Rwanda, Bangladesh, Guatemala, Nigeria and many other countries. We will continue to ensure that vaccines and treatments reach the most vulnerable.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are on a campaign against farmers. Recently, they have said they may mandate a reduction in nitrogen fertilizer use by 30%, a decision that would inflate food prices, decrease production, break farmers' bottom lines and put tremendous pressure on supply chains.

This proposed mandate is an arbitrary number from a government that is out of touch not only with farmers, but with reality. Will the Liberal government, today, reverse course and scrap this illogical, unscientific and out-of-touch mandate?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member cannot say that we are not in touch with farmers. I spend my days, weeks and weekends talking to farmers. I can assure the House that farmers are on board. Farmers care for the environment. Farmers care for the land. Farmers care for the water. They are on board with sustainable agriculture because they know this is the right thing to do for them, for the environment and for consumers.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of fertilizer use, last year I asked for the evidence and about the impact on production. It turned out the government's own departments have not even done the research. They just speculated on the potential for optimizing fertilizer use.

Fertilizer Canada has the brutal facts. There would be \$10.4 billion in losses in canola, corn and spring wheat alone, and farmers are hit with an ever-rising carbon tax.

From this farmer to that minister, why is the minister stopping crop growth and hurting Canadians who put food on all of our tables?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure members that this government is working with farmers for farmers. Farmers know how important it is for them to have sustainable agriculture. They are good stewards of the land. They know they are the first ones to be hit by climate change. They are on board to adopt more sustainable practices. They are on board to get access to better energy-efficient technologies, and we are there to support them.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the labour shortage in the agricultural sector is causing serious harm to farmers and processors.

In my riding, Olymel is short more than 200 employees in its business. More than one million pigs will not be slaughtered in Ontario and Quebec this year. No workers will be available until July.

When will the minister do something tangible to combat the labour shortage and the processing capacity problems?

We need a date.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure my colleague that we are very aware of the importance and impact of the labour shortage we are facing now, especially in the food processing sector.

I assure members that I am working very closely with my colleagues, the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Employment, to improve our programs for receiving temporary foreign workers.

My continued co-operation with the sector will ensure we will get this done as soon as possible and in the best way possible.

* * *

● (1455)

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is still clawing back COVID benefits from fishermen. The Minister of Fisheries told me that it was not her fault and to talk to the Minister of National Revenue.

The Minister of National Revenue's office said that it was not their problem and to talk to the Minister of Employment. The Minister of Employment's office said that it was not them and to talk to Service Canada. Service Canada said that it was just ROEs there.

The motto in the Liberal cabinet is, "Don't ask me, I just work here." Will someone in the government, anyone, show some leadership and reverse the decision to claw back COVID benefits from fishermen?

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the member that the fish harvester benefit and grant program was designed and rolled out very quickly because we needed to get support out the door when it was urgently needed. We created a program that could meet these needs head-on.

The terms of the program were clear from the beginning. It was designed for harvesters, especially self-employed commercial fish harvesters, because they were not entitled to CERB.

We promised to be there for the hard-working men and women of our fisheries, and that is precisely what we did.

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[Translation]

SENIORS

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government must stop cutting the guaranteed income supplement for seniors who collected the Canada emergency response benefit.

It is cruel to cut off money for those seniors who need it the most, those who have to keep working during retirement just to feed and house themselves.

We know that the minister agrees with us about this, but why is she waiting until June to stop these cuts?

We can work with the minister. She knows that she can count on the Bloc Québécois, which is on the side of seniors.

What is stopping her from acting sooner?

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree about just how difficult this pandemic has been for seniors, particularly those most vulnerable. That is why we have actually worked extremely hard to strengthen income security for seniors, including with increases to the GIS.

As my hon. colleague knows, we announced in the fiscal update that we would be delivering a one-time payment to those who received benefits in 2020. We also introduced Bill C-12 to exclude pandemic benefits for the purposes of calculating GIS going forward. I hope we can count on all members of the House to pass this bill extremely quickly.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hear the minister, but it is February and what she is saying will not be done until May and June.

Oral Questions

We know that the minister will introduce her bill, and we will support it. However, we want her to stop cutting the guaranteed income supplement, the GIS, for workers and seniors today. We have been waiting eight months for this.

The problem is that she is still forcing these people to go through months of terrible hardship, making them wait until May to be compensated and until June to stop seeing their benefits reduced.

The minister has the full support of the Bloc Québécois to take action, so why does she not take this opportunity to bring in a quick solution?

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's priority from the very beginning has been to be there to support those most vulnerable seniors. That is why we worked so hard to strengthen income security for seniors, including with the increase to their GIS.

We moved very quickly to help seniors during the pandemic. We have also introduced, as my hon. colleague knows, Bill C-12, to exclude pandemic benefits for the purposes of calculating GIS going forward, while also making a major investment through a one-time payment to those seniors affected. We are on top of this, and we will always be there for seniors.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Veterans Affairs Canada is set to cut hundreds of disability benefits adjudicators in March. These adjudicators were hired to deal with the massive backlog at Veterans Affairs. I asked the hon. minister what would happen when these people were cut, with respect to the backlog. His answer was that the backlog would increase 50% in just nine months.

Will the minister commit to rescinding this decision, yes or no?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is fully aware that we invested over \$200 million into Veterans Affairs to make sure it was able to hire employees: employees who, in fact, were fired by the previous government. The 2021 budget included an extension of these resources so we could continue to address the backlog. We have seen a significant decrease in the backlog, in fact, by 40%. I can assure my hon. colleague that we will continue to decrease the backlog.

Oral Questions

• (1500)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister promised to help veterans.

In 2018, he gave the impression that he would do something by hiring hundreds of contract workers to tackle the backlog of thousands of disability claims. These are the claims of the men and women who risked their lives while fighting for our country.

Today, the contracts have expired and he is refusing to commit to renewing the contracts even though there is still a backlog of 34,000 cases.

Will the Prime Minister get serious about tackling the backlog problem and renew the contracts?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is kind of rich to be getting this kind of question from a party that, when they were in power, fired 1,000 employees, cut funding to Veterans Affairs and slashed budgets. In fact, they hurt veterans and they hurt Veterans Affairs.

I can assure my hon. colleague that we will continue to make sure that we have the investments to continue to decrease the backlog. Our government has made sure our veterans receive the appropriate compensation they should get, and it will continue to.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Epiq Class Action Services Canada, which administers the federal government's \$900-million settlement with armed forces members and veterans who experienced sexual misconduct, has released private information about dozens of claimants. These survivors are now carelessly revictimized again at the highest level. This is what unacceptable looks like, and the Privacy Commissioner is now investigating.

What is the minister going to do to correct this and to make sure that it never happens again?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a concerning matter. Our government takes privacy seriously and treats this with the utmost seriousness.

Epiq is an independent, court-appointed administrator for the misconduct class action settlement. It has advised DND and CAF officials that the disclosure did not have the details or nature of any claims. DND and CAF are not involved in this disclosure, and class counsel have asked Epiq to ensure it takes meaningful steps to contain and resolve this issue, so it simply does not happen again. Claimants' private information needs to be treated with the utmost care and seriousness.

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the transition to a green economy is also an opportunity for our businesses to innovate and ensure Canada's economic prosperity in the economy of tomorrow.

Can the Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec inform the House about new and significant green initiatives for Quebec's small and medium-sized businesses?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Sport and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for her leadership in the Pontiac on our economy's green transition.

Our SMEs make a significant contribution to economic growth in addition to being key assets for rebuilding a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable economy. In February, I will be announcing investments of almost \$40 million for more than 20 innovative projects in Quebec. These are strategic investments in projects that will reduce the environmental impact and contribute to the economy of tomorrow.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will quote an email to the government sent by the Liberal MP for Thunder Bay—Rainy River at the height of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan: "I hate to tell you, but everyone on the ground considers our government's management of this amounts, so far, to a total disaster."

Afghanistan committee testimony indicates that nothing has changed:

...at this time it is not coming across that Afghanistan is a priority foreign policy issue for Canada. A Canadian moral stance is missing.

Why are the Liberal ministers failing to show leadership and accountability in dealing with this urgent humanitarian aid crisis?

• (1505)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Canadian Armed Forces did everything we asked of them under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Canada was part of an air bridge with our allies that saved as many people as we could. Our armed forces worked around the clock to evacuate as many people as possible for as long as conditions permitted, including our former interpreters, local staff and citizens of allied countries. Under the leadership of my colleague, the Minister of Immigration, we are committed to bringing 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada.

COVID-19 ECONOMIC MEASURES

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was not enough for the Liberals when they paid out \$9 million in CERB payments to dead people last year. It has now been revealed that they have paid out \$12 million in CERB to people abroad. Surely, even the government realizes it is the “C-E-R-B”, not the “oversea-E-R-B”.

Will the minister, to apologize to Canadians for this waste of taxpayers' money, stand and commit to recovering every penny of these wasted funds?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we will not apologize for, and in fact are extremely proud of, is having helped over eight million Canadians who received the CERB when they needed it most at the beginning of this pandemic. Verifications are ongoing to identify individuals who received the CERB but may not have been eligible, and claimants who are found to have received the benefit improperly will be required to reimburse the payment.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to official House documents, 1,610 people with addresses outside Canada received CERB. It is called the Canada emergency response benefit, not the international benefit.

Not one person in this government did a single thing to prevent the loss of \$11.9 million. This is another scandal.

Is there a vaccine for Liberal incompetence?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we acted quickly and brought in the Canada emergency response benefit when Canadians needed it most.

Although the Canada emergency response benefit is only available to individuals living in Canada, there were some recipients who work in Canada but have a mailing address in another country.

One example would be people working in Canada through the temporary foreign worker program. If an individual in this situation met all of the other criteria for the CERB, they were entitled to it.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the Ottawa blockade is not about truckers. Ninety per cent of truckers are vaccinated, and they continue to play a vital role in keeping our economy running. Despite that, for the second week in a row, the residents of Ottawa have been forced to put up with an unacceptable occupation, which is keeping local businesses closed and residents from being able to live their normal lives.

Can the Minister of Public Safety provide an update to the House on the support our government is providing to help get life for the residents of Ontario back to normal?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope all members will express solidarity with the people

Oral Questions

of Ottawa who have experienced grave disruption. People cannot get to work. Families cannot drop off their kids at day care, and seniors cannot get around. It is absolutely unacceptable.

That is why the government has worked to ensure police have all of the resources they need. I am pleased to report to members in the chamber that we have now provided two installments of additional resources of the RCMP. Our top priority on this side of the House is to ensure the illegal blockades end, that we uphold the law and that people can get back to their lives. I hope the Conservatives will join us in that.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has lost \$1.1 trillion in tax revenue in the last 20 years because of steady corporate tax cuts and flagrant tax evasion. This did not just happen. Billionaires are laughing all the way to the bank thanks to their Liberal and Conservative friends. All the while, Canadians are left with skyrocketing costs, crippling student debt and a growing housing crisis.

When will the Liberal government stand up for Canadians and fix the rigged system, which was designed by billionaires for billionaires, and force them to pay their taxes?

● (1510)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government absolutely understands that everyone in Canada has to pay their fair share. Our tax base is what allows our government to provide essential programs such as the early learning and child care system our government is delivering.

Our government is absolutely committed to being tough on tax fraud. I would like to remind the member opposite that, when we first formed government, we raised taxes for those at the very top and cut taxes for the middle class.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I introduced a petition with almost 18,000 signatories, Canadians from every corner of the country, calling on the government to fast-track the Canada disability benefit and lift almost 1.5 million Canadians with disabilities out of poverty.

Oral Questions

It has now been almost two months since the Prime Minister last commented on this critical support. Can the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion share when the governing party intends to reintroduce this legislation and commit to ensuring Canadians with disabilities are included every step of the way?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his ongoing commitment to raise up the hundreds of thousands of Canadians living below the poverty line who are working-age Canadians with disabilities. I thank him also for working with members in all parties in the House and, indeed, the other place to secure and build common ground around the introduction of the Canada disability benefit legislation.

We are working hard on this. It was a platform commitment, and it is a mandate commitment. We will deliver.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

There have been discussions, and I hope that, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion that, in the opinion of the House, the government should do more to address global vaccine equity by sharing resources, doses and knowledge, by taking the following actions: (a) announcing its full support for a temporary waiver of the agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, the TRIPS agreement, in relation to products and technologies related to the prevention, treatment or containment of COVID-19 as proposed by India and South Africa to the World Trade Organization; (b) facilitating the transfer of technology to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines around the world, including financial support for regional hubs such as the South Africa technology transfer hub; (c) following through on its own claims of the effectiveness of Canada's access to medicines regime, CAMR, by taking the necessary steps of adding COVID-19 vaccines and drugs to schedule 1 of the Patent Act; (d) donating at least 200 million doses of vaccine as promised to vulnerable populations around the world through COVAX by the end of 2022, through predictable and scheduled donations where timelines and quantities are transparently available to recipient countries and the public; (e) increasing assistance with cold chain logistics and supplies to low-income countries receiving vaccines; (f) delivering at least an additional \$1.1 billion as a net addition to the international assistance envelope and existing departmental resources to address global vaccine equity in budget 2022, including \$780 million to ACT-Accelerator partners to purchase vaccines, tests, treatments, personal protective equipment and oxygen in developing countries and—

The Speaker: I am afraid I am going to have to cut the hon. member off, as I am getting a lot of nays. We have gone far enough, and members have the gist of what the motion is. I can ask the question.

All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

There have been discussions among the parties and, if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion that the House condemns the intimidation of citizens and journalists, the incessant honking, the arson attempts, the shooting of fireworks in the downtown core of Ottawa, the flooding of emergency lines such as 911 and the local police phone numbers by fake emergency calls, the blockage of essential roads and infrastructure and the overall siege situation currently being maintained by protesters on the streets of Ottawa and elsewhere in Canada; and, calls on the protesters to the end the blockades and the occupation immediately.

• (1515)

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There have been discussions among the parties, and I think that, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion that, in the opinion of the House, those who question existing government policies should not be demonized by their Prime Minister and used to wedge, to divide and stigmatize Canadians; and, that the Prime Minister should listen to the member for Louis-Hébert, who said it was time we stopped dividing people and pitting people against each other.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: That was pretty clear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Thérien: Mr. Speaker, there has been consultation among the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the House call on the Prime Minister to meet with the leaders of the three opposition parties as soon as possible to report on the status of the situation around Parliament and to discuss available options for putting an end to the siege in Ottawa.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the Prime Minister said in an answer today that those briefings would be available. I am not sure why the Bloc felt the need to bring forward this unanimous consent motion.

The Speaker: That is a point of debate.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, is it time for the Thursday question?

The Speaker: No. We will do that after the vote.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed from February 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-8, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: It being 3:17 p.m., pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-8.

Call in the members.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 22*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arseneault	Arya
Ashton	Atwin
Bachrach	Badawey
Bains	Baker
Barron	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bergeron
Bérubé	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings	Carr
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Chahal
Champoux	Chatel
Chen	Chiang
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Collins (Victoria)
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Damoff
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Desbiens	Desilets
Desjarlais	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Dong	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury

Erskine-Smith	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Gaheer
Garneau	Garon
Garrison	Gaudreau
Gazan	Gerretsen
Gill	Gould
Green	Guilbeault
Hajdu	Hanley
Hardie	Hepfner
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Idlout	Ien
Jaczek	Johns
Joly	Jones
Jowhari	Julian
Kayabaga	Kelloway
Khalid	Khera
Koutrakis	Kusmierczyk
Kwan	Lalonde
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larouche	Lattanzio
Lauzon	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lemire
Lightbound	Long
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Martinez Ferrada
Masse	Mathysen
May (Cambridge)	May (Saenich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald (Avalon)	McGuinty
McKay	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod	McPherson
Mendès	Medicino
Miao	Michaud
Miller	Morrice
Morrissey	Murray
Naqvi	Ng
Noormohamed	Normandin
O'Connell	Oliphant
O'Regan	Pauzé
Perron	Petipas Taylor
Plamondon	Powlowski
Qualtrough	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Sahota
Sajjan	Saks
Samson	Sarai
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Sinclair-Desgagné	Singh
Sorbara	Spengemann
Ste-Marie	St-Onge
Sudds	Tassi
Taylor Roy	Therrien
Thompson	Trudeau
Trudel	Turnbull
Valdez	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vignola
Villemure	Virani
Vuong	Weiler
Wilkinson	Yip
Zahid	Zarrillo

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NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Arnold	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Benzen	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Block	Bragdon
Brassard	Brock
Calkins	Caputo
Carrie	Chambers
Chong	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Deltell
d'Entremont	Doherty
Dowdall	Dreeschen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Ferri	Findlay
Gallant	Généreux
Genius	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Hoback
Jeneroux	Kelly
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Kurek	Kusie
Lake	Lantsman
Lawrence	Lehoux
Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Liepert	Lloyd
Lobb	MacKenzie
Maguire	Martel
Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLean	Melillo
Moore	Morantz
Morrison	Motz
Nater	O'Toole
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Perkins	Poilievre
Rayes	Redekopp
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Roberts
Rood	Ruff
Scheer	Schmale
Seebach	Shields
Shiple	Small
Soroka	Steinley
Stewart	Strahl
Stubbs	Thomas
Tochor	Tolmie
Uppal	Van Popta
Vecchio	Vidal
Vien	Viersen
Vis	Wagantall
Warkentin	Wagh
Webber	Williams
Zimmer— 117	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize. Like my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière, I kind of jumped the gun.

Let me begin by stating that I am really looking forward to working with you and the government House leader. Despite any preconceived or misplaced characterizations he may have about me or my leadership team colleagues, which he so willingly shared with his caucus and publicly, he should not mistake our passion, our pride and our desire for only the best outcomes for our country and Canadians as any other emotion. If he would like to apologize, I am sure my leadership colleagues would gladly accept.

I note the government House leader gave notice of government Motion No. 7 and Motion No. 8 to schedule a program for Bill C-10 on rapid tests and for Bill C-12 on old age security. Under the terms of these motions, the sponsoring minister will not have to defend their legislation in committee, no stakeholders will be able to testify and no amendments can be made to improve the legislation. I want the government House leader to understand that the official opposition supports both bills, but his proposed approach is not acceptable. I call on him to abide by the time-tested procedures of the House and make sure the government legislation holds up to parliamentary scrutiny.

With that, I ask the government House leader the Thursday question: What is the order of business we can expect?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can see why my hon. colleague was anxious to get to the Thursday question. It was exceptionally well put.

Let me say to the hon. member across the way that I have very much enjoyed getting to know him over the last while as we begin this new working relationship together. It seems we share an affinity for the movie *Uncle Buck*, so maybe we will have a movie night together at some point in time.

My hon. colleague is correct that we have motions scheduled for rapid testing and critical funds for seniors. We must move as expeditiously as possible. That is why tomorrow morning we will take up debate on Government Business No. 8, which sets out the parameters of how to expedite Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19 and more specifically to rapid testing. In the afternoon, we will turn to Government Business No. 7, which is a motion to dispose of Bill C-12, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act (Guaranteed Income Supplement). When we return on Monday, we will continue debate on government Motion No. 8 so that we can pass the rapid testing legislation as soon as possible. Finally, next Thursday shall be an allotted day.

• (1535)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL COVID-19 MANDATES AND RESTRICTIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, Government Orders will be extended by 13 minutes.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity to address the opposition motion requesting that our government table a plan for COVID.

Let me be clear. Throughout the pandemic, the Government of Canada has prioritized the health and safety of Canadians. We have followed a plan to do this, informed by science and data, and we will continue to follow this plan.

The public health measures we have implemented have been, and will continue to be, based on the best public health advice, data and projections available. This is the plan we have been following and will continue to follow.

This plan has had some of the best outcomes in the world. Canadians have stepped up and done their part. I would like to join my colleague from Vaughan—Woodbridge in thanking all Canadians for doing their part in combatting COVID.

The incidence of serious disease and death in Canada is among the lowest in the world, and our businesses and citizens have been supported by the measures our government has put in place. In fact, as a country we have recovered over 101% of the over three million jobs we lost during this unprecedented pandemic. This is compared to the U.S., which has recovered 87%.

Canadians have pulled together and continue to do so by getting vaccinated. In fact, this past week over 60,000 Canadians got their first shot, and hundreds of thousands of Canadians are getting boosters to further help stop the spread of COVID.

We know vaccines are not perfect, nor are they the only solution, but they are the best solution we have right now to address this unprecedented global pandemic, to control the transmission of COVID and to prevent serious disease, death and hospitalization, especially in our much-needed ICU spaces. Vaccines are the best way to protect our frontline workers, the vulnerable, our health care system, the public health of all and ensure that restrictions can be lifted for the sake of our mental health and economic well-being. I am sure the members opposite would agree.

As the pandemic and our understanding of it has evolved, so have public health measures. These measures will continue to evolve. I am sure that all of us here want to see restrictions lifted and our lives returned to normal. We all want to travel and see our loved ones without testing and extra measures. In fact, it has been over two years since I have seen my granddaughters, who live in

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the United States. We all want to continue to be united with our loved ones and united as a country.

We will continue to listen to Canadians, as we have been doing and as I have been doing. I have spoken to many constituents, and they are not all in agreement, just like members in the House. I heard from one constituent who was very concerned about another wave if the measures are undone too early. I have heard from constituents who are frustrated with the border testing. I have heard concerns from others who are worried about sitting next to unvaccinated people on plane rides and want the mandates to continue. However, most of what I heard is frustration and anger, which is often directed toward us because people cannot lash out at COVID. It does not have an email address or a telephone number. It does not cross the street here in Ottawa in front of Parliament to come and work to try our very best to make responsible, mature and reasoned decisions.

I know, and members know, that we are all human and that the anxiety caused by COVID and the frustration caused by the restrictions and inconveniences have caused this mounting anger. In my mind, that only makes it more important for us to stay the course, to make changes when and if warranted by science, and to not respond to anger and frustration by telling Canadians that all restrictions will be lifted.

There are many different points of view on how to move forward, but the job of a leader, of a responsible and responsive government, is to listen to Canadians and our experts and make and follow a plan. This is what our government has been doing successfully.

• (1540)

The opposition motion asks for a plan, but what it actually wants is a different plan. We will continue to adjust pandemic measures as the pandemic progresses, as we have been doing all along. We will continue to follow the plan that we have and that has had among the best results in the world.

I hope that we in this House can model the civil and respectful behaviour that the majority of Canadians want and expect from us and is so needed at this challenging time.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about Canadians pulling together and getting vaccinated, and I agree. She is right that Canadians did pull together and get vaccinated, but now I am hearing from people who want to get their businesses back up and running at full capacity and see people go back to work. I am hearing from parents who want their children to be able to live a normal life again. I am hearing from people who are struggling with their mental health. I know the member has heard those same things. That is the frustration and anger she said she has heard from people. They just want a plan from the government to end lockdowns, restrictions and related things that are a result of the government's failure.

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I want to know if she is listening to her constituents, if she is listening to Canadians and if she will support this motion.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that we agree on a few things and that we are also listening to Canadians.

We are hearing a variety of views. I agree that we have to have a plan. As I said, we have had a plan and we are following it. To tell Canadians that we have an exact timetable or plan for how to end all restrictions would require that we end COVID, and I do not know how to do that. I hope the member does. If we did that as the Government of Canada, we would be very popular worldwide.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen a government that has been, I think it is fair to say, rudderless over the course of the last few weeks and months. It ended CERB abruptly, cutting 800,000 Canadians off from any supports, any method of putting food on the table or keeping a roof over their heads. There has been profound income and wealth inequality that we have seen exacerbated by COVID, and the government has done nothing about it.

I wonder if the member can comment on what has been a rudderless reaction as well to this crisis. There are now three border crossings shut down, the Ottawa airport was shut down this morning and there is a siege of Parliament Hill, yet the government and the Prime Minister seem to be missing in action and do not seem to know how to respond. Could the member comment on why the government has been so rudderless through this crisis?

• (1545)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Mr. Speaker, I have not seen a rudderless government. I have seen a government that has a plan and has stuck to it. We have had a plan that has given us some of the best results in the world, and we are continuing to follow that plan. We have provided supports for Canadians, more than have been provided in many other countries, and we have better economic results. In fact, we have had fewer small business bankruptcies during the pandemic than we did the previous year.

Canadians have been supported. We had the foresight to pass legislation in the fall to allow for supports to be put in place if provinces enacted lockdowns because of another surge in COVID. Those have been in place.

I do not agree that we have been rudderless at all. In fact, I think we have been very calm and have stayed the course in continuing with a plan that has given us very good results that we should all be proud of.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. She obviously cannot ignore what is going on outside or what happened in question period. This is about managing a public health crisis, but it is also about public health measures. There are people protesting right now.

Every party has made it clear that this calls for a party leaders' summit to enable meaningful dialogue, even if it is behind closed doors. There has to be a meeting with the Prime Minister and the leaders of the first, second and third opposition parties.

What does my colleague think about such a meeting?

[English]

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Mr. Speaker, I have not ignored and one cannot ignore what is going on outside, nor has our government. However, earlier a member asked for unanimous consent for a motion to end the blockades. The hon. members of the opposition did not agree. They said nay to that motion.

We have been reaching out. We have been trying. We have been asking for an end to the blockade. We have been offering support to the City of Ottawa and the Province of Ontario to end this blockade and others. We have been consistent in saying that these illegal activities should be ended. That has not been the case on the other side of the aisle.

I would ask all members to support an end to this blockade.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to rise and speak to a very important and critical debate in this place. I would suggest it is somewhat historical in the sense that we are trying to move forward from an incredibly tough couple of years for Canadians. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

I have been a member of Parliament now for six years. In my 57 years, I do not think I have ever seen the country as divided as it is today. It is divided along regional lines, divided along race lines and divided along faith lines, and we are now pitting neighbours against neighbours on the basis of their health status. That is not the way the country should be governed.

Over the last six years, we have seen the divisive nature of a Prime Minister who does everything he can not to unite Canadians but to divide Canadians. We have seen it in some of the language that has been used. This is why Conservatives have really tried to take a solution-oriented approach to this crisis to work with the government.

Earlier this week, the Leader of the Opposition sent a letter to the Prime Minister that asked him to convene a meeting of the opposition parties with him to try to come up with a solution and try to work through this problem. Even today, the hon. leader of the Bloc Québécois brought it up several times in question period and was trying to get the government and the Prime Minister to meet with opposition parties.

Emergency services are stretched out. They are stressed. They are doing everything they can to deal with not just the manifestation of that frustration and that anger here in Ottawa but what is also now cascading across the provinces. We are seeing blockades at critical entry points, not just for our infrastructure but also for our supply chain. There are blockades at the Ambassador Bridge; in Emerson, Manitoba; and in Coutts, Alberta.

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I want to say that I appreciate that level of frustration. As the member of Parliament for Barrie—Innisfil, over the last two years I have certainly heard from businesses and people whose lives and livelihoods have been affected. I have heard about businesses that have been lost, about mental health issues among young people and about the mental health crisis that exists. People are tired and frustrated and angry. They are lashing out. They are protesting. They are calling and emailing members of Parliament. It is our job to listen to every single one of those voices. That is our job, regardless of whether we agree with them, regardless of whether we form the same ideology. It is our job to listen.

In listening to all of this frustration that is being manifested through these protests, we need to come together as leaders in Parliament to find a solution, and we need to work together to do that. I will say that this morning the Leader of the Opposition called out and made a plea for the protests to end.

We have heard what people are going through. We know what they want. It is up to us as leaders in this country to work to find those types of solutions so that people can go home, so that they know that their political leaders are working together. That is what this motion is all about; it is about creating a plan, a strategy, an exit strategy so that we can get back to some sense of normalcy.

At this point, 90% of Canadians are vaccinated. I understand there are still some issues and some challenges; however, people are tired and weary of the restrictions and lockdowns and the types of things we are seeing being implemented and continued by the government, whether it is border testing or many of the other measures it has implemented.

We need an exit strategy. We need to make sure that our economy is functioning on all cylinders. We cannot just go to restrictions and lockdowns by default. We have to use every tool in our toolbox that we can. Vaccinations are one, and rapid tests and masking.

● (1550)

I think it is up to Canadians now to make their health choices, to determine how we are going to get back to some sense of normalcy, and the government can facilitate that. The government can do that by ending the lockdowns, ending the restrictions and ending the mandates.

I have been dealing with a situation at the ethics committee where we are seeing what seems to be a pattern of massive overreach from a privacy standpoint on Canadians in the collection of data without the consent of Canadians. If we start connecting the dots, as I said yesterday in question period, it is becoming increasingly concerning to Canadians what is happening with respect to their privacy rights.

We have to take down the temperature. We have to stop the inflammatory language, the incendiary language that oftentimes is coming from the government. In fact, we had one of their MPs earlier this week talk about a concerted effort to stigmatize Canadians and to create this division. This is not a time for us to be divided. This is a time for us to be united in our cause, and that cause is to ensure that these lockdowns and these mandates end so that Canadians can get back to some sense of normalcy in their lives, so that businesses can function and so that lives and livelihoods are not

lost. That is what we are talking about today. We need a plan and we need that exit strategy.

I know the Prime Minister today, even through question period and all day yesterday, was talking about science and evidence-based decision-making. Even the chief public health officer of Canada is saying that we have to get back to some sense of normalcy. In fact, there are public health officers right across the country, premiers, who are announcing no more lockdowns, no more mandates and no more vaccine passports. They understand that we have to get back to some sense of normalcy, if not for the economy of this country then for the mental health of our nation because people are suffering.

Sadly, as I sit here and I listen to the Prime Minister speak day in and day out about science and evidence-based decision-making, the reality is that the only science the Prime Minister understands is political science. That is the only science that he understands, political science and how to keep his job, instead of worrying about the people that he represents.

He does not just represent people who agree with his ideology. He is the Prime Minister of the entire country. He is not supposed to just represent the people who agree or disagree with him. He is the Prime Minister of all Canadians. That, I think, is what is seriously lacking here, and I do not know why. This is despite the calls from the opposition parties, all of the opposition parties. Even the leader of the NDP today talked about convening a meeting so that we can work together to find a solution to this crisis, which is not just seizing our country but starting to paralyze our country.

However, there are still more political games. A unanimous consent motion today by the Liberals just poured more gas on the fire. I am sick of it and Canadians are sick of it. They want their leadership and they want leaders in this country to be working together.

Today's motion to direct the government to create this exit strategy, to create this exit plan, is one of prudence. It is one that is necessary and it is one that Canadians are desperately hoping for. I know the people who I represent in Barrie—Innisfil are fed up. They are tired. They are angry. They want to get back to some sense of normalcy. They want to be able to travel again. They do not want to have to pay \$600 for a family of four for a PCR test.

We need to get back to some sense of normalcy. I pray and I hope that the government is listening to what we are proposing, because it is done with sincerity and it is done on behalf of Canadians, the same Canadians who sent us here.

Business of Supply

• (1555)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the opposition House leader. Having said that, the leader of the official opposition stood up and said that the Conservatives want to see an end to the illegal blockades, which is a great thing to say, but actions do speak louder than words. During the previous couple of weeks, the Conservatives have been supporting it in many different ways, in particular through social media and many of the actions that were taken by Conservative members of Parliament. That is what has led, in good part, to the blockades that we are now seeing at our borders, which is causing horrific economic damage, job losses and so forth.

Would my friend not agree that, if the Conservatives want to put some water on the fire, a part of it means for many of those same Conservative MPs to start putting it on their social media and start talking to some of their friends who are out there, saying it is time to end this illegal convoy, to go home and to let Ottawa get back to normalcy?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition was quite clear in her statement this morning. In fact, I was quite clear in my statement just now that these protests do have to end. Canadians have been heard, and it is up to the government. We are not the government. We are members of the opposition. The Liberals are the government, and they have all of the tools and all of the levers of power to choose from instead of, as I said earlier, inciting with incendiary and inflammatory language and trying to pour more gas on the fire. If the Liberals wanted to really work together, leveraging all the tools of power that they have, they could work to end this.

As I said, Canadians are frustrated. They want the mandates to end. They want to get back to some sense of normalcy. They want life to resume, and they do not want their kids to suffer anymore from the mental health crisis that they are already suffering from. The Liberals have the power. They have the tools and they can work collaboratively to try to find a resolution to this problem, but the protesters do have to go home and we have to get back to some sense of normalcy.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have read the motion. I gave a speech on it, so I should hope I read it.

This morning, I heard the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie accuse the Conservatives of wanting to lift all restrictions from one day to the next, not gradually.

I would like my colleague to clarify the motion and the fact that a plan does not necessarily mean an immediate reopening without warning.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I was involved in the crafting of the motion. The initial crafting of the motion was somewhat prescriptive in the sense that maybe it was a bridge too far to start, and

this is why we brought it back a little bit to talk about the government developing a plan by February 28.

We are not naive. We do not think that things are just going to all of a sudden stop. There has to be some period of transition, but we need an exit plan and we need an exit strategy. That is what this motion is calling for on the part of the government, to use those levers of power in order to ensure that we develop this type of plan so that Canadians can get back to some sense of normalcy.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, early in the pandemic, epidemiologists observed that this virus knows no borders. They warned that if we did not have a global vaccination program, then what they described as “immune escape variants” would undoubtedly emerge and make their way even to places like Canada that have very high vaccination rates. One of the responses to this is to allow countries around the world to have access to the technology and vaccine intellectual property that the public paid for, so that they could actually produce vaccines and vaccinate their citizens faster. This not only would be fair to them but would help Canadians stay safe.

I wonder if my hon. colleague agrees with the NDP that Canada should support the TRIPS waiver at the WTO so that we can expand global vaccine production and help keep Canadians safe. Up to now, I have not heard the member's leader or Conservatives actually support that very rational measure.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, there is no question about it that there has to be a vaccine plan globally, because there are risks associated with other types of variants that are going to develop in these nations. It is up to the global community to come together and make sure that, for those countries that are vulnerable and susceptible to these types of variants manifesting themselves, we come together and really work as a global community to make sure that those countries are safe. By extension, Canada becomes safe as well.

We do need domestic capacity as well and I really want to emphasize the need for biopharma. Pharmaceutical technology in this country needs to be developed, not just talked about but actually done.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Conservative motion before the House this afternoon calling on the government to finally come up with a plan to end the federally related COVID restrictions and mandates, including the government's punitive and discriminatory vaccine mandates.

When it comes to the mandates, the Prime Minister says he is merely following science. If he were really following science, he would listen to public health officials across Canada, including Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, who has stated that all existing public health measures need to be re-evaluated, including vaccine mandates. Make no mistake about it, the Prime Minister is not interested in science. He is interested in politicizing the pandemic, dividing Canadian society and demonizing Canadians for making a personal health choice.

Business of Supply

Repeatedly, the Prime Minister has used incendiary and hateful rhetoric against his fellow Canadians for merely making a personal health choice. He even went so far as to say, “Do we tolerate these people?” Those are the words of the Prime Minister against his fellow Canadians. Needless to say, history will not judge the Prime Minister kindly for his recent hateful words or his recent actions.

The Prime Minister's mandates have not done much to keep Canadians safe, but they have destroyed lives, they have destroyed livelihoods, they have eroded personal freedoms, they have pitted one Canadian against another and they have infringed upon the rights and freedoms of Canadians including privacy rights. It is on the issue of privacy rights that I wish to spend the balance of my time.

In a free and democratic society, governments respect the privacy of their citizens. To underscore the importance of privacy rights, earlier this week when the Privacy Commissioner appeared before the ethics committee, he stated that privacy is a human right. In May 2021, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, along with all provincial and territorial privacy commissioners, issued a joint statement on what they contemplated would be vaccine mandates imposed by governments.

In the joint statement, the privacy commissioners warned that vaccine mandates would encroach upon civil liberties, that there were significant privacy risks involved and that the government should not proceed without careful consideration. Having regard for those significant privacy risks, the joint statement stressed the importance of the government doing its due diligence in seeing that, before any such mandate is introduced, all applicable privacy laws would be complied with and privacy best practices would be adopted.

I should further note that it is a federal government policy, pursuant to a directive, that when there is a program or activity of government that involves the use of personal information that directly impacts an individual, a privacy impact assessment be undertaken in respect of that federal program or activity and that such a privacy impact assessment be conducted before the program or activity is implemented. The purpose of such an assessment is clear: to ensure compliance with the Privacy Act and to address other privacy-related issues.

• (1605)

In light of the warnings from all privacy commissioners across Canada, one would have thought the government would have reached out and worked with the Privacy Commissioner at the earliest opportunity before vaccine mandates were implemented. In light of the federal directive respecting privacy impact assessments, one would have thought the government would have worked on and completed such assessments before the implementation of mandates.

To learn more about what the government has done or has failed to do with respect to protecting the privacy rights of Canadians, my colleague, the hon. member for Oshawa, and I wrote to the Privacy Commissioner. The letter of response that we received is deeply concerning. It is clear in the Privacy Commissioner's response that the government did not consult the Office of the Privacy Commissioner at the earliest opportunity. Indeed, in many cases, the Privacy

Commissioner was contacted at the eleventh hour. For example, with respect to the vaccine mandate that affects the public service, the Privacy Commissioner was given four hours to review it. That is unacceptable, it is unreasonable and it demonstrates bad faith on the part of the government when it comes to protecting the privacy rights of Canadians.

What about the privacy impact assessments? The Privacy Commissioner has confirmed to my office that no such assessments have been produced. I would remind the government that such assessments were to be produced prior to the implementation of the mandates. Here we are, four months later, and there are no assessments. What makes that even worse is the clear warnings from all privacy commissioners across Canada about the significant privacy risks involved.

Sadly, this is not an isolated incident. It is part of a disturbing trend on the part of the government to disregard the privacy rights of Canadians. We learned recently, for example, that PHAC failed to work with the Privacy Commissioner in respect of the collection of mobile data from millions of Canadians without their consent. There is the case of Statistics Canada, which was caught with unjustifiable plans to collect the data of Canadians in respect of their financial transactions without their consent. One would expect to see this happening in Communist China but not in Canada, yet it is happening in Canada under the government's watch.

The continued systematic disregard for the privacy rights of Canadians by the government is leading us on a dangerous path. It is time to reverse course. It is time to end this massive overreach and restore freedom. It is time to end the mandates.

• (1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find this very interesting. We just finished voting on Bill C-8. Bill C-8 would provide hundreds of millions of dollars for the purchase of rapid tests. That is absolutely critical. The member can check with any province, territory and indigenous community to see that rapid testing is absolutely critical, yet the Conservative Party voted against those funds going there.

The member talks about the issue of privacy. He has no confidence and faith in the Public Health Agency of Canada, which has a very positive record on privacy and is recognized around the world. He wants to deny this indefinitely so a committee can study it indefinitely, as opposed to getting information. Does he not see the flaw in the Conservative strategy?

Business of Supply

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I respect the parliamentary secretary, and I say respectfully that I find it a little rich for the hon. member to be talking about rapid testing. For the past two years, the government has repeatedly dragged its feet when it comes to rapid testing. We on this side of the House, from day one, were encouraging the government to act with respect to rapid testing. Now, in year three, the government is finally getting serious. I say it is too little, too late.

The member talks about Bill C-8. What was completely absent from Bill C-8 was funding to increase hospital capacity in this country. When it comes to ICU capacity, for example, in which we had significant overcapacity problems part of the time during COVID, we have one-third of the ICUs the United States has and we rank last in the OECD, other than Mexico. Despite this, after blowing through another \$70 billion of new spending, the government could not come up with new spending to increase hospital capacity so we could avoid the issues we have faced over the past two years. It is really a lack of leadership on the part of the current government.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I see two important aspects to the Conservatives' proposal for lifting the health measures: the restrictions, which many people are protesting against, judging by the street full of people in front of Parliament, and the medical aspect. I know a little bit about the Conservatives' position on the medical aspect. I am thinking mainly of vaccination.

There is something else that I cannot figure out. The federal government has not been able to deliver enough supplies. Therefore, the Quebec government had to buy its own antigen tests. The thing is that a few dozen kilometres from the House, in Hawkesbury, there is a company called Zollaris that has a million of these tests in stock. That is what I do not understand. The inventory is there, the federal government is not able to access it, and the provinces are now being forced to pay for these supplies themselves. At least, that is what Quebec has done.

What is my colleague's position on this attitude or lack of leadership by the federal government?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's final sentence encapsulates the issue: a lack of leadership on the part of the federal government. We have seen this throughout COVID with the lack of PPE, lack of capacity in our hospitals and lack of rapid testing. The list goes on. What we need to do now, in year three of this pandemic, is realize that we will have to live with COVID. We will have to develop strategies to ensure we can live with COVID and live in a free and open society once again.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Alberta for his very typical thoughtful and comprehensive comments.

Certainly, the people we represent are no strangers to being attacked and dismissed by the government, as they have been for at least the six years we have been here. After the past two years of

government restrictions and rules, I think it is clear that Canadians right across the country, including small business owners, kids, families and entrepreneurs, are suffering. They are losing their livelihoods and relationships. There are increased mental health struggles and there is substance abuse. People are going to extraordinary lengths to fight for values like freedom, unity and the ability to work and make decisions about their lives, family and privacy. Of course, 90% of Canadians are vaccinated, and the provinces and other countries are showing a clear path forward.

Why does the member think the government and the Prime Minister choose the path of division, insults and degradation, instead of meeting with leaders to come up with a plan forward to end restrictions, end mandates and end lockdowns, which will end the protests?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, to give the short answer, it is because the Prime Minister sees short-term political gain in dividing Canadian society. The member noted that 90% of Canadians have been vaccinated. That is a good thing. However, if 90% of Canadians have been vaccinated, what is the government seeking to achieve with the continuation of these vaccine mandates, other than to punish Canadians and divide Canadian society?

It is time to get on with it. It is time to let Canadians take back control of their lives and, as a starting point, it is time to lift the mandates.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this opposition day motion. I have had the opportunity to listen for the majority of the day to the debate and I want to address a few points. A couple nights ago when we had an emergency debate, I started off with some facts. I am going to do the same thing today because I think it is very important.

The fact is that almost 90% of adults over the age of 18 in Canada have been fully vaccinated, and 82.7% of people who are five years old and older have been fully vaccinated. Remember, people five to 11 only recently became eligible. Also, just under 50% of adults 18 and over have already received a booster. In my province of Ontario, it is similar. Just under 84% of people who are five years old and older are fully vaccinated and 45% have received a booster. I am even more proud to say that in the health region of Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington, 88% of those who are five years old and older are fully vaccinated and 67% have already received their booster. I note that my riding shares a health unit with the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, and I think we can be extremely proud of this locally.

Business of Supply

I want to take a few minutes to go back to the introductory comments we heard this morning from the leader of the official opposition that related to the blockades, the protesters and everything that is going on outside. I found it quite interesting that she raised this in a debate that really does not address that. This debate is about developing a road map, which I will get to shortly. For some reason, she spent a great deal of time on a personal appeal to the protesters, asking them to leave, and I was delighted to hear that. It is great to hear the leader of the official opposition finally get to the point of asking those who are participating in these blockades to leave.

However, I cannot help but wonder why the leader of the official opposition is suddenly making a dramatic change in her approach. A week ago, in an email that was leaked by who I can only assume is a very conscientious and concerned Conservative staffer, the leader of the opposition asked the former leader of the opposition not to do anything about the blockaders and to make it the Prime Minister's problem. That does not sound like somebody who is trying to bring unity to the House and bring everybody together.

Then, even more recently, we learned from a Politico article that she sat down with truckers and told them not to stop what they were doing. Sorry, I should say "protesters", because I think the vast majority out there go beyond representing the truckers. She sat down with protesters and told them what they were doing was working and to keep it up. That does not sound to me like somebody who would then, within a week, stand in the House and introduce a motion that basically calls on everybody to get together and work on a solution. I am sorry, but we cannot have it both ways. We cannot be the saviours of the "freedom convoy" and the saviours of the people in downtown Ottawa all together in one when we are flip-flopping back and forth all the time.

I asked myself why the Conservatives have suddenly taken a new approach and a new direction, and I think it is quite obvious to those who are following this pretty closely: Public opinion is changing and it is changing pretty darn quickly. I even noticed it in social media feeds. More and more people are saying that what is going on in Ottawa is not right. This is not about truckers. This is something much bigger than that. By the way, where is the money coming from to fund this? There are all sorts of stories out there about GoFundMe and these other organizations that are drumming up money from the United States. It is being reported in other areas of the world.

The Conservatives are starting to get nervous now. They are sitting there asking what they are getting themselves into and saying it seemed really good a week ago and maybe it is time they changed course. In my humble opinion, although some of my friends across the way might suggest it is not all that humble, the leader of the official opposition can see the writing on the wall now. She has realized that it is time to change course on this because they are getting in way too deep. That is what is happening. They realize they have gone too far, and that is why they are asking the protesters to leave.

• (1620)

I want to read a quote for members. A Conservative member of Parliament said:

These blockaders are taking away the freedoms of other people to move their goods and themselves.

That is a quote from a Conservative member, talking about a blockade. It was not this blockade. It was the member for Carleton. He was talking about a blockade on February 13, 2020, blocking a rail line in the Tyendinaga area. Is that not interesting?

The so-called individual who will soon be coronated to become the leader of the official opposition has these incredible flip-flops. He is all concerned about the moving of goods down a rail line when it is indigenous protesters, but when it comes to what is going on in the streets of Ottawa, he is absolutely silent.

The member received three questions, a couple of days ago, from three of us back to back. I, the Bloc and the NDP all asked him if he supported what is going on out there, and he totally skated through it. He did not want to address it, because he knows he can raise money and get votes from the people who are outside. I think he also knows he cannot get them from indigenous protesters in Tyendinaga. That is the irony, the hypocrisy, of the member for Carleton and the Conservative Party writ large, because they do this all the time.

Conservatives flip-flop, and we are seeing these flip-flops. Let us look back at the past two years. They would say, "Close the borders. We need the borders closed immediately, right now. Why did we not do it three weeks ago?" Then, all of a sudden, they would say, "Why are the borders not open? We need the borders open. People needed to travel." They flip-flopped back and forth on that issue at least three or four times in the past two years. Is that leadership? I highly doubt it.

What about the vaccines? The member for Calgary Nose Hill said that we would not have vaccines until 2030. She said that we were never going to get vaccines, and that vaccines would never be around. Then all of a sudden she asked where the vaccines were, why did we not have vaccines and why were there not vaccines everywhere. Is that leadership? No, but we hear it. It is another flip-flop.

What about rapid tests? Conservatives said, "We need rapid tests. Where are the rapid tests?" They used to say, "Rapid tests do not work. Nobody needs rapid tests." They flip-flop. They literally go outside, stick their finger in the wind and ask, "What are we doing today? Which way is the wind blowing?" That is not leadership.

It is ironic. Not even an hour ago, there was a unanimous consent motion in the House, when the vast majority of members were paying very close attention to what was going on, that said, "The House condemns the intimidation of citizens and journalists, the incessant honking, the arson attempts, the shooting of fireworks in the downtown core of Ottawa, the flooding of emergency lines such as 911 and local police numbers by fake emergency calls, the blockade of essential road infrastructure and the overall siege situation currently being maintained."

Business of Supply

We sent this unanimous consent motion to the Conservatives ahead of time, which is the proper procedure when we do this. They knew what they were saying no to. One lone Conservative over there, obviously set up by the whip's desk, probably with their head down, said no and rejected the unanimous consent motion on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

This is the same person who says that we need to come in here and work together, that we need to be unanimous and that she wants the protest to end right now. It is clear that she does not want the protest to end for the same reasons the rest of the country does. She wants it to end because she realizes it is a political liability now. That is the conundrum the Conservatives have put themselves into, and they do it routinely.

This motion is calling for a road map. It is asking the government to set out a path and to put measurables in place to determine at what point certain things will happen.

An hon. member: That makes sense.

Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, they say it makes sense. Does that make sense?

Guess what. Ontario has done it, and keeps changing it. Three months ago, we did not know about the omicron virus. We had no idea. We are getting new things thrown into the equation all the time.

• (1625)

What the opposition members are asking for is that we develop a road map when there are so many variables. They want to be able to tie something down, when it is literally impossible to do. Ontario has been trying to do it unsuccessfully. It keeps having to change it, because it is impossible to do.

How will we do it? We will do it by listening to science. I will get to Dr. Tam's and Dr. Moore's points in a second. We will do it by science, and we will do it by listening to the experts who advise us at various points, rather than trying to do it based on the political wind that the Leader of the Conservative Party and her caucus, who are heckling me right now, insist on so much. We are going to do it by using the proper ways that we should allow for things like this to unroll, which is by listening to the medical experts.

We can talk about Dr. Tam and Dr. Moore, who, by the way, I have a huge amount of respect for. I was on the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Public Health unit before Dr. Moore was even the Medical Officer of Health for Kingston. I have known the gentleman since 2006. We have had a number of conversations on this and many other health-related matters in my riding. I have the most incredible amount of respect for him.

He and Dr. Tam have said—

Eric Duncan: Open up.

Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, no, they did not say, "Open up." That is what they are heckling me with from the other side.

This is my point. They are misrepresenting the comments that they have made. What they have been saying is that we need to establish, at some point, how we will move out of this. They need to do it, not politicians in this room.

Do members know how I know that to be the fact? Do members know how I know that the Conservatives know that to be the fact? It is because the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes referenced Dr. Tam coming to the health committee and making this comment, which she also made in a press conference.

My question for my Conservative colleagues is, did they ask Dr. Tam if we should make the road map? Probably not. No, they did not. Do members know why? It was probably because they did not want to hear her answer. I would be willing to bet that Dr. Tam would have said it was probably best that we leave the decisions in the hands of the experts, rather than to politicians trying to create a road map. That is what this is about.

That is what debate after debate in the House is about. It is about Conservatives trying to politicize every issue. They are laughing and clapping right now. Guess what? I have one. A week and a half ago, there were Conservatives all over Wellington Street, taking pictures with protesters and posting them on Facebook. Why are they not doing it now? Why does one of the members laughing at me right now not go outside, take a picture with a protester, and be like, "I am so proud to support these people"? Why do they not do that? It is because they know the conundrum they have put themselves in.

I realize they are heckling me because the truth hurts. It is unfortunately the reality of the situation. If Conservatives want to prove me wrong, I encourage one of them, right now, who is sitting in here heckling me to go outside and do that.

• (1630)

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for an excellent speech and the enlightening information. I want to know. What percentage of Canadians needs to be vaccinated before the mandates will be lifted?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, that is the first time a Conservative ever said I gave an excellent speech, and I thank him for that. I will give him the benefit of the doubt that it may have been a slightly wrong choice of words, in all fairness.

It is a great question, but I am not a medical expert. They are sighing. They are disappointed that I cannot answer that. They are disappointed that as a politician, I am willing to refuse to pretend to be a medical expert. I am not a medical expert. What I do know is that, all along, we have been taking medical expert advice from the experts, not the Conservative Party. As a result, whether you correlate it positively or not, we have the highest vaccination rate among the G7 countries. That is from listening to the experts. They are clapping. Why do we not listen to the experts as it relates to when it will be time to remove such measures?

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was certainly passionate. He brought up some inconsistencies, but there are inconsistencies on the other side as well, and that is not where I want to go.

Business of Supply

Politicians are not the only ones putting together a plan to lift restrictions. This must be done with the public health experts. However, this has never come up in debate, even though I think that, obviously, if there is to be a plan, the experts have to be involved.

Today, we are hearing that there needs to be such a plan, and in my speech this morning I gave some options about what should be included, particularly the experts. On February 28, will the government give us a plan put together with the experts?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate to hear that it appears as though the Bloc Québécois will be voting in favour of this motion, but I will say that we need to let the experts make the plan.

The member's question for me, which I will try to answer as directly as I can, is why we do not involve the experts in making that plan. I can tell her that the experts have been making plans. Look at Ontario. The province has to keep reworking it, because it cannot predict things. There are lots of variables that happen. Why should we be forcing people to give us something when it is not in the best medical practice to do that?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve honest answers and responsible leadership from their elected officials. I have spoken with constituents in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith who have told me they want clear, consistent and transparent communication from leadership. This is an area that I think we can all agree on. I am hearing from constituents who are exhausted and who want to see the light at the end of the pandemic. Again, I think we can all agree.

How to best keep us safe throughout this pandemic has been ever-evolving, and the way public health responds must be the same. We have learned critical lessons. We know that we need to keep increasing health care transfers to provinces and territories. We know we need to increase access to testing and PPE.

Does the member agree it is time for the government to act on these critical lessons today?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I always think there is an opportunity to learn, in terms of lessons and doing better wherever we can.

To the member's comment about Canadians deserving clear information, I could not agree more. It is unfortunate that my office has to spend a lot of time correcting misinformation that is out there. My office spends a lot of time correcting misinformation that, quite frankly, the Conservative Party is more than happy to promote, providing it attains its political objective.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the member for Kingston and the Islands, I have been absolutely mystified. Frankly, I think I am suffering from whiplash with the Conservative Party just not being able to decide what side of the conversation it is on. I do not know if Conservatives are outside handing out coffee to anti-vax protesters, or in the House telling them they need to go home.

By the same token, I have not seen too many of my Conservative colleagues suggesting that their constituents get vaccinated. It has been very seldom that I have seen information about a vaccine clinic or suggestions to get vaccinated. My question for my colleague—

The Deputy Speaker: There is a point of order by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I am confused as to how this conversation has anything to do with asking a question with regard to the motion versus simply challenging the position of the Conservative Party.

The Deputy Speaker: There is debate going on in the House and I am trying to allow things to flow.

I am going to ask the member for Milton to finish his question.

● (1640)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Speaker, this is the time for questions and comments. I thought I was entitled to ask a question or make a comment.

I will ask my colleague for Kingston and the Islands if he thinks there is anything we can do, as Liberal, science-believing MPs, to encourage members in ridings presided over by Conservatives who have not been sharing vaccine and clinic information to ensure that more Canadians get vaccinated so that we can get ourselves out of this pandemic.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, there is always more we can do. We should be encouraging people whenever we have the opportunity. In fairness, I will say that I have heard some Conservatives say that, although not as loudly those in other parties, but some of them have been saying that.

I will say one other thing. A lot of people in here might think that restrictions are being forced on people and that the mandates are forcing people to get vaccinated, but that is a misconception between what is being forced on people and them just going out to get it done.

I have an extended family member who had not yet been vaccinated. When the restrictions came in, and the mandate was that people had to be vaccinated to go into a restaurant, he said he would go and get vaccinated because he had not done it yet. We have this misconception that the mandates are forcing people when, as we have seen in Quebec, they are encouraging more people to get vaccinated. We know that vaccine appointments increased by something like 90,000, and do not quote me on that number, overnight when Quebec brought in its mandates. The mandates are another tool to encourage more people to get vaccinated, as we have seen.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to draw attention to the fact that the major focus of the member's speech was that they listen to the experts, and they do not make decisions as politicians or parliamentarians. I have some confusion about this because, when I spoke to the Speaker of the House when this first began, he made it clear that, when it came to sitting in the House of Commons, only the medical professional, the House of Commons nurse, would be making those decisions, and those decisions would be made privately.

Business of Supply

However, when she made her decision, this leader did not like what he heard, and they changed those expert recommendations. How is it that the member thinks there is one set of rules for over here, but they are breaking their very own statements?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I will bite my tongue as to where I really want to go with that one. I look forward to the opportunity to see the member in person again.

The reality is that we listen to the experts. The experts advise us, and then we make decisions based on that expert advice. This member seems to have an axe to grind with one particular issue with somebody in the House of Commons. I am sure she can go through the proper channels for that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, I am a constructive person and always ready to help.

Politics, partisanship and political games are not my strong suit. I will reiterate what I proposed this morning, noting that there is no timeline in what I am suggesting for preparing a plan of action. The approach I am proposing is very flexible.

There will need to be a clearly defined status update, qualifiable and quantifiable objectives and questions to be asked now, during and after. There will also need to be an outline of the steps and tangible actions to take, as well as the conditions to meet to go from one step to the next. It will have to be clear who is responsible for achieving and validating these actions, including the experts and people who are accountable. The communications, evaluation and validation tools will need to be specified, and an overview of potential obstacles and solutions for overcoming them will need to be provided. None of these suggestions has a deadline.

Is it possible to implement such a plan?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the member lost me at not wanting to play partisan games and having a partisan approach when she is choosing to side with the Leader of the Opposition, who was, literally a week ago, calling for the protesters to keep up the fight out there. Now she is suddenly coming in here to be the saviour of this place—

• (1645)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, I never, and I mean never, said that I agree with what is happening outside.

Protesting, yes; blockading, no; putting people's lives at risk, never. Let the member withdraw his comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order.

I did not say that the member was engaging in a partisan approach. I said she is willing to go along with the Leader of the Opposition, who is engaging in an overly hyperpartisan approach.

The Deputy Speaker: Members are descending into further debate, so we will cut it off here.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay, Disaster Assistance; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Lady-smith, Indigenous Affairs; the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, Small Business.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lethbridge.

Once again, Canada's Conservatives are called out to speak on behalf of all Canadians. A continued and profound lack of leadership has allowed us to get and remain in this quagmire pitting east versus west, rural versus urban, vaccinated versus unvaccinated and Canadian versus Canadian.

As many of us in the House have attempted previously, I will once again attempt to turn down the temperature using measured arguments and examples to help the Liberal government make informed decisions. It is unbelievable that just yesterday members of the House from across the aisle chose to mislead Canadians. I cannot count the number of times that the leadership of the Conservative Party has reiterated the fact that Conservatives support vaccination.

Often, when we move toward a more perfect union, there are those with differing opinions. To me, this is indicative of what we all see as Canadians. We can have different opinions, yet somehow those things which unite us in the greatness of Canada are much stronger bonds than those forces which strive, perhaps, to tear us apart.

While I was a practising physician, if a patient came into my office and they had significant issues or hesitancy around perhaps vaccines or treatments, my job was to build trust and a relationship, and then encourage those people to develop a behaviour that would be different and that, perhaps most importantly, benefited them. When we do that in a very kind, caring, compassionate and hand-holding manner, in a way that shows those folks that we respect them and that we are content experts, we know that the likelihood of change goes up significantly.

Does this mean that those people should be stigmatized, vilified, marginalized, mocked, called names, excluded from society and have their ability to support their families removed? I really think not. As a friend of mine once said, this is akin to a schoolyard bully not only winning the fight, but also taking our lunch money and our lunch box. It is shameful. Is this really the type of Canada that we want to be?

This week, I had the opportunity to speak to Trevor. He is a middle-aged man. He went away from his hometown to university. He filled his dream of becoming a math teacher. He then had the opportunity to move back to his hometown. He worked hard, and indeed he became a very well-respected math teacher and coach of the varsity soccer team.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately for Trevor in our society, he has decided not to be immunized. Why is this unfortunate? We all know exactly what happened. Trevor lost his job. He can no longer coach the soccer team. He can no longer take either of his children to their leisure activities such as the 4-H club or to their soccer games.

This is the important part that Canadians need to remember. Trevor is not a villain. Trevor is not uncaring. He is not disrespectful, and he is not against those who have been immunized. Who is Trevor? Trevor is our next door neighbour. Trevor is our cousin. Trevor is our brother. He is the guy who shovelled our driveway. He has coached our kids in soccer. He used to teach our children math. Now because of mandates supported by the federal government, he is unemployed. He is no longer a productive member of society, and his physical health, mental health and relationships have suffered beyond anyone's imagination.

I want to also tell the story of Douglas. Admittedly his story is similar to Trevor's, but perhaps slightly different. Douglas has had COVID twice. Thankfully, he has recovered, and because of somewhat unusual circumstances, he agreed to be part of an antibodies study for those who have been infected with COVID.

● (1650)

Therefore, Douglas knows he has antibodies against COVID-19. Perhaps many out there will be quick to remark that antibodies do not tell the whole story with respect to our immunity against COVID. We can talk about that all day if we choose to.

However, this gentleman has agreed to become part of our greater scientific understanding of the most damaging worldwide pandemic in over 100 years. Now why would Douglas agree to do such a thing?

Oddly enough, Douglas is a Ph.D. level scientist in organic chemistry. He knows science. He believes in science. He studied science. Members can guess what happened. I know this may come as a terrible shock, but once again, we have another Canadian who was a productive member of society, but who is now not, because he too has lost his job. He worked from home by himself. This is the unfair and divisive mandates we see here today.

It would be very easy at this time to launch into a tirade about the Prime Minister's lack of leadership, his inability to deviate from an ill-advised course, or to talk about his continued inability to show any compassion for someone who might disagree with his overly embellished view of the world. However, I took enough of the House's time during the emergency debate on Tuesday evening to lecture more on the topic of leadership, such as what we have already heard about a great leader like, perhaps, Colin Powell.

During a time of crisis, nations need leadership, and the Liberal government has not stepped up. It has failed Canadians. Indeed, from the most recent misery index, Canadians have become even more miserable, year upon year, under the failed leadership of the Prime Minister. I think that is enough said.

It is important, also, that Canadians reflect upon the negative impact mandates are likely to have upon children and adolescents. I have had the opportunity to speak to representatives from the Canadian pediatric society, who are arguably experts. The deep concern

they have for the ongoing emotional trauma placed upon Canada's children and adolescents is beyond belief.

As the world has never seen this type of mandate and loss of hope, the effects on multiple generations could be catastrophic. Most distressing is that we do not know what the future holds for these traumatized young people. What happens to a developing brain when it is continually presented with mixed messaging, an uncertain future, despair, isolation from their friends, lack of physical activity, inability to see facial expressions, a lack of physical touch and a population-wide division based on a failure of leadership?

How do these young people get help, and what do they need? How can a health system or a mental health system, which is already improperly funded and staffed with professionals who are tired and burned out, come to the aid of these children and adolescents? What are we to do for them in the future? As a physician, father, grandfather, politician and concerned Canadian, this question keeps me up at night.

There are those out there who wish to continue to dodge the blame and muddy the waters of federal versus provincial mandates. Certainly, the Prime Minister would rather have Canadians put the blame on their premiers. This is not leadership. I think many Canadians in this time of crisis would echo those words used by former president Truman: "The buck stops here."

As I begin to close my remarks, I think it is important for all Canadians to reflect upon this pandemic as an unprecedented crisis affecting the entire world. It has been a situation that has led scientists and physicians and, indeed, everyday Canadians, to look at scientific studies and statistics. This pandemic and the accompanying data and statistics have changed, and it is important that good public policy changes with the science. I implore the Liberal government to revisit their policy and understand the plight of everyday Canadians.

Finally, Canadians need to have a plan to end the COVID-19 federal mandates. Once again I will be clear, we need to talk about science, not political science, and we need to hear from medical doctors, not the spin doctors.

● (1655)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask my colleague from the health committee a question.

My heart goes out to people like Trevor and the other gentleman he mentioned. They have had such a difficult time. I certainly have had my fair share of hard conversations with constituents here in Milton as well.

Business of Supply

However, I am still a bit confused. What could the federal government have done differently to ensure that people like Trevor could have kept teaching? My colleague mentioned that we are treading on two jurisdictions here, but what aspect of the federal mandate that he is referencing had an impact on Trevor's ability to teach?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. parliamentary secretary has missed part of the point. The biggest point here is that Canadians expect leadership. Canadians, during a time of crisis, need to be given hope, to be given some certainty for their future, to be given some direction.

Let us think back about the other times of crisis that we have had in this great nation. We have been led by leaders. What do we have now? We have a Prime Minister who continues to use disparaging language, who wants to divide Canadians. He wants to call them names. He likes to mock them. He likes to point a finger at them. I do not know what other mean things he would like to do to them, but he continues to do them. He has dug his heels in all the way up to his neck and he refuses to change course, despite the negative consequences for all Canadians,

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Cumberland—Colchester for his thoughtful speech, which gave examples of what people are going through.

I would like him to elaborate on that. We agree that there are people who are going through difficult times and are afraid of this pandemic. There are people who are more vulnerable, including children, parents, the immunocompromised and seniors. In the current context, these people are not reassured by these protests and by the fact that health measures may be relaxed.

What message are we sending them now? Ultimately, do we want to have a clear plan from the federal government for them as well?

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, the important thing that we are asking of the government is to have a plan. It continues to refuse. All it wants to do is to continue this idea that this pandemic is going to continue incessantly. That is what leads Canadians to have no hope going forward.

Regardless of whether people are vaccinated or unvaccinated, old or young, everybody wants to hear what the government has for a plan. Whether Conservative, Liberal or NDP, they still want to hear from Canada's Prime Minister. They do not want to hear from the Prime Minister for just the Liberal people or just the people who are vaccinated or who believe what he has to say; they want to hear from Canada's Prime Minister.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to serve with my hon. colleague on the health committee. I think that as a physician, he will be interested in this quote from Dr. Katherine Smart, the president of the Canadian Medical Association. She says:

The lack of equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines raises significant ethical concerns in addition to increasing the risk of new variants. Vaccines are critical to

our exit from this pandemic. By protecting other countries, we're protecting everyone, including Canadians.

For many months, experts have been issuing warnings that vaccine-resistant variants like omicron are likely to emerge from regions with low access to COVID-19 vaccines. The median vaccination rate in the 92 countries identified by COVAX, the vast majority in sub-Saharan Africa, is just 11%.

Given that this pandemic will not be over anywhere until it is over everywhere throughout the world, can the member explain why the Conservative Party refuses to support the TRIPS waiver at the WTO to expand vaccine production in developing countries?

• (1700)

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the more important answer is to know why the Liberal government stole from the COVAX program. Why did it take vaccines that were already there and waiting for the developing nations that need them so dearly? Why did it take them from that program? Why have the Liberals only funded half of the doses that they said they were going to send to the COVAX program?

Again, it is due to failed leadership. That is why.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the primary responsibility of the Prime Minister is to unify this country, to bring it together for people from all parts and all corners: the French, the English, the indigenous, the non-indigenous, those from the east, those from the west, etc. The purpose of the Prime Minister, first and foremost, is to bring us together around a unified vision. This is what ensures our prosperity as a nation.

It is dumbfounding, then, that our Prime Minister would look to do the exact opposite. Why would he look to stoke the flames of division, fear and worry? Why would he look to pit friends against one another, neighbours against one another, family members against one another? Why would he look to even wedge his own caucus members against one another? We know this is true because there have been a few brave members from across the aisle who have come forward and have exposed the Prime Minister's strategy, which is to divide Canadians and to create wedge issues.

At the point of that are vaccines. Rather than using them as a tool, which is what they are meant to be, he has used them as a weapon. That is incredibly sad. The Prime Minister has used vaccines to pit one group against another, so instead of acting as Prime Minister, instead of being a statesman, he has been a gamesman. Instead of showing statesmanship, he is simply showing gamesmanship. It is divisive, it is exploitive, it is cold, it is cruel, it is calculated and it is wrong.

Business of Supply

Canadians have sacrificed so much. Over and over again, they have been asked to reorient their lives, to adjust and to follow the ever-changing rules and regulations, and, to their credit, they have. Now they are watching as other countries around the world, such as the U.K., the Czech Republic, Israel, Switzerland, Ireland and Denmark are opening up. They are watching as Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as the United States, are opening up. They are saying, “Wait a minute. We followed the rules and we did what we were told to do. Why is the Prime Minister not making good on his promise? Where is the plan? Why is Canada not able to open up?”

We do not have to look any farther than outside those doors to see the impact that the Prime Minister is having with his abdication of leadership on this issue. This country is in chaos. Canadians are pleading for help. They have done their part and now they are asking that the Prime Minister do his. Is it any wonder, then, that these individuals do not trust the government, that they have big questions about whether follow-through will actually take place?

Out of one side of his face, the Prime Minister says one thing and then out of the other side he says another. Sometimes he contradicts himself within the same sentence. Canadians have lost trust, and with that lost trust, hope is also waning, but that is not their fault, as the Prime Minister would like to point out. No, that is the Prime Minister's responsibility. He is the one who broke their trust.

People are desperate. They are desperate for hope, desperate for leadership, desperate for a future. Their ask is not out of this world. They are just asking the Prime Minister to do what he promised he would.

Canadians are absolutely incredible. I love this country and I love representing the people of it. As Canadians, we persevere because that is who we are. We are incredibly adaptive. We are innovative. We are creative. We find solutions. We solve problems. We are tenacious. We are resilient. We are courageous. However, hope and confidence are waning because of the trauma, the pain—two years' worth—the isolation, the lockdowns and the ever-changing goal posts.

I have received thousands of emails and phone calls. I will share a few.

James contacted me. He is a university student and he wrote to me to say this:

Following this summer, much of learning has been disrupted, from cancelled classes, in-person social experiences and now completely remote learning. This has taken a serious toll on the way I view education. I used to look forward to going and participating in class and now I dread spending hours of time a day watching pre-recorded videos alone. I plead that you will consider the harmful effects that these mandates can have on all the people of Alberta and Canada.

• (1705)

There is a plea being made by the people of this country. Domestic violence is up. Opioid use is through the roof. Cancer is being undiagnosed because people cannot get in to see their doctor in time.

Maria wrote to me. She works with adolescents in mental health, and she wanted to make sure I understood that she has seen a dras-

tic increase in young people with mental health issues. She said, “It is extreme.”

I had a desperate call from a mother just a little while ago. Her child is suffering from an eating disorder, and for a year and a half they waited to see an expert. They waited for help while their daughter wasted away.

There have been cancelled surgeries and treatments, and there has been isolation that has taken a significant toll on our elderly. I talked to a nurse who shared with me that the number of euthanasia requests has gone up, and the number one reason she is noticing is isolation and loneliness. No one should be put in a place where they are choosing to end their life because their government is dictating to them that they cannot see anyone, that they cannot be in contact with other human beings.

There are countless emails I have received with regard to loss of livelihood from postal workers and truckers. A health practitioner wrote to me and said this crisis has been exacerbated by “imposing lockdowns, separating families and support systems, enforcing vaccine passports, segregating people and making it socially acceptable to regard vaccine-free citizens as selfish, uneducated, irresponsible murderers. These are just a few of the things I have been called in the workplace. Recent comments by our Prime Minister simply fuel the hatred and the intolerance toward individuals like me.

The Liberals will try to slough this off by saying that the majority of what we are talking about today is the responsibility of the provinces, but make no mistake: The federal government has a significant role to play.

Language is powerful. When the Prime Minister decides to demonize a certain section of this society and a certain portion of our population, that is wrong, and he incites violence.

Travel by plane, train or public transportation requires vaccination. Many public sector employees are working from home, yet they lost their jobs because they did not choose to be vaccinated. Truckers and other essential service workers stay in their trucks. Please tell me the science behind that decision. How are they spreading the virus? The Prime Minister likes to use science, but only when it serves his desire to hold power. If it requires him to grant people their freedom, then he wants to ignore it altogether. That is wrong.

Dr. Tam has said that all public health policies need to be re-examined. She said that we need to recognize that this virus is not going to disappear and that we need to address the ongoing presence of the virus in a more sustainable way. The World Health Organization has advised that vaccine passports should not be required to enter or exit a country.

Why is the Prime Minister ignoring the science? It is time for leadership. It is time for action. It is time to put together a plan. It is time to be compassionate toward the Canadian people.

Business of Supply

Even today, during QP, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence said, “It is important more than ever to ensure that the Canadian public is informed about the ways in which we are going to get out of this pandemic”. I sure hope his colleagues across the aisle agree with him on that. It is time for a plan. It is time to restore hope. It is time to move forward into the future. It is time for the Prime Minister to make good on his promise.

Canadians are waiting.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many aspects that I would challenge that the member attempts to state as fact. My biggest concern is when she talks about mandates. Let us talk about, for example, the mandates of having to wear masks, lockdowns or partial shutdowns that have really been the responsibility of provincial governments.

Does she believe there is a lack of leadership in our provincial legislatures across the country or do those mandates not matter to her on the issue of freedom?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Speaker, this is classic Liberal strategy. Liberals want to divide. That is their strategy. If they can pit one group against another, if they can create something that does not actually exist, they will do it. They should not try to distract. The issue is federal. The Prime Minister has a responsibility for the language that he uses, and he has been inciting hate and violence across this country for quite some time now.

The issue is travel restrictions. That is a federal issue. The issue is federally regulated employees. That is a federal issue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Federal employees are a federal issue. Yes, I got that.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You got that. You're a smart one. I was not sure given the question, so I thought I would clarify.

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask members to direct their comments through the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Lethbridge for her speech. I have a few questions for her.

I find that there certainly is a muddying of the waters when we talk about all the provincial jurisdictions. However, she used two words that I appreciated, and they are “courage” and “solution”, words that should be top of mind for everyone.

I would like to have her thoughts on two things.

She spoke about the provinces. We know that they are stretched to the limit given the gap in the health transfers from the government, which does not even want to talk to the premiers of Quebec and the provinces. I find that shows a lack of leadership.

She also said that the government is dividing people. We talked about this earlier today. We would like to have a meeting with the

leader of the official opposition and the leaders of the Bloc Québécois and the third opposition party.

Would she agree that these are two examples of leadership that could get us out of this crisis?

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Speaker, there was a lot in that question. I will do my best.

This pandemic has certainly highlighted that the health care system is fragile. A lot has been left up to the provinces in the abdication of federal leadership, and that is very sad. Much more can be done and should be done.

When we were in the middle of the election campaign, which was an unnecessary election put forward by the Prime Minister only to divide Canadians further, Conservatives made a commitment to contribute \$60 billion to the health care system in order to advance it, grow it and make it better. That was our commitment. I have not seen the government make a similar commitment. I have not seen it follow through on helping the provinces meet the demand on their fragile health care systems right now, and they are in desperate need of attention.

• (1715)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member said that we are dealing with a federal mandate and I appreciate that, but the opening words of the Conservative motion are, “That, given that provinces are lifting COVID-19 restrictions”, and it goes on to use that as the basis of the motion. I know my hon. colleague is from Alberta and we know that Alberta Premier Jason Kenney is removing restrictions very soon, so I want to make a couple of comments and get the member's position.

Dr. Noel Gibney, professor emeritus at the department of critical care medicine at the University of Alberta, said, “What we've heard today is wishful thinking and an element of COVID denial where the government is saying, ‘Really, this isn't a problem anymore,’ while we still have a major Omicron surge causing pressure on our hospital systems”.

Heather Smith, president of the United Nurses of Alberta, said:

I think it is way too premature.... It's not evidence-based and it's irresponsible and reckless.

I'm very concerned that it is not only unsafe but it is asking for more deaths, more ill-health here in the province...

Finally, Dr. Stephanie Smith at the University of Alberta, a hospital physician and infectious disease specialist, said:

...there are many still waiting for their elective surgeries and to have all these restrictions removed with the possibility of having some increased transmission and maybe more hospitalizations, that's just pushing those surgeries further down the line, which is not what we are trying to achieve.

I have a straightforward question. Does the member support lifting restrictions in Alberta now?

Business of Supply

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House has to do with the federal level. It has to do with lifting the mandates that are currently on travel, that are currently on federal employees and that are on truckers and other essential service workers being able to cross the border. I am also talking about the vile language that is coming out of the Prime Minister's mouth and nauseam, and it needs to stop. That is what we are talking about today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be here tonight to speak to this extremely important issue. I would like to inform you that I will be splitting my time with our wonderful whip, the member for Salaberry—Suroît.

I will read the Conservatives' motion, which is quite short and pretty self-explanatory, because I want people to have a clear understanding of what we are talking about today. I am really addressing my comments to the people back home because, as it is plain to see, Quebecers are all fed up. They have had enough of health measures in general and are eager to move on. I hear it a lot at home, just like everywhere else. Therefore, it is to them that I speak today.

I will read the motion:

That, given that provinces are lifting COVID-19 restrictions and that Dr. Theresa Tam has said that all existing public health measures need to be “re-evaluated” so that we can “get back to some normalcy”, the House call on the government to table a plan for the lifting of all federal mandates and restrictions, and to table that plan by February 28, 2022.

It is not a bad motion. In fact, it is a very good motion, seeking some predictability. We have not had any for such a long time, for two years, with everything that has been put in place by the federal government. We understand that this is a unique situation.

I will refer to a tweet that I saw from a Quebec comedian I will call Louis T. He says that asking for a concrete plan is like asking the Weather Network to tell us exactly what the weather will be like in the next few days so that we do not have to worry about unpredictability and know when we can wear shorts.

We understand that it would be a bit of a stretch to ask for a clear picture of what is going to happen, because even the government does not know. We all saw it. When omicron hit us hard just before the holidays, it seemed like things were going well. Parliament here was full. We thought that we had put much of the pandemic behind us, but then it started up again. I myself caught COVID-19 over the holidays. I can say that it was no fun at all. I was pretty sick for 10 days, so we never know what can happen.

We understand what the government means when it says we need to be cautious and listen to public health guidelines. We completely agree and are calling for that as well. We must listen to public health guidelines and reassess measures that are no longer relevant. That is what provincial governments are mostly doing now. That is what is happening in Quebec. Things are moving gradually. The Legault government did not announce that all measures would be lifted overnight. That is not how it works. He gave dates for restaurants or theatres to reopen, for example, or for when it might be possible to have more guests in private residences.

People have an idea of what is coming. I think that gives hope to the people who are tired of all this. Knowing that we will be able to start having guests over and see our families gives people some joy. It is good for them. Just hearing that can make people feel more positive.

This is not about getting a date to lift all federal measures. Not at all. This is about wanting a plan so that we know what is coming. I completely agree with the Conservatives. I think we and all Quebecers and Canadians need to know what is coming.

This week we learned that the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois are not alone in thinking this. The member for Louis-Hébert thinks so as well. He called on the government to develop a clear plan for moving forward.

That reminds me of what is happening outside. At first, people said that perhaps the protesters did not know enough about why the health measures were in place, and that perhaps it had not been properly explained to them. In Quebec, we have seen the Legault government giving almost weekly updates and explaining why each measure is important, why it is in place and when it might be lifted. I have not seen the federal government do as much of that in the last few months or years of the pandemic. It would introduce a measure, then say that it was not really based on public health recommendations, but that it was implementing it anyway. We saw this several times. People are wondering why. They are wondering what is going on, and they are not necessarily getting any reassurances.

I think it would be good to come up with a reopening plan and to really explain why today, it is good to have border restrictions, and why in three weeks, for example, it might be all right to lift them. The reasons need to be explained. We do not want people to feel as if they have been working hard for two years for nothing, because the number of cases is still high. We do not want them to think that we have decided to lift the restrictions just because everyone is fed up.

• (1720)

I heard the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs say several times that we really need to listen to public health and not give in to pressure. I am thinking about the truckers' convoy right now. It is not a public health advisory, and I liked what the minister said, even though I do not always agree with what Liberal ministers say.

It is true that we have to go by what public health says and we must listen to the experts. I think we have reached a turning point where we are able to reassess what has been implemented.

Today I was listening to some of the speeches by Conservative colleagues, who took the opportunity to talk about the rules and health measures in place in the provinces, as well as vaccination. Some are against vaccination, but I do not think that the House is the ideal place to talk about that. It is time to call for a clear plan.

Business of Supply

There are not that many federal measures compared to the provincial measures. At the federal level, we are talking about measures that were put in place at the borders, which, again, benefit everyone: the use of ArriveCAN, the requirement to show proof of vaccination for travellers and, obviously, for truckers at the border, the PCR screening tests, quarantine in the federally mandated quarantine hotels that everyone will recall, the requirement to show proof of vaccination on federally regulated modes of transportation such as train or ships, mask wearing in federal buildings, and, of course, the vaccine mandate for employees of the public service.

It is not like we need to look at a hundred measures. I think is reasonable enough to wonder whether the numbers from the past few months prove that these measures have yielded tangible results and whether, given the current percentage of the population that is vaccinated, we could, if not lift the lockdown, at least relax the restrictions a bit.

I think those are some of the questions we should be asking to give our struggling businesses some predictability. I am thinking of businesses in the tourism, hospitality and aerospace industries, which are very much affected by these measures, particularly the border measures. We need to give them a game plan to tell them when they can start thinking about all of that again. We have seen how hard the Quebec government's measures have been on restaurants, which were given 24 hours' notice that they would have to close or a few days' notice that they could reopen. It has not always been easy for them to change tack so quickly. If the federal government could come up with a plan with specific dates, I think that would help them prepare as best as possible to get back to business.

I also wanted to talk about another point the member for Louis-Hébert raised, and that is health transfers. The Bloc Québécois has been talking about health transfers non-stop for the past two years, to the point where I am wondering why the federal government has not taken any action on that, since it must be sick of hearing us talking about transfers.

Furthermore, the Conservatives have joined our call in recent weeks, as have the NDP and the provinces through the Council of the Federation, which met recently. Once again, the request is unanimous. We will keep talking about it, but I think enough has been said and the federal government has heard sufficient sound arguments to finally agree to this request.

Why are lockdowns needed? It is because our health care systems are incapable of dealing with the impact of COVID-19. We have seen this in Quebec and elsewhere in the country. Increasing health transfers is crucial for the future because, as I said, the omicron variant hit us without warning, and there is no guarantee that we will be insulated from another pandemic or another variant. Our health care systems must be ready to deal with them.

The federal government has a duty to transfer money to the provinces and Quebec. I think this is a fairly legitimate request, since it is clear that our health care professionals have been stretched thin for months if not years. They need a little help, and I think the federal government could provide it.

I see my time is running out. I would have liked to speak to a number of other issues, but our whip will perhaps be able to fill in

the gaps later, in her speech. I would be happy to answer any questions my colleagues may have.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, to imply that there is no plan is somewhat misleading. I believe there has been a plan right from the very beginning.

Six weeks to two months ago, no one could have anticipated that the Province of Quebec would institute a curfew, for example, to deal with omicron. The issue is that the pandemic is far from being over.

I wonder if the member, in principle, believes that the principles she is trying to apply to Ottawa should also apply to provincial jurisdictions. Does she believe that the provinces have plans? If not, should they all be providing a plan before the end of the month?

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, as I said a little earlier, Quebec definitely has a plan, which was announced this week. We have also seen Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario announce plans to reopen not too far down the road.

Other countries, such as Denmark, France, England and Sweden are on track to completely lift their health measures. At least, they have announced their intention to do so. That is all we are asking the federal government to do.

We agreed with the measures applied at the border, and the Bloc Québécois really insisted that the federal government take the appropriate steps at our borders to ensure the safety of Canadians.

However, at this stage, I think we can reassess the measures in place, and we need to show Canadians this is being done.

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, many decisions have been made throughout the pandemic, and when politicians made them without the backstop of good medical advice, they were tragic. We saw this last summer in Alberta. In fact, we saw it in some form even here in Ontario. Quebec, fortunately, has had good leadership.

We want a concrete plan from the Prime Minister and the federal government, but does the member agree that the plan has to have the backstop of good medical advice on what we should be doing next, before politicians in this place can give Canadians the answer they are looking for?

• (1730)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

That is exactly what we have been asking for from the beginning: that the government listen to the public health authority. That is stated in the motion itself. Dr. Theresa Tam stated that all existing public health measures need to be re-evaluated. We are not saying that the plan must specify the date on which each measure will be lifted. That is not the case.

We are asking that if public health officials say that the border measures must be lifted, but that we must wait two more months to do it, that must be stated in the plan so we have an idea of what to expect in the short and medium terms. We are asking that this be done by listening to what public health authorities have to say. Naturally the decision must not be a political one; it must come from the public health authority.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech.

It lets us reframe the Conservatives' request today. It is fine to throw out a request for a plan to lift health restrictions, but what exactly does that look like?

My colleague outlined all the elements involved, which, for the most part, are the responsibility of the provinces. I feel that the provinces have done their job in this matter. Quebec, in any case, really did its job. What is missing are the health transfers going forward, that is to say the increase from 22% to 35% we are asking for. We are not going to back down. She spoke about this as well.

I would like her to answer the following questions. Why did the Conservatives move this motion today? Why are we spending the day on this? Is it public pressure, is it the trucks in the streets?

What does she believe to be the reason for this?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia has just five seconds to answer.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question.

It is a little hard to discern the Conservatives' position. We have heard the potential future leader of the Conservatives demanding freedom and encouraging the convoy. However, we have also heard other Conservatives—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today. I would like to thank my colleague for her speech, because we in the Bloc Québécois have a terrific team. I will try not to repeat what she said, but I agree with everything she did say, which I support.

I do not know if this has been done today, but I would still like to take the time to extend my condolences and sympathies to the 35,000 families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 in the last two years. We sometimes forget that these people went through a human tragedy and lost someone dear to them.

I would also like to take a few moments to quickly thank the health care workers in both the public and community systems. When we talk about the public health care system, we talk a lot

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about nurses and assistants, but there are also all of the other professionals in the system who help keep it running day after day so that care can be provided, not only to people with COVID-19, but also to those who need treatment or surgery for other health problems. I therefore want to say a big thank you to public and community health care workers.

My riding shares a border with the United States and is home to four border crossings: Dundee, Herdman, Hemmingford and Trout River. I would therefore especially like to thank the border officers, whom I have been talking to. They have sometimes had to grapple with instructions that were not very clear and implement health measures without the help of suitable tools or sufficient time to prepare. Their job has not always been easy. They have had to deal with travellers and people, including some of my constituents, who are having trouble getting across the border to visit their families in New York state.

There are a lot of people who have been and still are having trouble because of their family situation or because they live close to the border. I therefore want to thank our border officers and express my sympathy to the people in my riding who have struggled because of the pandemic but also because of problems getting across the border to see loved ones or help sick family members. We have not talked very much about our border officers, so I wanted to mention them, because they played an important role during the pandemic.

I agree with my colleague that our knowledge about the virus has grown. From what we have learned from public health, we see that it is time to reassess all the measures that have been put in place to fight the pandemic and stop the spread of the virus.

Today's motion appears to acknowledge that the provinces are easing lockdowns and have their own plans and to get the federal government to work in tandem with the provinces. The idea is to give the businesses, which suffered the most, a federal plan with a timeline for when they can expect to get back to a more normal schedule and to give people an idea of when they will be able to access services or see measures lifted.

As my colleague pointed out, the motion does not say that all measures will be lifted on February 28. I think that would be irresponsible. Naturally, even after the plan is presented, some measures, like masks, will remain. Even if that requirement were lifted, I would be uncomfortable flying without a mask. I think we will have to learn to live with masks.

However, I think we need to reassess everything. As I was reflecting on today's debate, I remembered something that many other members in the House have noted. The current government has a hard time communicating its own directives and is slow to do so. This was clear over the past two years when we had to push the federal government to announce, implement and explain measures.

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• (1735)

There is currently some confusion between federal and provincial measures, which are clear as mud. Some public restrictions are imposed by the provinces while others are imposed by the federal government. There is confusion and people are noticing a lack of consistency as well.

Here is one example. Let us say that I had COVID-19 and I go to Punta Cana. If I had COVID-19 and I go to Punta Cana, I can cross the border without having to get a PCR or any other kind of COVID test for six months. However, if I have three doses of the vaccine, I have to provide proof of vaccination and test results. People do not understand this discrepancy.

Perhaps there is some scientific basis for the fact that, if a person had COVID-19, they do not have to be tested for six months, but if they have three doses of the vaccine, they still have to be tested to cross the border. I am not a scientist, but what I do know is that people are confused. They do not understand this measure.

People do not understand why, if they travel with an unvaccinated child under the age of five, the child has to isolate for 14 days when they return. In Quebec, children under the age of 5 with COVID-19 symptoms have to isolate for five days. When they no longer have a fever, they can go back to school or day care.

There are some guidelines that seem inconsistent, and pandemic fatigue is being exacerbated by these inconsistencies. People are frustrated and, as my colleague said, we get that. In Quebec in particular, 80% of people have received two doses of the vaccine. People feel as though they have done their part. Things are tense right now. It is as if there are two camps: the unvaccinated and the vaccinated. People are starting to say that the unvaccinated are bad and the vaccinated are good.

I do not agree with that at all because I do not believe that the world is black and white. There are people who cannot get vaccinated. Constituents have called my office to explain that they were waiting to receive a medical assessment to get their medical exemption. When people talk about the unvaccinated, they feel wrongly judged, and this is creating a bad social climate right now. It is high time we thought about this and maybe came up with a plan.

I think it is important for us to say this today. I have heard many members talk in their speeches of health measures that are under provincial jurisdiction rather than talking about the ones that are the federal government's responsibility. Basically, the measures we are talking about today are not the ones that affect people on a daily basis, unless we count federal public servants. We are talking about measures that affect those who cross the border by train or by boat, or those who want to travel. This is about the border issue. The measures people are fed up with are mostly the ones that are under provincial jurisdiction.

There is some confusion. Once again, I think that if the provinces and other countries were able to come up with plans, it is high time the federal government also presented its own plan, to ensure that it coordinates and aligns its efforts with the provinces.

I will conclude by saying that I dream of a country, a country that manages its borders, takes sole and full responsibility for the man-

agement of its borders, and manages its own areas of jurisdiction. That would be much simpler, because there would be less confusion. In the meantime, in Quebec, we will continue to demand our due, which is to get back the money that we pay to Ottawa, so we can pay for our health care and build a strong and robust system to help and support all our citizens.

• (1740)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague made an interesting allusion at the end of her speech when she talked about the country and about the advantages proper border management would afford in providing more consistent health care.

It probably would have been a very good thing for Quebec to be independent during the pandemic, particularly during the previous waves.

My colleague also ended her speech by talking about health transfers. When we talk about increasing health transfers to 35% in a region like mine, it means, on a per capita basis, at least \$120 million per year in predictable transfers for the CISSSAT. The government has the opportunity to take action and help our health care system.

Will it heed this urgent call for help?

Does my colleague believe that the Prime Minister will show some leadership and finally call a premiers' summit?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question. I do not get the sense that the Prime Minister understands the urgency of the situation.

This gives me an opportunity to explain to him that all of the provincial premiers are calling for a 35% increase in funding because it is not Dr. Tam or her team or the Public Health Agency of Canada that provides care in hospitals, long-term care facilities and private residences.

Quebec health care workers are the ones who do that and, right now, the Quebec government is crying for help. It cannot fulfill all of its responsibilities and provide the level of service required because Ottawa is holding back a portion of the money collected from Quebecers. Ottawa wants to give the money back with strings attached, and that is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to pose a question to my hon. colleague. Obviously we are here talking about COVID protocols, but consider what we are seeing in Ottawa and, indeed, what we are seeing around the country. It is being reported that this is more than just a protest. This is a coordinated effort to occupy critical infrastructure across the country. It is having a major impact on our cross-border trade. It is a crazy disruption to residents downtown. Indeed, even this morning, as I was flying back to Nova Scotia, there was a coordinated effort to create disruption at the Ottawa International Airport.

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Would the member agree with me in the sense that this is moving beyond a protest to a coordinated effort, almost in the mode of an insurrection, such that it is becoming a national security issue and has to be dealt with as such?

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, I feel compelled to say that what has been happening on the Hill over the past two weeks shows a real lack of leadership from the Liberal government.

I think that things are crystal clear. Mistakes were made. No crisis task force was put together in advance when it was known that the trucks were coming. A crisis task force should have been set up, and all the various stakeholders should have been brought together to come up with an operational plan. Now we find ourselves in such a serious situation that any action taken will also need to be quite serious.

This is sad, because the government could have done things differently. I have noticed somewhat of a pattern with the Prime Minister. I will not say the word I have in mind, because it may not be parliamentary, but I do find that he lacks leadership. I expected him to be someone who would mobilize people. All the opposition party leaders offered to call a truce, come together and collaborate on finding a solution. However, this was flatly rejected.

I do not understand, and I will say that, honestly, what we are going through right now is because of the Prime Minister's lack of leadership. He is responsible for the current situation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable for a brief question.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank my Bloc Québécois colleagues for supporting this motion.

I think that my Bloc colleagues feel that the people in their ridings are also desperate to see a leader re-emerge to put an end to this whole situation we are currently in.

Some awful things have been done. We oppose them, and we condemn them. It is absolutely incredible. However, a lot of misinformation has been spread in the House today. They say that we are asking that all measures be—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. I allowed the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable time for a brief question. The time is now up.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, I think that I understand the question that was coming. I think that we sometimes cut corners in our speeches, and I think that our colleagues opposite would have us believe that the Conservatives are demanding an immediate end to all measures as of February 28.

That is petty politics. I think that today there was a great opportunity to say that it is time to work together, to join forces and to help the government with ideas so that it can come up with a plan—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Should we tolerate them? Let us think about that for a moment. That is not a statement that was made by some extremist. This is a statement that was made by the Prime Minister of this country. Should we tolerate them? Who is he speaking about? He is speaking about fellow Canadian citizens, some of our neighbours, some of our friends, people who chose not to get a vaccine. We do not know why they made that decision, but the Prime Minister of this country is asking us, should we tolerate them? I think that is deplorable.

What this has done, along with other comments he has made, is fanned the flames of division in this country. Imagine a person is at home. They have chosen not to get a vaccine and then they hear their Prime Minister asking if they should be tolerated. This is the division and the nasty politics that the Prime Minister of this country has brought to Canada.

It is pitting Canadians against each other. Why did he do it? That is a great question. The member for Louis-Hébert shed some light on that. It was for partisan advantage. We should all think about that for a second. We should think about how the Prime Minister of this country would say something like that because he thought it would give him a political advantage.

Let us talk about some of the people that the Prime Minister questions whether he and other Canadians should tolerate. I received an email from a constituent in my riding. Her son is in his twenties and he is a construction worker. He had to make a choice: get a vaccine or lose his job. He had a young family to support, so he made the decision to get a vaccine. Unfortunately, he had terrible side effects from the vaccine. We know these side effects are rare, but they do happen. All of the people in his friend group were then scared and did not want to get a vaccine. The Prime Minister is asking if we should tolerate them.

I had someone in my office who has a complicated medical history. Her doctor told her she should not get a vaccine. She does not qualify for the exemptions that have been put in place. They are extraordinarily narrow if one wants to work in this place. That is fine. The government gets to make that choice. She was terrified to get a vaccine. She was worried about what would happen to her based on the advice from her doctor.

We often get lectured by members on that side of the House to follow the science. I can tell members that she was following the science. Fortunately for her, she can work remotely. We were able to do that for her, but like the member for Louis-Hébert said, not all of us can work from a laptop at a cottage. Again, those who cannot are losing their jobs.

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When I rose in this place to speak about this earlier this week, giving a member's statement, and I said there are people who are losing their jobs because they did not get vaccinated, members on that side of the House shouted "good". I am not surprised by that considering the divisive rhetoric that comes from them and the demonization of people without knowing their circumstances. Why would they be so emboldened to act like that? I have a great reason. Their leader, the Prime Minister, asked if we should tolerate them. I think it is despicable.

• (1750)

Where are we now as a country? There was a recent poll that came out that said 25% of Canadians would support putting unvaccinated people in jail and 37% of Canadians would say it is okay that they do not get public health if they are sick. They feel that way because words matter, and words from the most powerful position in this country matter even more.

Canadians have been told by the Prime Minister that if they do not get vaccinated, they are racist or misogynist, and he asks if we should tolerate them. That is where we have ended up in this country: divided, angry, pitting neighbour against neighbour. This is not how this country should be run. It is not how this country should be led. It is not how we are in it together in this pandemic.

When we talk about this motion, what we are asking for is a plan to give people hope that there is an end in sight. We are not asking for something radical. We are asking for a plan to lift restrictions. If nobody else was doing it or no other country in the world was doing it, perhaps there could be some questions. However, that is not the case.

Countries around the world are doing this, because they are recognizing this is now an endemic and we are going to have to live with the virus. Medical officers all across the country have said this. This is not some radical Conservative idea, as much as that is how Liberals will try to paint it. Countries like Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Czech Republic, the U.K., Spain and Israel are all putting forward plans to lift restrictions, or they have lifted restrictions.

Why are we not doing it? Why are we not planning? I have heard the speeches from the members opposite today. They say it is impossible to make a plan because things change and that we should talk to the experts. Yes, do that. Talk to the experts who are saying that we now have to make the decision to live with this, and let us plan for that. Is it so hard for the Liberals to say? They have made plans before and provincial governments have made plans and had to change them, but their answer is that it is really hard to make the plans so they are not going to do it.

Canadians deserve better than that. Canadians deserve leadership. Leadership starts with the Prime Minister, and not the kind of leadership he has displayed over the last several months with vilification, demonization and pitting Canadians against each other.

What I say to my friends on that side of the House is this: They have an opportunity now to actually lead, to show some leadership and come up with a plan, to let Canadians know there is actually hope at the end of the tunnel and be a unifying factor for us. I ask Liberal members to please support this motion and come up with a

plan so that Canadians know, at some point, they can get back to their lives.

• (1755)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will address the member directly. I think it is clear, as he mentioned, that jurisdictions are—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind the hon. member that he cannot do that. He has to speak through the Chair.

Mr. Kody Blois: You have my apologies, Madam Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, I think it is very clear that jurisdictions are taking a change in their approach and re-evaluating the protocols. Certainly, Dr. Tam has suggested this.

I want to ask the member about the occupation that we are seeing in Ottawa, indeed about the blockades we are seeing at critical infrastructure across the country. We know that the organizers of the protests have called for the overthrow of government. They have talked about coalitions and meeting the Governor General.

Would the member go on record today to join me in condemning this type of behaviour, which is shutting down critical infrastructure that matters to all Canadians? Surely he could do that with me, right now.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, we have been very clear today and our leader was clear: We should not be blockading international crossings and travel. Those things need to stop. We agree with that. However, today in the chamber we saw something extraordinary. We saw all members of the opposition parties and all their leaders stand up to say they want a meeting with the Prime Minister so we can try to come together and solve this. The response from the Prime Minister was effectively no.

Will the member speak to the Prime Minister and say, "Let's collaborate; let's find a solution"?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I like today's motion because it is leading to collaboration, active participation, and the implementation of a plan to reopen—without necessarily setting a date, but by setting the public health conditions that need to be fulfilled, which could still change.

There have been words and accusations on what has been done about last week. Nevertheless, I think we need to look toward the future.

Does my colleague think that, for the sake of the future, this plan will allow us to get past any recriminations and really work together?

• (1800)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, yes, we are asking for a plan, and I do not think it is an unreasonable request. We have heard from members opposite today, in their speeches and questions, that it is really hard to make plans as things can change, and therefore they really cannot make a plan. Imagine if that had been the discussion around the table in May and June 1944 and we had said it was really difficult to plan an invasion of occupied Europe as things can change all the time. I guess we would not have made a plan, because we did not know for certain exactly what was going to happen at exactly every stage. Thank goodness the Liberals were not in government then.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have risen before in this chamber to speak to the state of health care in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith because of how important it is. People are struggling. Nurses are burning out. Doctors' caseloads are overflowing. We need more funding to go to our provinces and territories.

Does the member agree with the premier's unanimous call for the federal government to increase its share of health care spending, through the Canada health transfer, to 35% of overall health expenditures in Canada?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, one of the first things the Liberal government did in the late 1990s when the deficit was at horrific levels was slash transfer payments to the provinces, including the health transfer. The underfunding of health care is a direct result of what a previous Liberal government did.

Yes, we need to increase health care spending. That is an absolute must. I support that call and hope the Liberals will do it.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to speak in support of today's Conservative opposition day motion to end the lockdowns and restrictions and to have a clear path forward so Canadians can have faith in our parliamentary system again. The Prime Minister has placed many hardships on Canadians over the last two-plus years, and it is time that Canadians see some hope. It is a time they see a plan on how we can move forward and build trust again in this parliamentary system.

All of us in the House have experienced the outcry of so many Canadians across this country calling for a return to normal. Some are here in Ottawa and some are at the blockades along the border, but so many more are at home, desperate to live their lives and asking for the Prime Minister and his government to end their campaign of fear and division. I hear it all the time from my constituents. My constituents are some of the hardest hit by the Liberal government's failed policies. They want to go back to their lives and livelihoods without being vilified by the Liberal government.

I also want to take this opportunity to echo what our Conservative leader said this morning. My colleagues and I have heard the message that the protesters in Ottawa came here to bring, so we will not stop calling on the government to listen and we will never stop standing up for Canadians. That is our duty here. Now is the time to end the blockades at Coutts and the Ambassador Bridge, for the sake of businesses and the people. They do not deserve to suffer

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financially any longer. All Canadians deserve to have this economic pain come to an end.

However, while the Liberals continue their fearmongering and divisive politics, we know the cost of living has gone up. People are facing extraordinary house prices and inflation not seen in the last 30 years. Today's motion is an opportunity to extend an olive branch to Canadians. Let us end these mandates, let Canadians get back to a normal life and end the economic turmoil that is hurting everyday people.

As my colleagues and I have been saying all along, we condemn the use of hate symbols and do not tolerate the desecration of our national monuments. What also needs to be made clear is that the people who did those things—

• (1805)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I will ask the hon. member to remove the device he has.

He may proceed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, what also needs to be made clear is that the people who did those things do not represent the vast majority of the people who are concerned about these lockdowns and want these mandates to end. Those calling for an end to the mandates are ordinary Canadians. They came from across Canada, with diverse backgrounds and supporting different political parties. They are simply asking for a clear path forward out of this pandemic so they can get on with their lives.

However, if we listen to the Prime Minister's rhetoric, we would think there are hoards of angry people storming Ottawa and trying to overthrow the government. How would he know what is going on when he is hiding at the cottage with his MacBook? More importantly, how would he know the true intention of Canadians when he refuses to listen? He opens his mouth, pits everyone against each other for political gain and ignores the voices of the masses when they ask him to stop.

True leadership unites people, no matter their views. Still, the Prime Minister demonizes anyone who disagrees with his ideology. He would rather call people racist and misogynist than sit at a table with people of different views to help unite this country. My colleagues and I from Alberta know all too well that it is “get on board or get out of the way” with the current Prime Minister. Why can he not stop politicizing the pandemic and start listening to Canadians who have suffered enough?

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We have seen first-hand in Alberta how protesters on both sides of this issue have taken it upon themselves to act on the fear and division stoked by the current Liberal government. Last Canada Day, the then Minister of Health for Alberta was harassed by protesters who went after him in front of his kids and wife. This is not what Canada is about. This is not how we want to be seen on the world stage. However, when it was time for the Prime Minister to unite Canadians throughout the pandemic, throughout the fires in B.C. and the fall of Afghanistan, he called a selfish \$630-million election to capitalize on the fear and division he had created. What kind of leader thinks that is okay?

We have reached a point in this country where we need to look at the current government's and Prime Minister's actions and not just his empty rhetoric. We need to ask whether we will let them continue to divide us and make us live in fear. We all believe in science and facts, but we also believe in defending our country and what we stand for.

The chief medical officers of health across Canada are calling for an end to restrictions. Dr. Tam, Dr. Henry, Dr. Moore, Dr. Hinshaw and Dr. Shahab say that it is time for Canada to get back to normal. If we as a country of the true north, strong and free, believe in that principle, then it is time to listen to the science, to listen to the evidence, to listen to the people. We must end the lockdowns and restrictions.

Ninety per cent of Canadians are vaccinated. Most provinces are providing rapid tests for the public, and case counts are going down. Countries worldwide, such as Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Israel, the Czech Republic, the U.K., Spain and Denmark, are removing their COVID measures, including the vaccine passport, as are many U.S. states, as well as Alberta and Saskatchewan. Our allies are listening to science and, most importantly, the people. Why is the Prime Minister not?

I also want to mention that we, the Conservatives, are not alone in this House in calling for an end to restrictions. The Liberal members for Louis-Hébert and Marc-Aurèle-Fortin spoke out to say that enough is enough. The member for Louis-Hébert assured us that he is not the only one to have a certain discomfort on different levels with the direction the government has to take. The member for Louis-Hébert is not part of the French minority. He is not racist or a misogynist because he said these things, nor are the protesters or the people who are asking the Prime Minister to stop sowing his fear and division.

I have seen first-hand inside my own house the impact of these lockdowns and these measures. I have a daughter who suffered through such extreme anxiety that we had to pull her out of school because she could not handle all of the things that were happening all at once. It was not her fault. We understand COVID is going on, but she was going through extreme traumatic stress due to these lockdowns.

• (1810)

I can only imagine other households, and what is going on inside their houses. We owe it to parents and we owe it to children. We need to start living our lives and moving forward.

I think about what kind of country I want to see for my daughters. I want them to grow up without fear of having their own ideas. I want them to be proud of who they are and what they believe in. I honestly believe that all of us in the House want that, too, for future generations.

This is our opportunity to turn down the rhetoric, the fear and the division and let Canadians get back to normal life. It is time for the Prime Minister to stop politicizing the pandemic and start listening to Canadians. It is time to hear the people.

Canadians need hope, now more than ever. They need leadership and they need to be united. They need to stop being called names. They need real leadership now. They need a plan forward. They want to see the light that will help take them out of this darkness. Now is the time to stand up and keep our land united, strong and free.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to correct the record. I can certainly appreciate that Dr. Tam never suggested that we get rid of all vaccine mandates or protocols, but of course that there could be a revision and a look at the current measures. I think that is important to note.

To the member opposite, today during question period, his colleague for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex essentially asked the Prime Minister why he did not get rid of vaccine mandates, as that would allow these illegal blockades, and the protesters, to go home.

The hon. member mentioned in his remarks that this was not what Canada is about. Does he suggest that Canada is about allowing mob rule and illegal protests, and that those are what should dictate government decisions, notwithstanding the fact that, yes, we are moving in a different direction on COVID? On the idea that we drop everything right now, he suggested that the government should just acquiesce and basically bend to mob rule in this country.

Is that the type of country he thinks Canada is?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, I thank the PMO for that question.

What I heard in question period today was the minister of transportation saying, "I want to remind Canadians that we are still in a pandemic." To the member asking that question, and to the transport minister, why did that not stop the Prime Minister from calling an unnecessary, selfish election? It was the most expensive election in Canada's history for a shuffle change in the Liberal cabinet.

Business of Supply

Maybe the member can go back to the PMO and ask him that question on behalf of all Canadians, because they deserve to know that, while the fourth wave of this pandemic was raging, the Prime Minister was okay to campaign in Brampton and run around—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to get back to the reopening plan. Right now, Quebec and most of the Canadian provinces are making decisions based on the fragility of their health care systems. That fragility is caused by 30 years of health cuts.

In the reopening plan, would it not be wise to increase health transfers to 35%, which is still less than what is set out in our constitutional agreements?

[*English*]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, we need to have a really serious conversation about health care in this country, because in the last six years things have not improved whatsoever. We all, as a group here, from all parties, should be working together. Instead of politicizing this pandemic, we should have been finding ways to improve things in this country.

What we are asking for is just a plan. Give us some metrics. Give us something. The Prime Minister stood up in question period today, and he keeps talking about vaccines. We are already at 90%. Tell us what the threshold is. When does this end? When can Canadians have back the confidence in the House that has been broken by the Liberal government?

Give us some metrics so we can at least give hope to Canadians—

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, there has been a legion of policy reversals from the federal government since the beginning of the pandemic. I will itemize a few.

In January, 2020, Dr. Tam told the House of Commons health committee that asymptomatic transmission was a rare event, and that epidemics are not driven by that kind of transmission.

In February, 2020, the then health minister claimed that closing the border was not effective at all in controlling the spread of disease.

In March, 2020, Dr. Tam advised against universal masking practices. Canada has been among the slowest countries to acknowledge and act upon evidence showing airborne aerosols as a primary means of transmitting COVID-19.

In January, 2021, the Prime Minister said he was opposed to the idea of mandating vaccine passports, saying it would have divisive impacts on the community.

Finally, in May, 2021, Dr. Tam suggested that if 75% of Canadians had at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and 20% had two doses, provinces could begin safely easing restrictions.

With that degree of change and flux in policy, does my hon. colleague think that we can come up with a plan, given the variability of omicron and the developments in this disease?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, what my colleague is highlighting is what I have been talking about in my speech, about trust. I think Canadians lost a lot of trust because of all the failed policies and back and forth that they kept seeing from the Liberal government. This is the same government that the Prime Minister said last year would not call an election. We passed a motion in the House, and he turned on that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak today to my constituents and to Canadians on this issue and to share my thoughts. This is an important issue and worthy of serious, substantive debate. There has been far too much partisanship on this issue, including today, on all sides.

Like most issues before us, this is a grey issue. It is not black and it is not white. There are Canadians who feel very strongly that all mandates and all restrictions should be dropped, and there are many other Canadians who completely disagree with that premise.

I had the opportunity to speak in the emergency debate, and while a lot has been said today about the protests and the blockades, I want to say this. Peaceful assembly is a constitutional right. Blockades disrupting trade, businesses and people's lives are not. To those blockading, please go home. I call on all levels of government to provide police the support and resources needed to immediately end these illegal blockades. The rule of law still needs to exist in Canada.

With respect to the issue before us today, a pandemic is an unusual situation. This is the first one we have seen in our entire lifetime. Governments have done their best over the last two years. When I say “governments”, I mean all governments: international ones, the federal government and the provincial governments. They have to listen to science and then make decisions. The virus has evolved and things have changed. Governments always need to adapt and communicate. They do their best, even though we do not always agree with their decisions.

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One of the reasons that Canada has a much lower death rate than the United States is we have a slightly different conception of freedom. We know that freedom and liberty are important, but they also come with responsibility. When one's freedom clashes with someone else's, it sometimes needs to be limited. Someone absolutely has the right to remain unvaccinated if that is what they choose, but do they retain the right to work with the frail and elderly? These decisions are not easy ones to make. It is up to elected governments to make them.

Canadians throughout this pandemic have at various times been unhappy with measures taken by their federal and provincial governments. I, myself, at the beginning of this pandemic, protested outside a long-term care centre in Quebec when the Quebec government declared that caregivers and family members were no longer able to visit their frail, elderly relatives. I knew that my dad, in that long-term care facility, would not be adequately cared for, no matter how hard the staff tried, if his family, wife and sons, his caregivers, could not be with him. The policy was a harsh one. When I finally saw my dad months later, he had not been taken out of bed for months. Before the pandemic he could walk. He could walk the length of the floor, from one side to the other. After the pandemic he could not walk.

I have heard from Canadians who have kids with mental health issues because the schools were closed. I have friends who own gyms and have a friend who owns a basketball league. Sports are so important to the mental and physical health of Canadians. How do I justify to them why these are closed when other businesses that are comparable are open? How do we explain to our churches and synagogues why they need to close when other things can remain open?

Most of these are provincial restrictions; they are not federal. However, there are federal restrictions that have greatly impacted people. People could not have their loved ones come visit them in Canada for over a year, and people have to be tested multiple times, even though they are vaccinated, when they want to cross the border.

I want everybody to understand that I really heard what demonstrators and other people have said. I understand there are people who are deeply upset, especially after living through this for a couple of years. However, I have also heard from health care workers who have been working heroically with almost no break over the last two years. We had more people in hospitals in January 2022 with COVID than we did throughout the entire course of the pandemic. They are warning us that without any restrictions to slow down transmission, our health care system could break. I also hear from many vulnerable seniors who would be afraid to go to indoor spaces if everyone is not masked and vaccinated.

● (1820)

I say this because it is hard. Governments at all levels need to balance the freedom of individuals with caring for the vulnerable and nurturing our health care system. They must balance physical health versus mental health. We need to follow the science, but we also need to use our own judgment, listening to Canadians to determine what level of public health measures best balance those factors.

I personally agree that the Government of Canada, the same as various provincial governments, needs to come forward and explain when and under what circumstances some restrictions will be lifted. Measures such as this are exceptional, and we need to make sure that Canadians understand why they are in place and when they will be lifted.

In my view, the very first restrictions that need to be revisited are the ones that impact vaccinated Canadians. When will the travel advisory recommending against international travel be lifted? Do we really need testing at airports for vaccinated travellers who already had a COVID test before departure? I hope that we soon hear what the plans are with respect to these types of restrictions.

However, I also do not agree that each and every mandate and restriction now needs to be lifted. Vaccinations are key to getting us out of this pandemic. People who are vaccinated are less likely to infect others, and less likely to paralyze our hospitals, because there is less chance that they will get very sick, have to go to ICUs or die. There are vaccine mandates, which remain important, and there are requirements to wear masks in indoor spaces, which are important because we know that the virus is usually transmitted in poorly ventilated indoor spaces.

To simply call for ending all restrictions and all mandates all at once is not following the science. I agree that we need to move forward with easing restrictions, but we also have to understand that if there is a highly transmissible and deadly variant that emerges, measures may need to be reinstated.

What I do agree with is that every level of government needs to effectively communicate with the population what its plans are with respect to all restrictions, and needs to explain why they are there and at what point they will be removed. That is the important thing that all levels of government need to do.

I want to conclude my speech with one additional point that is important and that has been raised by many of my colleagues today, and that is surge capacity in our hospitals. One of the reasons why we have had to resort so many times to measures, such as the curfew in Quebec, that were highly unpopular and highly disruptive to the population is because we do not have the surge capacity that other jurisdictions do. Our hospitals are overwhelmed when they reach a certain number of patients, both in the regular wards and in the ICUs.

The federal government needs to show leadership. The member for Calgary Nose Hill gave a very good member's statement last week. I concur with her that the federal government needs to work with the provinces, in the same way we did to create national standards on long-term care, to create standards on surge capacity. The federal government needs to help fund the provinces to do that, because only when surge capacity increases in our health care institutions will we not have to worry about imposing so many restrictions.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight.

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• (1825)

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinipi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, in his compassionate speech, it sounds like my colleague for Mount Royal might actually be supporting our motion on this issue. I appreciate that very much.

Recently, the member for Louis-Hébert revealed that the Liberal leadership made the decision before the last election to wedge, to divide and to stigmatize Canadians. That was for political gain, no matter what the cost. A poll taken just after the election showed that 77% of Canadians felt the country was more fractured than ever. Make no mistake: That will be the legacy of this Prime Minister and of his government.

Does my colleague for Mount Royal agree with his Quebec colleague, that the legacy of the government will be one of division and fracture?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, no, I was trying to make a point in my speech that we should not be partisan but substantive on this issue. That was, unfortunately, a very partisan question.

Attacking the Prime Minister and making allegations about the Prime Minister seeking to divide the country and Liberal caucus is equally as egregious as what the hon. member claims to have occurred. There is no basis to believe that there is anybody in this place who wants to harm Canadians. Everybody wants to bring Canadians together. Everybody wants to do their best for this country. We have different views on how to do that.

I respect my colleague for Louis-Hébert very much, but I am not here to talk about what my colleague for Louis-Hébert said. I made a speech for 10 minutes, and the member can ask me about that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will come back to my colleague's conclusion that things can change and that the plan could be adjusted.

A well-crafted plan does provide for adjustments and for explanations that are clearly communicated to the public.

What does my colleague think about that?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I agree completely with everything my colleague said.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 6:28 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

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.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to an order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until February 14, 2022, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect that if you were to canvass the House you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:43 p.m. at this time, so that we can move on to adjournment.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

• (1830)

[*English*]

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, last November, I asked a question in the House about the flooding in British Columbia. As emergency preparedness and climate resiliency critic for the NDP, I wanted to hear from the minister that the federal government would be there to help the communities. In particular, I asked about the hard-wired requirement in federal disaster funding that municipalities have to kick in 20% of any disaster recovery cost.

I used the town of Princeton as an example, a small community of about 2,800 people with an annual taxation budget of about \$3 million. Three hundred people in Princeton lost their homes in recent floods when the Tulameen and Similkameen rivers overflowed. Recovery costs for the community was estimated at \$10 million, which meant Princeton was responsible for \$2 million, almost doubling its entire annual budget. It is clear that this 20% share just does not work for small communities.

I got a fairly positive response to my question. The minister said that the government would be there for the people of British Columbia and a joint committee made up of federal and provincial representatives was being formed that would coordinate and communicate with municipal leaders.

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Today, I talked with Spencer Coyne, the mayor of Princeton, to see how things were going three months after the floods. He was, I would say, distressed to say that they were not going well. Those 300 people are still homeless. Funding from the Red Cross that has provided shelter for those affected households is scheduled to run out next week, but it might be extended for another month. It is still winter in Princeton, and a full assessment of the damages will not be possible until the spring thaw later in March. Recent estimates suggest that the \$10 million estimate for the recovery may be far too low and the actual figure could be as high as \$20 million.

I asked the mayor specifically about communications with the federal government, and he said that he was given a phone number to contact the Prime Minister's Office. He called that number and was basically told to call the province. However, the province is already providing its share of the recovery effort, pitching in with all the necessary emergency repairs and other supports.

Mr. Coyne went on to suggest that the federal government could provide emergency funding for those 300 people who are still homeless. He has been told that federal supports are still in negotiation and asked me to plead that this be fast-tracked so that funds could be released as soon as possible. He felt that the government was asking for all the details of all the damages up front when those details and the total figure would not be known for many months. I will add that the nearby community of Merritt is in a similar position with 800 residents still homeless.

To sum up, small communities such as Princeton and Merritt are suffering, not just from catastrophic floods but from a bureaucracy that is not geared at all to towns of their size, putting a financial burden on their shoulders that they simply cannot bear in this time of great need.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

Our government absolutely recognizes the profound consequences that November's flooding has had on local communities in the member's region. Our thoughts remain with all those who were impacted by this tragic disaster.

Our government is committed to being a strong federal partner in the response and recovery from this event. Since day one, we have been there for British Columbia whenever the province reached out for help. We approved a request for federal assistance from the provincial government on November 17, 2021, the same day that it declared a state of emergency. At the peak of the response, just under 750 Canadian Armed Forces personnel were deployed in British Columbia. The CAF assisted with evacuations, offered logistical support and helped with flood mitigation efforts to protect critical infrastructure and properties.

Our government also announced in the immediate aftermath of this event that we would match every dollar Canadians donated to the Red Cross's British Columbia floods and extreme weather appeal. With provincial support, this meant that every dollar turned into three dollars for the people of British Columbia. Thanks to the generosity of Canadians, by the end of the fundraising period, just under \$19 million was raised. I am pleased to inform the member

opposite that as of January 17, 2022, the Red Cross has already distributed more than \$17 million in evacuation-related emergency financial assistance to more than 7,200 eligible households. Its work will continue in the months ahead.

As communities continue to move toward recovery from this event, our government recognizes that there is significant work to be done to build back in a better, more resilient way. We recognize that there is significant work to do. The Insurance Bureau of Canada has estimated that the insured costs alone from this event are roughly \$515 million, the highest of the year.

With the impacts of climate change, extreme weather events in B.C. and across Canada are only going to become more frequent and severe. That is why we have established a joint committee with the Province of British Columbia to move forward on these issues together. Through the committee, our governments will work with indigenous leadership to build back in a way that better protects British Columbians from future climate events, creates cleaner and healthier communities, and supports Canada's efforts in reaching our climate goals.

This committee is chaired by my colleague, the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, and his provincial counterpart, Minister Farnworth. The committee had its first meeting in December, when it laid out some of the key priorities to guide this work going forward. The committee held its second meeting earlier this week, during which members discussed the importance of enhancing capacity and putting more resiliency into our infrastructure and communities. This work will require a collective effort and an integrated approach that will recognize the important work of indigenous partners.

I thank the hon. member again for raising this important issue. Our government remains committed to ensuring the well-being of his constituents and everyone in British Columbia. We will continue to work with all partners as we continue on this path toward recovery.

• (1835)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that response. I would ask the parliamentary secretary, or perhaps his minister, to get in touch with the mayors of Princeton and Merritt to hear their trials and tribulations first-hand.

I would like to broaden the discussion, as the member did, into the future. In my short time as an MP, I have seen serious flooding occur several times in my riding alone. Those floods are happening more often across the country, as he said. Wildfires are happening with increasing frequency and increasing levels of destruction. The heat dome last summer killed hundreds of Canadians.

We have talked in this place about the future cost of climate change and the cost of inaction, but we are living that cost right now. Those costs will not be going down in our lifetime; they will only continue to rise. It is time the government realizes that we must not only fight climate change, but also set aside significant funds for communities large and especially small to protect their—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for the important points he is making.

On his first point, I want to assure him that through the disaster financial assistance arrangements, we are working very closely with the Government of British Columbia. We have received an initial assessment from it, and our officials are now reviewing that assessment for supports that would be available.

I agree with the member opposite that climate change is real and that climate change is having a huge impact on our weather patterns. We need to work together, work smarter and work harder to make sure we are building resilient infrastructure. If the member opposite looks at the mandate letter the minister received, he will see there is a very important emphasis being put on the minister by the Prime Minister to build resilient infrastructure so that our communities can sustain these—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to rise again this evening to discuss the devastating flooding we saw this fall in British Columbia. I know there is a lot of work still to be done to repair infrastructure and to rebuild from this extreme flooding situation.

For many people across the country, last year's forest fires and flooding were a wake-up call that we are living with the consequences of the climate crisis. This is a human-caused emergency, and we are paying the price for years of climate inaction.

In my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, first nations communities felt the impacts of flooding most acutely. When I spoke to Chief Roxanne Harris last fall, she expressed her frustration and the difficulty she had in connecting with timely federal supports in order to ensure that Stz'uminus First Nation was able to get the support it needed. The lack of timely supports meant the flood damage turned to mould damage, putting people's health at risk. This mould could have been avoided if the required supports had been made available immediately.

While it is critical that we take lessons from last year's flooding, for too many first nations communities this was not an isolated event. It has put a spotlight on the decades-long failure of the federal government to support first nations infrastructure. As the climate crisis is worsening, we know that infrastructure that is already pushed to its limits will not be able to keep up with this crisis.

Chief Wyse of Snuneymuxw First Nation highlighted that flooding is a yearly reality in his community. Each year, community members are forced to vacate their homes due to flooding. They are

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still in the process of trying to secure funding for upgrades to the infrastructure along the riverbank, but this is not a new issue; it is a crisis the community feels every year.

Both Stz'uminus and Snuneymuxw have highlighted that their sacred burial sites are being eroded each year. This is shameful. No community members in Canada should be forced to flee their homes each year or worry about the integrity of the land in which their loved ones are laid to rest, but that is the reality for too many indigenous communities.

While the Liberal government talks a lot about support for indigenous communities, we are not seeing the urgent investment in indigenous infrastructure across the country that we need. Whether it is on Vancouver Island with flood mitigation infrastructure, Kashechewan First Nation in northern Ontario, where hundreds of people need to evacuate each year, or Iqaluit, which has continued to struggle to ensure the community has access to clean drinking water, we must radically rethink how we ensure communities get the support they need as the climate emergency becomes more severe.

As a member of Parliament, one of the most frustrating things I find is that when first nations are looking for support, the federal government seems to only be able to provide dead ends. So many of the programs the government likes to point to have been closed for years because demand for support was so high and the funding provided by the government did not meet communities' needs.

Indigenous communities across Canada have been at the forefront of the climate emergency and have been sounding alarm bells about how the federal government is failing to address the climate emergency. We have seen, time and again, that indigenous peoples' knowledge and their connection to land have been ignored or minimized when they raise serious concerns about our rapidly changing climate. This is especially troubling, as the history of colonization has been one of forced relocation of indigenous communities to some of the land most at risk to climate change. Failing to learn from Canada's history only serves to extend Canada's shameful colonial history.

My question for the government is this: How much worse does the climate crisis need to become before we create a meaningful climate action plan that is created in true partnership with indigenous communities, such as Stz'uminus, Snuneymuxw, Lyackson and Snaw-naw-as?

● (1840)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge we are here on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

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The impacts of climate change are being felt right across Canada, but without question, we know indigenous and northern communities are among the most affected. The government shares the member's concerns about the unprecedented flooding of November, which forced countless people out of their homes, eroded land and destroyed roads in British Columbia. We can only imagine how challenging the extreme weather events of this past year have been for the families and communities impacted.

We have been keeping in close contact with first nations leadership and affected communities to ensure they have the supports they need. As they have done in facing repeated crises of late, first nations leaders have shown immense strength and resilience under pressure in dealing with a complex and evolving situation. Indigenous Services Canada has committed to continue supporting indigenous leadership to ensure first nations have the information or resources they need to keep their community members safe and supported.

Since the fire events of last summer, Indigenous Services Canada has provided \$6.2 million in additional funding for the First Nations' Emergency Services Society through the emergency management assistance program. These funds supported the First Nations' Emergency Services Society to assist first nations in their response and recovery from last year's devastating events, including conducting rapid damage assessments in communities impacted by flooding. Indigenous Services Canada also provided \$578,000 to the First Nations Leadership Council to support its member organizations.

In B.C., the government has a service agreement with Emergency Management BC to provide emergency management services on reserve comparable to those available to other B.C. communities. As part of the emergency management assistance program, the department reimburses first nations as well as provinces, territories and authorized third party emergency service providers 100% of eligible response and recovery costs. We will work diligently with Emergency Management BC to ensure the funds are released quickly to communities.

A tripartite memorandum of understanding on emergency management services with the First Nations Leadership Council, the Province of British Columbia and Indigenous Services Canada also sets the stage for a trilateral approach. We are working with the Province of British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council to move the current bilateral agreement into a trilateral agreement, as outlined in the MOU and based on views of first nations leadership.

We have committed to advancing the meaningful recognition and enhanced capacity of first nations within all pillars of emergency management. Indigenous Services Canada has supported the First Nations' Emergency Services Society in the coordination of a multi-agency support team that includes the First Nations Health Authority, the First Nations Leadership Council and Emergency Management BC regional staff.

Indigenous Services Canada is continuing to meet regularly with first nations leadership and communities that are affected by the recent floods to discuss this issue in light of their own unique circumstances and need. The Government of Canada is committed to

working with communities however long the recovery takes to help ensure first nations members are safe and secure.

• (1845)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite's response, but the actions of the government over the last six years speak loudly. It is clear we are not getting the results we need. The climate crisis is growing worse as the government continues to miss its targets.

On this side of the House, NDP members have put forward bold legislation to ensure Canada is supporting indigenous communities with meaningful investments while standing up to the climate crisis.

For example, my colleague's bill, Bill C-245, would ensure the Canada Infrastructure Bank prioritizes indigenous and northern communities in the fight against climate change. Similarly, my colleague's motion, Motion No. 1, calls on the government to develop a green new deal for Canada. The motion demands the government invest in a net-zero future with reconciliation at the forefront.

Does the member opposite agree we need to rethink our approach to the climate crisis and ensure indigenous communities get the investments they deserve?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, I absolutely do. That is why, on November 26, 2021, the Prime Minister and the premier of British Columbia announced a committee of federal and provincial ministers to work with indigenous leadership to guide and support the British Columbia families, businesses and communities affected by the recent extreme weather events linked to climate change.

We are working with partners to improve economic and social conditions for indigenous people so they can invest in infrastructure and other areas to ensure their well-being as they respond to climate change.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, farmers are worried, and rightfully so. I have been trying to get some certainty out of the government for Canadian farmers. I have asked the Minister of Agriculture in question period. I have asked the Department of Agriculture in committee. I have asked the Department of the Environment, and I have asked the industry. No one, and I repeat no one, has been able to confirm whether the Liberal government has ruled out limiting the amount of fertilizer that Canadians could use to grow their crops.

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I am going to explain how fertilizer restriction would impact Canadian agriculture, and why this issue is so important. In Canada, grain and oilseed farmers only have approximately 120 days to seed, grow and harvest their crops. That is right, 120 days. It is absolutely critical that Canadian farmers have the modern-day tools and resources available to ensure that they can produce the maximum amount of food in the most efficient way they can in 120 days.

Canada has so much opportunity in agriculture as an exporting nation. Our nation produces enough food not only to feed ourselves but to feed the world. Canada exports 70% of our soybeans, 75% of our wheat, 90% of our canola and 95% of our pulses. By 2050, the world population is estimated to grow by two billion people, and agriculture production will need to increase significantly to meet that demand.

As an exporting nation, I believe we have an immense opportunity to leverage this competitive advantage in agri-food to grow our economy and to create Canadian jobs. We can reach this potential while also playing an important role in addressing global food insecurity, which I believe is our obligation.

How can we seize this opportunity if the government is limiting the agriculture industry? How can we maximize food production if the government would not allow us to maximize crop yields? Experts have already stated that reducing fertilizer emissions by 30% would be unachievable without reducing crop production. I am a farmer. As a farmer, I understand the fundamental law of nature that when nutrients are taken out of the soil, they have to be put back in. For example, a farmer applies a nutrient like nitrogen into the soil and the plant uses that nitrogen to grow and produce food. That nitrogen is removed from the soil when the farmer harvests the crop, because these nutrients were used to produce food. If the farmer does not apply the nutrient again, the soil is left with less nutrient and, therefore, less production potential.

When crops grow, so does Canada. We should be proud of this, not ashamed. I hope the government understands, when the amount of food a farmer can produce decreases, so does their pay cheques. I hope the government also understands that when pay cheques of Canadian farmers decrease, so do the pay cheques of rural towns and communities. Agricultural policy has always been rooted in the shared belief of maximizing outputs and minimizing inputs.

I seriously wonder if the government believes in the same philosophy. If it does not, it should be honest and tell Canadian farm families because their livelihoods do rely on this.

Could the government tell the House and all Canadian farmers if it has ruled out limiting the amount of fertilizer that Canadian farmers could apply to their crops?

• (1850)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the wake of extreme weather events and rising global temperatures, it is more important than ever for all of us to safeguard our soil, our air and our water. We must ensure that our agricultural lands are healthy and productive for generations to come. To do that, we need to lower greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sec-

tor, which continue to make up around 10% of Canada's total emissions. All sectors of our economy have to play their part. I know farmers will do their part, and I know they can.

Fertilizer use has played a major role in the agricultural sector's success in the past decade. However, emissions associated with synthetic nitrogen fertilizer use have also grown significantly. That is why, as outlined in Canada's strengthened climate plan, the government has set a target to reduce GHG emissions from fertilizer application by 30% below 2020 levels by 2030.

Let me clarify something first, as I did last week. The fertilizer target is not intended to reduce fertilizer use by 30%. I believe I have answered yes or no. Our approach is focused on reducing fertilizer emissions, and is not a blanket, mandatory reduction in fertilizer application rates. Our target is ambitious, but achievable. The Western Producer conducted an informal survey about the 30% target. It asked a dozen soil nutrition experts, and almost all of them agreed that our emissions reduction goal was achievable and did not require making do with less fertilizer. This target is necessary if we want our agricultural and food production to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable now and in the future.

Canadian farmers are not alone in this. We will work closely with the industry to understand the challenges ahead and to determine how we can collectively meet the targets. We are looking at all solutions for reducing fertilizer emissions, while investing significantly in programs to help farmers adopt new sustainable products and management practices.

Recently, we invested \$165.7 million to expand the agricultural clean technology program, which supports research, development and the adoption of clean technologies, including precision agriculture techniques that can help improve the efficiency of fertilizer application; \$185 million for the living lab program under agricultural climate solutions, which brings together farmers, scientists and others to co-develop new climate-smart practices and technologies; and \$200 million for the on-farm climate action fund to support the immediate adoption of practices that sequester carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions directly on farms, including nitrogen management.

Supporting sustainable agriculture is our number one priority. We are confident that the fertilizer target will build on the practices, innovation and expertise that Canada's farmers and scientists are already using and developing to improve nutrient management and reduce emissions while maintaining the quality that Canadian agriculture is known for around the world.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1855)

Mr. Dan Mazier: Madam Speaker, this is part of the problem. For the agriculture industry, while the member has come a long way in acknowledging what good farmers do, there are still a lot of words that are very unclear. There is still really no clear answer. Producers are the ones who know best what to do on their land and for the crops, how they are testing and how they know what is going on with the soil.

Farmers are, as the member has acknowledged, part of the solution. They want to be part of the solution and, by the way, they are in one of the few industries where they can actually be part of the solution and offer that to government. What the government does, and has done for years, instead of working with the stewards of the land, is ignore them. We have seen this over and over again. It will talk a good game about how it is going to help them, but it does not listen or work with them.

I will ask for a clarification again. Will the government—

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, I reject the premise that farmers are not innovators. If farmers farmed today the way that our grandfathers farmed, we would all be out of business. Farmers have always been at the cutting edge of technology, and I am confident that the Government of Canada, in partnership with farmers across Canada, will be able to reach that target.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)

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