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Friday, March 4, 2022

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 4, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House proceeded to the consideration of 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, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

• (1000)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are 10 motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-8.

Motions Nos. 1 to 10 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available on the table.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 7.

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 9.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 44.

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-8 be amended by deleting Clause 45.

He said: Mr. Speaker, happy Friday. I believe few would dispute that we live in highly unusual times. Indeed, we are charting a path through a pandemic without a playbook. This is not the fault of the government: Every government is in the same situation, and as we all know, different governments have proposed different ways of moving forward. We must recognize that we agree, and I say “we” because we have to in large part unanimously agree, on most fiscal measures to this point. Canadians sent a minority Parliament to Ottawa and aside from the Prime Minister's shameless attempt to stage a power grab by calling an expensive and unnecessary election, here we are again in this minority Parliament.

We must recognize that, rightly or wrongly, our fiscal cupboards were literally spent dry responding to this pandemic. I am not here today to debate the past. I am simply pointing out the obvious. A significant portion of Canada's fiscal capacity has been spent. It is gone and we must recognize that. Why? Because in the event we run into any type of future emergency situation, we will have less fiscal room to respond.

Again, I do not raise that to point a finger of blame. I raise that because we must recognize that, going forward, we must be very careful how we proceed fiscally. Let me give an example. If anything, during this pandemic we have learned that our health care system was ill equipped to deal with the stresses and demands placed on it, more so when we see fully vaccinated Canadians who find themselves in our hospitals in the ICU. Every premier of every political stripe is clear that current Canada health care transfers are not enough to meet the needs of Canadians now or going forward.

Here is something I would like to share with every member of this place. The Canadian health care transfer stands at over \$45 billion a year. In the current fiscal update bill, spending is forecast to increase to over \$55 billion in fiscal 2026-27. In other words, there is an increase of over \$10 billion in that time frame. I am hopeful that my friends in the fourth party hear that clearly, as they have a bad habit of referring to increases in health care spending as cuts.

Government Orders

I will get back to this increase in health care spending. The increase in health care transfer spending between now and fiscal 2026-27 is \$10 billion. Here is the problem. Today, the interest we are paying on servicing our debt is just over \$20 billion. Over the same time, it too will increase. The same budget bill forecasts that debt servicing costs will increase to almost \$41 billion by fiscal 2026-27.

I can already hear members of the government say, “But debt-to-GDP ratio”. They will say, “The AAA credit rating”. They will say, “But now there is another thing”. Between now and fiscal 2026-27, we know two things will happen. The health care transfer will increase by \$10 billion, but servicing our debt will increase by over \$20 billion. That is \$10 billion on health and \$20 billion on debt.

To be clear, our interest costs of servicing our debt are climbing at twice the rate as our increases in the Canada health transfer. Does anyone not see that as being as a serious problem? The Parliamentary Budget Officer put out a report recently that said that the numbers the government put out in its last fall fiscal update actually underestimate our debt servicing costs in 2026-27 by \$6 billion.

When the government talks about all the things it wants to do on the economy, and when it talks about all the action it wants to take, we really have to understand that we are putting ourselves in a situation where we will not have the fiscal room to respond in cases of further external or internal events. In external events, we have nowhere further to look than the situation that is happening in Ukraine.

We heard from the Governor of the Bank of Canada last night. We see that now the talk about inflation being transitory has washed away. We are now seeing that Canadians are being told by economists they face a perfect storm of higher gas prices, rising interest rates and the costs that go with that, and rising food prices.

The Dalhousie report that came out earlier this year said the average family would be paying over \$1,000 more in just grocery costs alone. That is not even factoring in the hit to their income with Canada pension plan increases that the government has put forward.

● (1005)

We do not have the fiscal capacity, in my mind, to be able to say to Canadians that we can handle external events. Why? It is because the government has baked extra spending into it and, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, it is not giving proper projections of that. It is probably going to be higher. Government needs to be better than this. Our citizens are worried and anxious about their financial future, and the government continues to kind of walk around the issues that we have.

My particular area of focus right now, both on the finance committee and here in the House, has been given to me by our leader of the official opposition. I have been given the task of focusing on housing and inflation. Here is what I have to say on that matter: There has been a 43% increase in home prices. Right now, the average Canadian home price is \$811,000 and rapidly rising. We are seeing where the number of people purchasing homes and the low supply, coupled with many of the things that are causing those fun-

damentals to go up, are pushing away the dream of home ownership. The government continues to put forward policies, inadequate policies in my view, that simply walk around the issues.

The great MP for Simcoe North put forward a very reasonable amendment. In fact, members are probably going to be a little shocked here. We actually were trying to help the government by putting forward that amendment. It was around banning foreign ownership of residential properties. It would have been for two years so we could take a look. The government says that it wants to look at data. We could have given it a two-year ban, and essentially we would then be able to see if it pushed down demand in the market and allowed more young Canadian families to have that first shot at home ownership, by pulling out, for a temporary time, foreign bids.

The government voted against the amendment. We were only trying to help this Prime Minister who, by the way, in multiple elections has said that he wants to address skyrocketing housing prices, which are a gobsmacking 43% higher than in 2019. The Liberals voted against the amendment. That is the main problem with the current government. It has underestimated how much money it has spent. We will see much of that \$6-billion gap that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has identified in our fiscal track, so we are going to have less firepower from that.

We also have, at the same time, the perfect storm in which economists have told us that Canadians are going to be subjected to gas prices that they have never seen. I was born in Victoria, and I saw yesterday reporters pointing out that the cheapest form of gas was priced at \$1.94 on the island. I have never seen that. In April, we will see the carbon tax go up to \$50 a tonne, the backstop as well, and we will see where gas becomes increasingly unaffordable.

I have put forward with my able colleague, our industry critic, some very reasoned amendments to help improve the legislation that has been brought forward. Really, we can no longer simply let the government talk around the issues. It needs to start putting forward real policies, such as banning foreign owners from purchasing Canadian properties to give Canadians that first chance at home ownership. The government continues to bring forward legislation that is not up to the task.

Let me say again that it is always an honour to rise in this place. Again, I am imploring the government for my own riding. Those flooding victims in Merritt, Princeton and other rural areas of British Columbia are counting on the government. Unfortunately, they are told to wait as well. This is the problem I have with the current government. It is not addressing these important needs that Canadians have right now.

Government Orders

• (1010)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for putting forward some very reasonable amendments to the bill and for his advocacy on the housing file.

I would like him to expand a little more on the excessive spending and where we will be going when the cost of this borrowing goes up. I note in particular his comment about the over \$20 billion a year that we are currently spending just to service the national debt. That is more money than we are putting into national defence despite how volatile the world is right now. We are seeing what is going on with Russia and its invasion into Ukraine.

I would like him to comment on that, because I believe we need to make a serious investment in national defence in the coming years.

• (1015)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question from my colleague. As I said earlier in my speech, other important spending that Canadians count on, like health care, is set to go up at a certain rate, but our debt servicing will be far in demand. In fact, the debt servicing rate will be far over what we will spend in the fiscal year 2026-27 on military.

Yesterday, the Minister of National Defence tried to assure the House that our Arctic sovereignty is not at risk, but we can look at where other countries have been putting their resources. Russia has been investing heavily in nuclear ships so that it can push its sovereignty claims further into the Arctic. We need to ask ourselves if we are prepared to do the same. With the way the government has spent, I would say we are not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my colleague from the Standing Committee on Finance for his speech.

There is one thing about Bill C-8 that the Bloc Québécois members find particularly bothersome, and that is the 1% tax on underused housing owned by non-resident non-Canadians.

We could discuss the policy to determine whether it is a good measure in the context of the current housing shortage. The problem is that the policy sets a precedent. By collecting property taxes, for the first time in history, the federal government will be getting involved in a taxation area that, until now, has fallen under the exclusive jurisdiction of the municipalities and therefore the provinces.

I would like my colleague to share his thoughts on respecting provincial and municipal jurisdictions.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the work the member does on behalf of his constituents.

In our Constitution, it is very clear that the federal government, rightly or wrongly, has the ability to tax in areas like property. It has taxing powers that provinces and municipalities do not share. It has a very wide range of tools. However, typically governments

have trended not to go into those areas, because first of all, there is only one taxpayer, and second of all, the federal government does not have an established line of view into that area. This is the problem we have. The Liberals introduce all these new things whether or not the 1% would be effective and whether or not they are violating what is traditionally considered a provincial area, because municipalities and property taxes are provincial. I would say they are walking around the issue, not addressing it.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was talking about his concerns with the federal government's fiscal capacity. Do members know who does not have concerns about fiscal capacity? It is the companies that made off like bandits by profiteering during a pandemic and that collected benefits from the federal government while paying out stockholder dividends and so on.

In an effort to invest in people and workers to make our communities all they can be, why do the Conservatives neglect the fiscal capacity of the very richest and wealthiest corporations in this country? They never put measures in place to actually tackle that gross inequality, which is expanding and has accelerated over the last two years.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, my friend from the island will probably recognize that we have been very critical of the government regarding the Canada emergency wage subsidy for allowing profitable companies to access it while at the same time increasing dividends to shareholders and allowing bonuses for executives. This is unlike when Minister Jim Flaherty made some concessions on pensions with Air Canada. He put tight controls to make sure that executives could not profit from that.

We are on the record as opposing those kinds of payments, but I will remind the member that we are not in government. If he has an issue, he should be pointing the finger across the way and not at the Conservatives, because this program was designed by the government, and what it would describe as a bug is actually a feature.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are at report stage for Bill C-8, the economic and fiscal update implementation act of 2021, which contains a number of measures.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with the thrust of the bill. However, from the beginning, we have been pointing out a major problem, and that is the fact that the federal government is sticking its finger in the property tax pie. This is the first time that has happened.

There is a housing shortage. The proposed measure will mean that foreign residents who are not permanent residents or citizens will pay more if they have a residence in Canada that they are not living in. This measure could marginally assist in addressing the housing crisis. We do not disagree with the principle, but as the song by Jacques Brel says, *il y a la manière*, there is a right way to do things.

Government Orders

We see this as a dangerous precedent that brings to mind other similar cases in Canadian history. Today, Ottawa is proposing to interfere in a new taxation area, the only remaining area that it is not already involved in, and that is property taxes.

The part of Bill C-8 that targets non-residents proposes a 1% tax on underused housing. As I said, the idea may be a good one, but is it right for Ottawa to do this in such a cavalier fashion without consulting the municipalities and the provinces? I have a bad feeling about it, and we see this as a serious problem because different levels of government all have their own taxation powers.

Property tax is under the jurisdiction of the municipalities and other creations of the provinces, such as school boards. Revenue sources are limited, so when Ottawa steps in and helps itself to a portion of the property tax base, that sets an unfair precedent. Moreover, the federal government will collect this tax without even talking to the people, the organizations and the levels of government that handle this area of taxation. That is a serious problem.

We are only talking about some \$100 million annually, which will not have a huge impact on the fiscal imbalance. The real problem here is precedent. To collect this new tax, the federal government, its departments and the Canada Revenue Agency will have to develop a brand-new mechanism and will have the power to collect this revenue from property taxes. The history of taxation in Canada gives us reason to worry.

During the First World War, the government decided to introduce a corporate tax to fund the war effort, citing exceptional circumstances. That tax was justified and was supposed to be temporary, but Ottawa never cancelled it and is still collecting it to this day.

The same scenario reappeared during the Second World War, when Ottawa introduced individual income tax to pay for the war. This exceptional tax was supposed to be temporary too, but Ottawa is still collecting it to this day.

Everyone in Quebec remembers Mr. Duplessis's rallying cry "give us back our loot", which I would like to co-opt today for property taxes. This is how Ottawa works. Once it takes hold of a taxation area, it never gives it up, even if temporary and extraordinary circumstances might seemingly justify it.

That is the problem with this machine. It is always getting bigger and taking over everything, aiming to be the be-all and end-all.

We are telling the federal government to be careful. Municipalities, school boards, and organizations associated with the provinces and Quebec have the opportunity and the power to manage this area, which they do while drawing only limited resources. We have to be careful not to let the federal government get its hands on this area of taxation, since the provinces and municipalities are already under-resourced and struggling to provide all the services within their jurisdictions.

● (1020)

As we know, the Parliamentary Budget Officer publishes a fiscal sustainability report nearly every year. Even with Ottawa's extraordinary spending during the pandemic, his findings have not changed. In the long run, over the next few decades, Ottawa will

have a budget surplus, and without major changes, the provinces will be saddled with debt levels from which they will never recover.

That is why all the provinces are asking Ottawa to fund health care at 35%, or just over a third of spending, simply to restore some balance. Studies by the Conference Board of Canada have reached similar conclusions. The Council of the Federation also says that balance needs to be restored. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's studies remind us of this every year.

Rather than agreeing with us and saying that the federal government is taking too much tax for the services provided and will therefore increase health transfers or leave tax points, now Ottawa wants to get its hands on the last taxation area that it has not waded into until now. This is unacceptable. It makes no sense.

This is what constitutionalist and law professor Patrick Taillon said on February 17, in parliamentary committee:

However, being a good idea is not an excuse to flout our constitutional principles. From the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the division of powers, the spirit and letter of the Constitution must be respected. Without the prior consultation of the provinces or an agreement with them—in other words, without some legal due diligence—this good idea has vulnerabilities.

It is clear that the pith and substance of the measure involve the regulation of housing law, and there is no doubt that the provinces have exclusive jurisdiction over housing when it comes to private law, specifically, property and civil law and, generally, in relation to social policies and local affairs.

What the constitutional expert, Mr. Taillon, is saying is that because the purpose of this tax is to change behaviour in housing, an area of jurisdiction, it is highly likely that it is a regulation in disguise and would in fact be unconstitutional. He said that unfortunately, it is the courts that will have to rule on this.

It would have been interesting, smart and pragmatic to check all this ahead of time instead of exposing ourselves to court challenges that could end up overturning the legislation, knowing that if the act were to be struck down, the federal government's entire property tax infrastructure would already be in place and spending already committed. The damage would have been done. This would undermine the municipalities.

Should it not be deemed unconstitutional—we cannot assume how the courts will rule—it would nonetheless set a dangerous precedent because the tax will have been introduced without co-operative federalism, which could worsen the fragile fiscal balance within the federation. The balance would be unfair, and that is truly a serious problem.

In closing, the Bloc Québécois proposed a very simple amendment in committee stating that if Ottawa wants to move ahead with this tax, it must have the province's agreement to impose it, ensuring that there are consultations with the municipalities.

In closing, I take exception to your decision, Mr. Speaker. I take issue with you this morning, because you, and I am obviously directing my comments to the table, deemed that our amendment was out of order.

We do not agree with that decision. Our amendment did not broaden the scope of the act, nor did it alter it. It merely sought to make the bill respect the Constitution. We are therefore very disappointed with your decision, which makes the historic precedent set by Bill C-8 against the rights of the municipalities and provinces even worse.

In spite of my rebuke, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

• (1025)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent speech.

This bill includes measures to provide funding for health care and COVID-19 tests. Every day, the Bloc asks for an increase in health transfers for Quebec.

What does the member think of these measures? Will he support them?

• (1030)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from Sarnia—Lambton for her question.

Bill C-8 provides funding for COVID-19 tests. Ottawa is going to pay for COVID-19 tests and send them to the provinces.

We want transparency and the ability to follow up. We naturally agree with this necessary expenditure. However, it reminds us that Ottawa is not contributing its share to health care.

In the 1990s, the Liberal government decided to fix its deficit problem by reducing transfers to the provinces. Since then, Ottawa's revenues have far exceeded the services it provides. Health care funding must be rebalanced. We do not want conditions, we want money now.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my colleague will agree with me that a lot of water has passed under the bridge since the fall economic update was presented to the House back in mid-December, both here in Canada and all around the world.

I know the member and his party have been very active on the issue of climate change. I would like to hear his thoughts on what kind of fiscal capacity he would like to see the federal government direct toward climate change going forward because of the economic costs that will be incurred if we do nothing or too little.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, these days, we seem to be jumping from one crisis to the next. The Emergencies Act was applied recently in response to the siege in Ottawa. Now there is a barbaric war going on, in which crimes against humanity are being perpetrated. This is unconscionable in 2022.

All of this is going on against the backdrop of an environmental crisis. Yesterday, the Governor of the Bank of Canada appeared in committee and told us again that we are underestimating the economic consequences of the climate emergency. The clock is ticking. We must act now.

Government Orders

Quebec has adopted a carbon market system, which is an excellent system. We are disappointed that the United States and the Canadian provinces have not gotten on board, because this system could have worked well.

Yes, we must do more. The Bloc Québécois is proposing an ambitious green finance plan that would allow private funds to support green infrastructure and net-zero projects rather than polluting projects.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave a brilliant speech about the federal government's proposed interference into provincial jurisdictions.

Not only would this create a precedent, but it also seems as though the way the tax is designed, how it will be applied and collected, will not do much to help with the housing shortage.

I have to wonder whether the federal government should be using other methods, such as Quebec's proposal to try to address the housing shortage. What would my colleague suggest?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my brilliant and esteemed colleague from Mirabel for his speech.

The housing shortage is affecting everyone throughout Quebec and Canada. It is a major problem. A whole series of measures is required to remedy it.

Yes, a 1% property tax for non-resident owners of underused housing is more than marginal. It is symbolic, and this level of government has no business collecting it, at least not without the cooperation of the provinces.

The problem is that there is not enough housing. The government really needs to make up for all the lost time and, most importantly, build more social housing.

Once again, Ottawa abandoned social housing back in the 1990s, and today we are paying the price many times over. We are now seeing where decades and decades of underinvestment has led.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate to be able to rise today and contribute to the House's debate of the Liberal government's bill, Bill C-8, which has been faithfully reported back to the House by the Standing Committee on Finance.

The committee did consider one amendment to that, and of course today we are dealing with the report stage amendments brought forward by my Conservative colleagues. I very much appreciate the work done by committee members in examining this bill. I especially want to thank my colleague, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who is the finance critic for my caucus and has been shouldering a lot of work at that committee.

Government Orders

Bill C-8 is an act that would implement certain provisions presented to the House in the fall economic statement. It would be a gross understatement to say that the country, and indeed much of the world, have changed since mid-December. I know, from the feedback from people in my riding and people I work with here in the chamber, that the pace of change over the last two months has really left our heads spinning. We seem, as a country, to be lurching from crisis to crisis these days, and it is not giving people much of a breather to accept their changed reality. I am hearing a lot of accounts of the mental health stress this has put on people.

It was back in mid-December that we were just, at the House, beginning to get a glimpse of how bad the omicron wave was really going to be. I remember the news reports in early December that there was some hope that the variant, which first emerged and was detected in South Africa, did not seem to have as much lethality to it, but of course that was blown out of the water by the concerns of how rapidly it spread. Even if a smaller percentage of people ended up going to the hospital, that small percentage, when we had the variant passing through our population so rapidly, did give rise to very considerable fears that our hospital system would be overwhelmed.

Of course we had a change in leadership with one of our political parties in the House. We had the protests descend on Ottawa and many cities across Canada, which turned into an illegal occupation and blockades at our border, further putting strains on our relationship with the United States. Then, of course, beginning just a few short days after that ended, we now have a fully modern conflict raging in Ukraine, where unprovoked Russian aggression is now putting the lives of 40 million Ukrainians at risk.

Here we are. The world has changed quite a bit. I do want to acknowledge that it is a frustrating time for so many people, especially in Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. They are, like many Canadians, dealing with the inflationary pressures. They see the results in the price of food at the grocery store and the cost every time they fill up their vehicles.

What people have also witnessed over the last two years is the fact that so many of the wealthy in Canada, and indeed many of our most profitable corporations, have seen their profits soar during this time. Many of those companies actually took pandemic benefits and were guilty of paying out dividends to their shareholders.

It seems the hard-working families in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford are working twice as hard as their parents but for less money. These pressures are putting families at the breaking point. That is why I have always been proud to be part of a party that stands for trying to ease that inequality in Canada and making sure the very rich in our country do pay their fair share. If they do not, that burden ends up falling on working families.

In my riding, in the space of one year, depending on what part of the riding someone is in, we saw housing prices increase anywhere in the neighbourhood of 30% to 40%. That is in one year. With those stratospheric record levels of housing costs, of course many people were trying to sell their homes during that time to take advantage of the high prices. All of that selling in the Cowichan Valley also caused a huge crisis on rental availability, because when people are putting their house up for sale, usually the tenants are

evicted as it is not really known if the new owner wants to inherit tenants or not.

• (1035)

We also have the worst record in the G7 when it comes to combatting climate change. In my province of British Columbia, we saw a record heat wave in June. We saw wildfires consume so many communities right across the province, and then just a few short months later, we saw catastrophic floods that effectively cut off the Port of Vancouver, our busiest port, from the rest of the country.

A smart government would be looking at this and looking at the evidence that these climate change natural disasters will keep piling up if we do not address them. A smart government would look at the economic toll this will place on our ability to raise revenue in the future.

As for my Conservative colleagues, who like to proclaim themselves as fiscally responsible, they should not ignore the damage this is going to do to future tax revenue and our ability to help communities from coastal inundation, protect them from wildfire danger and stand up for our hard-working men and women in agriculture, who seem to be dealing with flooding and droughts at a much more precipitous pace.

I know, from my time at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, of which I have been a proud member for four years now, that all farmers will tell us they are on the front lines of climate change. They need to have some recognition of the good work they are doing. They also need a partner in Ottawa who is going to help them take advantage and thrive through these very uncertain times.

It is all about choices. With Bill C-8, I think there is a sense of regret. For me, it is a sense of regret for what could have been and what should have been. That being said, if through these measure, we are going to propose things like allowing small businesses to acquire equipment that will improve the quality of their indoor air, I think that is a solid investment. Just because we are starting to see some very hopeful signs of us getting out of this latest variant of COVID-19 does not mean there will not be future airborne illnesses. We want make indoor air quality much better, and we would if we were to make these targeted investments.

I also like the idea of allowing for an increase in the school supplies tax credit and allowing us to expand that eligibility criteria to include the electronic devices that educators benefit from. A lot of people are struggling to make sure they can get by on those family budgets, so little measures like that, for many families, can actually go quite a long way.

Government Orders

I am also interested in the proposal here in Bill C-8 about the refundable tax credit for the return of fuel levy proceeds to agricultural businesses. This has been an issue we have been seized with at the Standing Committee on Agriculture, because, especially when it comes to activities such as grain drying or even heating a barn, I am all for giving farmers an alternative that is not based on fossil fuels.

However, what we heard, very clearly, at the agriculture committee was that the technologies that are free of fossil fuels are not yet commercially viable, and they will not be so for another 10 years. Therefore, if we are going to make sure we are trying to give that price incentive, we still have to ensure that a viable alternative exists for our farmers, which is why I am in favour of giving them these very specific and targeted breaks, so they can make it through with their bottom line.

Part 2 of Bill C-8 would basically establish a 1% annual tax on the value of vacant or underutilized residential property. This would only be when the direct and indirect owners are non-residents or non-Canadians. Again, on housing, there are so many more ways that the government could have tackled this very big issue. I would say this is a good first start, but there is much more that needs to be done. I know the government likes to pat itself on the back with all of the things it has done with housing, but the proof is in the pudding. If we still see housing prices rise to these stratospheric heights, we have to measure the effectiveness of the policy against that reality.

I will conclude here by saying that we do have a federal budget coming in the next number of months. I sincerely hope the government realizes that this is the time for bold policy action, to really make sure Canada comes through these uncertain and very challenging times.

• (1040)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of sitting with the hon. member at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, and he raised an important point. I know it does not impact the province where he is from, but we have heard from farmers the importance of the availability of a carbon rebate for grain dryers and for heating their barns.

Can he inform the House how important it is to pass Bill C-8 so they can get access to this important tool?

• (1045)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, allow me to return the compliment to my friend. I have had the pleasure of serving on that committee with him. I think he and I are the two longest-serving members on that committee.

We have heard repeatedly from farmers about their willingness to do the right thing and be a central part of the conversation on how we combat climate change. When it comes to the hard choices that farmers have to make when they are purchasing new equipment or finding an energy source, we first want to make sure that viable alternatives exist, which is why until they are developed and until they are commercially viable, we prepare the necessary tax breaks to help them through those tough times.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member referred to the NDP's finance critic, the MP for Elmwood—Transcona, and I would like to thank that member specifically for his work at the finance committee. He supported the amendment from the member of Parliament for Simcoe North to Bill C-8 that would ban foreign buyers from purchasing Canadian residential properties. This member has mentioned that in his riding on the island, we have seen amazing jumps in home prices and lots of speculators there, including foreign speculators. He lamented that there is so much more that Bill C-8 could have been.

Could he enlighten this House as to why the government would vote against something that its own Prime Minister has promised to young Canadian families who want to get into home ownership? Why, when it comes to the chance to vote for something that meaningfully will address that issue, do they vote against it?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, sometimes the workings of Liberals at committee, as with Conservatives, can remain a mystery, and we do not always know the full reason that they vote the way they do.

That said, I agree with him that so much more could have been done, but as an opposition party, we have to respect the government's prerogative to decide the time it will devote to the bills that it brings forward. We can only deal with the parameters that the government sets out.

For me, I am always looking ahead to the next day, to the next fight and to the ways that I can influence government policy and make sure that it is doing right by the residents of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. I very much look forward to that opportunity being with the next federal budget.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier, my colleague from Joliette said that an amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois to Bill C-8 was rejected.

What does my colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford think of our proposal that the federal government consult the provinces before infringing on areas under their exclusive jurisdiction?

The Bloc Québécois is very concerned about housing. We have made a lot of suggestions, but we think that the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces over taxation must be respected.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I guess I would answer his question this way: The federal taxation power is a very broad power that can be open to a lot of interpretation, and courts have been a bit wary about intruding on that specific right.

That being said, I think the challenging times that we live in demand that the federal government look at unique and innovative ways to raise revenue. The NDP has long championed things like a wealth tax, and that is something I will continue to proudly fight for.

Government Orders

On the member's main question of consultation with the provinces, absolutely. If we are going to have a strong federal partnership, the provinces play a very important role in that, and I will never shy away from promoting the idea that consultation should happen on a regular basis.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today on Bill C-8 at report stage. I may also include some general comments, as I did not get a chance to speak to the bill when it was in the House earlier because the Liberals shut down debate on it.

Let me go through the different parts of the bill. As always, I am not here just to criticize the government; I like to make helpful suggestions as to what would be better or what should have been done as we go.

In the first part, there are some amendments to the Income Tax Act to put in place a few tax credits. I do not find these tax credits very objectionable, but I see there is one there to expand the travel component for northern residents who have to travel as part of their job. I want to bring to the attention of members that there is also a private member's bill to do this for tradespeople who are travelling as well, which is quite a good thing.

With respect to the tax credits in the bill, I want to talk a bit about the one for farmers to return fuel charge proceeds to give them a break. What I think would have been more helpful is for farmers to have been exempted from all the carbon tax increases that have happened over time. They do not get credit for the fact that most of them are growing crops that take CO₂ out of the air. On the other hand, they are paying thousands of dollars in carbon tax. At a time when we as a government and Canadians in general are concerned about food inflation and the cost of everything is going up, certainly we could do more for farmers.

Also, many of them are still waiting for the compensation committed to them when the new North American free trade agreement, CUSMA, was put in place and supply-managed quotas were given up. In these times when the world is concerned about food security and food inflation, giving farmers the benefit of an exemption from the carbon tax and giving them the compensation they are due would be important.

With regard to the part 3 limitations with respect to paying back amounts owing under the COVID programs, the Conservatives supported the measures that were needed to get through the pandemic. However, we see that a lot of the problems with them, such as the GIS problem experienced by those people who also collected the CERB, are still not fixed. I think the government could have done a much better job in addressing those, but wrapping up these programs and making a plan to exit the pandemic and restore the economy is key.

There is money included to make support payments for COVID tests. The Conservatives were calling for rapid tests for quite a long time but, as with everything, the government has been very slow to deliver. The issue I have now is that the World Health Organization is saying all these travel restrictions, measures and mandates at the borders are no longer meaningful because omicron is so transmissible. It is everywhere, and people who are vaccinated can get COVID. Although at the time we were calling for rapid tests, now

we are calling for the removal of these measures, especially at our borders, such as in Sarnia—Lambton, because they are really not doing anything to prevent the transmission and spread and are a burden and a barrier to trade and tourism, which are areas we want to see restored in the fall economic document. We want to get back to creating jobs and get tourism going, and these things will require the elimination of these mandates, which is what is being called for by the World Health Organization. We see many other countries and provinces dropping these measures, as is appropriate.

Part 7 talks about amendments to the Employment Insurance Act to address benefit periods for seasonal workers. While I think that is very good, I do not understand why some of the things we have been hearing about now for two years have not been addressed. An example is that people who were not quite ready to go on maternity benefits during the pandemic had to give up their jobs. We heard questions in the House this week on that issue. I would say that this issue is a priority.

The other thing that needs to be fixed is this: Federal mandates and mandates in other areas meant that people who would not take the vaccine were fired from their jobs and were not allowed to collect employment insurance.

• (1050)

This makes no sense at all. Under the employment insurance system, people pay a premium into it and they receive the benefit. The discrimination that prevented these people from collecting what they were qualified to receive from the system that they had paid into needed to be fixed.

Among other issues that we have seen, there is the discussion about the tax on vacant housing. We have heard members say that it is not the government's jurisdiction, but I would argue that it is not even going to work. The problem we are trying to fix is the affordable housing crisis in this country. That is simply a problem of supply and demand. Solutions that provide a minor amount of tax are really not going to drive the kind of behaviour we need to see.

In my own riding of Sarnia—Lambton, we have made quite a comprehensive plan, recognizing that we do not want to just tax vacant buildings but convert them into affordable housing. That is the kind of initiative that the government should be presenting and participating in with municipalities. If the measure the government put in place here was going to put a larger tax on vacancies and give that money back to the municipalities to address the affordable housing crisis in their ridings, that would have been far better.

In addition, the money is just not flowing fast enough. Certainly, we are coming along with our plan. We recognize that we have a lot of foreign students, so we need a residence built and we need some government support there. There are a number of issues that we could have addressed to deal with the supply.

The other thing is to keep foreign buyers out of the market. I have been speaking about this for two years. I know this aspect was raised at committee, and the government even had it in their platform. It just boggles the mind that it takes so long to put something in place that makes sense to all parties in the House.

The other reality we are concerned right now is food inflation. There are so many different factors at play, but one of them is the supply chain. We have certainly seen supply chain disruptions. I am concerned about the potential rail strike that we may see as early as in the next week or two, which will further disrupt the supply chain. This is going to be a big deal. Where is the government plan? We have distribution by rail and we have distribution by truck and we have distribution that comes through our ports, but there is really no comprehensive plan to protect and expand those distributions to impact on food security.

At the same time, in the middle of this pandemic, the government continues to increase the carbon tax. The carbon tax has done nothing to reduce our emissions in Canada. Emissions reductions in Canada have come from the technologies that we implemented and from actions we have taken to actually reduce the footprint. The carbon tax has done nothing but drive the price up for the people who could least afford it. I think it is obscene that the government is going to once again raise the price when we see people living on a fixed income and seniors being in such a tough spot.

When this bill came out, I expected that it would reflect some of the things that were in the fall economic statement, which started off by saying that it would protect our recovery by finishing the fight against COVID. Where is the plan from the government to finish the fight against COVID, to exit the pandemic and restore the economy? Let us get rid of these mandates. The World Health Organization is calling for it and other countries are doing it. We see the provinces returning to normal. We need to do the same. We need the government to take a role in putting forward a plan. Canadians are looking for that.

We have a lot of work to do to rebuild our economy and restore lost jobs. I, for one, would work together with all parties in this House to make that happen for a better Canada.

• (1055)

The Deputy Speaker: I know we are almost out of time. I thought we would switch over and come back later for five minutes of questions and answers with the hon. member.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

INDEPENDENCE DAY OF GHANA

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the people of Ghana as they celebrate the 65th anniversary of independence this Sunday. Like Canada, Ghana is a member of the Commonwealth. It was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve its independence from Britain and one of the first countries in Africa to establish diplomatic relations with Canada.

Statements by Members

Like Canada, Ghana is blessed with abundant human and natural resources. Like Canada, Ghana's nearly 33 million people are comprised of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups living in a stable and peaceful parliamentary democracy. Like Canada, its people take pride in their country's health care, economic growth and human development.

I invite the members of the House and all Canadians to join with the people of Ghana in celebrating Ghana's Independence Day this Sunday, March 6.

* * *

• (1100)

UKRAINE

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ukrainians have contributed immensely to the cultural, economic and social fabric of this nation and, in particular, to my constituency. Nearly 20% of my constituents are of Ukrainian heritage, over 35% in the city of Dauphin alone. My riding is home to Canada's National Ukrainian Festival and countless Ukrainian cultural and historical sites, but now the future of Ukraine and its people is under attack in the largest threat to peace in generations. President Putin has invaded their democratic nation. He is murdering innocent lives and he is attacking the territorial integrity of a democratic state.

I know that Ukrainian people are strong and united. They have experienced a history of devastating hardships and resilience, but history will also judge the free world for what we do. I stand with the nation of Ukraine. I stand with the people of Ukraine. This is a war between freedom and tyranny, and freedom will prevail.

Glory to Ukraine.

* * *

UKRAINE

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Ukraine is getting worse by the day. For over a week now, Ukrainians in Ukraine have been living in a war zone, fearing for their lives as missiles and bombs drop down on civilians.

[Translation]

Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine has turned into a humanitarian crisis and has put Europe in a more vulnerable position than ever since the Second World War.

[English]

Just last night, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant caught fire due to continuous Russian bombardment. Had an explosion occurred, its effects would have been 10 times worse than those of Chernobyl, but luckily the fire was extinguished early this morning.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

Canada and the rest of the world must keep working together to end this war as soon as possible. We must continue to support Ukrainians who are attempting to flee the country by offering them asylum and enabling them to come to Canada quickly and easily.

I am very happy that our government has shown military, humanitarian and economic leadership, and it will continue to do so to support Ukraine through this crisis.

[English]

The brave men and women fighting for their country at this very moment are an inspiration to us all. We stand with them.

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COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is cold out there. The generosity and community spirit of the Cowichan Valley was highlighted last weekend on the Coldest Night of the Year, a family-friendly winter walk in support of people experiencing hunger, hurt and homelessness.

On February 26, I joined with nearly 500 walkers in 67 different teams, headed out into a grey and dark afternoon, facing a steady and persistent cold rain. That cold rain and darkening sky was the ever-present reminder of what our homeless community faces on a regular basis. That night, \$90,718 was raised, blowing past their goal of \$50,000. These funds will go to the Canadian Mental Health Association's Cowichan Valley branch to create a safe space and programs for homeless youth in the Cowichan Valley, a service that is unfortunately needed now more than ever.

I also want to express my sincere thanks to the over 40 volunteers who were on hand to make for a well organized and fun evening.

* * *

● (1105)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, I had the great honour of being in Grand-Pré with our Minister of Official Languages to participate in announcing the introduction of Bill C-13, an act for the substantive equality of Canada's official languages. I do not think we could have picked a better place to make the announcement than Grand-Pré, which many people think of as the historical and spiritual heart of Acadia.

The act was last reformed over 30 years ago and must be modernized to better reflect Canada's linguistic realities and promote substantive equality between English and French while contributing to the vitality of official language minority communities.

This achievement was made possible thanks to the involvement of many actors and stakeholders who contributed to conversations about modernizing the act over many years. I want to thank them, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to get this important bill passed.

[English]

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Ukraine continues to be besieged and mothers and children flee to safety in other countries, it would be easy to suggest that they are alone. They are not. Canadians have always been passionate and compassionate when others desperately need their help. Now is no different.

Chris Profota from Weatherby Canada and the Canadian Shooting Arms and Ammunition Association have gracefully stepped up to help. The firearms and sport communities have recognized that Ukrainian children must not go without food, clothing and diapers, so they have donated for raffle many thousands of dollars and created a website to allow Canadians across the country to donate. One hundred per cent of all proceeds raised will go directly to feeding and clothing the children affected by the war.

Legal firearms owners are compassionate and they lead by example when others are in need. I thank Weatherby and CSAAA for their dedication. I urge everyone to donate, as able, #GunOwnersSupportingUkrainianKids.

Slava Ukraini.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 8 marks International Women's Day and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Canadian women in my community of Orléans, in this House and across Canada for their passion, dedication and contribution to our society.

This morning I had the privilege of celebrating this remarkable day at my annual women's day breakfast and I would like to thank OCCO Kitchen for welcoming us and providing its hospitality for this event. During this impassioned event, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with the leading women who have and will continue to impact the community of Orléans and our country.

At this year's ceremony, I had the honour of recognizing 31 exceptional women of all ages by awarding them with the Orléans Leading Women and Girls Recognition Award of 2022. Congratulations.

UKRAINE

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2018, Olena Yurchyshyn, a young Ukrainian student, passionate about learning and contributing to a democratic society, shadowed me here in Parliament as she completed her internship in my office. Since then, Olena would usually reach out to share her extraordinary accomplishments or to talk about her most recent travels. After four years, Olena's message has a different tone, one filled with fear and despair.

Today Olena pleads that parliamentarians and Canadians do everything we can to support a free and democratic Ukraine. Canada stands with Olena and all the people of Ukraine who deserve a future filled with hope and optimism.

[Translation]

The solidarity and generosity shown by Canada and its allies are strengthening the courage and spirit of the Ukrainian people.

I want all young Ukrainians to know that the world stands with Ukraine in this battle for their future.

[English]

Canada stands firm against terror and tyranny.

[Translation]

We will continue to take strong action to support Ukraine in the name of democracy, freedom and human rights.

Slava Ukraini.

[English]

B.C. FILM INDUSTRY

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the film industry in B.C. is demonstrating once again its job-creating power. The industry has plans to build dozens of new state-of-the-art stages across the province, and my riding of Langley—Aldergrove will be the beneficiary of a lot of that new investment, with a massive expansion of the Martini Film Studios. Just recently, it broke ground on a 33-acre campus that will employ 2,000 technicians and artists.

This is a good news story, of course, but all of this growth is putting a lot of strain on an already-strained workforce. I want to give a big shout-out to Gemma Martini and her team for providing the facilities free of charge to a provincially funded program that recently graduated 62 young people for the industry.

It is this type of entrepreneurial spirit that will ensure that Canada remains in the top three global destinations for the movie industry and, of course, metro Vancouver is number one in Canada.

• (1110)

ORDER OF CANADA

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Tuesday is International Women's Day, when we pay tribute not only to the amazing women in our communities but even

Statements by Members

more so to those on whose shoulders we stand. I rise today to pay tribute to such a woman: Dr. Elizabeth Betsy McGregor.

Betsy was recently appointed to the Order of Canada for her national and international championing of women in STEM and politics. Her tenacity, coaching and mentorship are the reasons that many women who have been elected to the House were successful.

She also founded the World Women's Veterinary Medical Association and was a founding architect of the APEC Women Leaders Network, among countless other achievements. As she is someone who has dedicated her life's work to lifting up other people, to opening doors and forging paths, and to putting words into real action, I want to congratulate my good friend, Dr. Betsy McGregor, on this well deserved honour.

VICTIMS OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Liberal government is demonstrating that victims of crime are a low priority for it. For the past half year, the position of victims ombudsman has remained vacant. The victims ombudsman is an integral resource for victims, including addressing their complaints and bringing forward recommendations on how to improve laws and programs to better support victims.

After half a year, the justice minister's statement that this position will be filled in due course is unacceptable. This, after all, is the same government that previously left this position vacant for nearly a year.

Victims deserve a voice and they deserve it now. It is time for the government to end this inexcusable delay and forthwith appoint a victims ombudsman.

UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY IN CAPE BRETON

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the turn of the 20th century, Cape Bretoners opened their hearts to a wave of Ukrainian immigrants. In the years since, the community has become a vital part of the fabric of our island.

On Saturday, my colleague and I attended mass at the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Parish where Whitney Pier's Ukrainian community has sought solace in dark times. Colleagues, I have been inspired by many Ukrainian Canadians, some in this House, but I think the most inspired I have been was with the words of Father Roman in his sermon about his faith and the challenges he has during these troubled times. His faith pushes him to learn and practise patience, tolerance and forgiveness, even to those who hurt his family, his community, his Ukraine.

Statements by Members

In pursuit of peace in this world, let us not forget the power of love and kindness. We pray with Father Roman, we stand with him and we stand with Ukraine.

Slava Ukraini.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report we cannot ignore. The evidence is clear. It tells us we are in a rapidly closing window for taking action to avoid climate catastrophe. Even with making best efforts now, the results of our previous inaction will cause serious harm to the ecosystems that sustain life on this planet.

I believe there is still hope because I hear from so many people in my riding about their personal commitment to change, yet however much heavy lifting individuals do, it will never be enough without concerted action by governments to avoid this disaster.

We in the House must not fail those we represent by allowing the federal government to slow-walk us over this cliff. We must end fossil fuel subsidies now and fund a rapid shift to renewable energy, and we must do so in a manner that prioritizes new, high-skill, family-supporting jobs.

It is time to act as we were in a climate emergency because it is a fact that we are. There is no more time for excuses and half measures. The clock is ticking.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SPORT

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the Beijing Paralympic Games begin today, I would like to draw the attention of Canada's Minister of Sport to a certain issue.

The Canadian Olympic Committee Athlete Excellence Fund offers performance-related awards to Olympic medalists: \$20,000 for gold, \$15,000 for silver and \$10,000 for bronze.

However, these awards are not offered to Paralympic athletes. How can it be that, in 2022, such talented athletes who are also competing in the Olympic arena are discriminated against on the basis of their disability?

I also want to take this opportunity to once again ask the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board to ensure that the Treasury Board's additional funding envelope for the Special Olympics Canada movement is maintained permanently at \$3.8 million.

After meeting with Quebec representatives of the organization, we know that investing in our communities through sport also makes a big difference to the overall health determinants and the quality of life of all athletes.

My message is simple. We need to invest more in sport so that everyone, with or without a disability, can have the means to pursue their dream and their passion through their sport.

* * *

● (1115)

[*English*]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 2022 summer tourism season is quickly approaching and international travellers are starting to make their vacation plans now, yet mandatory predeparture testing requirements continue to serve as a disincentive to visit our country.

In my riding of Niagara Falls, communities, businesses and workers depend on tourism. In Niagara alone, we have four international border crossings, which facilitate travellers and visitation into Niagara and Canada. Tourism is our largest industry locally. Before the pandemic, this sector employed 40,000 local workers and generated \$2.4 billion in tourism receipts alone.

COVID-19 and federal restrictions have had a devastating impact on tourism in Niagara. The Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable, border-area mayors and the federal government's own expert advisory panel have indicated that predeparture testing requirements are not needed.

When will this federal government end all COVID-19 restrictions and mandates? Where is the plan? Let us save the 2022 tourism season.

* * *

WELLESLEY VACCINATION CLINIC

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the incredible work done by volunteers and health care professionals at our Wellesley vaccination clinic. Throughout the pandemic, the people at this clinic have been tirelessly administering COVID-19 vaccines, prioritizing our small communities. They also took the time to visit the homes of older adults and priority populations to administer doses where people live. The Wellesley vaccination clinic has been so successful in Kitchener—Conestoga that it is no longer necessary and will be closing at the end of this week. This is a credit to our community stepping up to its part.

The Wellesley clinic has been crucial to the vaccine rollout in the Waterloo region, especially for our rural communities. I thank and appreciate Dr. Jennifer Jones, Tracy Crowther and all the volunteers and health care workers at the clinic for their amazing efforts.

The pandemic has made us realize the things we take for granted in life, not to mention life itself. Those at the Wellesley clinic helped save lives, and I thank them.

HEALTH

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has now been two years since the first set of COVID restrictions came into effect. Since then, we have seen an inconsistent patchwork of requirements, bans and restrictions that many Canadians feel have done more harm than good.

For example, a trucker in my riding who provided free services to assist during last year's floods now finds himself unemployed. Other constituents have been prevented from seeing dying family members. We have soldiers who are being kicked out of the armed forces during a time of heightened global conflict. I think this is a terrible idea.

At home, we have nurses being permanently terminated. This month, regulated health professionals are now deemed unfit to provide care for British Columbians despite having done so safely for the past two years. This is happening at a time when COVID has been on the decline and when the rest of the world is opening up.

It is time to end these restrictions, allow society to return to normalcy and begin healing the many non-virus wounds that this pandemic has created.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, Canadian families have a serious problem. This morning, Canadians woke up to the news that the price of gas is going up dramatically. Back home in my riding in Quebec City, gas is \$1.85 a litre. It is \$2 in British Columbia, and it keeps going up.

There is one thing the government can do to at least ease the burden for Canadians. Can the government commit to not increasing taxes on April 1?

• (1120)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I would, however, remind the House that our economy grew by 6.7% in the last quarter. Our economy is rebounding significantly, and we are there to deal with the challenges of inflation. I also want to note that other countries around the world, including the United States, have much higher inflation rates than Canada.

Our government knows how to manage our economy carefully and responsibly.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is rebounding this morning is not what the member just talked about, but the price of gas that all Canadians are facing this morning. I am sorry, but an increase of 40 cents in one month is not acceptable where I come from. The government continues to hide behind the numbers, whereas Canadians have to live with the reality every day. Transportation affects all sectors of the economy. Inflation will rise because of this.

Oral Questions

The question is quite simple: Will the government again commit to giving Canadian families a bit of breathing room by not moving forward with the tax hike scheduled for April 1, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's record is clear. We are there for the most vulnerable Canadians, we are there to support them. During the pandemic, the Conservatives were proposing austerity measures, but that is not what Canadians wanted.

We will ensure that our economy continues to grow. As I said earlier, the economy is doing well, and we will continue to do our job.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is really quite simple. This Liberal government plans to increase taxes on April 1. We are not talking about what is going on in the U.S. or about the inflation rate or the recovery or real GDP or who knows what. The reality is that taxes will increase on April 1. The reality is that the price of gas has gone up 40¢ to 50¢ in the past month.

Could the government at least commit to freezing the increase planned for April 1?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are here to support Canadians. We are here to support our seniors. We are here to support our families. We created the Canada child benefit and then increased it. Bill C-12 received royal assent this week, which will allow us to get more money out to seniors.

We are here for Canadians. The austerity that the Conservatives are proposing is the wrong approach.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, life under the Liberal government is quickly becoming unaffordable for Canadians. High inflation means that prices are going up twice as fast as wages. Middle-class Canadians are struggling to avoid falling into poverty. Seniors are also hurting. To make matters worse, the Prime Minister's tax hikes on everything from gasoline to home heating are scheduled to take effect on April 1.

How about showing a little empathy and maybe a little compassion to the millions of Canadians who are struggling to make ends meet because people can no longer afford to pay their bills? Will the government cancel all of these tax hikes on April 1?

Oral Questions

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member opposite that the federal carbon price is revenue-neutral. In fact, with the climate action incentive, families in the Prairies will get close to \$1,000 back. As the Governor of the Bank of Canada reminded us at the finance committee just this week, climate change itself is also causing inflation, something the Conservative Party should not ignore.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is cold comfort for Barrie—Innisfil residents, who this morning are paying 172.9¢ per litre for gasoline. Instead of helping Canadians, the Liberals are actually going to increase the carbon tax by 25%. Increasing taxes now means that out-of-control grocery prices will go higher.

The Liberals claim they are concerned about inflation, but their policies are making the problem much, much worse. Why are the Liberals implementing policies and tax hikes that are punishing Canadians and seniors at a time when they can least afford it? Will they cancel the tax increases on April 1, yes or no?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to remind the member again that the federal carbon price is revenue-neutral. I am also happy to remind the member that while our government is concerned about inflation, we also understand that this is a global phenomenon. We know that Canada's rate of inflation is lower than that of the United States and the U.K., and lower than the G7, G20 and OECD average. At the same time, we are taking efforts to address affordability, with measures on housing, measures on child care and measures for seniors. These are all measures that the Conservative Party, in fact, votes against.

* * *

• (1125)

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government can count on the Bloc Québécois when it comes to the war in Ukraine.

We worked together to extend Ukrainians' work and study permits. Let us work together again to help the families who are fleeing the war come to Canada. I commend the government for creating the authorization for emergency travel. However, the problem is that it is going to take two weeks to set up, and two weeks is an eternity in times of war.

Given the circumstances, the least we can do is to ensure that, as of day one, there will be planes there to transport families. Will the minister launch a large-scale airlift operation?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, President Putin's war on Ukraine is a war on freedom, democracy and the rights of all Ukrainians.

For over a month, we have been prioritizing applications for permanent or temporary residence from Ukrainians who wish to come to Canada, as well as applications from Ukrainians who are currently in Canada on a temporary basis and wish to extend their stay.

Yesterday, we announced new measures that will help Ukrainians who are fleeing the war to come—

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. minister.

[English]

Our audio from the minister is pretty bad. I do not know whether it is because of where the boom is placed.

I am going to let the minister back up and finish up the answer and hopefully it will be better.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, to conclude, I thank the Bloc for its co-operation and I look forward to continuing our work together to advance solutions that will not just allow people to come, but facilitate their entry into Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Europe expects the number of people fleeing Ukraine to reach seven million. Yes, I said seven million.

The government has no choice but to be ready in two weeks when its new measures come into force. It must implement a historic airlift operation by chartering as many planes as possible. If not, the worthwhile measures that it just announced will not have any impact. If not, millions of people who are over there, half of whom are children, will remain trapped in refugee camps.

Will the minister deploy a large-scale airlift operation?

[English]

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to that question, I think it is very important to say that we have taken unprecedented measures to fast-track all immigration measures over the last several weeks and have announced increased measures, which will take place within the next two weeks, to ensure that Canada does its responsible activity in ensuring that all Ukrainians have the chance to have a new life in another country. Right now there is also a refugee crisis, and Canada will do its part and more than its part to ensure that refugees find safety in our world.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 60% of Canadians say they are struggling to feed themselves and their families. Under the Liberals, the ultrarich are thriving while Canadians feel abandoned. While people are forced to pay more for food, CEOs of huge grocery chains and other big box stores like Walmart and Canadian Tire are making billions in profit during the pandemic, but the Liberals have repeatedly refused to make the ultrarich pay their fair share.

When will the government stop protecting corporate profit and start standing up for Canadians?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we care deeply about the issues of affordability, and we also want to make sure that organizations pay their fair share. We have made commitments as such.

With regard to affordability, I will remind the member that we lowered taxes on the middle class while increasing them on the top 1%. We created the CCB, which lifted 435,000 children out of poverty. In fact, we implemented a comprehensive poverty strategy that lifted 1.3 million Canadians out of poverty.

We are going to continue working with the party opposite and the member opposite to make sure that affordability is top of mind, because it is a priority for our government.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Afghans were in refugee camps in Ukraine. Now, they are now forced to flee their second humanitarian crisis as Putin invades the country. Kamila Safi walked hours to the border less than 48 hours after she gave birth. Her family was rejected six times trying to leave Ukraine at the Slovakia-Poland border. They faced racial discrimination. Their application to seek refuge in Canada did not even get a response from the government. Their situation is not unique.

Will the Liberals help resettle Afghans and other visible minorities fleeing Putin's war?

• (1130)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and I would share that it is completely unacceptable and egregious that anyone fleeing war would be discriminated against on the basis of the colour of their skin or their country of origin. We have, to date, already resettled a number of Afghan refugees who transited through Ukraine. To the extent that there are individual case files, of course the timelines can differ depending on the complexity of those cases, but we are working to make good on our commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees regardless of which country they transit through, because we have stated that publicly. We will not go back until we have completed our effort successfully.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ivana fled Ukraine following the Russian invasion. She hid in Bulgaria and was trying to reunite with her husband in Vancouver. She applied for a visitor visa, but was refused because IR-CC was not satisfied that she would return to Ukraine. Ivana's story is not unique. I am hearing that people who are calling the hotline or applying for visas are getting stuck in the same Liberal-made bureaucratic mess Afghan refugees are facing. Around the world, 140 countries have lifted visa requirements.

Why are the Liberals ignoring Ukrainian Canadians and the calls of oppositions MPs to implement visa-free travel for Ukrainians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and his conversations with me over the past number of days. The reality is that we have announced a program that is going to allow the fastest and safest way for people to resettle in Canada. With respect to the timelines that people are operating under, I would point out that as of today, there are already 6,265 Ukrainian nationals who have arrived in Canada since the beginning of January. We started moving the moment we knew there was a potential influx of newcomers who would be seeking to come to Canada fleeing Putin's war. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure we process people efficiently and take down the barriers that may lead to an unjust refusal.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the government did not cancel the northern gateway and energy east pipelines, and had stood up for the Keystone XL to be built, Canada would be oil self-sufficient. Regulatory delays, excessive taxes and costs have LNG projects struggling and partners selling out. Canada could be entirely natural gas self-sufficient if the government would just get out of the way. With the completion of these projects, Canada would be in a position to supply the world with clean, ethically produced energy.

How is the government going to fix its regulatory systems to help the world reduce its dependence on Russian energy?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current situation in Ukraine underscores the importance of energy security for our allies in Europe and across the world. Building more pipelines to increase oil and gas capacity would take a number of years and would not address the current crisis in the Ukraine. The real solution is to quickly deploy renewables and clean tech to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas now and into the future. I would direct the member opposite's attention to the independent International Energy Agency's 10-point plan, which specifically points to renewables as a solution.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary says that building pipelines takes too long. That has been our point for a very long time. Let us speed up that process and let us put in place these measures for the long term. Europe's reliance on Russian gas has constrained its ability to sanction Russia. Some European countries are less dependent on Russian gas, but rely heavily on coal. Europe needs energy. Canadian natural gas is safer than Russian gas, and it is cleaner than coal.

Oral Questions

When will the government realize the need to significantly increase energy exports to Europe and put in place the measures to ensure that going forward?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to direct the member opposite to the International Energy Agency's actual report. It has a 10-point plan to reduce the European Union's reliance on Russian natural gas. It points to renewables. It points to wind and solar. It points to many solutions that it has made and that it is working on. Renewables are a part of the solution to the energy security issue in Europe.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it needs to be all of the above and Canada needs to get in the energy export game to Europe.

Many Ukrainian Canadian organizations are doing incredible work confronting the humanitarian crisis in the Ukraine. The government's matching program only applies to the Red Cross. We have seen previously how, such as in the case of Lebanon, the government's matching program excludes Canadian charities with strong, on-the-ground experience. This is a missed opportunity for those charities.

Will the government expand and broaden its matching program to at least include established organizations, such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all thank the Ukrainian Canadian Congress for the incredible work it is doing. I would note that the \$10-million matching fund program for the Canadian Red Cross is just one part of what we are providing. There is also \$50 million in humanitarian aid already announced, plus the UN flash appeal of \$100 million, where Canada is leading the world in terms of what we are providing. This is going to provide support for displaced populations with essential life-saving services such as shelter, water, sanitation and food. We are doing our part and we will continue to do that.

* * *

● (1135)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when asked in question period about the Russian navy's 40 armed nuclear-powered icebreakers roaming the Arctic, the defence minister said basically not to worry about Canadian sovereignty because here we "have the Coast Guard working for us."

Now, does the Minister of National Defence realize that our Coast Guard, as good as it is, is a civilian service and does not have armed naval vessels? I am pretty sure the Russian navy is aware of that.

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's sovereignty in the

Arctic is long-standing and well-established. We are making landmark investments to increase our ability to operate in the Arctic, including conducting joint exercises in the Arctic, purchasing six Arctic offshore patrol ships and enhancing surveillance and intelligence capability in the Arctic.

We will remain firm and unwavering in defending Canada's sovereignty, the people and the communities in the north, and our national interests.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, windmills and fairy tales have not gotten Germany and other countries off of Russian oil. The government is doing nothing.

Russia sits on the executive of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, which governs what we can catch internationally, including in the Grand Banks off of Newfoundland. It is a multilateral forum that we all abide by. Yesterday at the fisheries committee, my motion to have Russia removed from that executive was unanimously approved.

Since Russia no longer abides by the international rules of order, will the government lead the charge to expel Russia from the executive of NAFO?

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Russia's war on Ukraine is a war on freedom, democracy and the rights of Ukrainians. This aggression will not go unpunished. Earlier this week, our government announced a ban on all Russian-owned or registered ships and fishing vessels from docking in Canadian waters.

I am aware of the motion the member opposite brought before the DFO committee. Yesterday, Russia stepped down as the chair of NAFO. We are examining this issue closely and will always stand with the people of Ukraine against Russian aggression.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even now, new moms who were let go from their jobs while on parental leave cannot collect employment insurance.

When these women, who have just started their families, lose their income, Ottawa abandons them. The federal government has been refusing to fix this injustice for years. Six women took the government to court and won. Instead of fixing the problem, Ottawa appealed the decision. These are young mothers who have lost their jobs, and the government is dragging them to court.

Why not help them instead?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know it is very hard for women who do not have access to employment insurance.

The Social Security Tribunal is an independent tribunal, and it made a decision. The Canada Employment Insurance Commission, which is also independent, opted to appeal the decision.

None of that changes our government's commitment and our focus on modernizing and adapting the EI system to the realities of the 20th century.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the moment, it just looks cheap.

The minister cannot hide behind the commission. It is up to Parliament to amend legislation, as the commission itself pointed out. It is entirely the minister's responsibility.

There are exceptions to the law that allow people claiming EI to calculate their income over two years rather than 52 weeks. People who cannot work because they are sick, injured or incarcerated are entitled to this.

Why are new mothers who have lost their jobs not entitled to the same thing? It seems pretty simple to me.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the situation these mothers are in. It is very difficult. This is my motivation for changing the EI system. We can absolutely do better.

• (1140)

[English]

The system simply has not kept up with the way Canadians work, which is why we are spending so much time and effort on our modernization efforts for EI. We have heard from many mothers in this situation, and we are working to make things better, more equitable and fairer for women and for all workers in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past few days, the cost of gas in Rivi re-du-Loup has been more than \$1.85 a litre. The cost of groceries will jump by more than \$1,000 over the next year. That has been announced.

This year, costs are spiking everywhere, and I am talking about just those two things. I am not even talking about housing. With the \$500-billion deficit that the government added to our country's debt, inflation just keeps on climbing.

When will the government start to address inflation?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr.

Oral Questions

Speaker, we know that there is inflationary pressure everywhere in the world right now.

Our government is there to support vulnerable Canadians. We are there with programs to help everyone, including seniors and families.

My colleague across the way, a member from Quebec, should know very well that we are also dealing with a global climate crisis, and we have to make sure we protect the environment.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "Newfoundland gas prices to skyrocket Friday." "Windsor housing costs reach new heights in February." "Farmers concerned as cost of production soars." "A second mortgage: Record gas prices strain consumers struggling with the rising cost of living." "Inflation rates continue to jack up the cost of living."

These are the headlines in Canada today. They are a result of failed Liberal policies over the last six years. Things are getting harder for Canadians. What is the government's plan to tackle the cost of living and the out-of-reach increases in inflation?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives often accuse us of over-investing in Canadians, but I will remind the member opposite that in the last election the Conservatives actually promised to spend more than what our government is actually investing. At the same time, their promised policies were assessed by experts and were noted to under-deliver on housing, under-deliver on climate change and under-deliver on child care.

We have renewed the inflation target of 2% with the Bank of Canada, and we will continue to focus on affordability for Canadian families going forward.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that response was completely out of touch with what Canadians are going through.

The last time Canadians saw inflation surpass 5%, they were hearing the word "Internet" for the first time. Our finance minister continues to ignore and only compare Canada with others to justify Canada's inflation. Other countries in the G7, including the U.S., Germany and the United Kingdom, acknowledge their high inflation and have announced various plans to tackle inflation in their countries.

When will the Minister of Finance announce her plans on how she will tackle inflation in Canada?

Oral Questions

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that inflation is in fact a global phenomenon, and anything that affects affordability is important to our government. We know that while inflation in Canada is at 5.1%, it is lower than the U.K.'s, lower than the U.S.'s and lower than the G7 average, as well as that of the G20 and the OECD.

Our government is taking measures to make life more affordable. That includes cutting taxes for the middle class. That includes the CCB, which has lifted 435,000 children out of poverty. It includes making tuition more affordable. It includes increasing the OAS and GIS, and indexing those to inflation for seniors. These are all measures that the Conservatives have voted against. If they care about affordability—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, \$2 a litre: for the first time ever in Vancouver, that is the price of regular gas. We know what happens when gas goes up. The price of everything goes up. It is what happens any time the government rolls out its policies. Whether it is its anti-energy obsession or its reckless fiscal plans, the result is the same. Canadians pay more.

Will the government admit that it is the problem, or will it simply brush it aside and say that it is “Justinflation”?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, inflation is a problem, and our government is focused on making life more affordable for Canadians.

With regard to that particular question, I must remind that member that the carbon price is revenue-neutral. We have rolled out the climate action incentive, and the fact is that climate change also causes inflation. We need to make sure that we continue to make life more affordable but that we also take meaningful action on climate change, which is something that the Conservative Party is not willing to do.

* * *

● (1145)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Infrastructure Bank is broken. Liberals know it. Canadians know it. Everybody knows it. However, the IPCC report is clear: The window to secure a livable future is rapidly closing. We must act now.

We need to shift from diesel to green energy across the north. We need infrastructure support to fight forest fires. We need all-weather roads, as melting is leaving indigenous and northern communities stranded. We need a climate change mitigation strategy now.

My climate bill would do exactly that by making the Infrastructure Bank work to tackle the climate crisis. Will the Liberals stand with indigenous and northern communities fighting climate change? Will they support this bill?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that every dollar spent on infrastructure is an investment in our communities and it is an investment to fight climate change. When it comes to the Canada Infrastructure Bank, this bank has received over \$6.7 billion in private and institutional investments. Those investments are going to go a long way to ensure that we are building the type of infrastructure that is truly transformational, addresses climate change and creates an economy for the future.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Gordie Howe bridge being built in my riding of Windsor West offers huge potential for the creation of good Canadian jobs and a boost to our economy. However, the government is considering using foreign steel for two parts of this project, despite promises that Canadian steel would be the priority.

Instead of creating Canadian jobs, it is unconscionable that the Liberals would consider using sources with poor environmental records, poor human rights records and trade barriers to Canadian steel. Why will the government not keep its promise to use Canadian steel and create jobs for Canadian workers and their families, especially since Canadian taxpayers and families are paying for the entire project?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to infrastructure, of course we are always going to focus on the ability to create good Canadian jobs here at home. As I said previously, every dollar invested in infrastructure in this country is an investment in our economic growth, an investment in our communities and an investment for workers and Canadians right here. That is our focus. That has been our focus since day one and we will continue to do so.

* * *

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 8 is International Women's Day, a time to celebrate women's and girls' achievements and crucial contributions to our society. International Women's Day is also a moment to raise awareness of the progress made toward gender equality and to look to the work that remains to be done for the equality of all women in Canada and abroad.

Can the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth comment on the importance of International Women's Day?

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next Tuesday, Canada joins the world in celebrating International Women's Day. This year's theme is "Women Inspiring Women".

Everywhere and in every area of our communities, women inspire us with their leadership and contributions to the fabric of our country, but inequalities abound and impact women the most. It is why International Women's Day is also a call to action, a push for all of us to create real change. That means working to eliminate gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and reducing the cost of child care.

It is also a time to reflect on trailblazers like Michaëlle Jean and Roberta Bondar. We thank them for paving the way and lifting as they rose.

The House will not be in session next week, so I will take the opportunity now to say happy International Women's Day.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, I spoke with a local business owner in Bancroft. Just like thousands of others in my riding, he had received his heating bill and was dumbfounded at what he saw. His bill had doubled over the previous month.

Owning and operating a business is 24-7. The government's policy of taxation on top of taxation is gouging rural Canadians. Many business owners and families are mere months away from bankruptcy. When will the government commit to stopping the planned tax increase on April 1?

• (1150)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the success of small businesses. I will remind that member that carbon pricing is revenue neutral federally. I will also remind that member that our government has had business owners' backs throughout the greatest economic shut-off that we have had since the Second World War. That is why there are actually more businesses operating today than there were before the pandemic even started.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I spoke with Scaletta Haulage, a small company in Tweed that hauls mostly agricultural products. They are close to a point where they will have to park their trucks because the cost of fuel is hitting them too hard. Last month, it was \$12,000 to fuel two trucks. This month, it was \$25,000 to fuel those same two trucks.

They wonder: Does the government really not care about the little guys keeping this country moving?

When will the government stop blaming others, take some ownership and present a plan for Canadians?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take supporting small businesses seriously. I would remind the

Oral Questions

member opposite that it was our government that lowered small business taxes from 11% to 9%. We have listened closely to businesses during the pandemic to make sure we had a suite of measures in place.

In fact, we focused on a health-based recovery. That has actually helped us have an economic-based recovery. Even though we lost three million jobs during the depths of the recession, we have now recovered 101% of that, while the United States has only recovered 87%.

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[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are not second-class citizens. The lack of cell coverage is unfathomable. The gap between rural and urban Canadians continues to widen.

The Prime Minister did not address this issue in his mandate letters for the Minister of Rural Economic Development, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry or even the Minister of Public Safety, which shows just how disconnected the government is from rural Canadians.

This is an issue not only in terms of fairness but also in terms of public safety. When will the government step up and show some real leadership on this issue?

[English]

Hon. Gудie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government does understand rural Canada. Since I have been appointed minister, I have done 37 round tables all throughout the country. The number one issue I hear is connectivity. We know that connectivity with reliable, affordable, high-speed Internet is the number one thing to build back better in rural Canada. We need it for keeping in touch, for kids doing homework and for our businesses, and, frankly, we are getting it done.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituent Darren sent me the following message on how inflation is affecting his life. He said, "With payments, registration, repairs and fuel to drive to work there isn't much motivation to keep working. Then the government takes two thirds of my income for income taxes, CPP, EI and carbon tax. I will have to soon borrow money to be able to stay working."

When will the Liberal government start listening to Canadians and stop these continual tax increases?

Oral Questions

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been focused on affordability issues and issues around inflation. Since taking office, in fact, it was our government that implemented a thorough poverty strategy that lifted 1.3 million Canadians out of poverty.

We are investing in programs like child care, which is going to lower the cost of child care in B.C. by 50% by the end of this year. We are investing in the national housing strategy to make sure people can afford a place to live. These are all measures the Conservatives are not supporting, but that we are going to get done.

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[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, weir fishing is a precious part of Charlevoix's intangible heritage. Quebec's only two capelin fishers still practise this ancestral skill.

In the St. Lawrence estuary, capelin season starts in early April, but because Ottawa does not make any distinction between our two traditional fishers and those in Newfoundland, 2,000 kilometres to the north, our fishers are prohibited from fishing before the end of May or early June. The problem is that by the end of May, there is no capelin left in the St. Lawrence.

If the season is not moved up for our two fishers, this national tradition will disappear. Will the minister authorize weir fishers to fish for capelin in Charlevoix starting April 1?

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question and will take her comments into consideration.

We use the best scientific data available, in consultation with the industry, to determine the opening dates for all of our fishing seasons. I know how important the fisheries are to our coastal communities, and I will work with the fishers to ensure they can remain economically sustainable in the long term.

• (1155)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a world of difference between the Newfoundland fishers, who catch 9,000 tonnes of capelin a year, and our two traditional fishers, who catch less than 50. However, Ottawa puts them all in the same boat.

Our two remaining weir capelin fishers have never been consulted or invited to participate in the scientific consultation about the start of their fishing season. They must be included in the decision-making process. In the meantime, will the minister immediately grant them special authorization to begin fishing on April 1?

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I already stated, we use the best scientific data. We are holding consultations with the industry all along the east and west coasts and in the Arctic. That is a very clear rule.

We will establish the opening dates based on science and the scientists we will be consulting. Fishing will be equitable—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite some of the highest vaccination rates in the world, the federal government refuses to remove its travel mandates. Canadians returning home from the U.S. at land border crossings without a COVID test result could be fined \$5,000.

Yesterday, 15 border mayors called for an end to the testing requirements. Many European countries and Canadian provinces have already ditched their mandates. Canada's chief medical officer of health said that we need to empower people to make the best choices to protect themselves.

Can the health minister tell the House what information he has that other jurisdictions already returning to normal do not?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to answer that question.

As the member may know, I come from the wonderful Quebec City. I am very proud of the strong workers, people and partners working for my tourism industry. I understand it is also an important industry for the member. I look forward to further measures, but I would also point out that on Monday, just a few days ago, we announced important measures that are going to protect workers and travellers and invest in our tourism industry.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tourism is vital to the economy in northwestern Ontario, with the vast majority of visitors being Americans who cross at the land border. Unfortunately, the government's current COVID testing requirements mean that many of the regular visitors are once again going to choose to stay home this season.

When is this government going to do the right thing and put an end to the arbitrary and unscientific testing requirements for vaccinated travellers at our land border crossings?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am obviously very pleased to hear one more colleague who cares about the industry of tourism. I do as well, as I just said. That is why we are working to protect both the health and safety of workers and travellers, but also to make sure that our tourism industry can thrive. We know how hard it has been for workers and small businesses over the last 23 months, and that is why we look forward to further investing and further supporting our tourism industry.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ontario has announced that it is dropping its vaccination policies as of April 4, and public servants will be returning to work in person. I keep hearing from my constituents how exhausted and frustrated they are with these mandates, and that they just want their lives to get back to normal.

When will this government follow the example of Ontario and finally restore the freedom of Canadians by removing these unscientific and undemocratic federal vaccine mandates?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 1.1 million is the number that a recent Harvard study told us would have been the additional number of people dying in the United States without vaccination. In Canada, it is about 400,000 people who would have died in 2021 if, first, we did not have vaccination, and second, we did not have strong public health measures. Fortunately, we were not there, and fortunately we are elsewhere today because of the hard work and hard commitment of vaccinators and all the 30 million-plus Canadians who got vaccinated.

* * *

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Official Languages Act enshrines the official language rights of all Canadians, but it needs to be stronger to really protect those rights.

Would the Minister of Official Languages please tell the House if the government's modernization of the Official Languages Act includes provisions to make it stronger and more effective?

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Yukon for standing up for official language rights.

Our modernized act will strengthen the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages, including new authority to impose monetary penalties. In addition, for the first time, we are centralizing coordination of the act with a single minister who will have access to the resources of a central agency.

Canadians told us these measures were needed. I am proud to say we have taken action.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I visited with a federal corrections officer who just

lost his job because he refused to reveal his COVID-19 vaccination status. His hope is to be rehired at the Prince Albert penitentiary without loss of seniority and pay grade.

With COVID-19 mandates now being lifted in Saskatchewan and other provinces, could the minister please inform Parliament when all mandates for all federal employees will be lifted?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, I am very pleased to report to this chamber that corrections officers have taken up vaccinations at a very high rate. That is clearly a reflection of their belief, as it is the government's, that the best way to get out of the pandemic is to become vaccinated.

We will continue to follow all of the evidence and science that has allowed us to make this progress. Obviously, we want to thank the corrections officers for their work on the front lines.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently spoke with a veteran named Nicole. Day after day for many years, she was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. Nicole was medically discharged from the military after developing PTSD after being sexually assaulted. Caseworkers at Veterans Affairs Canada are overworked, and so much so that calls often cannot be returned, like Nicole's. Nicole's story is a sad one, but it is a common one.

Will the minister stop talking about historic investments and tell Nicole when she will get a call back?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government places the highest priority on ensuring that veterans and their families have the support and services they need when they need them. We have increased funding for case management services and have hired over 400 caseworkers since we formed government. We also have improved the tools and processes to reduce administration, allowing frontline staff to spend more time in directing services to veterans and their families.

If my colleague wants to have a conversation aside about the individual, we can follow up on that individual as well. However, I can assure him that our government has been focused on veterans and we will continue to do the work that we need to do to support our veterans and their families.

*Points of Order***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I met with Ukrainian leaders in Oshawa who are mobilizing to help anywhere and everywhere they can to bring humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but also to help their family members and friends come to Canada for refuge. Our government needs to do more to facilitate a speedier, safer pathway for Ukrainians to come to Canada.

Oshawa is asking what the government is going to do to allow Ukrainians to come to Canada visa-free today. Time is of the essence. Lives depend on it.

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his concern for the well-being of Ukrainians seeking to come to Canada. I am pleased to share that we started working on this important file in mid-January, and since the beginning of this year, there are now 6,265 Ukrainians who have already arrived in Canada. We are going to continue to prioritize any applications from Ukrainian nationals, and just yesterday, I announced a new pathway that will make it easier, in the fastest and safest way possible, for more Ukrainians to get here as quickly as possible.

We will leave no stone unturned and Canada will be there to welcome Ukrainians fleeing this unnecessary and costly war of aggression.

* * *

• (1205)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, broadband connectivity plays such an important role in the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Our government has committed historic amounts of investment toward improving connectivity across the country, yet 60,000 households throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are still struggling without reliable high-speed Internet.

Could the Minister of Rural Economic Development provide an update to the House on the government's progress in delivering high-speed Internet to my province of Newfoundland and Labrador and across the country?

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to collaborate with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to invest up to \$136 million to connect rural and remote communities throughout the province. It is joining the governments of Quebec, Ontario and Alberta as the fourth provincial government to sign agreements with us to deliver our goals faster. These investments are going to make all the difference in the world for kids doing their homework, for businesses accessing new markets and, frankly, for keeping in touch. We have a plan to connect all Canadians and it is working.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a ship-breaking facility has opened up in the community of Union Bay in my riding. This process involves the disassembling of large vessels, container ships and barges for the extraction of raw materi-

als, mostly for scrap. The lack of federal regulations to protect workers and the ecosystem is apparent and has caused huge concern for local residents, governments and first nations. While the U.S., the EU and other countries have signed on to international agreements, Canada is without these necessary protections.

Will the Minister of Transport commit to ensuring that facilities like these have strong standards in place to keep workers and the local environment safe?

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken a number of steps to make sure that our oceans and waterways are safe, including the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act. The International Maritime Organization has adopted the Hong Kong convention, which aims to create new requirements for the disposing and recycling of ships. Although the convention is not yet in force, Transport Canada is currently analyzing it in the context of strengthening federal regulations, labour and environmental protection and areas related to provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like me, you saw that there were technical difficulties when the minister was answering my first question.

I ask leave to repeat my question so that the minister has a chance to respond.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the member to repeat her question?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, the government can count on the Bloc Québécois when it comes to the war in Ukraine. We worked together to extend Ukrainians' work and study permits.

Let us work together to help the families who are fleeing the war come to Canada. I commend the government for creating the authorization for emergency travel. However, the problem is that it is going to take two weeks to set up, and two weeks is an eternity in times of war.

Given the circumstances, the least we can do is to ensure that, as of day one, there will be planes there to transport families.

Will the minister launch a large-scale airlift operation?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member, my Bloc Québécois counterpart, for her question and particularly for her co-operation on the Ukraine file.

We are prioritizing applications from Ukrainians. More than 6,200 Ukrainians have arrived in Canada since January. Yesterday, I announced new measures that will make it faster, easier and safer for Ukrainians to come to Canada.

I will continue working with my colleagues to facilitate the arrival in Canada of as many Ukrainians as possible.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, my point of order arises out of question period. Repeatedly today we heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance state that the carbon tax is revenue neutral. With the House's permission, I would like to table pages 17 and 18 of the most recent "Public Accounts of Canada", volume I, that showed GST collected under the carbon tax was almost a quarter of a billion dollars, and then an extra \$98 million taken from the carbon tax was distributed, so it is not carbon neutral.

• (1210)

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the hon. member's request to table the document. All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, my point order comes out of question period as well. I raised this point of order with one of your counterparts a few days ago and I still have not received a response.

When the Conservatives talk about inflation, they continue to use language that directly references the Prime Minister's first name. What we know is that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly, and it is very clear that they are trying to use his first name.

I would ask that either the Speaker rule on this now or return to the House with a ruling at a later date.

The Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has previously said that this term should not be used, so there has been a ruling on it already. I hope that satisfies that point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order arising out of question period. The Minister of Fisheries said that the Russian Federation is no longer the chair of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization. Its website still lists it as the chair and it is still listed on the commission.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member, but that sounds like debate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, entitled "Supplementary Estimates (C), 2021-22".

Routine Proceedings

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled "Supplementary Estimates (C), 2021-22".

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled "Desecration of Monuments Honouring Veterans".

INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports from the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

The first report is entitled "Proposed Acquisition of Shaw Communications by Rogers Communications: Better Together?".

The second report is entitled "Affordability and Accessibility of Telecommunications Services in Canada: Encouraging Competition to (Finally) Bridge the Digital Divide".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these two reports.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES ACT

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-258, An Act to amend the Fisheries Act (closed containment aquaculture).

She said: Mr. Speaker, British Columbians understand that wild Pacific salmon are facing an emergency, one that threatens first nations, coastal communities, commercial fishers, recreational anglers and the entire ecosystem that relies on wild salmon. I am bringing forward this bill to ensure that Canada is protecting wild Pacific salmon and creating a real plan to move away from harmful open-net pen fish farming. This bill calls upon the minister as well to develop a transition plan, a plan that recognizes that workers cannot be left behind during the transition to a more sustainable economy.

Routine Proceedings

I am proud to follow in the footsteps of members of this House, including the member for Courtenay—Alberni and the former member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, Fin Donnelly, who have previously championed this legislation.

With the support of all members of this House, we can protect wild Pacific salmon and become leaders in closed containment aquaculture.

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

* * *

• (1215)

PETITIONS

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people concerned about Canadian companies that build in other places but contribute to human rights abuses and environmental damage in those places. They are calling on the House of Commons to adopt human rights and environmental due diligence legislation to make sure that companies properly protect human rights and the environment, that there are appropriate consequences for not doing so and that there is a legal right for people who have been harmed to seek justice in Canadian courts.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present an important petition, e-petition 3573, calling upon the Government of Canada to support freedom, democracy and human rights in Cuba. This petition was initiated by a local constituent in my riding of Niagara Falls, and it is an honour for me, as its sponsor, to present it here today.

CANADA POST

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present e-petition 3784, with over 1,700 signatures from constituents in my riding of Yellowhead. The petitioners are calling on the government to appeal to Canada Post to rescind its mandated vaccination practices and allow all employees affected to be able to return to work without prejudice.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise and table this petition on behalf of residents of Courtenay, Cumberland, Bowser and Royston in my riding. They are citing that 83% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders are volunteers. In addition, 8,000 essential search and rescue volunteers respond to thousands of incidents every year.

The tax code of Canada currently allows volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers to claim a \$3,000 tax credit if 200 hours of volunteer services were completed in a calendar year. This works out to a mere \$450 a year. They are calling on the government to increase the tax exemption from \$3,000 to \$10,000 to help essential firefighters and volunteer search and rescue people across this country. They are calling for the support of Bill C-201.

It is timely, because the PBO just released a report this week to cite that this would cost taxpayers in Canada \$40 million for 42,000 volunteer firefighters and first responders.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition this afternoon from neighbours of mine in Kitchener. They too are concerned about companies across the country that are contributing to human rights abuses and environmental damage around the world.

They call on this House to adopt human rights and environmental due diligence legislation that would, among other items, require companies to prevent adverse human rights impacts and environmental damage throughout their global operations in the supply chains, require companies to do their due diligence and result in meaningful consequences for companies that failed to do so.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a clear matter of international law that prisoners of war should be released when hostilities end. Petitioners in this case are following up on the terrible 44-day war in the Nagorno-Karabakh, or the Republic of Artsakh, noting the fact that there are still, today, Armenian prisoners of war who are detained by Azeri authorities. Various reports, including by Human Rights Watch, have detailed the deplorable conditions facing these prisoners of war.

The petitioners condemn this ongoing, illegal detention of prisoners of war and call on the Government of Canada to do all it can to advocate for the release of these captives, condemn the ongoing incitement to violence, denounce the aggressive rhetoric from Turkey and Azerbaijan, and provide humanitarian assistance to those who have been affected by this conflict.

FIREARMS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am tabling today deals with the important issue of firearms rights and firearms owners in my riding.

The petitioners are objecting to the backdoor gun registry that the government was working on with respect to Bill C-71 from a previous Parliament. They are very opposed to the government's approach with respect to targeting responsible firearms owners rather than targeting the gun smugglers and distributors of illegal guns who are, in fact, the real cause of gun crime in this country.

HAZARAS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am tabling is with respect to the situation of the Hazara community in Afghanistan. This is a minority community that was very hard pressed even prior to the Taliban takeover, and their situation has obviously become much worse. Many Canadians are concerned about the failure of the government to move quickly in helping Hazaras, other minorities and vulnerable Afghans leave in the context of the Taliban takeover.

The petitioners want to see the government recognize in particular past genocides of the Hazaras as acts of genocide, and also to designate September 25 as Hazara genocide memorial day.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. There is a great deal of concern about the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia, in particular, the situation in the Tigray Region. The petitioners call for a stronger response from Canada, a stronger international response.

There are some elements that the petitioners are asking for that, at this point, are out of date, but the conflict continues to be a source of concern for parliamentarians as well as the petitioners. The need is there for greater government awareness of an intervention in support of human rights in Ethiopia.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am tabling calls on the government to finally do something that the House of Commons did a year ago, and that is to recognize that Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China have been and are being subject to an ongoing genocide.

The petitioners note, in particular, the use of forced sterilization and abortion as being contraventions of the genocide convention provisions around preventing births within a group. There is evidence to suggest that not just one but all aspects of the genocide convention have been contravened by the actions of the Chinese Communist Party. The Government of Canada has an obligation in these cases, as a party of the genocide convention, not to wait for someone else's determination but to look at the facts and to respond accordingly. The petitioners want to see the government formally recognize this genocide and also to use the Magnitsky act, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, to sanction those responsible for this heinous crime.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am tabling is in support of Bill S-223, a Senate bill that has now passed the Senate unanimously and is here before the House.

The petitioners want to see this bill passed to make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ that has been trafficked or taken without the consent of the person involved and, also, to support provisions in the bill that would create a mechanism by which someone could be deemed inadmissible to Canada

Routine Proceedings

as a result of their involvement in forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

● (1220)

This bill has been before the House and the other place in various forms for about 15 years now. Everybody agrees. It has passed unanimously multiple times. It is time for this Parliament be the one to get a bill against organ harvesting and trafficking into law.

● (1225)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the final petition I will be tabling today is with respect to the human rights situation in Afghanistan. I previously tabled a petition regarding the Hazara community. This one highlights the human rights situation of the Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan. We know that other religious and ethnic minorities have already faced challenges prior to the Taliban takeover and face significantly more challenges now.

The petitioners are asking the government to create a special program whereby these religious minorities could be sponsored directly to come from Afghanistan to Canada. If we had that special program in place prior to the Taliban takeover, many of the members of these communities would have been able to get out. Sadly, that did not happen, and more action is required to help the vulnerable minorities in Afghanistan.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to congratulate the member on the new baby in his family. It is good to see that it has not slowed him down at all.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021**

The House resumed consideration of 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, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: When we left it last time we were going into question period with the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing about inflation. We have heard about the housing crisis. Right now in my riding housing has gone up over 40% in value just in one year, especially in Port Alberni. People are being pushed out. We need non-market housing. There have been several applications made to the federal government, but it continues to give them the shuffle. More and more people are displaced or homeless. Right now, we have an opportunity, a partnership of multi-stakeholders wanting to purchase a hotel in the Alberni Valley to house the hardest to house.

I might outline also that the Parole Board of Canada has written a letter of support for this proposal. It has outlined that there is not a single space for its clients to live when they are released through the federal parole system. That is very alarming and keeps the cycle of incarceration going.

Therefore, I am calling on the federal government, and I would ask the member if she agrees, to invest quickly into non-market housing to address this need.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree that we are seeing concerns with respect to inflation, food inflation and affordable housing, all due to the failed policies and lack of action from the current Liberal government. What I do not understand is why the member and his entire party continue to prop up the government and support these failed policies that are causing inflation and this burden on the people of his riding as well as mine.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you in the chair. I know the member is well aware that the Canadian taxpayer has the ultimate responsibility for the ever-increasing \$1.2-billion debt the current Liberal government is continually escalating.

The member also mentioned in her speech the carbon tax and the ever-increasing financial impacts of that. I know she is aware that when we look at the price of gasoline going up, even the 45¢ increase in gasoline we have seen over the last six months amounts to a 3¢ per litre GST increase to the government, not to mention the quarter of a billion dollars in GST that is being collected. I wonder if she could give us her thoughts on the impacts of the GST and the carbon tax.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely concerned that at a time when we see seniors and people on a fixed income really struggling to survive, the government has put three carbon

tax increases on them, an increase in CPP premiums and the escalator tax on wine and beverages. To add insult to injury, that carbon tax comes with a tax on a tax. This is really crushing the ability of people to afford to live. I think it is outrageous that the government is doing that, and I would call on it to reverse the taxes it has put in place already so that people can afford to live.

• (1230)

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, the member commented earlier about the NDP and the Liberals working together. This is what it looks like: It is actually the Liberal-Conservative coalition that cut and gutted the national housing strategy over 25 years ago. We have lost over 500,000 units because of the Liberal-Conservative coalition to not invest in non-market housing and to come up with incentives for developers to build housing and profit off the backs of people who need non-market housing and need it right now.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, certainly, they do need help right now. When we talk about affordable housing, we know it is supply and demand. The government, its actions and its bills have not increased the supply appreciably. It has not kept foreign buyers from the market. It has not done anything to address the vacant buildings. The measures in this act are small, yet the member and his party are going to prop up the Liberals again and vote in favour of it. I do not understand it.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, good afternoon and happy Friday to everyone as I begin to speak on Bill C-8. Before I begin, I did have a chance to do a Standing Order 31 statement on Ukraine. I want to speak about Olena, who was the intern in my office as part of the number of Ukrainian youth who come to Parliament. They have not come for a couple years now because of COVID. My thoughts, my prayers and the prayers of all Canadians are with her and the people of Ukraine at this very difficult period they are going through.

Rest assured that Canada, our government, is there for them and we are with them, not only today or tomorrow but for all the days ahead so that the Ukrainian people can live in a free and democratic society. We want to ensure that Liberal democracies throughout the world have a path for freedom and democracy for their individuals. Liberal democracies are under attack because of Russian aggression. We must go to the wall, as I say, in helping the people of Ukraine and make sure that they are able to have a free, democratic and prosperous future. I want to say to Olena that she is in my prayers. Keep sending me messages on Instagram. I will keep responding and we will keep being there as best as we can for her.

It is a pleasure to rise today and chat about Bill C-8 being debated again. This is another measure that our government has brought forward to ensure that we recover, we continue to grow and we come out of this pandemic even stronger, not only for our economy but as a nation, as a people. Despite what is happening in Ukraine, which has received a lot of attention, and rightly so, we are still fighting a pandemic here at home and globally. Our focus is multi-faceted, but we still need to get that job done. We will, and Bill C-8 is part and parcel of that. It is obviously part of our fiscal update that was tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021.

I know much reference has been made to affordability here in the House. What I can say, as a father of three children and as someone who lives in York Region, is that our government is aware of this. The empathy is there. We have cut taxes several times for middle-class Canadians. We have raised them on the wealthiest 1%. We will always be there for middle-class Canadians and hard-working Canadians. We will make sure that they can get ahead and that they have a better future for their families.

We will be there today and tomorrow. I look forward to whenever budget 2022 comes out, because I know the focus of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance is ensuring that middle-class Canadians and their families have a great future. That is why I am part of the Liberal team. I have been a Liberal for many decades, and I will continue to fight for middle-class Canadians to ensure they have a bright and prosperous future.

In December, the government released the economic and fiscal update. The update provided important information about the government's continued support for Canadians and Canadian businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, I would like to speak about one aspect of Bill C-8 that would implement measures in the update that build on steps already taken to keep Canadians safe and help the economy recover.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

The government has made the health and safety of Canadians its top priority since the beginning of the pandemic.

While the government has been focusing on a strong economic recovery, it has also been investing in vaccines and booster shots and taking other important measures.

[*English*]

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect our families, communities and ourselves from COVID-19. Vaccines are effective in preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19, including the omicron variant. We must say that Canadians, unfortunately even today, are still passing away from COVID-19 and the variant, so we must remain vigilant as a society and as a country.

Today, Canada's immunization campaign has been highly successful thanks to an effective procurement strategy, a strong and agile regulatory system and clear and consistent work by public health workers and governments across the country. We are protecting children by making sure that Canada has the pediatric vaccines needed for children five and over to get their shots. We are also en-

Government Orders

sureing that booster shots are free for all Canadians, just as first and second doses have been.

[*Translation*]

Manufacturers have also run clinical trials of their vaccines for children in all age ranges, including children under five. They are expected to seek regulatory approval next month. The fact that children are able to be vaccinated will help prevent outbreaks in schools and help keep kids, teachers, school staff and parents safe.

[*English*]

As we know, millions of Canadians have been doing their part by getting vaccinated. As of mid-January, 81% of Canadians age five years and older have received their first two doses, and 41% of those 18 years and over having received their third, or booster shots, as well. In fact, Canada has the fourth-highest vaccination rate in the G20 and the second-highest in the G7.

Canada's existing agreements with Pfizer and Moderna provide for enough vaccine doses for all eligible Canadians to receive first, second, third and even fourth doses if necessary. The agreements also include options to procure vaccine adaptations such as those to protect against mutations or variants of concern. The government has also made investments to secure millions of booster doses for the years to come.

Our government, the federal government, is also committed to a national proof-of-vaccination standard. All provinces and territories have already implemented proof-of-vaccination requirements, including standardized pan-Canadian proof-of-vaccine credentials.

[*Translation*]

The requirement to show proof of vaccination to travel within and outside Canada and to enter businesses and public spaces helps protect Canadians from COVID-19.

To implement such a requirement, it is essential to have reliable, standardized proof of vaccination status that works from coast to coast to coast and internationally.

The federal government is also working with international partners to ensure that the standardized Canadian proof of vaccination is widely recognized abroad, allowing fully vaccinated Canadians to travel anywhere in the world.

In order to support proof of vaccination, the government worked with the provinces and territories on developing a pan-Canadian proof-of-vaccination standard, which helps fully vaccinated Canadians travel within the country and abroad.

Government Orders

The government is currently setting aside the necessary funds to help the provinces and territories cover the cost of implementing new proof-of-vaccination programs.

[*English*]

As indicated in the economic and fiscal update, the government is committed to supporting the provinces and territories in implementing proof of vaccination by introducing the COVID-19 proof of vaccination fund.

Bill C-8 contains many measures to help Canadians on an individual basis and with their businesses. One of the measures in Bill C-8 is on extending the time period for CEBA so that individuals who have received payments from CEBA will be able to pay them back. If we look back over the pandemic, sometimes we think about how it has been two years and that time has passed. The CEBA helped nearly a million businesses across this country from coast to coast to coast. It was a vital lifeline to many of our small businesses. It kept them afloat. It helped them pay expenses. It helped them pay salaries, heating bills and so forth. It allowed them to weather the storm that was COVID-19 and that COVID-19 continues to be, although less so, thank God, as we move forward.

Also, with regard to Bill C-8, our government has stressed the need for more affordable housing and measures to help with housing affordability, including a vacancy tax. There are very simple measures we can do. I hope to see the elimination of blind bidding, which I know in the area I live in, from the feedback I have received, is a big problem for many individuals. Bringing more certainty and transparency, much like the Australian model and the U.K. model, to purchasing a home would be a big step for middle-class Canadians and many of the middle-class Canadians who live in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

It has been great to speak about Bill C-8. I look forward to answering questions and comments from colleagues.

• (1240)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague that I brought up during the initial debate on Bill C-8. I am trying to understand why the government chose September 21, 2021, as the start date for the refundable tax credit for improving air quality and ventilation in businesses. There is a business in my riding that owns an arena, and right from the get-go, it stood up as a field hospital to deal with the pandemic and deal with the potential there. It was responsible in making those changes.

Why is it out of pocket thousands of dollars? Why does it not qualify? It was hinted that this would be discussed at committee, but I do not think that change was made. If the member cannot answer the question today, I would appreciate the government coming back to explain the rationale for why September 21, the day after the federal election, is when the tax refund credit is effective.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, obviously I was not at the finance committee and do not know whether an amendment was put forward or not by the opposition or the government. What I will say is that in Bill C-8 there are a number of measures that continue to help businesses, employers and Canadians on an individual ba-

sis. There is an improved tax credit for educators. There is the ventilation tax credit, as the member mentioned.

In terms of the start date, whether it was September or another date, I am not privy to the rationale there. However, I know that the measures we brought in have helped Canadian businesses and have assisted them weather the storm. For any changes on ventilation, which is very important for businesses, we will continue to be there to assist them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague who so ably talked about the federal immunization campaign. I notice that the federal government is far from being immunized against encroachments into areas of provincial taxation.

Under the Constitution, taxation was originally the direct jurisdiction of the provinces, and the only area of taxation for which jurisdiction and the spirit of the Constitution are still respected is property tax.

With respect to taxing unoccupied housing, does my colleague not think that before the federal government starts taxing in areas of jurisdiction that are exclusively provincial, it should get the provinces' consent first?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I would like to say to him that our government worked very hard with all the provinces in Canada.

[*English*]

During the pandemic, we were there to support the provinces of Quebec and Ontario in long-term care homes.

On measures with regard to housing, obviously there are taxation measures that are very relevant to the federal government that we need to look at and we need to use. There are tools available for us. Our goal is to help with housing affordability and affordable housing. We have done that with the national affordability housing program. We will be bringing out a suite of measures that the minister has been working on. I look forward to seeing them. They were in our platform and Canadians voted for them. We are going to see them in the coming weeks and months.

• (1245)

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying how much I appreciate the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge mentioning the cost of housing in his speech. In Kitchener, as he might know already, the cost of housing went up over 32% in the last year alone.

He mentioned an interest in going further and being more bold. For example, the underused housing tax that is in this legislation would only be for those who are non-Canadian, non-permanent residents. I wonder if, on the topic of blind bidding, for example, he might be interested in sharing more about his personal views on how we could go further to address the housing crisis we are in.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, on housing affordability we must table measures. One of them will be the \$1 billion-plus national accelerator fund. We need to encourage municipalities to speed up the process of approving projects and get shovels in the ground faster. I always hear the comparison that in the United States it can take eight to 12 months to start putting shovels in the ground, but in Canada it is much longer. We must break down the red tape and get more housing built across this country. In my area, the prices that things are selling for are remarkable. We need to get supply out there. This is multi-jurisdictional, and we will work together with all jurisdictions and all levels of government to get it done.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned about inflation.

My friend and colleague for Vaughan—Woodbridge just mentioned that he was prepared to fight for the middle-class Canadian. I found that really interesting as I was listening to and reflecting on his comments, because Canadians are concerned about inflation.

When we ask about this in the House, especially on this side of the House, we hear that inflation is a global phenomenon. The government is quick to look at everyone else and say that if we look at this G7 country, it struggles with inflation. If we look at that G7 country, it struggles with inflation. Despite repeatedly asking the government about the housing bubble, it will not even acknowledge that one exists. We should look at everyone else, but not look here.

Let us remember what fuels inflation, which is more dollars chasing the same number of, or fewer, goods. That is my concern. That was my concern yesterday. That is my concern today, and that will be my concern tomorrow when we debate in the House the government flooding the Canadian economy with more money.

When I hear my colleague for Vaughan—Woodbridge talk about fighting for the middle class, I contemplate the middle class.

I would like to think that my upbringing was about as middle class as it comes. My parents were both Italian immigrants. My father worked at a sawmill after coming from Italy when he was in his teens. My mother stayed at home to raise us and she went back to work just before I became a teenager. I feel like that is pretty middle class.

I do not know how my family would have survived today. On top of that, we look at things like taxes, and taxes upon taxes: GST on top of a carbon tax. People have their CPP deductions, their EI deductions and their income tax. When I look at what the government puts out and I see increases in taxation, I get worried.

That is what I saw. I saw a 5% increase, to my best recollection, at the last economic update. When we talk about fighting for the middle class, it is really irreconcilable when we see tax upon tax. Canadians are being asked to give more. These are not just the peo-

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ple who can afford it, but really everybody: the lower class, the middle class and the upper class.

This may surprise some, but I do most of the cooking in my house. I do much of the shopping in my house, so I am keenly aware of the nature of inflation.

I have watched prices go up. I try to be an astute consumer, as my dad taught me to be, but let us face it. People are now paying the same amount for chuck as they did for rib-eye just one or two years ago. I have butcher shops in my riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, and I am very proud that they carry local products. One such butcher shop is called Chop N Block. I love that they carry products from just down the road: beef from places like Devick's Ranch, for instance, and things such as that.

I have watched their prices go up. What was \$35 a kilogram, and was a treat for most people when it came to meat, is now \$50 a kilogram. That treat is now out of reach. Chop N Block and butcher shops like it have often fed the residents of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo at reasonable prices. Those reasonable prices are escalating not because Chop N Block wants to make a greater profit, but because their costs are going up and those costs get passed on to the consumer.

I am deeply concerned when it comes to Bill C-8 and thinking of more spending, where it is going to go and how it is going to be evaluated and considered.

The average Canadian will spend an extra \$1,000 on groceries. Carbon tax is set to increase at nine cents a litre come April 1. Putting aside exactly whether we agree or disagree with the carbon tax, the simple fact is that gas will rise at nine cents a litre on April 1. That will amplify the already escalating cost on groceries. When groceries go up and goods go up, prices go up.

● (1250)

I hear the government say that we have a target of 2% per year with the Bank of Canada. A target is great, but how is inflation going to be reduced?

The price of bacon has gone up. Most notably for me, the price of pasta has gone up. Not everyone is as fortunate as I am to have a backyard garden where I can make my own pesto sauce for pennies. Not everyone can pay the taxes upon the taxes. The fuel is surging and I am concerned about this.

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I recently held an economic round table with business owners in my riding. I plan to make this, hopefully, a monthly activity. I asked what was concerning them. The constituents from the businesses said, “We need more workers.” When we think about any stimulus spending, any further spending and anything that pumps money into the economy, we are worried when we see “help wanted” signs everywhere. People need more workers. Inflation and carbon tax are making it difficult for businesses to get by. They also said that bureaucracy and red tape for projects could be crippling, and that the CERB criteria were not specific enough and the CERB was therefore abused. That impacted their employment prospects. These are all things that we need to consider when we think about spending more money in the House.

We have repeatedly questioned the housing minister about a housing bubble. We have questioned the finance minister about a housing bubble. I have yet to hear an acknowledgement of this. When we ask the minister about the housing bubble, he talks about everything the Conservatives did not vote for.

I will tell members what Canadians did not vote for. They did not vote for the average house price to go from \$435,000 to \$810,000 in the last few years. I did not vote for that. Canadians did not vote for that. Why do we not simply acknowledge this and say what we are going to do to address this?

I once wrote a paper about short-term payday loans. I talked about death by a thousand financial cuts in that paper. At the time, I never imagined I would be in the House of Commons talking about this same principle of death by a thousand small financial cuts. Canadians are seeing more and more of their paycheques going to the government. The Prime Minister has spent \$176 billion in new spending unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the Prime Minister who promised small, modest deficits, saying that \$10 billion was where we were going to start and that the budget would then balance itself.

Here is the problem. It is easy for today's government to bring on debt. It is actually quite selfish to do so, especially when that debt is unnecessary. Let us make everyone happy and we will spend. Does someone want money? Here we go, but who pays? It is all of us who pay. Everyone pays income tax. Everybody pays this. Passing it on to the next generation is simply not the answer, and it does not make it the right thing to do.

I have concerns about spending, I have concerns about housing and I have concerns about inflation. I know that Bill C-8 has a lot to say. It is over 100 pages. These are some of my concerns that I wish to share with the House.

● (1255)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see you in the chair, aspiring to a higher position.

I want to thank the member for his speech. Just to put something in context, in my hometown of Conception Bay South today, a litre of gas is \$1.91. It is not cheap. The member is right.

The member mentioned in his speech that the cause of inflation is too many dollars chasing too few products. How do we get more products out there, or less money out there?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly sympathetic to the people of Conception Bay South with gas at \$1.91. I still remember when the gas stations were making room for the one in front of the zero, in Vancouver when I was an undergraduate university student. That was not that long ago, and here we are. I am certainly sympathetic.

With respect to fewer goods or the same amount of goods, we have goods. Those goods generally, unless production can increase, are going to remain the same. The concern I have is with how much we spend. When the government puts money into the economy, that is more money in the economy. That money chases the same number of goods, and as a result supply and demand, or whatever we want to call it, fuels inflation. That is the point I was trying to make to the hon. member.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has been a great addition since this Parliament began.

I would like to ask him a quick question in regard to what is not in this bill. At committee, the MP for Simcoe North brought forward an amendment that would in fact help the Prime Minister keep his commitments to Canadians on housing. It would basically ban foreign ownership or purchasing of residential properties here in Canada.

We were able to get it on the floor to be spoken on, but it was Liberal members who voted against it. I know he is facing many of the same pressures in his riding as I do in mine, and foreign ownership is part of that.

Why does he think the government voted against its own commitment? Is it because the Prime Minister only cares about those votes at election time and has no intention to carry through on his promise?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I have learned a lot from the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, as I have learned from members on all sides of the aisle, so I thank him for that.

I am not sure why the Prime Minister would have voted against this. This is a pretty clear-cut right thing to do. When we have foreign money coming in, it will increase costs. Not only that, when we talk about money laundering and ill-begotten gains, that money can come in and be not only a mechanism of inflation but also a mechanism of laundering. I am not sure why the Prime Minister did not take action on this, because it really would have been a multi-pronged approach to issues that are plaguing Canada.

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Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spent much of his time in his intervention lamenting inflation and consumer costs, with zero reference to the stagnation of real wages for workers. He lamented taxation on incomes, but he made no reference to the record profits that have been hoarded by big corporations, complete with ridiculous CEO compensations and shareholder dividends.

The hon. member has made lots of criticisms on this, but no criticisms on the capitalism that fuels it. Would he care to comment on the impacts of inflation as they relate to real working class people, such as the folks I represent in Hamilton Centre?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has one minute remaining.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the clarification.

[*English*]

With the greatest of respect to the member for Hamilton Centre, I represent real working people as well. My riding has seen a record number of sawmills shut down. My riding is even complaining about not being able to find workers when we do have industries there.

With all due respect, I am not sure that simply capitalism is the problem here. The problem here is that the government is spending a lot more money. If he wants to talk about the minimum wage, he should talk to his provincial counterparts.

• (1300)

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very nice to see you in the chair. I hope we will see more of you there. It is a pleasure working with you at committee, but it is nice to see you in the chair today.

It is nice to intervene with my colleagues on Bill C-8, the economic and fiscal update implementation bill, but before I get to that, it seems rather appropriate to acknowledge the devastation that we see in Ukraine. What we see in the unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation in Europe is heartbreaking. The Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the government have my full support to continue to respond in the harshest of terms. I would support them to take an even more aggressive approach and I look forward to a Canadian response that includes an increase in our humanitarian efforts and aid.

I have listened to many colleagues speak in the chamber about Bill C-8. We studied the bill at committee. I take this job very seriously. On its face, there are many items in Bill C-8 that seem rather reasonable, such as measures to support educators on an annual basis by increasing tax relief and measures to extend the COVID supports provided to businesses. How we will procure additional vaccines in the future is also addressed.

There are other areas that I have significant concerns about, in particular the proposed housing tax and the carbon rebate that the government has proposed for farmers. However, before I turn to these issues, I would like to address an overall objection that I have to the bill.

Legislation is constantly being sent to the House that has significant amounts of spending attached to it. We are never told how it will be funded, because the assumption is that these bills will be funded with debt. The assumption is that there is no limit to the debt this country can absorb and that when we want to fund our programs, the answer is to just add them to the deficit.

This is not sustainable. I am appealing to all my colleagues that we must hold the government accountable for its spending plans. If members agree with all the expenditures in the bill, that is completely fine, but unless the government is also going to propose areas where it will cut back in order to fund priorities, I cannot support this legislation. We are missing an opportunity to set priorities. There will be no objection from me on spending on the priorities that all Canadians rely on, including health care, education and social support programs, including those programs for our low-income and most vulnerable members of society, and of course our seniors.

We cannot just keep piling on debt and pretend that there are no consequences for future generations. On this basis alone, I am against the legislation, and until the government brings forward a proposal to review its spending and shows how any new spending will be met with reductions in other areas, it will be hard to persuade me to support future bills.

Until the government gets serious about setting priorities for its spending, we will continue to see difficulty passing legislation through the House. I think there is a reasonable debate we can have about what those priorities are, but I also want to know where it would like to cut back. I agree with a former Liberal leader who indicated that it was hard to set priorities. That is right, and if we have 100 priorities, I submit that we have none at all.

The Bank of Canada raised interest rates just two days ago, and it is projected that the bank will raise interest rates many more times before the end of the year. The Parliamentary Budget Officer released a projection indicating that the federal government alone could see interest payments on its debt increase to \$40 billion a year annually. That is \$40 billion a year that we are not spending on health care, that we are not transferring to the provinces for education, that we are not using to grow an inclusive economy.

A social democrat friend of mine recently told me that social democrats should care about fiscal responsibility because it means that governments do not waste in some areas so that they can spend in priority areas.

• (1305)

Let us think about that. We could be having a debate right now about how we could spend \$40 billion. We could be debating pharmacare, a universal basic income or doubling or tripling the support for certain vulnerable groups in society. We could also be debating about how to provide much-needed tax relief for Canadians to keep the burden of taxation low on families and individuals, especially in an inflationary environment.

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The Bank of Canada tells us the economy is robust. It tells us that the economy is operating at capacity. That also means new spending will have upward pressures on inflation. Many economists are recommending to the government that it review its spending and reconsider its proposals to introduce new spending plans, because at this point in the business cycle, new spending will have upward pressures on inflation, and we know the budget coming before us in a month or so will introduce new spending.

Last year's budget introduced almost \$100 billion over three years, and curiously, I did not see one additional dollar for health care. At a time when health care expenditures in provinces are going up without any end in sight, at a time in a pandemic when health care spending is of the utmost importance, the government has not shown an approach that would see an increase in spending on health care.

Now I will turn to Bill C-8, and specifically to the two proposals I wanted to mention today that we had challenges with. We have just heard one of them in the recent intervention: the proposed underused housing tax for foreign purchasers or foreign owners. If we think a 1% tax is going to have any impact on purchasing behaviour or increase the level of supply across this country, we are sorely mistaken. When an asset price rises by 30% or 40% in a year, a 1% tax is not going to change somebody's behaviour and will not deter money launderers, so we put forward a reasonable amendment, which was to introduce a temporary ban to provide a reprieve on foreign purchases of Canadian real estate for two years.

This was a campaign commitment of both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party in the last election. The Liberals are famous for making promises, but they typically make two kinds of promises: those they intend to keep and those they hope we forget about. Canadians want to know whether this is a commitment the government is walking away from.

With respect to the carbon tax as it relates to farmers, I have heard from farmers in my riding and across the country that the rebate does not go nearly far enough. I had one farmer send me a bill for \$13,000, just in carbon tax, for natural gas to dry their product. We need to provide farmers with relief. They are the ones who feed our cities. They cannot afford additional taxes.

A carbon tax is supposed to do two things. It is supposed to raise revenue for the government and it is supposed to change behaviour. However, sometimes there are no alternatives available for changed behaviour, and with prices going up somewhere between 30% and 40% over the last year on natural gas and fuel across the country, the outcomes the carbon tax is hoping to achieve are already being achieved. The government needs to provide much-needed relief to farmers, but it also needs to reconsider raising the carbon tax on April 1 of this year, because in and of itself, this is an inflationary pressure.

I look forward to questions and comments.

• (1310)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Simcoe North for his work on the finance committee, where he put forward suggestions

to help the Prime Minister keep his commitment to Canadians. Unfortunately, the government members rejected those suggestions.

I wanted to talk a little more about the fiscal policy the member was raising in his speech. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has actually said the government has underestimated its debt servicing for the fiscal year 2026-27 by \$6 billion. That is \$6 billion that could take away from important services that Canadians count on.

Could the member please reflect for the chamber on this mismanagement of our finances and on the impact that this underestimating of debt service costs could have on Canadians?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. It is wonderful working on the finance committee, and I am learning a lot from him.

With respect to the interest charges on debt, we absolutely need to worry about this. One of the justifications for the government's spending using deficit financing early on in its mandate was that interest charges were so low. They told us not to worry. Now we see challenges with interest rates going up, and we know that they are going to continue to increase.

Now, as my hon. colleague has mentioned, we see that there is maybe a \$6-billion additional cost that otherwise was not considered. Where is that \$6 billion coming from? Of course, we could continue to borrow the money, but eventually my grandchildren, who are not even born yet, will be bearing that cost. I think that we need to consider this very closely.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his fine speech.

I have questions about social housing. As we know, the provinces are capable of managing their own budgets. When we talk about health care, we are talking about transfers. Why does the government not transfer these amounts to the provinces as well?

I think that the government is interfering. It should really hand over the related amounts to the provinces, which are responsible for housing.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Chambers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that very good question, and I agree with her. I think that the government is underfunding health care transfers to provinces.

In 2015, the incoming Liberal government ran on a platform to increase provincial transfers, but it has not. In fact, it has increased certain amounts of money, but then tied strings or attached some conditions on what that money could be used for. I would submit that the provinces know best where and how to use the money they receive from the federal government to provide services to their citizens.

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Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member to the House. I know the member is new. I am certainly a big fan of his predecessor, so if he should see him in the future, I ask him to please pass along my hello.

I have brought this up a lot in the House, although I will accept the fact that the member may not have heard me speak of this given that he is relatively new. The price on pollution was not meant to be a revenue-generating item for the government. All the money goes back to individuals and back to farmers in many cases. It is intended to be a mechanism to change market patterns and the decisions that are out there.

Will the member at least acknowledge the fact that, of the money that is collected in the provinces where the federal government has to do it, that money is returned back to the public in various ways?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the hon. member makes a number of interventions and I find many of them helpful, because it allows me to answer some of these questions quite clearly.

We would not know where all of the money is that is collected, because the government does not really, in a transparent way, show us this. It also does not indicate the cost of administering the carbon tax and rebate program that it has introduced, but I would welcome the opportunity to look at that.

Let us remember that, if a carbon tax is supposed to affect and change the behaviour of Canadians by increasing the price, what we have just seen in the last year, with prices for fuel increasing by 40% to 50% in some cases, is accomplishing what the carbon tax is supposed to accomplish. The carbon tax is, in many ways, just redundant and salt in the wound for many Canadians who can least afford its increase.

* * *

● (1315)

ROYAL ASSENT

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall

Ottawa

March 4, 2022

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 4th day of March, 2022, at 12:20 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Ian McCowan

Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor

The bill assented to, on Friday, March 4, 2022, is Bill C-10, An Act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19.

[Translation]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed consideration of 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, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to see you, especially since we will be closing out the week together. Thank you for recognizing me.

Today, we are debating Bill C-8, which contains a number of budget measures, which we support for the most part. The Bloc Québécois is a party that proposes and supports measures that are in Quebec's interest.

This bill includes several standard elements and funds allocated under agreements with first nations, which we must endorse. Generally speaking, because these measures are useful, we will vote in favour of this bill.

However, there is a big hole in the bill, as there is nothing to address the housing crisis. The pandemic has changed people's habits. Some sectors in the market are facing severe shortages and, as several colleagues mentioned, the cost of renting or buying has increased considerably.

The economy will reopen, and immigration will resume, because Canada will accept newcomers and foreign students. That makes us happy. However, that is going to put pressure on the housing market in Quebec and the provinces.

As we have said repeatedly, the federal government has almost completely disengaged over time. From 1960 to 1995, it worked with Quebec and the provinces. For example, it supported the construction of about 25,000 new housing units. These past 20 years, however, there has been nothing. I am not saying it is any one party's fault. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals are to blame for doing nothing, and now we have a major housing shortage.

The government has since launched the national housing strategy and plans to help build 6,000 units per year, but that will not do much to alleviate the shortage I was just talking about.

The program numbers are convoluted because they include provincial money, private sector money and other sources of funding. Not only is this program less generous than what the Liberal government would have us believe, but it has been complicated for Quebec.

We lost a good two-and-a-half years negotiating. Housing falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, which we confirmed when we examined the bill in committee. Nevertheless, the Liberal government insisted on trying to impose its conditions, which shows the federal spending power. The federal government holds the purse strings, and so it has the provinces on a string.

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Now it has come back to haunt them. Prices are rising and everyone is concerned about it, so the government is looking for a magical solution by creating a new tax on unused housing. This is a fiscal microaggression, an expression I am sure our NDP colleagues will appreciate. It is a small tax that will generate only \$100 million in revenue. That is a small amount, and it is really easy for people to get around paying it. I am no tax expert, but I predict that people from other countries who have a house in Canada will start sending their children here on vacation for a few days so that they do not have to pay this tax.

This is also a one-size-fits-all tax. I am an economist and, during my career, I often looked at CMHC reports and expert reports on the housing market. Experts in the field study the housing market one segment, province, region or metropolitan area at a time, and yet this government is proposing a one-size-fits-all tax that will be the same everywhere, without any of the distinctions that a competent individual would make between the different markets. Sometimes, I feel like I am the only one here who understands that Montreal is not Vancouver and Saint-Colomban is not Halifax. That is a problem.

Despite all that, this tax infringes on the last big area of taxation over which the provinces have exclusive jurisdiction. Patrick Taillon, a professor at Université Laval and recognized constitutional expert, testified about this before our committee. He said, and I quote:

● (1320)

With this tax, the federal government is, for the first time in the history of Confederation, at least, to my knowledge [and he knows a lot about this], encroaching on a form of taxation thus far left, and rightly so, in the hands of local authorities at the municipal and provincial levels. I am referring to the property tax.

He said that the federal government had shown wisdom in leaving this in the hands of the provinces. I would argue that the federal government had already lost much of its remaining wisdom when it comes to respecting provincial tax jurisdictions, and now with Bill C-8, it has none left at all. The government is fully treading on provincial jurisdictions.

This is a serious first step, because it will require infrastructure. When the value of a property or an asset is assessed, it has to be taxed as a percentage. This requires officials and infrastructure, mainly at the municipal level. That is a big problem.

This shows us once again that the federal government cannot help but interfere in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces at the slightest temptation and any time there is a crisis, especially one that it has partially or fully caused.

History shows that whenever the federal government decides to take a little foray into the provinces' tax fields, it is often a one-way trip, and Quebec ends up footing the bill. That is how it is, and I think it is extremely serious.

During the election campaign, the city of Saint-Colomban held a fantastic debate hosted by its mayor, Mr. Lalande, whom I salute. The mayors have told us that all towns and cities in Quebec need more tax revenue and that they need to look after their infrastructure. Some municipalities are having infrastructure problems because of climate change.

These mayors were telling us that they cannot rely on property tax revenues alone. That is all our cities have left, but the federal government is poking its nose in. Of course, the government will tell us that it is a small tax of just \$100 million, but it is about the principle.

At committee, Mr. Taillon pointed out that this tax might very well be unconstitutional. On top of that, it will be ineffective. I am very familiar with tax systems, and this one will not get the job done. Not only is it a mistake, but it also shows a lack of respect for the fiscal jurisdictions of the provinces, for the Constitution and for our municipalities, which are asking us not to allow anyone to set foot in their tax field.

The Bloc Québécois proposed an amendment. There have been some major tax collection agreements. That is how Quebec got its own tax return. The other provinces get their tax base defined by the federal government. In the past, there have even been tax rental agreements, where some provinces rented their tax base to the federal government through a bilateral agreement. Some provinces did that, while others said no. Typically, Quebec was against that. Ontario did it and then withdrew, but it was done through a bilateral agreement.

In Quebec, we asked for common sense and respect for the Constitution, for Quebec and for historical precedents. We told the government that if it wanted to tread on our jurisdiction, then it needed to ask us ahead of time, and the provinces that were unwilling could establish their own policies. Quebec is capable of establishing its own housing policies, especially since housing is under Quebec's jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, I have to blame the table for not allowing this amendment. The Bloc Québécois still thinks that this would have been a solution for allowing willing provinces to consent to the federal government using this tax. Unfortunately, this was refused. The fact remains that we need co-operation, which is missing from this clause from Bill C-8.

I will close by quoting Mr. Taillon.

In short, if co-operative federalism means anything, the very least the government can do is consult the provinces and negotiate agreements to implement this policy, in keeping with the spirit and letter of the Constitution. The co-operative mechanism should not, for that matter, allow the federal government to exert any authority over property tax.

● (1325)

I would have said it myself, but it was said so well at the finance committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could my colleague from the Bloc add his comments on the price of commuting and gas in Quebec, including in Montreal and throughout rural Quebec, considering his familiarity with his home province. Gasoline prices have soared 33%. Natural gas is up 20%, and food costs are climbing, with beef up 12%.

Could the member reiterate his thoughts on how this is impacting his home province?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, my constituents and I certainly are worried about the price of gas and the price of many other things.

This is further proof that we must accelerate the energy transition. Naturally, someone who has no need for gas or whose gas consumption is decreasing is less affected by this price increase.

Unfortunately, the price of oil is being affected by geopolitics and the war in Ukraine. However, we should be wary of using geopolitics or crises where people are suffering as an excuse to produce or export more dirty oil from western Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to know if my colleague shares my belief, and that of the NDP, that the economic update released a few months ago and the finance bills squandered opportunities to make up for all the cuts to health care. That happened under the former Harper government. The Liberal government has continued with these cuts, so people are struggling in the health care sector. Whether they are in Quebec or British Columbia, people everywhere are having a hard time.

Does my colleague believe that these were missed opportunities for the government, which is not providing adequate funding for our health care system?

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that more health care funding is needed. I think that the government needs to unconditionally increase health transfers to cover 35% of system costs.

I do want to make a small correction. I am very concerned about the federal government interfering in provincial jurisdictions and, in many respects, I do not agree with the NDP's proposed funding method, which would involve even more interference in Quebec's jurisdictions.

• (1330)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent, dynamic speech.

My question has to do with the underused housing tax.

Constitutional expert Patrick Taillon told the Standing Committee on Finance that it was probably unconstitutional and would be nullified by the courts. One of the concerns Mr. Taillon raised was that, in the meantime, Ottawa would have put a whole system in place to collect a property tax and that it would use this system in the future. There is a risk here.

What does my colleague think about that?

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, what I find funny is that the Liberals are telling us that it was in their platform.

I am stunned that they have not read their own platform, because I can assure them that we would have noticed. Nothing is more permanent than a temporary little tax. This will have long-lasting effects and will likely be expanded.

We should all be as concerned as my colleague from Joliette.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: Before we begin Private Members' Business, I want to inform the member for Mirabel that he will have one minute remaining for questions and comments when this debate resumes.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

BUILDING A GREEN PRAIRIE ECONOMY ACT

Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.), seconded by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, moved that Bill C-235, An Act respecting the building of a green economy in the Prairies, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, one does not plan in life to win the lottery, but when one does, one is left with decisions about how to take advantage of the good fortune. I thought long and hard about how I would use my good fortune to come up with a private member's bill that was an extension of so much of the work I have done across the Prairies.

The building a green economy in the Prairies act was inspired by reflections over decades. The first were in my own province of Manitoba. In the 1980s, the \$200-million core area initiative program shaped the interests of the governments of Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg into a common agenda. The three levels of government, through their senior representatives, met often to work to align their policies in the interest of rehabilitating and renewing downtown Winnipeg's core. Almost \$200 million was invested through this format. It was successful and well regarded by the citizens of Manitoba.

More recently, during the first months of the pandemic, it was notable how much Canadians appreciated governments collaborating, co-operating and co-ordinating their agendas around the common interest, the public interest, to achieve shared goals. Canadian federalism is strong and flexible, but it cannot be taken for granted. This bill was developed by placing these thoughts side by side and applying to them the economic development of my own region, the Prairies.

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This bill would give the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry of Canada, in consultation with the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, a mandate and statutory framework of consultation with provincial governments, first nation and Métis governments, municipal governments, businesses and their employees, and civil society itself to prepare for significant changes in federal public policy. This is adapting to the new reality of how we produce energy, how we adapt to the new reality of using that energy and how we prepare for the changes to the energy environment worldwide and in our own communities.

We know that the prairie provinces are going to be especially impacted by climate change and the policies implemented to combat it. Traditional industries will take on a far different look, and we already have evidence of that. Leaders in the corporate sector are changing their strategic plans to adapt to a reduced reliance on fossil fuels and investing in other sources of energy. We have many examples of this.

In my home riding of Winnipeg South Centre, there are start-up companies that recognize the growing importance of carbon capture utilization and storage, and they are developing prototypes to build this technology on an industrial scale. Alberta is already the largest hydrogen producer in Canada. It recognizes its role in bringing this cleaner, low-cost energy to the rest of the Prairies, Canada and the global market. We see the evolution of the small modular reactor technology, and we know that if Canada is going to meet our objective of net-zero emissions by 2050, we must rely on a wide variety of energy sources.

For a few hundred years now, we have grown food on the Prairies to feed ourselves and to feed the world. Increasingly, it is evident that what we grow on the Prairies can also fuel the world. The pace of innovation in the biomass supply chain means that very soon we may be able to do just about anything with a bushel of canola that we can do with a barrel of oil.

The bill recognizes this and knows that, to implement these policy objectives, our chances of success improve if there is co-operation among the levels of government and those who create wealth. In Canada, we talk about the distribution of the nation's wealth, and these discussions are critical. We should also talk about wealth creation, something that we do not do much about because we are so focused on how we are going to spend the bounty of our nation.

• (1335)

We can take child care as an example. It is both an economic and a social policy. We know that the Prairies are struggling with other difficult circumstances. I can use transportation as an other example. Anybody who has tried to get from one part of the region to the other over the last number of years will know how challenging it has become.

Train service has been dropped. A train has not run between the cities of Calgary and Edmonton since 1985. Bus service has been curtailed across wide sections of the Prairies, making life more difficult, particularly for seniors living in rural communities. Let us review this, discuss it and debate it. The bill emphasizes this.

This bill represents a new way of doing business as a nation. Many of the elements and the aspirations of the bill are already here, not because they are mandated or obliged to happen, but because a particular minister or a group of MPs or a premier or a mayor has an idea that co-operation would be a good thing. This bill would do more than make suggestions. It would give the minister of industry and the federal government 18 months to establish this framework, after deep and meaningful consultation with those mentioned in the bill, and it demands a reporting to Parliament.

The intention is to focus the ministerial mind to make that kind of consultation and coordination easier because it must happen. It mandates collaboration, co-operation and relationship building.

This bill is not about jurisdictional overreach. It is clear that these policies are within the federal jurisdiction but must consider local circumstances and continuing dialogue with local governments and with businesses and workers who, after all, are best positioned to understand the consequences of changing policy on the way they run their governments or their businesses in an ever-changing landscape.

Indigenous nations are partners because their interests are integral to the success of the entire region, and the entire country. Not only does our Constitution demand this, but we know that development of resources across first nation, Métis, and Inuit land requires these conversations to be meaningful from the start.

Though the bill is succinct, I believe it is full of possibilities and ideas that span a wide range. I am optimistic, which springs from spending many months as the minister responsible for the prairie provinces, talking to decision-makers and regular folk across a vast range of interests. I was working on my little computer on the second floor of my house. That gave me the scope and the capacity to cover a lot of ground.

I remember one day when I chatted with people over breakfast at the Calgary Chamber of Commerce before moving on to a visit with canola producers and then ranchers. After that, I talked to people who are in the power business in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, before leading a round table with first nations and Métis community and business leaders. I was in touch with the heads of unions and other associations too.

I was able to do this in a single day because I did not have to get on a plane. Having that ease to stay in touch with so many people was a great advantage.

What I found was that there are very few stereotypes that hold water and, in any case, stereotypes are barriers to progress. I wonder if colleagues know of Professor Michael Houghton at the University of Alberta, who has a Ph.D., is a Nobel laureate, and was recognized for his work combatting hepatitis C and with vaccinations. The Prairies are absolutely full of scientists in each of our provinces.

When we think of the Prairies and when we think of Alberta, I want us to think of Nobel prize winners. I want us to think of the cutting edge of research. I want us to think about feeding the world.

• (1340)

I was struck, over the course of those several days, by how much community of interest I found across the great diversity and expanse of the Prairies. In perspective, in topography and in geography, it is a vast region. What I found was that we can find common ground if we seek it.

I was often delighted and encouraged by the degree of agreement I saw and that played out as we moved closer to a whole variety of decisions.

The time for a bill like this one is now. It takes what we have already accomplished across this special part of our country and builds on it. I am hopeful this bill will tap into the aspiration that the country should unite around shared objectives and values.

The bill recognizes that what we have, more than the bounty of natural resources we have been so adept at developing, is this generation of young people who understand the urgency of climate change. They are sophisticated in their thinking and see the economic opportunities that building a new Prairie economy would provide for them as they choose career paths over the next 10, 20 and 30 years.

We want our young people across the Prairies to thrive in the region and to have prosperous and secure futures. We want the energy infrastructure we have today to help us move along to the next generation of energy development that is clean, sustainable and marketable. Without question, the region will be very attractive to those looking to invest in the new economy.

Though the Prairies are the region I have chosen, because it is the region I live in and the one most impacted by changes in the energy world, I am certain this bill provides a template for a way of building relationships and doing business that would be relevant to any other region of Canada.

Therefore, I am encouraged, excited and optimistic about how we can strengthen our federation in ways we have strived to achieve as a nation for decades. With this framework, mandated by a statute passed by the majority of members in the House of Commons and the Senate, I am confident that we will have ushered in a new era of co-operative federalism and a dynamic moment for Canadian democracy.

• (1345)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to second the bill brought to us by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre. He and I first worked together as board members on the International Institute for Sustainable De-

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velopment. It was a board on which the parliamentary secretary seated near him also served.

I support the bill. I look for some amendments taking place at committee, particularly. I think the Minister of Agriculture should be referenced. As well, the hon. member will know I am not enthusiastic about the inclusion of the nuclear industry.

I see this bill as a template for coordination for sustainability and for the transition to a green economy. I just want to ask him this. Is he open to amendments when we get this bill to committee?

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that question is yes. I would like to remind the member that we go back maybe 30 years through a whole bunch of different issues, venues and challenges. I have a great respect for her perspective and her integrity. One of the great advantages of having lived a while is that one learns that one does not know everything. If I said that I would not consider an amendment, that would assume that I know more than everybody else. Everybody knows that I do not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech and his bill.

In his speech, he talked about the provinces' involvement in developing all this. What provisions are there to force the government to heed the report? What can be done to ensure the government does not just shelve the report?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had that authority. We do our best. We make an argument, we bring people to our argument and then we hope that others in a position of influence will buy the argument. What this bill does require is the reporting back to Parliament. That is what is different about this, and that is where I find hope.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg South Centre, which is the riding where I grew up. The approach I saw in this bill was the Prairie approach of collaboration. It reflects what we have learned in COVID about isolation versus collaboration. This bill could help to bring government together and also to bring Canadians together.

Could the hon. member comment on that, please?

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, although I stayed in Winnipeg, and I want that to be made clear, the best way to talk to people is to be respectful of their point of view, even if it is different from one's own.

What this bill seeks to do is reach out as broadly as the region itself in order to find those areas where we can find agreement and alignment. When we do that and as we are successful in defining that alignment, we really will change the world.

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Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend and colleague from Winnipeg South Centre for his visionary remarks and for presenting this very important bill. The Lake Winnipeg prairie watershed extends from the Rocky Mountains to the Manitoba-Ontario border and touches four U.S. states. It is the prairie watershed. As the hon. member knows, we have had two major floods and the worst drought in seventy years.

Can he offer us some reflections on how this co-operative framework can assist in protecting and managing our water resources?

Hon. Jim Carr: Mr. Speaker, because my hon. friend spent most of his adult life trying to wrap his arms around water—let us just imagine that for a minute—he knows the jurisdictions that are inherent in the Lake Winnipeg issue.

I think the jurisdictions include four provinces and a number of states and an international border. What is required in trying to make sense of all of those interests is to have a common goal, and the common goal is to clean up that water. I know that my colleague will play an integral part in making sure that is a success.

• (1350)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the member for Regina—Lewvan and colleagues right across Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, I will respond to the private member's bill, Bill C-235, from the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

I first wanted to say that I really respect the member. I enjoy working opposite to and sometimes constructively with him. Most of all, I am sincerely heartened to see him here and in good health.

My own background is, of course, a rural prairie one. I grew up near a village of about 200 people. My husband and I live and raise horses where he grew up a mile west of a town of fewer than 1,500 people, so no matter where I go or what I do, I am always a rural Alberta farm girl at heart.

As an MP, I have fought non-stop for farmers, for farm families, for oil and gas workers, for responsible resource development, for rural and indigenous communities and against burdensome government red tape, taxes and barriers to rural life. I am grateful to our interim leader for her friendship, counsel and confidence and for the opportunity to focus on rural economic development and rural broadband in the months ahead.

Right off the top, let me share the general view of prairie residents, especially rural people and those in Lakeland. The federal government in Ottawa is very far away, very expensive and very slow to respond. It does not get the realities or the priorities of prairie life, and the very best way the federal government can help the Prairies to develop and diversify their economies, to create jobs and to reduce emissions is to get out of the way. We are already doing it.

I know this member is sincere in his intentions to increase collaboration between all levels of government and indigenous communities, but it will instead add the very layer of bureaucracy that often stifles economic development initiatives or private sector projects, partnerships and investments in the first place.

A framework to enhance consultation sounds commendable. The reality will be a complex bureaucratic process spanned across three provinces and at least five federal departments, dragged out over a year and a half, just to create a plan that is likely to mostly feature predetermined federal Liberal government ideology and goals. While effective and timely collaboration does not always happen in practice, this attempt to create yet another layer of red tape is, and ought to be, unnecessary. There is nothing stopping federal and provincial ministers, existing departments and public servants from working together on any and every policy area that overlaps and impacts each other already. The fact that an MP thinks it is necessary to legislate such practice is actually an indictment on the status quo approach of current governments and politicians, and maybe even senior levels of departments and regulatory bodies.

I think most Canadians expect that this sort of work is already happening regularly and that it should not take a new law and a long drawn-out process to get it done. As someone who has worked in a provincial public service primarily focused on energy, environment and economic development policies and issues, I can say firsthand that it is eminently possible and reasonable for public servants to work in cross-departmental and cross-provincial capacities with the federal government, along with a variety of private sector and indigenous partners, and to achieve real outcomes.

A federally imposed, top-down, drawn-out legislated bureaucratic process is not necessary and is most likely to be long on meetings, procedures and reports, but short on deliverables, outcomes and actual economic or environmental results. Instead of accepting that yet another legislative- and administrative-heavy framework is what is required, it seems to me the ministers, departments and each level of government should both demand and do better. I believe that timely accountability is what most Canadians expect too.

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On top of that, frankly, I think what the member is trying to remedy in his bill is already happening in the provinces to which it applies. It seems to be a solution in search of a problem. Most notably in the Prairies and across Canada, provinces have created and already implemented working plans to reduce emissions and enhance environmental protection. These are both programs that enable more R and D and innovation to advance energy technologies and energy efficiency through seed funding or private-public partnerships, and specific programs designed to increase indigenous participation in economic opportunities, both as partners and as owners, by increasing the capacity for indigenous and Métis communities to participate in regulatory processes, and to advance economic reconciliation by enabling indigenous people to secure more significant, long-term economic opportunities to build legacies of prosperity and self-sufficiency for future generations through increased access to capital. The duty to consult on major federal resource projects or related infrastructure is of course an explicit federal responsibility, and it should focus on getting that right.

Therefore, it seems to me that an obvious unintended consequence of this bill is that it could actually undermine the extensive work already being done across the country, and particularly in the Prairies already leading the way, by municipal and provincial governments, indigenous communities, utilities and the private sector. Instead of this "Ottawa knows best" approach to formalize oversight across three provinces and to federally wag the dog on their respective approaches to environmental stewardship, the federal government would do well to identify all the ways in which federal programs, rules and taxes overlap, duplicate, contradict and add costs and administrative burdens to entrepreneurs, resource developers and farmers.

• (1355)

The federal government would do better to listen to private sector proponents and indigenous communities, which say the regulatory burden the Liberals have created in Canada is politicized, onerous, punitive and driving away billions of dollars in projects and hundreds of thousands of jobs in the very sectors this bill focuses on, because it is so disproportionate from competitor jurisdictions and economies that nothing can get built here. The federal government would do better to listen to innovators and fix the major problem in Canada that they call the valley of death, where years of risk-taking, innovation, collaboration, creativity, inventiveness, research and development, and money go to die before ever making it to real commercialized, usable, feasible technology in Canada, making innovators go elsewhere. The federal government must maintain high standards in its key areas of responsibility, obviously, but otherwise should get itself out of the way of local and provincial governments that know their jurisdictions best and out of the way of private sector proponents, entrepreneurs and innovators, who know their sectors best.

Let us face reality. It is safe to say that the majority of people in the prairie provinces, where the major economic drivers are agriculture, mining and gas and oil extraction, and which are home to 62% of employment in Canada's egg activities and food processing and 19% of Canada's resource-based employment, are rightly skeptical and suspicious about the current federal government's intentions and actions. The Liberals' high-taxing, anti-energy, anti-resource

development, anti-private sector legislative and regulatory approach has killed pipelines, driven away billions of dollars' worth of business and indigenous-partnered projects in oil, mining, natural gas and LNG development, and initiatives for more Canadian resource exports. Their approach has stuck 20 billion dollars' worth of resource and critical infrastructure proposals on idle in their cumbersome and prohibitive-by-design regulatory framework. The point really should be efficient, transparent, fair, objective and evidence-based due diligence in consultation, while maintaining Canada's world-class standards, not checking off boxes with ever-changing rules over the years and then not being certain a project can go ahead if it does get the green light. All of that has really done more to stifle innovation, R and D, technology advances and economic development and diversification in the Prairies than anything else.

This, of course, is at the heart of the matter. It is the fundamental difference in the world views and the approaches between the Liberals and the Conservatives and perhaps, really, between Ottawa and the Prairies.

The most significant private sector investors in clean tech; in emissions reduction; in new, renewable and alternative energy technologies; in solar, wind and green hydrogen projects; and in others areas are existing oil and gas, oil sands and pipeline companies. All kinds of government bodies at all levels, and utility companies, are currently shovelling millions of taxpayer and ratepayer dollars into pilots for what they call the energy transition. However, in real terms with real outcomes, it is actually the private sector energy and resource companies that have long been leading efforts on emissions reduction, technological adaptation and mitigation, energy efficiency, and environmental stewardship and remediation, without risking billions in tax dollars.

It is also true that initial academic and government partnerships with seed funding and favourable regulatory approaches were important to starting major developments that benefit all of Canada and spinoff employment in multiple other sectors like the oil sands. This is 100% true in agricultural industries and among egg producers too, so it is strange that this bill does not actually include egg production at all. I notice this is a PMB seven years in, so one wonders how much of a priority it is to the government.

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The fact that the heavy lifting and real leadership in emissions reduction and green technology advancements come from the private sector should not be a surprise to anyone. However, the federal government does often seem to be unaware. It stifles the very work and outcomes it says it wants to achieve, in favour of top-down, high-cost, complicated, low-results big government.

People in the Prairies, and especially in Lakeland, are not inclined to welcome the “I’m from the government and I’m here to help” mentality, and for many, many good reasons, so notwithstanding this respected member’s goodwill and positive aspirations, the Conservatives will oppose Bill C-235.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed reading my hon. colleague’s bill. It is very interesting. The intention is sincere, and it could be impactful. Kudos to my colleague, and I thank him.

This bill talks about concentration in the economy and the importance of diversifying the economy. As we know, having an extremely concentrated economy primarily in the provinces that produce very polluting resources has an important impact not only on those provinces, but also on the rest of the country and Quebec.

The first thing we need to talk about is the environment. We all know that one Albertan produces six times more greenhouse gas emissions than a Quebecker. One Saskatchewanian produces seven times more than a Quebecker. That is substantial.

Next is resilience. A poorly diversified economy is less resilient in the face of stress, recessions, geopolitical uncertainties and pandemics.

There is also dependence. Anytime too much of the economy is focused on a single resource or group of resources, that creates dependence.

Conservative members like to say that Quebec and other provinces depend on equalization. However, the greatest example of dependence in this country is Alberta’s dependence on oil. I will give an example. I had a lot of fun looking at Alberta’s old budgets. I like public finances. There are normally very few surprises in the public finances of the provinces, but Alberta was pleasantly surprised this year.

Based on last year’s projections, Alberta was expected to run a deficit of almost \$11 billion for the 2022-23 fiscal year. All of a sudden, a \$500-million surplus is announced. The Alberta government appears to be a genius at managing public funds.

The difference between the two Alberta budgets is that royalties on what they very affectionately call “bitumen” have increased by almost \$8 billion. That is what magically covered nearly 70% of the province’s deficit. Note that if Alberta had a value-added tax, a sales tax like most industrialized countries that know how to tax properly, like Quebec and the other provinces, like Europe, there would no longer be a deficit.

Yes, those provinces need to diversify their economy.

Beyond that, the market concentration can be calculated. Without getting into any detail, there are concentration indicators, such as

the Herfindahl-Hirschman index. When we look at the concentration of Alberta’s exports, the index is six times higher than that of Quebec, Ontario and the Canadian average, depending on the year. The most recent reliable statistics that I have date back to 2017. They are a few years old, but when we were debating the situation in Ukraine, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills did not hesitate to refer to a report from 2015 to say that we needed to produce more. I do not think that it will bother anyone that I am using data from 2017, but as an economist, I can say that the basic gist remains the same.

Yes, we need to diversify the economy.

Since I have been a member of the House, I have heard a lot of talk about diversification, in particular from those sitting next to me. Is there a problem with western Canada’s public finances? Let us diversify and produce more oil. Is global warming a problem? Let us produce more oil and hope that, in 70 years, when the oceans have risen by three centimetres, we are able to sequester greenhouse gas emissions. That is pretty obvious.

On a more serious note, I would say that the Conservatives even used the war in Ukraine to try to justify the construction of pipelines that will take 10 to 15 years to complete. We are not talking about Keystone XL; we are talking about forever. They are trying to sell us that. It is serious.

I am a relatively new MP. In passing, I would like to say hello to my constituents in Mirabel and thank them for electing me six months ago. Parliament is a rumour mill. We hear things in the halls and secrets in the cafeteria. It would seem the Conservatives are thinking about putting oil in Canada’s food guide.

● (1400)

It seems that this would resolve the problem of diversifying our diet. However, they do not agree at all. Some are wondering if it will be in with the fruits and vegetables. Others are wondering if it will be in with the meats and alternatives. I think it will end up with the dairy products because some people will put oil on their cereal in the morning. Since there is a leadership race, this question will likely be settled in September, or at least we hope so.

Let us come back to serious matters. This is an interesting bill that says that within 18 months after coming into force, the ministers concerned will meet with stakeholders. It says that they will have to make recommendations and reflect—it is a smart process, we admit it—that the report will have to be tabled in the House and brought to the attention of members, and that the process will have to be repeated every five years.

However, let us make sure that these reports do not end up like all the other reports, including the IPCC report. The government shows interest for a day and then throws it in the trash.

The same thing happened to the report of the commissioner of the environment. The commissioner blamed the government. We then asked questions in the House, but to listen to them talk one would believe that the commissioner was congratulating them. They need to do something else with these reports other than say that diversification will be paid for with more oil.

I, too, would like to see major research being conducted in Alberta. I have several university friends there, and I know that some research is already being done. I, too, want to see excellence, but this must be financed with something other than royalties.

Alberta must become less dependent. Their public finances indicate just how vulnerable Alberta is. When the price of oil goes up, everything is good; when the price of oil goes down, things are very bad. When things are good, they want more of it; when things are bad, their solution is to have more. Alberta and oil, it is like nicotine. When you miss it, you smoke more; when you smoke more, you cannot stop.

In the process that will lead us to reflect on this bill, I hope that we will find ourselves in a situation where we are constructive, forward-looking and do not continue to invest in an industry of the past. We must look ahead more than 10 years and stop relying on an industry in decline. Canada's history shows us that it has not always been easy. In former times, with the Pearson government, Canada's policy focused on buying Canadian.

We know they are very interested in the price of oil. Well, they were selling us their oil for more than the global price. That profit margin enabled them to develop the western oil sands, which cost a lot more to exploit than conventional oil because of the three processing stages.

In 2009, the Harper government said it would eliminate inefficient oil subsidies, whatever that means. Anyway, it does not matter what it means because the government did nothing. Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, our banks have invested \$609 billion of our money, our savings, in non-renewable energy projects, in oil. That is a total of \$609 billion, including \$84 billion for coal. This is the 21st century, but we are investing in coal. It feels like we are back in the days of old locomotives.

There are solutions, in particular industry-led ones. This has to be a two-way street. The Bloc Québécois has made a lot of green finance proposals because the transition must be financially worthwhile. We need to ensure that the big capital is going to the right place, that investors have an incentive to invest, and that effective price signals are sent. We can use taxation, a savings tax. Transparency in the banking system is lacking. I want to know if my bank is investing my money in dirty oil. I will then make my own decision, but I want to know.

We are talking about maybe working on the fiduciary duties of pension funds, which invest our pensions for 20, 30, 40 or 50 years, when this industry is expected to be on the decline. We are talking about norms, about norms from the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures, or TCFD, about other norms that could be applied to Crown corporations, and so on.

There is a lot to think about. There is a lot of work to be done. We need to get a lot of people around the table. I read this bill with

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great interest and I hope that it will produce something constructive for the future of people in western Canada.

• (1405)

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-235. It is clear that we need better co-operation between the federal government, the provinces and the territories in order to get serious about climate action. We know that is the case because we have not seen serious climate action. We haven't seen our governments rise to the occasion and make the investments we know we have to make for Canada to do its part with respect to lowering its greenhouse gas emissions. Clearly, there is a need for a conversation, so it is difficult to oppose a bill that sets up a framework for that conversation and a mechanism to report on that.

It was interesting to listen to the member for Lakeland because I think we have a very different take on the central message of this bill. I do not see it as an "Ottawa knows best" bill. I think it is an admission that Ottawa does not know enough about how to take serious action on the climate change file. That is a real disappointment to a lot of people who have been looking to governments and especially the federal government for leadership on climate action since it was elected in 2015 and promised it would do exactly that.

It is worth remarking on the fact that the bill is being presented by someone who has been a central player in that government, a former minister of both natural resources and international trade. If there is a disappointment with respect to the bill, it is that there are no clear indications as to what kinds of projects we should be moving forward on as a country. Clearly, there are conversations that need to happen to be able to co-determine those priorities along with other jurisdictions.

The fact that we have somebody who has been a central player in the current government for the over six years now that it has been in power, and whose main suggestion is to get the conversation going, is a real testament to the fact that Canada is not where it needs to be and that the government has not lived up to the promises it ran on in not only 2015, but 2019 and 2021. The fact that it went from having a comfortable majority in 2015 to just kind of hanging on by its fingernails in 2019 and then again in 2021 is a testament to the fact that Canadians are watching and they know the government has not made good on its commitment to take serious climate action.

Therefore, by all means let us carry on this conversation and have some public reporting out so there can be some accountability, but I do not think we can pass over in silence the disappointment at not having some concrete ideas about how we get there as a country.

Private Members' Business

It would be nice to see the federal government, the provinces and the territories agree on some things with respect to investments. I look to our own region, the region that is indeed the subject of this bill, western Canada and I think about some of the conversations that have happened and the various reports that have been published about the possibility of a western Canadian power grid. That would be about more than just simple transmission between provinces, but about trying to have a coordinated system of generation, transmission and distribution so that provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan, which have an enormous potential for solar and wind energy, can benefit from having neighbours in B.C. and Manitoba that have an abundance of hydroelectric power that can be used to even out the generation cycles of those other forms of renewable energy. That could be a massive benefit to Canada with respect to lowering our own greenhouse gas emissions.

It is also a project that could create a lot of employment, both with respect to the building and the ongoing maintenance and operation of the grid. A lot of Canadians look to pipeline projects as a place to create construction and ongoing jobs, but we can do that with renewable energy infrastructure as well.

Six and a half years of government by the Liberals and no real progress in championing a large infrastructure project like that is a missed opportunity and we are running out of time to keep missing opportunities. We need to get serious about selecting some of these opportunities. We need to get serious about investing in them. We need to get serious about investing in them not as a one-off pilot or a little project here or there, but with a plan for the next 10 or 20 years on how we are going to create sustainable infrastructure in Canada. That is important to not only get a sense of how we will do with respect to our greenhouse gas emissions but for work forecasts as well.

• (1410)

That is what gives Canadians confidence that they are going to be able to go out and get jobs, if they are employed in the industries that build and maintain our critical infrastructure of this kind.

It is also really important when we look at a stubbornly high unemployment rate, and we are going to talk about training. We need to talk about training, but we need to know what work is going to be there in the next 10 to 20 years. Certainly, a lot of work is going to be there just as a product of demand in sectors such as housing and others. We are going to continue to need tradespeople. There is an opportunity here to lay out some ambitious projects on a timeline for companies and other actors in the sector. I think of my own union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, which does a lot of good work in training electricians for the workforce.

Having a sense of the kind of work that is going to be out there, and that is going to be publicly funded as part of our effort to do our part in the battle against climate change, allows those organizations to work with training colleges, unions and contractors to figure out how we supply the workforce that we need.

That is why it is so disappointing. This would have been a great bill in the year 2000. This would have been lovely work to do back then. It would have been great for the government to have done it in 2015. The information and the research are out there. That is why these conversations between governments are important, because it

is a matter of choosing those priorities and building that political will, in the absence of which we are simply not going to make progress. As I say, we are really just running out of time to get this done.

To the member for Lakeland, I would say that this is not about whether government knows best. This is about there being a meaningful role for public investment in facing down the climate crisis and in training people for the economy. All the time, we hear that employers are concerned that they cannot find people with the relevant skills and experience to make their businesses go. They are looking to the government for solutions on that. They are looking to have meaningful training programs that are publicly funded, at least to some extent.

Those are things that the private sector is looking to the government for. We know that there has to be a role for the public sector in rebuilding the economy post-pandemic, and we know that there has to be a role for the public sector in taking on the climate challenge. The idea that somehow there is not a role for the public sector here is certainly naive, if it is true. Otherwise, it is just sort of trying to pass over the important role of the public sector here for the purposes of a political narrative. I think that is doing more harm than good.

We need coordination in order to meet the challenges of the climate crisis. We need coordination to meet the challenges of the labour supply shortage that we are facing, even in the face of a high unemployment rate. We have this curious problem in Canada: we have a whole bunch of people who are looking for work and cannot find it, and a whole bunch of employers who are saying that they are looking for workers and cannot find them. If the private market, on its own, was going to fix that, it would have done it by now. There is absolutely a role for governments to work with all of those stakeholders and come up with a plan.

Ultimately, this is a bill that is about planning. That is fair enough. This is planning not only that we need to do, but it is planning that we should have done by now. I think it is an admission. The fact that this bill comes from somebody who has been such a central player in the government is an admission that the government has not been doing that work, or certainly not doing it well enough.

Let us get on with this. I hope the government will not wait for the deadlines established in this bill, because I think it has enough information, or it should by now, in order to come up with a plan. I would hope that the conversations this bill calls for are conversations that are already ongoing. If they are not, we have a big problem.

I am comfortable moving the bill along, but I certainly hope the government is not going to take that as a sign that it can sit on its hands and wait another 18 months to start thinking seriously about how we take climate action in Canada.

Private Members' Business

● (1415)

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member of Parliament for Winnipeg South Centre mentioned in his intervention a moment ago, sometimes we need a little bit of luck, and only 24 members had worse luck than I did in the last private members' draw. Fortunately, my prairie colleague has put forward an excellent private member's bill, Bill C-235, which I was honoured to second at first reading, and I am thrilled to rise once again in support.

My hon. colleague recently served as the special representative to the Prairies. In this role, he provided members in this House with a clear-eyed assessment about the direction this government must take for our region to grow and our communities to thrive. The hon. member's guidance and wisdom have been deeply appreciated by everybody who has had the pleasure of meeting and working with him. We will never forget his passionate advocacy for those who call western Canada home.

As chair of the Liberals' Prairies and northern caucus, I have had the privilege of leading many great conversations about western Canada's future. Last week I had the immense pleasure of touring across Saskatchewan, meeting with local mayors, business and community leaders and area residents. These conversations have left me hopeful while giving me a deep appreciation for the challenges ahead of us. They have also shown me how valuable a framework of co-operation, as proposed through Bill C-235, would be in addressing these shared challenges.

I am a newly elected member of Parliament, but I have been a Calgarian my whole life. I have watched my city grow and develop through boom and bust. We are resilient and hard-working and we are always ready to come together to solve problems.

The world is changing more quickly than ever before. We are facing many massive challenges, and there are not many challenges greater than climate change. We are witnessing the devastating impacts of climate change today. It is not just tomorrow's problem.

The area I represent, northeast Calgary, was ravaged by a hail-storm in June 2020. I stood up for the thousands of residents affected by this devastating storm, which caused more than one and a half billion dollars of damage. This storm was one of the costliest weather events in Canadian history, a clear example of extreme weather caused by climate change.

While touring Saskatchewan, I heard about the growing threat of drought looming over the farmers who put food on Canadians' tables across the continent. From massive devastation caused by flooding in British Columbia to fires tearing through our forests, climate change is happening. Our Liberal government has already invested over \$100 billion to fight climate change. We are going to do more, and Bill C-235 will help us focus our efforts.

Our government has committed to fighting climate change throughout all we do. We have already taken major steps toward reducing emissions. There is much more work to do, and we are going to do it, but while we do our part, we cannot forget about western Canadian workers. The member for Winnipeg South Centre said it best: "This bill represents a new way of doing business as a nation."

Our western economy is incredibly well positioned to thrive in a green economy, but our government must make sure this happens. Western Canada, the Prairies, Alberta and Calgary need to be world leaders in all things energy as we move towards a low-carbon economy. Industry stakeholders understand that this is inevitable and are reorienting their operations to compete in a low-emissions environment.

● (1420)

Our government should incentivize the transition while understanding that it cannot happen overnight. Only the Liberal government recognizes both the urgency of climate action and the importance of supporting Canadian energy workers. Striking this balance is at the heart of Bill C-235.

Our green transformation will have tremendous effects, not only on the energy industry, but also in reaching our net-zero goals, which will require an economy-wide effort. It is about integrating clean energy into all energy-intensive sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, transportation and manufacturing; rethinking how we live and move in and between our cities and towns, investing in public transit projects, such as the blue line LRT in my riding of Calgary Skyview, as well as Edmonton-Calgary and Calgary-Banff train links; investing in rural transit; and consulting with counties, hamlets and towns to better understand their needs.

I recently spoke with Chief Cadmus Delorme of the Cowessess first nation. He re-emphasized the importance of his community being self-sustaining and of being an economic partner in the growth of the province and country. Our government recently invested \$5 million in a solar grid at Cowessess, which will allow the nation to power its own homes with renewable energy and contribute to the Saskatchewan grid. Bill C-235 would facilitate projects like these by mandating co-operation, collaboration and relationship building.

As a former city councillor, I have seen what happens when local government perspectives are shut out of conversations. Municipalities understand local priorities and concerns. Our federal government needs to build strong, productive relationships with our counterparts in towns and cities across the country, focusing on the Prairies. Bill C-235 proposes a framework to build a better economy. It is a framework that will help our federal government coordinate local co-operation and engagement. It is a framework that acknowledges that one level of government cannot build a green economy alone, and it is a framework that can serve as a model from coast to coast to coast.

I want to voice my full support of this bill once again. I hope the House can stand up for prairie workers as we continue to build a green economy that works for everyone.

Private Members' Business

• (1425)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take the opportunity to speak to this bill. I congratulate my colleague from Winnipeg South Centre for bringing forward his thoughts on how we can succeed in the Prairies. It is great to see him back in this place, and I bid him more successes.

I was also pleased that the member would be open to amendments because, as he said, none of us has a monopoly on all the good ideas. I thank him for phoning me yesterday to have a conversation about this bill. I had some concerns, which I shared with him, and he was willing to look at an 18-month time frame that might be put forward for something like this.

He is very aware of the fact that there have been lapses in some of the green funding in the Prairies for some of the projects there. I spoke specifically to him about one with natural gas in the south central area of Manitoba. The government may not be willing to fund those types of things anymore, but it is a great benefit to a small part of one little prairie province.

The agriculture side of the industry has made great steps over the years in efficiencies, the use of energy savings and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and this seems to be more focused on getting things green than in getting things done.

• (1430)

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

[*Translation*]

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 21, 2022, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

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

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