



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 004

Wednesday, May 6, 2020

Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1205)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

[*English*]

Welcome to the fourth meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[*Translation*]

At the outset, I wanted to say a few words to once again thank all of the staff of the House Administration who have been working so hard to set up the virtual and in-person meetings of the committee and to all members for their patience and co-operation.

Yesterday's virtual meeting saw fewer technical issues arise than during our first meeting, and I am convinced that, as we all become familiar with this new technology, the proceedings will continue to go smoothly.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, April 20, the committee is meeting today for the purpose of considering ministerial announcements, allowing members to present petitions, questioning ministers of the Crown, including the Prime Minister, in respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a take-note debate considering a motion that the committee take note of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's proceedings will be televised in the same way as is typical of the House.

We'll now proceed to ministerial announcements. A minister of the Crown may make a short statement, and a member of each of the recognized parties as well as a member of the Green Party may then comment briefly on the response.

We'll go to Ms. Freeland.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Chair, between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the allied victory in Europe on May 8, 1945, more than one million Canadians served in our country's armed forces. More than 43,000 lives were lost. In the liberation of the Netherlands, which we also commemorate this week, 7,600 Canadians perished over the course of a brutal nine-month campaign. The scale of their generation's sacrifice can be difficult to comprehend, for this was a time when Canada's population was only 12 million—think about that—yet they shouldered their bur-

den and they carried it without complaint until the job was done and they could come home and resume their lives, those who were able to come home.

In so doing they laid the foundation not only for seven decades of postwar peace and prosperity but also for a new generation of immigrants from across the European continent and, in time, from around the world, who built new lives in Canada, and who built Canada itself.

[*Translation*]

For them, our country represented peace and a refuge from crisis and turmoil. Then, as now, Canada held the promise of a better, more peaceful and more prosperous future. What better and more enduring example is there of Canada's importance in the world?

The tens of thousands of patriotic men and women who enlisted to serve their country during the darkest days of war in the early 1940s could not have known that, in the end, the allies would be victorious.

[*English*]

They could not have known that on a sunny day in May long years later, Canadian soldiers would be greeted as heroes by throngs of overjoyed men, women and children in the streets of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague. They knew only that they had a moral obligation to serve, one shared by the six brave Canadians who tragically lost their lives a week ago while serving in Operation Reassurance.

Mr. Chair, as we mark the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day, we honour all these great Canadians. We honour their toughness, their moral fibre and their resolve, which changed the course of history. We honour their sacrifice.

[*Translation*]

For the Canadians who went to the front lines and served in the Second World War not only defeated the forces of fascism, authoritarianism and oppression. They built a better world. They built transatlantic alliances that protect us to this day and formed bonds that enhance our prosperity.

When Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands addressed this House in 2018, he spoke of the enduring friendship between our two countries, a friendship forged during the war through the extraordinary actions of ordinary Canadians. Our soldiers liberated the cities from Nazi occupation and, to this day, the children who hailed them in the streets remember them still. Seventy-five years later, they continue to tend to the graves of our fallen soldiers. Their children and grandchildren lay flowers at the feet of monuments dedicated to the memory of our Canadian heroes.

• (1210)

[*English*]

It has been 75 years since our parents, our grandparents and our great-grandparents, the greatest generation, stepped up to do their part to build a more prosperous, secure and free world. As our Minister of Veterans Affairs put it, many sacrificed their future to liberate people who had suffered for years under brutal occupation. They left behind family, friends, children, parents and communities, people who loved them. My grandfather, Wilbur Freeland, and his two brothers, Carleton and Warren, were among those volunteers. Carleton and Wilbur came home. Warren did not.

Today, as our country faces a new battle against a pandemic that knows no borders, I cannot think of a better example to follow, and I cannot think of a better reason to serve.

For the last surviving members of the greatest generation, our elders are now the generation most in need of our protection from the COVID-19 pandemic. They look to us to do what is right, responsible and just, however hard that might be. They look to us to forgo, for now, the comforts and pleasures of gatherings and ordinary social interaction. They look to us to follow the advice of public health professionals to wash our hands, to avoid non-essential travel and to stay home as much as possible for as long as necessary.

I actually think it is very simple. We owe it to the generation of Canadians who won that great victory in Europe, and who built the peace that followed, to do whatever is in our power to keep them safe. We owe it to generations to come, our own children and grandchildren, to bequeath to them a country that is more prosperous, more free and more secure than the one we ourselves inherited.

They did their part. Now we must do ours.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go now to Mr. Brassard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I have the pleasure of joining my hon. colleagues in commemorating the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day.

[*English*]

Seventy-five years ago this week, the guns fell silent marking the end of a brutal war that had cost tens of millions of people their

lives. The silence was replaced by cheers and tears as citizens took to the streets to celebrate the German surrender and the beginning of an era of peace.

Today we remember the courage of the more than one million brave Canadians and Newfoundlanders who left their homes, their families and their friends to fight for freedom during the Second World War. Their service and sacrifice along with that of our allies allowed us to defeat the tyranny of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, but it came at a great cost. By the end of the war, more than 45,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders had made the ultimate sacrifice and 55,000 were injured. All carried scars, whether visible or invisible, that would last a lifetime.

While it is said that the First World War made us a nation, it was the Second World War that solidified Canada as a key player on the world stage. Despite our relatively small population, Canadian soldiers, sailors and aviators punched above their weight including at Dieppe, in Ortona, on Juno Beach and in the liberation of the Netherlands. In early 1945, the First Canadian Army helped free Dutch cities and towns from their Nazi occupiers. After five years of German occupation, the Dutch welcomed Canadians into their homes and formed lasting friendships.

Today, Canada is home to many proud Dutch Canadians. In my riding of Barrie—Innisfil, Tollendale Village just around the corner from where I live is home to many Canadians of Dutch descent who lived through this period of darkness in their homeland. When I visit Tollendale, I hear the stories of what they went through under German occupation. I also hear about the undying gratitude they have for Canada and for the brave soldiers who came to free them. It would not surprise me at all if Canadian flags are draped over the balconies of Tollendale Village today to signify that deep and profound level of gratitude.

However, the deep bond forged between our two countries goes beyond the battlefield. During the conflict, members of the Dutch royal family found sanctuary in Canada. In recognition of our friendship, the Dutch sent thousands of tulip bulbs to Canada after the war, which became an annual tradition and the inspiration for Ottawa's Tulip Festival, which we celebrate each May.

Like so many other celebrations, this year's Tulip Festival and the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day will be much different.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Normally, we would gather at community cenotaphs to honour those who gave their lives and to remind ourselves that freedom always comes at a price. Due to the current pandemic, this year we will gather online for virtual services or to pause for personal reflection.

[English]

While the crisis has affected Canadians from coast to coast, I know that the isolation has been particularly difficult for our seniors and our veterans. I ask Canadians to please remember to check in on the veterans and seniors in their communities. Let them know that they are not alone, that their service has not been forgotten and that help will always be available if needed. For they are the ties that bind this great nation together.

During these unprecedented times, Canadians continue to demonstrate the dedication, bravery and patriotism that defined our efforts throughout the Second World War. Our health care professionals are on the front lines each and every day fighting to keep us healthy and safe. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces are helping in long-term care homes. The Canadian Rangers are supporting northern and remote communities, and reserve units stand ready to help Canadians if needed.

[Translation]

Canadians are grateful for your service. On behalf of the Official Opposition, I want to say thank you.

[English]

Just this past week, we were reminded of the tremendous cost of service as six members of the Canadian Armed Forces were killed in a helicopter crash during Operation Reassurance. Our sincere condolences go out to the families of the fallen. May God bless them and comfort them during this difficult time.

Today and every day, let us honour our veterans, our brave service men and women and all those who continue to fight for a freer and peaceful world.

Lest we forget.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Blanchet.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Chair, if I may, I'd like to begin with a few words for the family and friends of Maxime Miron-Morin, who was lost in the Canadian Forces helicopter crash in the Ionian Sea. Mr. Miron-Morin is from Trois-Rivières, the region that welcomed me a few years ago. My thoughts are with all the people of the Trois-Rivières community, the Mauricie region, Quebec and Canada after the dramatic loss of these six lives.

Many human lives were lost in a much more dramatic military context. We lost 7,600 during the liberation of the Netherlands, in which the Canadian Forces and, of course, many Quebeckers took part. The duty of remembrance to which we are committed today must continue, in the hope that the conditions that make human beings develop the desire to take the lives of other human beings will become a thing of the past as quickly as possible, because it is such an aberration in its very essence.

The conditions for this to happen as little as possible were largely created after the Second World War. There are still terrible conflicts, which explains the need for armed forces. However, the armed forces can be used for other purposes and play a civilian role in our societies.

Of course, I would like to say a word about a Quebec hero, Léo Major. History tells us that he single-handedly liberated a municipality from German forces in the Netherlands. He is the kind of little known and very real hero who helps to create a strong identity within a nation.

These people who fought, certainly for their country, their nation and the people they identified with, often fought for their loved ones and their families. They did it to protect their loved ones, and we owe a lot to those people. We owe a lot to those who came before us. We owe a lot to the people who protected at the cost of their lives, but also built the rich society we live in today. That rich society now has the means to deal with an unprecedented health crisis.

It isn't innocent to remember today that if we pay tribute to people who have, in many cases, been dead for a long time, we could pay a living tribute to the seniors who are still with us, to those who have indeed built this rich society that can now face the pandemic. But words are not enough to pay tribute to them.

We have a duty to remember those who came before us, but we have a duty of action to those who are still with us. In purely health matters, we have a duty to ensure that as many people as possible who were with us before the crisis are still with us after the crisis. We must bring them alive and well to the other side. However, we also have an obligation, which we are too slow to honour, to relieve the most vulnerable people in our society of a weight, a burden and an anxiety that is becoming very heavy.

• (1220)

We stopped sitting in this Parliament in mid-March. Subsequently, we resumed our activities, sporadically and virtually. It is now the beginning of May and it is still our duty together—I do not want to point the finger at anyone, especially since we insist that we are ready to collaborate—to act now, on behalf of our seniors who are very much alive.

I repeat, and I can never repeat enough, that our seniors are most fragile in terms of their health. In that respect, in this pandemic, that does not need to be demonstrated by statistics. They are also most fragile in terms of their anxiety about finances. Geographically, they are the most isolated. Often, in the regions, they are isolated in places where few can travel. In Quebec, they have only just been allowed to go outside. They are isolated because they are less familiar with information technologies. That is why, in the east of the country, our elected representatives are telling us that the Service Canada offices must be reopened.

Once again, I am going to make a request. It represents a very small fraction of the assistance measures that have been implemented to date. We must settle this now. I want to see a smile of relief appear on the faces of hundreds of thousands of seniors who are impatient, yet who show not a fleeting shadow of malice. They are impatient simply because they are afraid and because they do not know how to deal with the situation. I am asking that we give the notion of urgency real meaning. At the outset, we feel the urgency. We want to address the urgency. But, with every passing day, the very notion of urgency loses more of its meaning, to the extent that the emergency measures that will end in a few weeks may not have fulfilled the functions for which they were created.

Since those who went before us have passed away, we have gathered the conditions that provide us with a better society. Today, let us forsake no segment of that society, be it the lobstermen in the east, the teams of researchers valiantly seeking solutions to our problems, the many, many workers in the highly diversified tourist industry wondering how they are going to make it through the summer, given that the programs will not longer exist at that point. And, of course, our seniors, to whom we owe everything.

The word "urgency", with all its precision and all its meaning, must remain the first of our concerns, until we are certain that we have left no one behind. Just like our ancestors in times of war who did all they possibly could so that none of their own was left behind.

So I invite us to act on our compassion and our remembrance. I invite us to act quickly on behalf of those whom we love, and to act, above all, out of respect for their own ancestors, who gave their lives.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1225)

[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Chair, this week we mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day. We honour all those great Canadians.

[Translation]

There are many events of which we are proud in Canada's military history. One of the best-known and most significant was the liberation of the Netherlands.

[English]

The Dutch people have never forgotten the efforts of our brave soldiers to free their country after years of harsh German occupation during the Second World War.

In the liberation of the Netherlands, 7,600 Canadians perished over the course of a brutal nine-month campaign. In doing so, they laid the foundation for seven decades of peace and prosperity.

[Translation]

Last year, I had the honour of attending a ceremony on Juno Beach to recognize Canada's major contribution to the war. I stood

on the same beach as thousands of young Canadians 76 years ago. I could imagine their courage as they fought against the forces of hate.

[English]

Standing there with Canadian veterans who made the trip back to where they fought was something that I'll never forget. Those who made the ultimate sacrifice had their young lives cut short so that we could stand here today as free people. We will never forget them.

• (1230)

[Translation]

On behalf of all New Democrats on this 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands, and to mark Victory in Europe Day, we express our gratitude to all our veterans for their service. We pay tribute to their sacrifices.

[English]

We will always remember.

The Chair: We'll now go to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, colleagues.

[Translation]

My thanks to the Deputy Prime Minister for her very strong, very clear speech, and to all my colleagues here in this room

[English]

We are joined together today, as we join together on some occasions that are sombre, where we can put partisan rancour to the side.

I want to acknowledge that I'm standing today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples and express gratitude. Once again, *meegwetch*.

I have the enormous privilege of being a close friend of two of the Canadians who were involved in the combat to liberate the Netherlands 75 years ago.

I'll be holding a virtual community meeting by Zoom on Friday night. I have invited one of those extraordinary people to join the meeting to speak to whomever from my community will be joining. Normally we would have done this in person.

I want to tell you a little bit about Major (Retired) Commander Charles Goodman. He served at D-Day. He was part of the liberation of the Netherlands. Fortunately, our Department of National Defence pays attention. The Department of Veterans Affairs brought him with the group that went to the Netherlands to celebrate the 70th anniversary.

Chic Goodman was one of those who liberated the Westerbork concentration camp. Anne Frank was once at the Westerbork concentration camp. It was somewhat of a transit station. People were rerouted from Westerbork. Anne Frank died at Auschwitz.

That liberation stands in memory of all.

When I was a child, a family friend, now deceased, was part of the Dutch resistance. I want to pause for a moment to pay tribute to the Dutch people who, under the occupying force of the Nazis, lived in the cruelest and most dangerous of circumstances and continued to shelter Jews, continued to fight in the resistance, and died fighting the Nazis in the period of time in which they were occupied.

Our family friend, Chris van Wiengarten, lived in The Hague. As a small child, I was riveted by the stories of him hiding in the family attic. There was a closet with a false front in which they hid the family's silver. Sure enough, the Nazis came one day and discovered that there was a false wall. They got through it, found the family silver but didn't go through a second false wall where they would have found the staircase to the attic.

There is tremendous courage and heroism among the Dutch people which I want to also celebrate today.

Chic Goodman, who is now in his nineties, will be joining the community virtual meeting on Friday night to share with some constituents his experience of war and, thank the Lord, his experience of peace.

Ironically, today is the anniversary of the death of my other very close friend who fought with the Canadian Forces in the liberation of the Netherlands. On May 6, 2014, six years ago today, we lost Farley Mowat. As many of you will know, Farley was a member of the The Hastings & Prince Edward Regiment. He wrote two books about the war. One is *The Regiment*, which is a tribute to the history of the the "Hasty Ps". The other book is *And No Birds Sang*, which is the story of the Italian campaign. To read that is to know we should never go to war again—ever.

Farley never wrote of what he did with behind enemy lines intelligence just before the war ended. He met in secret with a German commander who was willing to be persuaded that there was a problem. The civilian population of the Netherlands was starving. People were down to eating tulip bulbs and horses. There was a very immediate risk of famine, even as the allied forces closed in and were ready to liberate the Netherlands.

In that meeting, Farley Mowat, a young officer, with another officer, managed to lay the groundwork to get to higher command with a plan that the Germans would stand back if there were prearranged food drops coming from Canadian, British and American bombers on prescribed routes to drop food in places where otherwise, the Dutch would starve to death before they could be liberated. It's an extraordinary story. Farley never wrote it. But Operation Chowhound, which is what they called it, came out of Prince Bernhard making a frantic call, a plea, to General Eisenhower. Eisenhower said, "I can't do anything", but the Canadians put this together, and I think it bears mentioning.

This is a day to mark heroism, a day to mark sacrifice.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Today, I want to pay tribute to our veterans. I also want to pay tribute to those who have died this week.

[English]

We lost six brave Canadians in the Cyclone crash.

[Translation]

We are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands. We thank God for that liberation and for the courage of all the soldiers, including those from the countries that fought courageously against Nazi forces.

[English]

I want to close by reinforcing the words of the leader of the Bloc Québécois and picking up on the points made by our Deputy Prime Minister.

Among us today, the most vulnerable to COVID-19 is that generation. We can't turn our backs. It is urgent. I know there are things being done, but more needs to be done.

[Translation]

I want to echo the words of the leader of the Bloc Québécois, because I agree with him completely. We must do more for our seniors.

[English]

Today, I want to give thanks for those people I know.

Thank you, Chic, thank you, Farley, and thank you, Chris, the people I've had touch my life and who are the real heroes of a period of time that I hope we will never see again. We will embrace a post-pandemic period with the same spirit of courage that we exhibited postwar. Take care of each other. Rebuild our economies. Whether it takes a Marshall Plan or a new Bretton Woods plan, we work together.

Thank you, all of you. *Merci.Meegwetch. Dank u wel.*

The Chair: I understand there's an agreement to observe a moment of silence in honour of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian Forces and the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

[A moment of silence observed]

We'll now proceed to the period for presenting petitions, which will not exceed 15 minutes.

I would like to remind members that any petition during a meeting of the special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions. Once a member has presented their petition, we ask that they please come and drop it off at the table.

Presenting petitions, Mr. Motz.

• (1240)

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm honoured to present e-petition 2341 on behalf of more than 175,000 Canadians. This pile on my desk is but a small sampling of those 175,000 Canadians who oppose the Liberals' firearms ban and believe that using an order in council to bypass debate and accountability in this House is wrong and undemocratic.

This is the largest e-petition in Canadian history to date, although I am pleased to report that new e-petition 2574, started recently by my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill and also directly related to the recent gun ban, already has over 80,000 signatures in the first day. That fact just underlines the significant importance of this issue to Canadians.

As the e-petition 2341 petitioners note, the government's ban fails to take firearms away from criminals and unfairly targets Canadians, the firearm owners who are already among the most vetted in Canadian history and society. I believe it is wrong for the government to use the current pandemic and immediate emotion of the tragedy in Nova Scotia to push through their ideological agenda and make major firearms policy changes at this time.

As a former police officer, I know first-hand that Canadians want real action on crime, on gangs and on smuggled and illegal firearms. The vast majority of Canadian crimes committed with guns are committed by illegally obtained firearms by individuals who are not legally authorized to possess them. Nothing the Liberals announced last week addresses this problem. Instead, the government's policies are targeting law-abiding firearm owners instead of the dangerous criminals who choose to do evil with illegal and smuggled firearms. This is lazy and ineffective government.

Conservatives have supported and will always support common-sense firearms policies that keep guns out of the hands of dangerous criminals.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Point of order.

Mr. Glen Motz: We know that it is much harder—

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I have a point of order.

Could I get some clarification? Do the normal rules of presenting petitions still apply under the rubric of the COVID-19 committee?

The Chair: Yes, they do.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I would object to the member making a speech.

The Chair: That is a valid objection—making a political statement and making a speech.

I will ask the member to wrap up as quickly as possible.

Mr. Glen Motz: First of all, I would like to address the point of order, Mr. Chair, if I could.

In a democracy, this is a petition put in by Canadians who believe their democratic process has been challenged. As such, I believe I should have the ability to take two to three minutes maximum to explain what their concerns are to the House.

I need about one minute or less, Mr. Chair, to finish, and I would be honoured to be able to wrap it up on behalf of the Canadians who trust us to do their business in the House.

The Chair: Mr. Motz, the normal way of doing things is a very concise description of the petition. It has deviated a bit.

I will let you wrap up very quickly. I will give you about 30 seconds, if you don't mind.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We know that it's much harder and more difficult to go after criminals and illegally acquired firearms, but that is the difficult work that we as Conservatives have always been prepared to do. We know there's a lot to be done.

The Chair: If I may interrupt again, I want to clarify that it's about the petition, not about a speech.

I will ask you to wrap up about the petition, please.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Chair, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to do that, and I will. I just want to voice my objection.

This is how Canadians feel right now about what was done last week, and I will wrap up with this.

I would like to thank my constituent, Mr. Brad Manysiak, who initiated this petition, and the 175,310 Canadians who signed this petition.

I'm also thankful for the millions of Canadians who oppose this Liberal government policy and the Liberals' policies on gun control. We will stand together and not be deterred in our fight to do what's right for Canada and for Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I better not make a speech.

Mr. Chair, I am presenting electronic petition number e-431. The petitioners ask that the House assembled consider the urgency of the climate crisis, that it is an emergency and that Canada is called upon to set ambitious targets. The petitioners call for Canada to act expeditiously to ensure that domestic actions meet the global challenge of holding global average temperature changes to no more than 1.5°C.

• (1245)

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to present this e-petition. One of my young constituents, Haley Odegaard, presented this to me. I think it's timely considering just last week we were talking a lot about students in the House, and I hope we continue to talk about how we're going to help them.

This petition is in regard to the fact that over half of Canadian post-secondary students graduate with student loan debt. She indicates, and all the petitioners indicate, that millennials now account for 20% of Canada's population, and many aren't able to purchase homes, get married or have children due to this financial burden. An educated workforce is an advantage that should be viewed as an investment in our future, and higher education should be encouraged and not penalized.

The petitioners call on the Prime Minister and the government to eliminate interest on all outstanding and future federal student loans.

The Chair: Seeing no one rising to present petitions, we will proceed to questions for ministers.

I would like to remind honourable members that no member shall be recognized for more than five minutes at a time, and that members may split their time with one or more members by so indicating it to the chair. I also wish to remind the ministers that their response should approximately reflect the time taken for the question.

[*Translation*]

Please note that, given the rapid exchanges at this point in the meeting, we will suspend proceedings every 45 minutes, to allow the employees who are providing support to the work of this meeting can replace each other in complete safety.

[*English*]

Mr. Scheer.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Chair, small businesses are facing unprecedented challenges. Moreover, the government is not providing the rent subsidy to those that have lost less than 70% of their income. Those that have lost 50% of their income are not entitled to the subsidy and perhaps will have to close their doors. The government is preventing the economy from reopening because of the nature of this program.

Is it ready to make changes that will make the program more generous and more flexible, in order to assist small businesses in need?

[*English*]

The Chair: The Deputy Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, we agree that small businesses are essential for the Canadian economy. That is why our government has implemented an economic program that is without precedent in Canadian history. We have done so to help all Canadians, including workers and businesses. We have specifically helped

businesses to pay salaries. Small businesses can access loans of \$40,000.

As for rent...

The Chair: Mr. Scheer, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: The problem, Mr. Chair, is that the cold-hearted nature with which they design these programs is forcing incredibly difficult choices on small business owners. For example, a small business owner who is told in the next few weeks that he or she is able to reopen at a reduced rate will face a very difficult decision of whether to operate at 50% of their revenues and lose the supports, or stay closed and be able to pay their rent with the subsidy program.

Why won't the government make these programs more generous and more flexible to facilitate the reopening of our economy?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, let me start by challenging the notion that our economic support has been in any way cold-hearted. I think all the members of this House really, really feel for Canadians. We know that this is an unprecedented time, without parallel since the Second World War, and I think all of us are working hard to support Canadians and Canadian companies.

Our economic support right now is at 11% of GDP. That is a lot of money going into the Canadian economy, and that is great. When it comes to flexibility for the support for small businesses, we have made some tweaks along the way—

The Chair: We'll now go back to Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: The fact remains, Mr. Chair, that there are so many Canadians who are going to be facing incredibly difficult choices. The government has had this flagged for weeks now, and yet they have so far refused to change those programs. Someone who earns \$1 more than \$1,000 a month will lose the entire \$2,000 emergency response benefit. That is certainly not generous. Conservatives believe these programs should be more flexible.

There are other examples of the government hurting Canada's response to this pandemic. The delay in approvals by Health Canada is forcing provinces and companies to look elsewhere for personal protective equipment. We know that the mass production of personal protective equipment is critical not only to the front-line health care workers, like nurses, doctors and support workers, but also to supporting the efforts to get people back to work safely.

Canada's small businesses have answered the call and are trying to meet this demand, but news reports indicate that they are running into government bureaucracy and red tape, since Health Canada has so far been unable to come up with a system that fast-tracks approvals. Why is the government slowing down the production of Canadian-made PPE?

• (1250)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the government is not slowing down the production of Canadian-made PPE. I, in fact, agree with the member opposite that the fact that Canada has preserved a strong manufacturing base, the fact that Canada's outstanding patriotic manufacturers are stepping up to support us, is fantastic. We are working so closely with those manufacturers. We are proud of their work.

I spoke last night to the CEO of Thornhill Medical in my own riding. They are making ventilators right now and have started to deliver them to Canada.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Blanchet.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Scarcity breeds value, so it's going to be very valuable. I agree with the leader of the official opposition.

When we approved the parameters for the wage subsidy, the Bloc Québécois's support hinged upon the government providing support to cover some of the fixed costs of small businesses. To date, all we have seen is the rent assistance measure, but fixed costs include a lot more than just rent. The conditions are so restrictive that many small businesses still don't have access to any support. They are in panic mode, wondering how they will survive the crisis. I urge the government to honour the commitment it made and to even do more to help businesses with their fixed costs.

Let's talk about small businesses. During my press conference this morning, I talked about the lobster industry and the many small businesses that fall under the umbrella of tourism, including summertime arts events and research.

Will the government make a clear commitment today to extend the current programs as needed to keep pace with the reality facing businesses and the needs of Quebec and Canadian society, against the backdrop of this protracted crisis?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The government will commit to doing everything necessary to support Canadians, Quebecers and the Canadian economy. It's impossible to predict today what exactly is going to happen with the coronavirus, but the Government of Canada will be there to support Canadians. We've already done a lot. Eleven per cent of GDP is a lot, and we will do everything necessary going forward.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, I was expecting a few more particulars in the Deputy Prime Minister's answer. It's just as vague as what the minister responsible for the Gaspé region tells people in the fishing and tourism industry when they ask her the same question. When I talk to them, they don't know any specifics. More specific answers are needed; the clock is ticking. The government has been working on this a while now.

The situation the fishing and lobster industry is facing is alarming. Prices are going to be extremely low because the core markets aren't there. The pandemic is driving up expenditures, as is the case in every industry.

Tourism is an extremely diverse sector with specific needs. The programs are going to end before the tourist season even starts.

Will the government make a clear commitment to establish new programs? People in the fishing and tourism industry need reassurance, and they need to know that they will be supported in the short term.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, my answer is twofold.

First, the member is right to say that the seasonal nature of the fisheries and tourism sectors makes them unique. We agree that has to be taken into account.

Second, I want to point out that we have already invested \$675 million in our six regional development agencies, and we made such a large investment because the agencies provide assistance to fishing and tourism businesses in the regions.

• (1255)

The Chair: Mr. Blanchet has enough time for a quick 30-second question.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Given their revenue, Mr. Chair, businesses in the lobster fishery can't receive a \$40,000 loan in the hope of repaying \$30,000 the following year so they can have \$10,000 of the loan forgiven.

Will the government adjust the proportion of loan forgiveness and the deadline for repayment to reflect their circumstances and really help them?

The Chair: The honourable Deputy Prime Minister has about 30 seconds to answer.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I will simply say that fisheries, including the lobster fishery, are a special case, and we are working on it.

[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We know there is a return to work, and in some cases the work conditions are not adequate. Will the government confirm that if a worker refuses to do dangerous work because the conditions aren't adequate, that worker will still be able to access the CERB?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, no Canadian worker ever should feel compelled to work in dangerous conditions. That is particularly true today, when we know that conditions are particularly dangerous. This government will never do anything with our programs to force workers to make that kind of choice.

The Chair: Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The situation is that in Cargill, there are 900 workers right now who have fallen sick due to COVID-19. The workers and the union are asking that conditions be improved so that workers are not put in a situation where they're unsafe.

The federal government has authority over food safety. I make the argument that food safety and worker safety cannot be divorced. Will the government ensure that those workers are in a safe work condition?

The Chair: The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the member opposite is quite right about where the federal government has particular authority in food processing, which is to guarantee the safety of the foods processed there for Canadians to eat. I think all members know that it is the provinces who are responsible for public health and for delivering health care. They are doing a fantastic job, and we are collaborating closely with them.

When it comes to Cargill and food processing, I agree with the member opposite that it's something we all need to be particularly concerned about, and we have been.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the government commit to using the authority that it has under food safety to ensure that workers are also safe? There's no way that food can truly be safe if workers are in dangerous conditions and if workers are contracting COVID-19. We've heard about workers who have died in meat-processing facilities. If workers are dying, the food can't be safe. Will the federal government use its authority to ensure that workers are protected?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I think we all understand that there is a very clear difference between the duty to inspect food that is produced and ensure that this food is safe for Canadians, and the equally sacred, or I would say even more sacred, duty to ensure that workers are working in safe conditions. We take both of those extremely seriously, and we are aware what falls specifically in our jurisdiction. Having said that, we care very much about all Canadian workers. I think all of us are so grateful for the essential workers working in Canadian food processing. We have a shared responsibility to keep them safe.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, we know that in the return to work, one thing that is absolutely important is that if workers are sick, they should be able to stay at home and they need paid sick leave. So one of the things we are pushing for in the return to work is that the government guarantee that all workers get 10 days of paid sick leave, that they can use the CERB or the EI to obtain 10 days at minimum, so that if they are sick, they don't have to make the choice between going to work and risking the transmission of the illness, or staying at home but not knowing how they're going to pay their bills.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I absolutely agree with the member opposite that one of the most important things, I would say in general, but particularly when it comes to addressing the spread of coronavirus, is for all of us to stay home if we are even a little bit sick, and that is precisely why we took the unprecedented step of putting in place the CERB. The initial inspiration there was to make sure there was no disincentive for people to stay home to take care of themselves, to take care of their children, to take care of their communities.

• (1300)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It won't cover workers if they have to stay home for less than 14 days. My question is, will the government commit to allowing the CERB or a modified version of EI to be put

in place so that a worker can take paid sick day leave if they need to stay home from work?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, let me just point out one thing specifically when it comes to coronavirus, and that is that if people suspect, if they have symptoms that they think may mean they have coronavirus, the prudent thing would be to stay home for 14 days.

The Chair: Mr. Singh, you have time for a question of 30 seconds or less.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Sure. Government employees, workers and members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada have been delivering front-line care and battling COVID-19. They have been delivering emergency financial support to millions of Canadians, but 140,000 of them are working without a contract. Thanking these workers is not enough. Will the government commit to bargaining with these workers in a fair manner, to go beyond just thanking them, to bargain with them to ensure they have a contract?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I do actually want to start by recognizing the outstanding work of Canadian public servants. All of us on this side of the House are privileged to work with them every single day, and they are doing an amazing job in supporting Canadians through this unprecedented crisis.

When it comes to collective bargaining, our government believes in that, and of course we will bargain and negotiate in good faith.

The Chair: We'll now go on to Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can the minister confirm that she has reached out to the WHO in support of the health committee's request to speak to Dr. Aylward?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, I personally have not reached out to the WHO.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: As provinces begin to reopen their economies and Canadians are encouraged to return to work, is the government confident in the tools currently available to adequately trace cases and prevent a large second wave?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, in fact, the honourable member is correct. Tracking and testing are going to be a very important component of keeping Canadians safe. We are working with the provinces and territories as we speak to make sure that we have a comprehensive approach that will ensure the safety of Canadians when they return to work.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Chair, how many tests would Canada need to be able to conduct to reopen the economy?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, the question that the member opposite is asking is a difficult one, because in fact there are testing strategies that are determined by jurisdiction. Having said that, the federal government is working to make sure capacity exists.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Through you, Mr. Chair, what is Canada's current testing capability?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, our current testing capability is about 60,000 tests per day.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: How many Canadian companies have properly applied through the Buyandsell portal to supply Canada with PPE?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I don't have the exact number of how many companies have applied through Buyandsell. It's somewhere in the range of 5,000 to 6,000 companies. I know that my colleague Minister Bains has worked carefully to contact all of those companies.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: How many of these Canadian companies have been approved to begin producing PPE to the Government of Canada?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I'm looking for the detailed information on how many companies have been approved, but I can say that it's a fair number of companies. A variety of different devices are being analyzed through Health Canada. The determination of Health Canada is that the devices that are sold in Canada must be safe, obviously, for Canadians, so we continue to do that work—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: How many of these applications have received a response from the government?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The majority of the applicants through the Buyandsell web page have received a response.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: With the tools currently in place, is the government confident that Canada can manufacture enough PPE to supply our front-line and essential service workers?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Of course, Mr. Chair, as I am sure the member is aware, personal protective equipment is in hot demand all across the world as countries prepare for and manage their respective outbreaks. Here at the Government of Canada, the member is well aware that we have both a procurement process and a domestic production process. We are, we believe, turning a corner. We have—

• (1305)

The Chair: Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Has the minister heard from patient groups that the PMPRB regulatory changes will negatively affect drug supply?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In fact, Mr. Chair, there are some members of Canadian society who have concerns with the PMPRB and there are others who do not.

Thank you.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Has the minister heard from patient groups, though, on the PMPRB regulatory changes?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Obviously, my department and my office are in regular conversations with patient groups. We stand committed to ensuring that patients who suffer with a variety of conditions get the support and treatment they deserve.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: With COVID-19 currently threatening Canada's drug supply, will the government delay the PMPRB regulatory changes scheduled to come into force July 1?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I think the honourable member knows that our government has been committed to ensuring that medication is available to Canadians and that the cost of medication does not stand in the way of Canadians getting the medication they deserve and need to treat their illnesses. We'll continue that important work.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Again, Mr. Chair, will the scheduled July 1 date be rescheduled or delayed?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, our government will always remain committed to the work that we started in our mandate, and that has been supported by Canadians, to ensure that the cost of medication is not something that makes medication inaccessible to Canadians.

The Chair: We'll now go to Ms. Shin.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many of the communities look to ethnic media for information about their local cultural community, and use articles written through the unique lens of their ethnic Canadian identity. They are struggling to survive because of revenue loss caused by the pandemic.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage be including ethnic media outlets to receive part of the \$500 million in funding for cultural sectors? If so, how much, and which companies will benefit?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Chair, in fact we've already been investing in these media in more than 12 languages in Canada—more than 900 newspapers and 500 radio and TV stations across the country.

Ms. Nelly Shin: In doing so, have they been part of the \$30-million ad buyout? If so, will the minister provide my office with a public report that identifies which ethnic media companies were included, and how much was spent with each?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, the answer to the first question is “yes”. The answer to the second question is that we're still compiling that list, but we'll be happy to share it with them.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you so much.

Forest fire season is approaching in British Columbia. A wildfire in the midst of stringent social distancing measures would require a unique plan to ensure a safe evacuation. What would be the minister's emergency evacuation plan for forested urban ridings if a fire disaster were to take place?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Mr. Chair, let me assure the member opposite that our emergency preparedness work with provinces and territories is ongoing. In light of the COVID pandemic, a number of additional measures are being taken, but we are prepared to respond to any request for assistance that we receive from any of our provincial jurisdictions.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you.

The village of Belcarra in my riding is a densely forested area. If a forest fire were to start, it could potentially consume the entire riding. Currently, Belcarra has access to only one hour's worth of water to put out a forest fire. There are only two narrow roads for evacuation from Belcarra. So far, Belcarra has been safe because of luck and good providence. The limited water supply issue must be resolved, especially during this pandemic with its added complications.

Over a month ago, the Mayor of Belcarra put forward an application to seek government support to build a water reservoir in the village. Will the Minister of Infrastructure return my request for a phone or Zoom call and discuss this urgent need for infrastructure support with the mayor of Belcarra?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, a very important part of our work in emergency preparedness is making investments in communities right across the country to reduce and mitigate the impact that wildfires and flooding can have in all of our communities. There is certainly consideration going on, and investments through our infrastructure spending, to invest in communities when those requests come in. When they come in, they will be assessed appropriately and responded to as necessary.

• (1310)

Ms. Nelly Shin: In response to that, Mr. Chair, I would just like to ask for a commitment soon on when that time would be, because there is urgency in this.

Moving to my next question, many business owners in my constituency are struggling through the pandemic and feel left behind, because they hire contract workers and don't meet CEBA's \$20,000 payroll requirement. Other business owners don't qualify for CEBA, because they've been paying themselves through dividends, and dividends don't count towards payroll.

Will the Minister of Finance extend CEBA qualifications to include these business owners so that they too can have a chance at saving their businesses?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, our government has been working around the clock to develop those programs. CEBA is one that is helping many businesses. I know that more than 535,000 businesses have already applied for CEBA. We're continuing to look at how we can help those businesses who fall in the cracks, and we will continue to do so.

Ms. Nelly Shin: I would just like to add that these asks have been coming for a long time. They're getting very desperate, so I hope the response will be very quick.

Despite CECRA, many businesses are still challenged with paying rent because landlords are opting not to participate. Recent sur-

veys show that only one in five landlords are opting in. Will the Minister of Finance amend CECRA to incentivize more landlords to participate so that Canadian businesses can survive?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, that was another great question by the member. This is an unprecedented challenge, and I know that many businesses are having to make sacrifices that they never imagined they would need to. Our government is encouraging landlords to do their part and help tenants, as in your example, to get through this. Many landlords have already stepped up to the plate. We will continue to encourage with the program we've set up.

[Translation]

The Chair: We now move on to Mr. Martel.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Chair, as we all know, the price per tonne of aluminum is at an all-time low. We expect the government to strongly defend aluminum workers. A low-carbon buying policy is needed to protect our aluminum industry. Will the government be announcing specific measures to support those workers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Our government is committed to defending aluminum workers and the sector. Beyond the support under CUSMA, we have strengthened our anti-dumping rules. We've also put new tools at the disposal of the Canada Border Services Agency so it can determine whether aluminum is being dumped in Canada. Lastly, we've created a new oversight regime for imports—

The Chair: Order, please. Mr. Martel has the floor.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, owners of sole proprietorships and partnerships such as farms, day cares and hair salons are largely paid through dividends or income splitting. These businesses still aren't eligible for the Canada emergency business account.

Since the government recognizes dividends as qualifying income under the Canada emergency response benefit, does it plan to change the eligibility criteria so that these businesses can apply?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, our government recognizes that sole proprietorships are good businesses that provide good jobs for Canadians, and we have introduced measures to help them cope with the crisis, including providing access to cash at this difficult time. We will continue rolling out programs that support sole proprietorships.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, the Canada emergency student benefit has forced many employers to contend with bribery when it comes to students working part time and wanting to receive the \$1,250 monthly benefit.

What incentives is the government going to offer to encourage students to return to work as part of the economic recovery?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the member for his question, because it gives me the opportunity to say that Canada is proud of students. We are also very proud of their work and their contribution to human capital. We are proud of the energy and ambition they bring to Canada.

We have no doubt that they are going to work very hard if they have the opportunity to do so in the coming months.

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, yesterday, the government announced federal assistance in the amount of \$252 million for Canadian farmers, even though the Canadian Federation of Agriculture was calling for emergency funding in the amount of \$2.6 billion. Dairy farmers have had to dump thousands of litres of milk down the drain because processors don't have enough people to do the work.

Is the government truly going to help farmers and dairy producers, instead of just talking about it?

• (1315)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Chair, dairy producers are coping with decreased demand mainly as a result of restaurants and hotels shutting down. Thanks to the Canadian Dairy Commission, farmers are able to manage, purchase and store dairy products. We are going to make a legislative change to increase the commission's lending capacity—I hope with the support of the opposition members.

Mr. Richard Martel: In my riding, Mr. Chair, many people's jobs depend on tourism, including the cruise ship industry. The Saguenay Fjord and surrounding villages are a premier destination for tourists. Our agri-food products are worthy of being served by top chefs.

How does the government plan to help the tourism industry?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, we know the tourism industry has been hard hit by COVID-19. It was among the first to feel the impact, for that matter. We are in constant contact with industry stakeholders. Since the beginning of the crisis, we've been in contact with the provincial and territorial tourism ministers, as well as industry representatives.

On top of all the measures my fellow members mentioned, our government invested \$675 million in our six regional development agencies and \$287 million in the network of community futures de-

velopment corporations to help businesses, especially those in the tourism sector.

[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Chair, confusion is spreading among hunters and farmers over the government's firearms ban. The government's regulations prohibit many modern 10-gauge and 12-gauge shotguns with removable chokes because they exceed the maximum bore diameter of 20 millimetres, as outlined by the government.

The minister issued a statement last night that the Liberals are not banning these commonly used shotguns, but isn't this an empty public relations gesture since judges and police officers will enforce what is written in law and not what the minister writes on his Facebook page?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I really appreciate the efforts that some are making to confuse this issue, but the reality is crystal clear. The government, under prohibitions of military-style assault weapons, has not banned 10-gauge shotguns which have a bore capacity of 19.69 millimetres, which is under 20, nor 12-gauge shotguns which have a bore capacity of 18.53 millimetres, which is obviously under 20. The threading of those weapons for the affixation of a choke in no way changes the nature of that firearm. They will not be prohibited.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Chair, why then are lawyers raising this? Why is the National Post writing about this? Why is the local newspaper in my riding, The Saint Croix Courier, telling bird hunters to be careful about going out this weekend with these commonly used firearms, shotguns?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, people who sell weapons that are designed to kill people are very concerned about the impact. In order to garner greater public support for their weapons, they're frightening farmers and hunters, none of whom will be impacted by the measures we implemented.

I'll repeat one more time, 10-gauge and 12-gauge shotguns are not prohibited under this order in council.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Chair, in the minister's experience, do law enforcement officials enforce the laws and rules and regulations as they are written, or do they enforce what a politician might say or write on his Facebook page?

Hon. Bill Blair: Having spent 40 years as a police officer and 10 years as a chief, and having worked with literally tens of thousands of police officers over those decades, I can tell you that the police officers know their jobs. They are trained in the law and they know what is and is not covered under the law.

We have been very clear. This does not cover 10-gauge and 12-gauge shotguns. The police will understand that. They know how to do their jobs. I trust them.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Chair, the Deputy Prime Minister told the House last week that she holds former Liberal MP Irwin Cotler in high regard after he blamed Communist China for the scale and spread of COVID-19. Mr. Cotler also likened Beijing's cover-up to the Chernobyl disaster in the former Soviet Union. As well, the Deputy Prime Minister agreed that democracies are more transparent and accountable than totalitarian governments.

Why then has Ottawa not joined Australia and other democracies in calling for an investigation of Beijing's reporting of COVID-19?

• (1320)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I very much hold Irwin Cotler in high regard, as I think every member of the House does. I don't think I agreed that democracies are more transparent than authoritarian regimes. I think I said they were and maybe others agreed with me, which is good because we are a democracy.

When it comes to looking into how we got here with coronavirus, we absolutely agree that it is going to be very important to have a review. Our Minister of International Development spoke about that with Dr. Tedros of the WHO—

Mr. John Williamson: The Chinese Communist Party is critical of a decision by MPs to formally summon a Canadian World Health Organization adviser to testify before Parliament's health committee. As well, Beijing is pressuring other nations to dismiss these investigations.

Will the health minister urge WHO officials to co-operate with our Parliament to understand the international agency's handling of COVID-19?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me just say to that, Mr. Chair, that no country in the world has any business telling Canadian parliamentarians and Canadian parliamentary committees what they can and cannot do. We are a sovereign country and a sovereign democracy. I think all of us are rightly proud of that.

The Chair: We will go on to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's good to see my colleagues here today. I hope everybody is keeping well both here in the chamber and across the country.

My questions for today are going to focus on the CRA and the upcoming tax deadline of June 1. Being about three and a half weeks away now, can the government advise what percentage of Canadians have completed their tax returns to date, and furthermore, if that number is above or below where we would normally be at this point?

Hon. Mona Fortier: As we know, our government understands that Canadians are going through a difficult time. That's why we're here to support them and why the agency has announced a series of relief measures for individuals and businesses for the 2019 tax season. Those relief measures include but are not limited to extending the deadline for filing income tax returns to June 1, 2020 and—

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Chair, my reason for asking is that I'm growing increasingly concerned that too many, particularly lower-income Canadians who rely on volunteer clinics, are going to miss the deadline. I have concerns about the volume of filing still left

outstanding and the lack of time for tax preparers and volunteers to complete those returns.

From a local Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry perspective, I am very fortunate to have a great group of volunteers in my constituency office through the community volunteer income tax program. That group last year completed nearly 6,000 returns. Now we rightfully suspended back in mid-March whenever the COVID crisis hit and we did our social distancing. The volunteers by that point had completed about 1,500. Normally they would have a month and a half to complete the other 4,500. However, there are millions of Canadians being advised to stay at home. Frankly, with the deadline approaching in three and a half weeks, I'm just concerned that we're in a similar situation in many parts of the country.

Is there any consideration to a further extension of the tax deadline to make sure people can get their taxes done?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, honestly, we are currently still bringing the current measures into action. Of course, we know these are unprecedented times. We will have to monitor it to see if we need to take this concern into consideration. Also, we know that Canadians are at home right now and want to do their taxes, but they will need some support, especially the most vulnerable who we know go to those tax clinics to get help doing their taxes.

We will take that into consideration and will be back to share those next steps.

Mr. Eric Duncan: The serious time crunch we have is not just from the tax deadline itself, but also from the renewal of benefits that come from Canadians filing their taxes. Every July, rates and payments for GST, HST, the guaranteed income supplement and the child tax benefit, among others, get recalculated. If someone is reliant on these benefits, we don't want to see them cut off. Benefits rates for many low-income Canadians renew in July. Millions of Canadians live paycheque to paycheque in normal circumstances, let alone during this pandemic.

Can the government assure Canadians that they won't be cut off their benefits in July if they can't get their taxes done safely and in time because of the overwhelming demand and the time remaining? Furthermore, is the government considering extending current benefit rates until August or September as a potential solution, to ensure there's no interruption of these much-needed benefits to Canadians now more than ever?

• (1325)

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm delighted to be given this opportunity to talk about the importance of delivering these benefits and what we've done in the last few weeks in terms of enhancing them. First is the Canada child tax benefit, which we put into place just a few years ago and which is benefiting 3.5 million families. The great news is that they are going to receive, on average, an additional \$550 just a few weeks from now.

We're also very mindful of the importance of the increased GIS we put into place just a few months ago for seniors. We're also very mindful of the increase in the GST tax credit, which most low-income and modest-income seniors received just a few weeks ago. We'll keep working very hard to make sure not only that they have access to those benefits but also that they actually receive them.

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Allison now.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Still too many small and medium-sized businesses are not getting any support from the government. They have been forced to shut the doors. They have no income and no sales, and now they have no hope but they still have expenses. The wage subsidy doesn't work because they have no staff; rent relief doesn't go far enough, and their fixed costs are high.

What is the government going to do for these businesses that have given up everything, sacrificed everything and are currently at risk of losing everything?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, since day one we have been providing immediate help to businesses in need through programs such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency business account. However, it has become clear that certain sectors of the economy and their workers may not qualify for existing measures. That's why we have been taking additional action to provide immediate relief to innovators and young entrepreneurs, and businesses in rural communities.

I will be continue after he asks me his next question.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, the pandemic has been hard on the small business community that employs many Canadians. Small business owners continue to struggle and many don't qualify for any government help. Sole proprietors in my riding, such as landscapers and greenhouses, were deemed non-essential and forced to close their doors as part of the fight against this virus. To be eligible, these businesses are being asked by government to have a business account. Many owners have operated with a personal bank account for years.

Will the government expand its criteria to allow these small business owners to qualify for CEBA loans and stay open?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Our government recognizes that sole proprietors own good small businesses and offer good jobs to Canadians. We have therefore put in place measures to support them through this crisis that will help provide cash flow during this challenging time, including the Canada emergency response benefit, the

loan guarantee and the co-lending program, as well as the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance. We will continue to work with those businesses that are falling through the cracks.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, recently the government announced over \$600 million of aid to Canadian media, including tax credits to help the sector during this pandemic. The government has been a joke when it comes to transparency, however, on where all the money has gone. I can tell you that the local publications in Niagara West haven't received a dime. In rural ridings like mine, these local papers are essential to keep folks informed about our community.

Will the minister commit today to make help available to small community publications like those in my riding of Niagara West?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: In fact, we have already started deploying money to regional and local newspapers and media across the country. Earlier on, I specified a \$30-million aid package that has gone to media, to more than 900 newspapers across the country and 500 radio and TV stations across the country in 12 different languages, including French, English and Inuktitut.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, currently the government is seeking a negotiated settlement of the WTO wine challenge by Australia. There is a concern that the Canadian wine industry will lose the federal excise exemption, which will risk the future of hundreds of wineries and grape growers across Canada.

This is compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has a negative impact on winery tourism, is closing retail channels and has created a significant revenue losses for vintners in my riding and across Canada. In light of these two threats, will the government implement an industry-proposed wine grower value-add program to replace the excise exemption?

• (1330)

The Chair: The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I would like to thank the member for that very important question. I think everyone who is aware of the wine industry and the trade issues that it faces is aware of the seriousness of the Australia wine challenge, and it is absolutely the case that both the industry and the government are going to have to adapt in this new environment. I think we need to work together to do that.

The Chair: Mr. Allison, a very brief question.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, absolutely.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced three-quarters of the wineries in the Niagara region to lay off staff. Half of them have been temporarily closed because of their operations. This is about to get worse with the loss of the excise exemption, creating a bigger crisis for the entire Canadian wine industry.

The proposed wine growers' value-add program is trade legal and would provide immediate support at little additional cost. Will the government agree to implement this program?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, as we are in unprecedented times, we know that we have put forth an economic emergency plan to support workers, Canadians and businesses, and we are continuing to look at how we can continue to support these businesses that are in very hard times. I look forward to working with my honourable colleague to find those solutions and bring them forward.

The Chair: We'll now take a very short break, for probably about 45 seconds, to allow our console operator to switch over safely in these times of COVID-19.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.)): Order, please. We will now resume.

Ms. Larouche has the floor.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

With society aging, a larger part of the population is vulnerable, not just physically, but also financially. What's more, growing senior poverty affects women, in particular, since there are significantly more senior women. In 2015, women made up 55% of those aged 65 or older. They tend to live longer and account for the majority of caregivers.

It's appropriate, then, to look at the measures that have been announced since the crisis began with a critical eye. Unfortunately, none of them has done much to improve conditions for seniors, even though the Prime Minister keeps saying that he wants to announce measures to help them.

In a time of crisis like this, isn't it beyond necessary to immediately raise the monthly pension benefit by \$110 for those 65 or older and to enhance the guaranteed income supplement?

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister.

Hon. Deb Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Madam Chair, thank you.

I want to assure Canadian seniors that the government has been working on how best to serve their needs during this pandemic. COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on seniors; however, their pensions and their benefits are still flowing. Unlike those who have lost their jobs and those who had to close their businesses, they still have income.

However, it is tough, so we've introduced measures such as the GST credit for low- and modest-income seniors and reducing the RRIF withdrawals by 25%. We've also made them accessible for the CERB should they not have got their income because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We continue to look at ways to support seniors during this difficult time.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: The GST credit and the CERB aren't specifically designed for seniors. Here are some statistics that illustrate the drop in seniors' purchasing power.

In 1997, people 65 or older were receiving 13.4% of all reported income in Quebec. In 2015, that proportion rose to 19.9% of Quebec's total revenues, a 6.5% increase. By comparison, people 65 or older filled out 15.9% of income tax returns in Quebec and 22.8% in 2015, an increase of nearly 7%.

In short, seniors' overall income has not kept pace with the overall increase in taxpayer earnings. That means seniors have less purchasing power than other taxpayers, but their expenses continue to go up. The situation is even worse in a crisis, with rent increases, housing adaptation and home care costs, rising grocery bills, higher drug costs and so on.

Is the minister aware that, at this rate, \$110 more a month may be the bare minimum seniors need to cover their expenses?

• (1335)

[English]

Hon. Deb Schulte: Madam Chair, we definitely recognize that the benefits that seniors receive, the OAS and the GIS, are an important part of the retirement income of Canadians, particularly for lower-income seniors. We have, as I mentioned, already introduced many measures and we are definitely aware that COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on seniors. They have greater need for services and supports. This is why we have also introduced \$9 million more for new horizons money to go to United Way to help support those seniors most in need, especially vulnerable seniors. We are also pivoting our new horizons for seniors program, which has disbursed about \$50 million since January. We've pivoted that program to allow the organizations that are directly supporting seniors to be able to help those in need in the community.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, I'd like to talk about something that isn't new, the new horizons for seniors program.

Since you recognize that seniors have particular needs, you should be introducing specific measures to help them. According to Quebec's Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques, if the government doesn't enhance the public pension plan, a scant 27% of Quebecers will have a decent income in retirement.

What's more, in this time of crisis, people are making it clear to me that they are very worried about protecting pension plans, especially with so many bankruptcies expected. Protecting workers' pensions is something many seniors organizations are concerned about, all the more so since pension funds are running deficits. When all is said and done, seniors' purchasing power is dwindling as their savings shrink.

Shouldn't we be doing something now to help them through this crisis? Something as simple as increasing the monthly pension benefit by \$110 and enhancing the guaranteed income supplement for those 65 or older would. That's a mere fraction of the CERB and the emergency student benefit.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Please give us a five-second response, if you possibly can.

Hon. Deb Schulte: Thank you very much. In five seconds I can say that we are definitely continuing to look at how best we can serve seniors during this pandemic, and we will continue that work.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Simard, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The current circumstances are particular because of the crisis, and the reflection on crisis recovery will consist of two phases. First, we must never again be caught off guard by this kind of a pandemic. Second, certain economic recovery opportunities will have to be seized.

I feel that the research world is essential for meeting those two requirements. However, it is not currently being discussed. We know that the main research institutions are going through a difficult time because a large part of their funding has been cut.

Has the government looked into the possibility of providing wage subsidies for research institutes, so that their expertise would not be lost?

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, to the member opposite, for highlighting just how important our research community is to Canada. In fact, we've been working with the research community to make sure researchers have what they need to continue their excellent work during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, we have established funds, enormous amounts of money—\$300 million in the first tranche, for example—to accelerate research in the area of the outbreak, whether it's on vaccine trials, whether it's on new treatments or even on some of the social outcomes related to the outbreak. We'll continue to work with the research community to make sure we understand what its needs are and to support and retain the brightest minds in our country.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Chair, I am fully aware that the government has invested \$300 million. I will talk later about the investment it has announced concerning AbCellera.

I am wondering whether the government is aware of the requests made by Quebec's chief scientist, Mr. Quirion, who has been promoting a fairly interesting initiative: the Quebec COVID biobank. That is a research group fully dedicated to the sequencing of the COVID virus. It has already received international recognition in that area. I think it has already applied for financial assistance from the government.

As Quebec is one of the sites of infection with the most cases, this may be an opportunity to collect samples that will help fight the virus more effectively.

Are you aware of the Quebec chief scientist's request to participate in the Quebec COVID biobank?

• (1340)

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I will say that sounds extremely interesting and valuable. I look forward to meeting with the member opposite, virtually of course, to talk about this particular researcher. The chief scientist of Quebec makes it sound as though there are some very good potential opportunities to partner. If that isn't happening already, I will certainly check with the research community to make sure that this particular individual is looped in to the work that's happening nationally.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: In the same vein, the government announced earlier this week that it was allocating \$175 million to the firm AbCellera. I am wondering on what basis that \$175 million was allocated.

Are there currently teams of experts in place to study the various proposals that are being made? Are those groups of experts looking at the directions for federal government research? On what basis was that decision to allocate \$175 million to AbCellera made?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I will say that it's an amazing researcher community that we have in Canada. In fact, in the early stages of the outbreak, many of the applications were peer-reviewed by other researchers. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which is led by Dr. Michael Strong, managed to mobilize the research community so that we could get the money out the door as quickly as possible, to facilitate that research to happen as quickly as possible.

In terms of AbCellera, yes, all applicants go through a rigorous screening process to make sure their approach is in line with the best scientific methods we know need to be in place.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Simard, you have 15 seconds.

Mr. Mario Simard: I just wanted to come back to the health research institutes in Canada. We know that they are currently no longer considering new calls for projects. This means that someone who would present a research project on infectious diseases would not have their project considered because tenders are currently not being looked at.

Do you have a schedule or a timeline for health research institutes getting back to considering calls for projects?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Minister, you have time for a quick answer.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I can get back to the member opposite with respect to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's approach to resuming other research, but I will say that all of the agencies, such as CIHR, are focused right now on the most intense and pressing problem that faces Canadians, which is how to live with COVID-19.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We'll go to the honourable member for Nunavut.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): *Mat'na*. Thank you, Madam Chair.

On April 14, the Government of Nunavut was told by the federal government that it was approved for \$30.8 million of the \$42 million it had requested. It has yet to see this funding. When can the territory expect to see this \$30.8 million that has been promised?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services): Madam Chair, I would like to confirm that we are currently in discussion with the Government of Nunavut to flow those funds. Again, it knows that it has the financial backing of the Government of Canada. Those funds are there and will be used to combat COVID-19, in addition to the other funds that I would be glad to speak about with regard to Nunavut.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq: This pandemic, COVID-19, has no timeline. There are no restrictions. This disease does not care who you are, where you come from or what your background is. It can affect all of us. With the vulnerability in the communities that I see in my riding, this has the potential to be much more fatal than in many other places throughout Canada.

Why have we not seen this funding come through yet?

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, there are a number of funding envelopes that have flowed to the north, including \$45 million through ITK and the land claims organizations directly to protect the Inuit people and prepare for something, as the member says, that nobody can really predict the outcome of. The vulnerabilities that are pre-existing are unacceptable, and they are ones we obviously factor in when we deploy resources in partnership with the territorial organizations and their health boards in order to prevent the onset of COVID, and when it does appear, to stamp it out.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq: With the CERB, the Canadian emergency response benefit, the NDP has continuously said that we are seeing glaring gaps and major inequalities. We keep saying that day after day and week after week, yet the response to that has been extremely slow. We need to be helping Canadians remove barriers as opposed to creating them.

Madam Chair, artists and artisans throughout Canada and my riding.... I'm talking about jewellers, carvers, performers and musicians. There are thousands of indigenous people who maybe don't have the necessary documentation or proof to be able to apply for these programs, which is why we, the NDP, are saying that government should put \$2,000 into everybody's pocket. Why are we treating them, especially those in very vulnerable communities and regions, with less?

Why is the government so keen on creating barriers for individuals when we need to be breaking them down?

• (1345)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our colleague for mentioning inequalities in her question, because one of the impacts of a crisis like this one is not only to make previous inequalities even worse, but also to generate new inequalities. That is why we introduced those very important measures, very quickly, very efficiently and in a manner that was equitable and targeted to those individuals, many of the millions of Canadians who have unfortunately lost or still don't have any income to make ends meet.

That's why we have moved quickly, and 7.5 million Canadians are now in receipt of the Canada emergency response benefit. We know there is more to do, and that's why we will continue to work.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq: Madam Chair, it's really frustrating to have to stand here and say the same things over and over again, and continuously hear over and over again, "We know there are inequalities." Where is the action? We hear nice words. Where is the backup for decreasing those gaps and eliminating these barriers?

We're talking a lot about business. In my riding in particular, we rely very heavily on airlines. That's our transportation. It brings in our medical supplies. It brings in essential workers. It's our lifeline.

Canadian North alone is spending between \$1.5 million and \$2 million a week, and the government has said that it will contribute \$5 million. That barely covers about two weeks when you look at the numbers.

It would be absolutely great to see what the Liberal government plans on doing to support northern airlines.

Hon. Marc Miller: I thank the member for her question.

As she knows, and as all Canadians should know, air transport to the north is an essential service. To that end, the Government of Canada provided up to \$17.3 million to the governments of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut to support northern air carriers and the continuance and consistency of flights and travel into the territories to provide an essential service that we take for granted here in the south.

That included \$3.6 million for Yukon, \$8.7 million for Northwest Territories and \$5 million for Nunavut, and I'm pleased to say, Madam Chair —

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We recognize Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a privilege to be in the House again. It's where my constituents believe we should be. This type of session we are having should be happening more often, because that's what my constituents are demanding of me. It's a privilege and an honour to be here, and at my age, I value every minute I can get here.

The government has known for a long time that the business risk management programs for the agriculture sector need to be reformed. With less than 31% of them buying in and an insurance program with very high rates and very low returns, it is broken.

Will the minister acknowledge that there is a problem with the business risk management programs?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister has the floor.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I can reassure my colleague. It is important to remember that risk management programs are cost shared. The federal government's contribution accounts for 60%, and the contribution of provincial governments accounts for 40%. Since July of last year, we have been working together to find solutions and improve our risk management programs.

[*English*]

Mr. Martin Shields: Would the minister commit to a timeline by which it needs to be fixed?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, once again, it is a matter of establishing an agreement with all the provinces and territories to make changes to the risk management program. In the meantime, we have made certain improvements in terms of administration, and to the AgriRecovery program just yesterday.

[*English*]

Mr. Martin Shields: You've announced a new program. It's for livestock feeders. This is really critical. There are hundreds of thousands of animals at risk. How will the producers apply? When will they get the money?

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, the AgriRecovery program is administered by the provinces. So the amounts we announced yesterday—\$50 million for beef producers and \$50 million for pork producers—will be administered by the provinces. The exceptional thing about what we did was accepting to open the program in all the provinces and territories. The Government of Canada's 60% contribution has been accepted. Each province must now confirm its contribution. In all the cases, Canada will provide its contribution.

[*English*]

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Chair, with hundreds of thousands of animals at risk today, that has to move, because they are in the process of euthanasia. Leverage that. Move it. You are saying it is a partnership; well, then you need to exert your level to make that partnership work.

Since new PMPRB regulations were proposed, companies have held off applying for Canadian approval for life-saving drugs. Health Canada registrations for new clinical trials have dropped dramatically. Would the minister acknowledge that drop in applications?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The floor belongs to the honourable Minister of Health.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, we know that during this unprecedented time of coronavirus, the entire world has turned its attention to drugs that will help treat this disease. We know that it's a challenging time for drug manufacturers as well, as they search for a cure to COVID-19.

Certainly we're keeping our eye on the applications to Canada and we are working to ensure that Canadians will always have access to the drugs that they need and deserve.

Mr. Martin Shields: Diseases like cystic fibrosis desperately need drugs that are available and approved now in other countries. Will this government stop those PMPRB changes before the July 1 implementation date?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, as I responded to his colleague, we are focused on ensuring that Canadians have affordable medication that meets their needs and that can be delivered at a cost Canadians can afford, and so we continue the work that we started in our previous mandate.

In regard to the specific drug that I assumed the member is referring to, that applicant has yet to apply to Canada to market its drug here.

Mr. Martin Shields: Under a program the government announced for those with property and lease and rental, you have to have a mortgage. I have a construction company and an owner who has two strip malls within blocks of each other. On one, he has paid the mortgage, and the other he hasn't. One lease is going to qualify and the other doesn't.

Is that gap going to be corrected?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madame Chair, as Canadians take action in the fight against COVID-19, we know that many small businesses are worried about being able to pay rent. In recognition of this challenge, our government has reached an agreement with provinces and territories to implement the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance for small businesses, and we will be delivering this with the provinces and territories.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The Chair recognizes Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I understand a criminal with COVID-19 was released from prison. He was convicted of 10 gun offences. I wonder why violent criminals are being released. Like the minister, I know from experience in law enforcement that stats are a baseline for decisions. Decisions can be based on number of homicides, the number where guns were used, and lastly the number of individuals responsible who were in possession of an acquisition licence and a legal gun.

Madam Chair, I did some research, and I'm sure the minister did as well, to determine the number of legal gun owners responsible for these crimes. It is a very small number.

Can the minister tell us the percentage of those with a legal PAL versus the individuals with no PAL who used illegal guns when committing the offences?

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, I think it's very important that we recognize the weapons that were prohibited by our actions last week. These are weapons that were not designed for any other purpose than for soldiers to kill soldiers. They were intended to be used for killing, they're designed for killing and they have been used for killing. They have been used in Canada at École Polytechnique. They have been used in Quebec at the Quebec mosque, they've been used in Moncton to kill RCMP officers, they've been used in Fredericton to kill other police officers, and very tragically, just in the past few weeks, they've been used yet again, so we have acted.

In the time of COVID there are many things that have changed in this country, but some things have not, and it does not diminish our responsibility to take action necessary to keep people safe. We know that gun violence has not decreased during this period of pandemic. We know that domestic violence has actually increased across this country. We were reminded only a few weeks ago that leaving these types of weapons in the wrong hands can end in terrible death and tragedy.

• (1355)

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, not providing an answer is what I expected.

As the number is so low, would the minister agree the buyback program funding would be, based on these low stats, better put into funding for the RCMP integrated border enforcement team and the CBSA to enhance border enforcement, to reduce the trafficking of illegal firearms and to once and for all target gangs and organized crime, as they are the individuals who are committing these crimes?

Hon. Bill Blair: This was before the member joined this House, but I would remind him that back in 2013, a former Conservative government cut hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of staff positions from both our border services and the RCMP. They ended the funding that was available to municipal police services. When we came into government, we introduced a program to allow \$347 million for law enforcement across this country to deal with guns and gangs. His new colleagues voted against that. They voted against the \$89 million we put into stronger border measures.

I look forward, given the member's comments, to his support for the measures that we will bring forward in the near future to strengthen gun control and to strengthen our border measures.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, Canada has more than 1.1 million small businesses. They employ 8.3 million people. This sector contributes 40% of Canada's entire economic output, yet every day I'm hearing too many stories of businesses falling through the government's process cracks.

One story is about Finley's Bar and Grill, a restaurant in the mountain town of Nelson, B.C. It employed over 50 people prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has recently begun to rehire based on a promise of a 75% wage subsidy. However, of the 12 employees it was able to hire, only five qualified for a wage subsidy. The remaining seven did not qualify due to a technicality created by this government.

Madam Chair, when will the government move to secure a future for small businesses, and the workers they employ, by removing criteria such as a 14-day clause and a payroll test?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madame Chair, since day one we have been providing an economic response to support small businesses across the country. I had the privilege of talking with many of the chambers of commerce to try to find solutions to help those businesses.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy supports businesses. We know they are the hardest hit. The subsidy covers 75% of an employee's wages for employers of all sizes and across all sectors that have been hard hit by COVID-19.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan has the floor.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Chair, yesterday's announcement by the government of \$252 million in financial assistance to Canada's agri-food sector was completely misleading. I say that because \$125 million of that figure had already been budgeted, so the money was not new.

Will the minister confirm today that only half of yesterday's funding announcement was new money?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, the risk management programs do not involve money that has already been committed. Those are insurance programs—no more and no less—that provide insurance for various disasters, including a decrease in income or a loss caused by a natural disaster. It is wrong to say that the money set aside for the AgriRecovery program was already on the table. We really needed to make a commitment, with the provinces' agreement, to dedicate \$50 million for pork producers and \$50 million for beef producers.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, this was not new money because the money, \$125 million, had already been budgeted. If you've already previously budgeted money, you cannot consider the rest of it to be new. At best, yesterday's announcement was a repackaging or a reannouncement of previously announced funding.

Does this government have plans to announce new money and new initiatives of a financial nature for Canada's agri-food sector?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, the agriculture sector is hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis. Every day—morning, noon and evening—I work with our producers, with their representatives and with my colleagues. We want to find the best ways to help those producers.

Yesterday, we made extremely important announcements for the meat sector—pork, beef and processing—and for the repurchase of food surpluses that will be directed to our food banks.

• (1400)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, when will new financial assistance for Canada's agri-food sector be coming?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, we continue to work with the sector to find the best mechanisms to help the producers to complement risk management programs already available to our producers.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, the question was “When?”

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: That will be done as soon as possible.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, I'd like to know from the minister her definition of “imminent and soon”. When will the money be coming?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, I don't have an exact answer for my colleague. We are working day and night, during the week and on the weekends, to find the best mechanisms.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, Canada's agri-food sector and our farmers are in crisis. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture has estimated that \$2.6 billion is required. Yesterday's announcement was only a pittance of that.

What do the minister and her government think Canada's food supply chain is actually worth?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, our food supply chain is clearly an essential service. Food security in the country is an absolute priority. That is why programs are already available. I also encourage all producers to sign up for the AgriStability program. The deadline for signing up has been extended to July 3. We also give them the opportunity to get an advance payment of 75%, and not only 50%, in the provinces that have accepted. They also have the opportunity....

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, one thing that is apparent is that this pandemic does not impair the government's ability to obfuscate. Let me ask another question, and hopefully we can get a clear answer.

Yesterday's announcement indicated that \$77.5 million would go to food processing plants for PPE equipment to help protect workers, to redesign and refit processing plants for health concerns and to make stricter controls. When will that money become available?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, a few details need to be worked out. After this announcement, we wanted to take the time to engage in discussions with the stakeholders and the affected sectors to ensure that we are implementing the correct criteria. I can assure you that this will be done as quickly as possible.

Our processing plants now know that they will be able to count on a federal contribution to make accommodations to protect workers and to increase their capacities.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will recognize Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Chair, in these unprecedented times, I am glad that I'm redefining "backbencher", as I'm actually behind the Speaker.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, times are really difficult for farmers, particularly in my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South. Farmers are coming to me and saying that times are so tough they're considering not even planting their crops.

In that context, one of the things they come to me about, over and over again, is the carbon tax. The government recently decided to increase the carbon tax. There was a study done, as was reported in the media. Will the minister commit today to giving the results of that study to the Canadian people?

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I give the floor to the Honourable Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance.

[English]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we know that small businesses and farmers are facing significant challenges due to a sudden reduction in sales or in their crops. That's why we are providing immediate assistance by deferring any payments on GST, HST and customs duties over the next three months. For over 3.2 million businesses and self-employed Canadians, this measure will help provide them with the cash to continue operating.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, as reported in the media, there was a study done by Agriculture Canada with respect to the carbon tax. Will that carbon tax study be shared with Parliament, and through us, with the people of Canada?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I have a better sheet now to answer my honourable colleague's question.

Our most urgent priority, of course, in COVID-19 is the health and safety of Canadians, and that's why we are supporting Canadians through this time. We also have to ensure long-term economic, environmental and physical well-being. Putting a price on pollution is a critical part of Canada's plan to tackle climate change. It is the most affordable and effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

• (1405)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, if the minister will not commit to giving us the study results, will the minister tell us how much the carbon tax cost farmers in 2019 and how much it will cost in 2020? We know you know.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, our system provides money directly to families when they file their taxes and leaves the vast majority of families with more money in their pockets, with low-income and medium-income families benefiting the most. We are also providing support to small and medium-sized businesses, as well as municipalities, hospitals, schools and indigenous communities to ensure that they can save money while lowering their emissions. Through our plan, a family of four will receive more investments in their pockets.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, once again I will ask. What will the cost of a carbon tax be for farmers in 2020?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, the most urgent priority right now is the health and safety of Canadians. As we support Canadians through this time, we also have to ensure long-term economic, environmental and physical well-being. Putting a price on pollution is a critical part of Canada's plan to tackle climate change.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, as the government will not answer my question, I will answer it myself.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said that for the average farmer, the carbon tax will cost \$14,000.

I have a private member's bill that would help relieve this burden. As part of team Canada, will the government support my private member's bill to remove the carbon tax from propane and natural gas?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, again I will continue by informing the honourable member that we need to continue to put a price on pollution. It's a critical part of Canada's plan to tackle climate change, and it is the most affordable and effective way to reduce greenhouse emissions.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Lawrence, you have time for a very short question.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you. I have a different topic.

Women have been disproportionately affected in the COVID pandemic. In a recent survey, almost twice as many women as men lost their jobs. What will this government do to commit to helping women return to the workforce, given that they bear a disproportionate burden of child care?

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable President of the Treasury Board has the floor for 15 seconds.

[English]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is a very important question. Unfortunately, I don't have time to answer it, but you're exactly right. Investments in child care, investments in family support, investments in fighting domestic violence, investments in housing, investments in training, investments in Canadian housing benefits in Canada and investments in child benefits are all important to support women.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Ste-Marie has the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

France, Denmark and Poland will not help businesses that use tax havens. Belgium, Italy, the United Kingdom and even the European Union are looking into the issue. Here, nothing is happening. The *Journal de Montréal* reported that businesses using tax havens will finally be able to benefit from federal assistance. After suggesting that rules will be tightened, the Prime Minister has gone back on his decision.

There is something paradoxical in the fact that banks and multinationals that have been involved in tax avoidance for years are now calling on taxpayers' solidarity. This is a reminder that the tax system is deeply unfair. Everyone pays their share, except for Bay Street banks and multinationals that are involved in tax havens.

We have a \$250-billion deficit, but it is for funding emergency measures that are necessary. Businesses that use tax havens receive their share of assistance, and not only for wage subsidies. I am thinking of the upcoming bailout programs, the purchase of rotten assets or the massive liquidity injection for banks. They are continuing to report their profits in their shells in Barbados or the Bahamas.

Why isn't the government dealing with the legal use of tax havens?

Please, I am asking the minister not to talk to me about the Canada Revenue Agency's efforts to track down fraudsters. I am asking the government to make illegal what is immoral.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister has the floor.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank my honourable colleague for his question.

Since the beginning of the crisis, we have implemented an economic plan to meet the needs of workers and Canadians. We focused on programs that will help pay workers, so that they can keep their jobs. This means that the Canada emergency wage subsidy is the solution.

We will continue to ensure that, if a company is evading taxes, it will have to face legal consequences. That includes the potential exclusion from federal emergency programs in a way that targets its decision-makers, especially management, boards of directors and shareholders.

• (1410)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I want to return to the example of the five major Toronto banks. They are receiving massive liquidity injections. They are benefiting from the purchase of their assets that have lost all value. They are receiving government assistance.

At the same time, they all have one or several branches in tax havens that enable them to report their profits earned in Canada as if they were earned in the empty shell in the tax haven. They are doing this to pay less tax here. That is unacceptable, and it has to change.

Why isn't the government taking action?

I remind the minister that the change can be made through a simple amendment to the Income Tax Regulations, in section 5907, which contains the problematic wording that enables businesses and major banks to avoid paying their taxes here. That is completely legal, but entirely immoral.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, during this unprecedented crisis, we have focused our efforts on enabling workers to keep their jobs. That is why we have implemented the wage subsidy for businesses.

Of course, we will continue to fully prosecute businesses that are avoiding taxation. We are clear: in everything we are doing, we will target those who are responsible, and not innocent workers. An employee is an employee, regardless of whom they work for.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I have a question for the minister.

Will the government prosecute banks that legally declare their profits in tax havens?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Since 2015, we have made historic investments in the Canada Revenue Agency to ensure that it has the tools it needs to catch violators and bring them to justice. The CRA currently has more than 50 active investigations on international tax evasion.

As I said earlier, the fight against tax evasion is a priority for our government. We have been very clear: anyone who violates the law to avoid paying their fair share will suffer serious consequences.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The floor belongs to Mr. Ste-Marie. Please be brief.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Canada Revenue Agency is doing more, but it's not enough. The \$1 billion that the Minister of Revenue keeps mentioning is a ridiculous figure. For example, it even includes an employee hired to replace a retired employee. This has nothing to do with the approach in the United States or Europe.

Will the government outlaw the immoral use of tax havens by Toronto banks and multinational companies?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Minister Fortier, you have five seconds.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, I want to thank my honourable colleague for his question.

We're going through an unprecedented crisis. We're making efforts to protect workers and their jobs. We'll continue to make the wage subsidy available to ensure that these workers are paid.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Scarpaleggia has the floor.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be sharing my time with the member for Kanata—Carleton.

My question is for the Minister of Health.

First, I want to thank the minister and the other members of the government for their excellent work under the leadership of the Prime Minister. They're working hard around the clock to deal with this pandemic.

A number of my constituents who work in the private sector, especially the people in the retail or manufacturing industries, are wondering how they'll obtain the personal protective equipment needed to ensure their safety when they return to their jobs. For these businesses and workers, this issue poses a serious challenge, especially since there's no centralized distribution network, as is the case for the health care system.

Our government has just announced the creation of a council that will look at the supply issue. Can the minister explain the role of this council? Can she tell us about the plans to support businesses when it comes to personal protective equipment as the economy re-opens?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

To revive the economy, we must know that Canadians are safe.

[English]

While our primary focus is the needs of front-line workers and health professionals, we're also actively exploring how we can help organizations and businesses that provide essential services across Canada with the personal protective equipment that their workers need. The COVID-19 supply council is bringing together a group of leaders from the private and not-for-profit sectors who will provide further advice on establishing diversified and adaptable supply chains for key items, such as masks, gloves, disinfectants, etc., as this situation continues to evolve.

• (1415)

[Translation]

This council builds on our collaborative approach to help us meet current and future supply needs.

[English]

In leveraging their extensive experience and networks, they will provide us with valuable input on how we can best streamline and

strengthen our approach to ensure that Canadians have access to what they need to stay safe at work. We need to work together, obviously, with provinces and territories, workers and businesses. This will ensure that we can have strong and stable supply chains into the future.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We'll go to Mrs. McCrimmon.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to begin by offering my sincerest condolences to the people of Nova Scotia, to the colleagues, friends and loved ones of the people who lost their lives, both in the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces, and those who are struggling with such sorrow. I just want them to know that we are mourning with them.

These are challenging times, so I have a question for the President of the Treasury Board.

In these times when there is very little precedent, designing an emergency economic system would require some innovation and require some approaches different from what had been used in the past, but we do need some strategic guidance. You need to have an idea of what considerations are important, or what things to keep in your mind when you're trying to design something that hasn't been done before.

I would ask the hon. member for his ideas on how we help make this happen.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the important and very timely question.

As most members will know, since day one our priority has been to protect the health of Canadians and minimize the very severe socio-economic impact of this unprecedented crisis for workers and businesses. The objective has been and will continue to be to preserve our social contract, the esprit de corps of our society. Indeed, behind the economic statistics there are real people—men, women and families—who are struggling, but who have the right to dignity and security.

The current crisis is, unfortunately, aggravating inequalities. We have a duty to reduce them as much as possible. Together we will go through this crisis, and together we will emerge out of it stronger and more united.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are going to suspend for about 20 to 25 seconds to give our AV technicians a chance to move around.

Now the honourable member for Chatham—Kent—Leamington has the floor.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. Indeed, it is good to leave my own house and to be back in this one.

Pelee Island fits the traditional definition of a remote community, and it's also Canada's most southern inhabited community. It lies 14 kilometres into the middle of Lake Erie. It's surrounded by water, and it continues to lose its shoreline. It's inaccessible by water almost four months of the year, and its connection to the mainland is critical and a matter of life and death.

The Prime Minister has promised for five years to address the following situation. Since declaring high-speed broadband Internet a basic telecom service in 2016, does the Prime Minister even know what percentage of Canada's rural and isolated communities now still have only basic service, even after five years of this government? To paraphrase him, it's 2020, and Canadians are still waiting.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I share the member's frustration with not having access to reliable Internet in some parts of our country. In fact, we know the majority of Canadians have access, but some of these more remote communities actually struggle, including in some parts of my own riding.

Our government believes that everybody deserves reliable, fast, affordable Internet, no matter where they live or work. We will continue to work with all partners to make sure that their services are responsive to the needs of rural Canadians and that we continue to grow our network connectivity in this country.

• (1420)

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Chair, the answer is 60%. Sixty per cent of Canadians in rural and remote communities don't have high-speed Internet.

For five years the agricultural industry has been calling on this government for, and has been promised a review of, business risk management programming without any action.

The Agri-food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University states that without receiving significant help quickly, up to 15% of Canadian farms could be gone by the end of the year. The impact on Canada's food security is alarming.

Is additional support from the federal government conditional on provincial support, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, in general, risk management programs are shared-cost programs. These programs receive 60% of their funding from the federal government and 40% from the provincial government.

Since our second-to-last meeting with provincial and territorial ministers, our priority has been to review this. However, after the Conservatives' budget cuts in 2013, when everything was going well, it isn't easy to convince all the provinces to sign on.

Our commitment yesterday, in this time of crisis, shows that the federal government can make a larger contribution. We demonstrated this yesterday with the AgriRecovery program.

[English]

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Chair, Ontario has funded the risk management program for grain and oilseeds even without federal support. Will the minister commit to fulfilling the federal share of its 60% funding obligation for this program, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: In addition to the risk management programs, we have what's called the Canadian agricultural partnership. Under this \$2 billion program, the provinces are free to put forward their priority projects. The provinces then ask us to contribute our 60%, which we almost always provide out of respect for the provinces' priorities and jurisdictions.

[English]

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Chair, that was not an answer.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture has called for an immediate investment of \$2.6 billion in emergency funding to help maintain Canada's food security, yet yesterday the government announced 10% of that amount. Canadian farmers can compete with any others in the world on a level plowing field. Excuse the pun. The U.S., our largest competitor and largest trading partner in agriculture, has committed 2% of its ag economy as a response to COVID-19. In its response, Canada has committed one-third of 1%.

Why, Madam Chair, does the Prime Minister only value our food security and our ag industry at one-sixth the rate of our largest agriculture competitor?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: A range of risk management programs are already available to our producers, amounting to an average of about \$1.6 billion a year in a normal year. We're very open to these programs. Our producers already have access to some programs. I encourage them to take advantage of the programs.

Yesterday, we announced additional programs: \$50 million for pork producers; \$50 million for beef producers; \$77 million for processors; \$50 million to purchase food surpluses and send the surpluses to food banks; and a legislative change for the Canadian Dairy Commission, which I hope will be made with the co-operation of my colleagues.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will recognize the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. As excited as I am to be here to see all of you, I'm actually more excited to one day get a haircut again.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Aitchison: I can't pull off what the government House leader does; I wish I could be like him.

I want to talk about small and rural communities like those in Parry Sound—Muskoka that are full of these truly small seasonal businesses that simply fall between the cracks. They don't qualify for the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy or the Canada business credit availability program. COVID-19 is threatening the survival of so many of our businesses in the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors.

Summer camps, interestingly enough, are particularly vulnerable. This is a billion-dollar industry in Ontario alone. Will the Minister of Finance agree to meet with me and the Canadian Camping Association to discuss this urgent situation and the particularly unique needs of summer camps?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, as you know, we are providing immediate help to businesses in need, through programs such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency business account and other measures. We know, however, that it has become very clear that in certain sectors of our economy, workers may not qualify for these measures. That's why we're taking additional action to provide immediate relief to businesses in rural communities and businesses not eligible for emergency support. I believe that we will have to work together to find those solutions. I look forward to speaking with the hon. member about summer camps.

• (1425)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Chair, interestingly enough, in my riding alone there are over 50 summer camps. They welcome over 70,000 campers in a season and employ almost 6,000 people. Those are just the camps in my riding.

COVID's impact on seasonal employment continues to be devastating. Hundreds of thousands of summer jobs across this country have been impacted, and the government quite rightly—I give credit where credit is due—has responded with aid to students by extending the federal summer jobs program. However, for some strange reason, even though there is more demand than funding currently permits, the government has chosen not to put more money into this great program.

Why is the government, through the CESB, paying students not to work, instead of putting more money into a program like Canada summer jobs, which supports students and employers?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll respond in French, because this issue is also very relevant in my constituency, Québec, where I know the students very well. I don't know all of them, of course, but I know a number of the students who live there.

We also have very successful summer camps. Unfortunately, for the students and for the summer camps, things may be a little diffi-

cult in the coming weeks and months. We've been increasing our assistance through the Canada summer jobs program over the past few years. I also want to mention the Canada emergency student benefit to help students make ends meet. We'll be providing more details on this assistance in the near future.

These measures, along with many others, will not only help students make ends meet and prepare for the coming school year, they'll also enable the students to fully participate in the community. As we know, the situation is the same in most cases.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Chair, there are lots of summer camps that have applied to the Canada summer jobs program in my riding, as an example, and they have all said they would still use the positions. They're trying to be innovative and look for ways to do summer camp online and those kinds of programs. Canada summer jobs is a \$263-million-a-year program. The Canada emergency student benefit is \$9 billion. The government could very easily transfer a billion dollars, let's say, from the CESB to the Canada summer jobs program, and you would actually help employers as well as students.

Will the government consider transferring some money from the CESB to the Canada summer jobs program, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is a very good question, and I know that my colleague, Minister Qualtrough.... I think I have the right to name her, and not only to name her but also to mention her, because she's working very hard. She has enhanced in all sorts of ways the ability of the Canada summer jobs program to provide support that is better adapted to the current crisis. Part-time students are able to apply. We can extend the help throughout more months. We can also allow for flexibility in the types of jobs that can be funded.

These are all the sorts of things my colleague, Minister Qualtrough, is working on, in addition to the important support through the Canada emergency student benefit.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We'll go to the honourable member for Sturgeon River—Parkland.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Cystic Fibrosis Canada has been lobbying Health Canada to remove barriers for the groundbreaking drug Trikafta, which can treat up to 90% of the 4,300 Canadians suffering with CF. This drug was approved in the United States last fall.

When will the government move forward and remove barriers to this company's bringing forward an application for Trikafta?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I'm well aware of the call for Trikafta by the patient groups. We continue to work with patient groups to make sure they understand how to apply for the special access program. In fact, the applicant has now applied to market this drug in Canada.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Chair, that's certainly good to hear.

Canadians with CF and their families are concerned that the Liberals' recent changes to the PMPRB will delay the approval of groundbreaking drugs like Trikafta in Canada. This drug does save lives and it enables Canadians to live to their full potential.

Why is the government introducing new rules that could kill the hopes of thousands living with CF, and will the health minister commit to changing course?

• (1430)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As I replied to a couple of the member's colleagues, we will always stand up for the right of Canadians to have access to affordable drugs. The work that we started in our mandate, beginning in 2015, on affordability of medication for Canadians continues. I look forward to hearing the member's ideas about how we can strengthen and accelerate it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Chair, the trouble in Canada's energy sector is not over. Companies have lost billions of dollars, and tens of thousands of workers are being laid off. Meanwhile, it has been 42 days since the finance minister promised action within hours or days, yet companies still cannot access the promised BDC financing.

When is the government going to stop dragging its feet and help our troubled energy sector?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, the energy sector is an essential part of the Canadian economy, contributing hundreds of thousands of well-paid jobs and billions of dollars in tax revenue. That is why our government strongly supports the sector, and it's one reason why we were very proud to announce more than \$1.7 billion in support to clean up orphaned wells. That support is going to put thousands of workers in Alberta and Saskatchewan back to work, and that is a good thing.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Chair, that's a drop in the bucket compared with what's needed, but we do have some great news: Alberta's oil can now be used in east coast refineries.

However, there's a catch: They need to transport the oil 15,000 kilometres through the Panama Canal to get it there. There has to be a better way—perhaps, dare I say, a pipeline that only goes 4,000 kilometres.

When will the government wake up to common sense and support an east-west pipeline in Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I do agree with the member opposite that it is a very good thing that east coast refineries are working on refining Canadian oil. That is good news for our whole country.

When it comes to pipelines, I'd like to remind the member opposite that our government does believe in them. That's why we bought one.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Chair, I think TransCanada, the proponent of the energy east pipeline, might like to disagree with that, but my next question will be about social workers.

In my constituency they are sounding the alarm. With many of my rural constituents lacking access to high-speed Internet, many of the resources that assist with mental health challenges during this difficult time are out of reach for rural Canadians.

What actions will the government take to ensure that rural Canadians can access the mental health supports that they critically need during this time?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Since it is Mental Health Week, I think it is very appropriate to be talking about mental health. We know that living with COVID-19 is exacerbating people's struggles with mental health and struggles with substance use, but it is also creating new anxieties and worries for Canadians. That's why we launched the Wellness Together portal. As the member mentioned, there are many resources available digitally through that portal, but there are also resources to reach out to counsellors by telephone. I'll make sure that the member has the resources so that he can share them with his constituents.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have time for a very short question, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Chair, I have checked those resources and I'm disappointed to see that on Crisis Services Canada, the website that the government uses for suicide prevention, a number of the features are actually down. That's not acceptable. I've heard from social workers that liquor store sales have quadrupled and pharmacies are prescribing more antidepressants than ever.

Does the government have a strategy to address this growing mental wellness problem that we are facing? If not, why not?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The Minister of Health has 10 seconds.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm really glad to be talking about the mental health of Canadians and the struggles that Canadians have faced, both before COVID-19 and as actually exacerbated by the condition of living with a pandemic. We have invested millions and millions of dollars in mental health resources, including renegotiating health transfers with provinces and territories to ensure that Canadians have access to mental health resources no matter where they live. There is far more to do, as we can see, given the nature of this pandemic.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will give the floor to Ms. Shin.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Service Canada is on the front line of delivering benefits to Canadians who need them desperately during these times. However, many Canadians are struggling to connect to Service Canada to get information or provide information. We've also heard that some individuals were told that if they had received assistance from an MP's office, then they were no longer eligible for help from Service Canada.

Can the minister please assure us that this is not the case?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for the question, which gives me the wonderful opportunity to first thank the public servants who are going through difficult times as well, personally and professionally. They are working very hard to deliver the emergency benefits and programs that we have designed in very little time. Much of the credit for that help to Canadians goes to them.

Second, on Service Canada, we are mindful also of the difficulties Canadians are facing. Some Canadians are used to going in person to the Service Canada site. That's not possible in many cases, but it is in some cases. They can use the phone to have a personal appointment designed to their own circumstances if they face difficulties using either the phone or the Internet.

• (1435)

Ms. Nelly Shin: That still doesn't answer my question. If they seek help from an MP's office, are they eligible or not? Could you answer that question, please?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm sorry for having forgotten this other piece of the broad question. It's very useful to remind everyone that members of Parliament have an important job to do, and Service Canada is always going to be there to support their jobs.

Ms. Nelly Shin: With respect to Service Canada employees, recognizing that there is so much to do, do all Service Canada employees have access to the necessary equipment and network access to work remotely?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is another important opportunity, for which I'm grateful, to tell all Canadians that we owe a big debt of gratitude to public servants, who work in very difficult circumstances. They face challenges in doing their usual work when they do this work at a distance. They are mindful of the restrictions that may exist from time to time in their ability to use particular channels to transfer information, but in all cases they are supported by their departmental officials so that Canadians can receive the benefits they deserve.

Ms. Nelly Shin: What percentage of Service Canada employees are working on a full-time basis?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I can assure the member that all public servants, and that includes Service Canada workers, are giving, as they should, all that they can to serve Canadians in this very difficult period of time. We are immensely grateful to them, because we are asking them to do things in a manner that is different from what they would usually do but is still in the same spirit of serving Canadians at all possible times.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Has the government considered setting up local Service Canada numbers so that Canadians can call a local number instead of being directed to the central 1-800 number?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Perhaps I might invite the member, if she has any particular circumstances or any particular way in mind that we could help her as an MP to do her job, to connect to my colleague Mr. Hussen, who is responsible for Service Canada, so that we can improve even further the quality of services that Canadians receive from Service Canada.

Ms. Nelly Shin: I appreciate the offer and I look forward to an opportunity to have that conversation if the member would make that possible.

Have you considered implementing a callback system so that Canadians aren't on hold for hours and to ensure that those who are not called back that day can be called back the next day, so they don't have to start all over?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, the services that Canadians expect and need vary in all sorts of different ways. It depends on both the types of benefits and services they are seeking and the types of agencies that they are connected to.

Again, I would invite the member to let us know, me or perhaps even more importantly my colleague Minister Hussen, whatever manner by which Canadians could be better served by Service Canada and other officials.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We'll go to the honourable member for Vancouver Granville.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Madam Chair, I want to acknowledge that the government has introduced many programs from which we and all Canadians are benefiting. Thank you for that and thank you to the hard-working public servants who implement those programs.

As we've heard here today, seniors are falling through the cracks. I get an inordinate number of calls in my office in terms of seniors and their inability to qualify for individual programs. Can the government tell us what specifically they're doing for seniors in need, and can seniors expect a similar program as was introduced by the government in other areas?

Hon. Deb Schulte: Madam Chair, I thank the member very much for the opportunity to again address what the government has done on behalf of seniors. I want to assure the member that the benefits seniors are enrolling in, such as old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, are programs that have been continuing and we have been expediting all those new members. There are no benefits that seniors normally apply for that haven't been continued in this pandemic.

I also have discussed before the financial measures that we've brought into place and also some social services measures, but I wanted to take this opportunity, because it is mental health week, to make sure I acknowledge that we've launched a new portal, Wellness Together Canada, which connects Canadians to peer support workers, social workers and other professionals, making it easier to find credible mental help. That's an important aspect as seniors are very much more isolated during this pandemic.

• (1440)

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, as other members in the House have commented and asked questions about, I'm wondering if the government will be setting national standards for long-term care.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I was very pleased to work with my colleague the Minister of Seniors on a set of national guidelines that can help reform long-term care, and in particular during this crisis, to reduce the number of infections in long-term care all across the country. Those guidelines were developed in partnership with the provinces and territories.

We all agree more has to be done. We all agree that we need to take better care of our seniors no matter where they live in this country. I look forward to working together with my colleagues and the Minister of Seniors on a longer project.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Thank you.

Will the government be introducing a national licensure system, so that doctors and nurses can have their credentials recognized in all provinces?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, the provinces and territories have been working very quickly to ensure that doctors and, in fact, medical professionals can practise in new and innovative ways all across the country. Take the rise in virtual care, for example, something that was very difficult for Canadians to access which is now ubiquitous all across the country. We know that the provinces and territories are working very diligently to ensure there are the medical professionals that we will need now and into the future, and I look forward to continuing those conversations with my colleagues.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, recently my office has been made aware that some small businesses are running up against landlords who are refusing to take part in the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. For small businesses, what is the government's intention with respect to these challenges that they're facing?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, this is an unprecedented challenge and I know many are having to make sacrifices they never imagined they would have to. Our government is inviting landlords to do their part and help tenants like the honourable member was mentioning to get through this. Many landlords have stepped up and we commend their efforts. We are counting on tenants and landlords to work together to take advantage of the programs available and the one that we just made available with the support of the provinces.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, recognizing that we are all focused on COVID-19 and making our way through COVID-19, we also recognize that we need to look towards the economy and the challenges we're facing with respect to the economy. Will the government be tabling a 2020 budget and has the government considered raising the GST?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, currently, as we all know, we are putting a lot of effort into the economic emergency response. We will continue to monitor what needs to be done to support the next steps in the economy.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, provinces are starting to put forward plans for people to return to work. For parents, going back to work means making sure their children are safe and cared for. This crisis has shown us how essential quality, accessible child care is to the economy. The economy doesn't work if parents don't work, and parents don't work without child care.

For far too long the government has been promising a national child care strategy, but nothing has been achieved. When will the government make parents and their children a priority?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable President of the Treasury Board has the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, the question reminds us that although we are in an emergency, the types of investments we made prior to the emergency do make a difference when we go through these difficult times.

The \$7.5-billion investment that we announced and implemented in the first mandate, which will continue until 2028, is an important part in the emergency context. We know that parents, as was well signalled, do need child care if they want to return to work throughout and after the crisis.

● (1445)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, there's a real emergency here, and those talking points aren't helping women right now and they're not helping those children.

Will the government finally make quality, affordable child care a reality in Canada?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I would go beyond quality and affordable and would also say inclusive and accessible. Those are the four key principles of our long-term investments in child care that we started making in the first mandate, which are important in the current crisis, and which we'll continue to implement over time.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, in the first mandate, actually a lot of downloading onto the provinces happened. That's not the kind of leadership Canadians need right now. Apparently, women and children are going to continue to fall through the cracks, so let's move to young people.

I've heard from a lot of young people in high schools. They have been left out of these federal programs. They would normally be working over the summer, saving for their post-secondary education, helping pay the bills for their families, but because businesses have been closed because of COVID, they've been hard hit.

The government stated that it wants to support students, that it wants to make them part of this recovery. Will the government include those aged 15 to 17 years in the programs? When will the minister announce details on the service grant program?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, well, we are very grateful for that list of measures that we announced. Many of them have already been implemented. We're looking forward to announcing the details of some of them very soon, including on the Canada emergency student benefit.

The service grants are also very important. We know that our young Canadians are very ambitious. They want to make a difference in their communities. That will be part of the government's support for these young Canadians, of whom we are very proud. We are stronger because of them.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, I did not hear a date. Hopefully, I will hear a date in response to my next question.

It's not just young people who are being left out of those government supports. Adult learners are being left out. They're working to earn their secondary school diplomas.

When can we expect some announcements in terms of the service grant program? Also, what is the government doing to help those adult learners who, so far, have been left out of that program?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, again, that's a very relevant set of comments. We know that when we go through these very difficult crises we end up emerging out of them in a very different context. Training, supporting adult learners, supporting all learners will be absolutely essential once we get through this health crisis and reinvest in people, in workers, so that we can grow the economy again.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, now that the minister mentioned workers, I'd like to shift a little bit and yet stay on the topic of post-secondary education.

Last year the public funding of universities and colleges made up less than half of their revenues. Because of years of decline in that public funding for the sector, at least one-third of academic staff are working contract to contract, with limited, if any at all, access to those benefits. They are vulnerable to any downturn in enrolment and other revenue losses, which will result in significant revenue loss, leading to program closures and cuts to those jobs and student services.

Post-secondary institutions were not included in the government's wage subsidy program. Will the government change that exclusion?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable President of the Treasury Board, a very short answer.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: How much time do I have?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): You have 15 seconds.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, 15 seconds is very unfair, because there would be so much to say.

I will reach out to you directly to let you know about all the things we've already started to do. We have a number of important comments that we would like to be able to fully provide.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable member for La Prairie has the floor.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Last week, during a virtual sitting of Parliament, I repeatedly asked the Minister of National Revenue about tax havens and I was treated to a broken record. She kept telling me things that didn't make sense and that didn't answer any of my questions. Believe me, even a Buddhist monk would have lost patience.

I've analyzed the situation. Everyone thinks that it makes no sense that people who can afford to pay their taxes aren't doing so. Everyone understands this, except the government.

In the minister's responses, throughout her broken record, I found something. She said that the government would fight aggressive tax avoidance. I think that I understood and my question is simple. What's non-aggressive tax avoidance?

• (1450)

Hon. Mona Fortier: We know that we're currently going through an unprecedented crisis. We want to support workers, and we're doing so through the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The subsidy is designed to help Canadians pay their bills, keep their jobs and get through this crisis.

If a business that avoids paying taxes gets caught, it must face the full force of the law. The business may be deemed ineligible for federal emergency programs. The government will target the decision-makers, whether they be the executives, board of directors or shareholders.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I can see that the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity is reading the responses prepared for her colleague from national revenue. We aren't out of the woods yet. I'd like the responses to be as long as the questions.

Let me start again. What's non-aggressive tax avoidance?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I just want to take my few remaining seconds to say that we're currently focusing on workers.

Mr. Alain Therrien: The government doesn't seem to have a definition of what constitutes non-aggressive or aggressive tax avoidance. That's my understanding.

I'll ask another very simple question. Why can Denmark say that it will give money only to the people who have paid their fair share of taxes? Why can Denmark do this? Why is Poland doing this? Why are France and other countries doing this? Simply put, why isn't the Government of Canada doing this? The logic is simple. The people who don't pay their taxes shouldn't receive any assistance.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Since we were elected to form the government in 2015, we've invested billions of dollars to fight tax evasion. We'll continue to crack down on tax cheats in Canada and abroad because this issue is a priority for our government.

Mr. Alain Therrien: The results show that the government isn't able to do this. Yet it's simple. The people who don't pay their taxes shouldn't receive any assistance from the government. Even my dog would understand this.

I'll ask my question again. Why doesn't the government make sure that the people who fail to pay their taxes don't receive any assistance?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, I want to remind my colleague that, since 2015, we've been making historic investments in the Canada Revenue Agency to ensure that we have the necessary tools to catch offenders and bring them to justice. There are 50 international tax evasion investigations under way. I also want to reiterate that we're in a time of crisis and that we'll be focusing our efforts on workers.

Mr. Alain Therrien: We know that we're in a time of crisis and that the Liberals are providing over \$150 billion in assistance, since we've given our approval for this assistance.

However, now that we're in a time of crisis, why aren't the Liberals choosing to give money to the people who have paid their share? Can the minister stop reading the responses prepared for the Minister of National Revenue? I don't read. I speak from the heart. I want the minister to do the same and to answer the question. Why doesn't the government take the same approach as Denmark, France and Poland? These countries are fiscally virtuous.

Hon. Mona Fortier: We're currently focusing on workers. The Canada emergency wage subsidy covers 75% of wages and helps pay workers. We want workers to be able to keep their jobs and we want to protect their jobs. We'll continue to focus our efforts on supporting workers.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Does the government think that Denmark isn't taking care of its workers? Denmark is a social democratic country and one of the most virtuous countries in the world.

The minister will say that Denmark isn't taking care of its workers, but that the Liberals are taking care of workers by letting people who don't pay their share receive taxpayer dollars from people who do pay their share. That's what she's saying. She defends—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Unfortunately, we don't have enough time for the minister to respond.

We'll move on to Mr. Martel.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Chair, businesses that give their employees T4A slips, which are T4 slips for self-employed workers, still don't have access to the Canada emergency business account, even though they meet all the criteria.

When will these businesses receive support?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, as I've been saying all along, we have put programs in place to help small and medium-sized businesses. This includes the \$40,000 loan to help them pay their bills. We will continue to ensure that these entrepreneurs have access to this loan.

• (1455)

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Chair, seniors have yet to receive any assistance from the federal government. Yet the COVID-19 crisis is driving up prices and creating additional expenses for seniors, including grocery delivery costs.

How does the government intend to help those who helped build our country?

[English]

Hon. Deb Schulte: Madam Chair, I do, again, want to assure Canadians that seniors are top of mind for this government.

We have implemented many measures to support them financially. One is the GST credit, a supplementary payment for low- and modest-income seniors. We have reduced the minimum withdrawals from RRIFs by 25%. We have also put in \$9 million and are pivoting another \$50 million to the new horizons for seniors program to help seniors directly with supports in their own communities.

We will have more to say on this matter soon.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Chair, those who have exhausted their weeks of employment insurance for long-term illness and whose eligibility period is still open should receive the Canada emergency response benefit instead of regular EI benefits.

Does the government intend to correct this inequality?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his interest in this issue, which is extraordinarily important.

A few weeks ago, we realized that the employment insurance system, which was created in the context of the Second World War, was totally inadequate to take care of people in a crisis situation like this one. We announced parameters for all those who have lost almost everything so that they can make ends meet and get through the crisis. We are talking about 7.5 million people. There are a variety of conditions and I will be happy to talk about them in detail if my colleague so wishes.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Chair, we parliamentarians must respond to our citizens on a daily basis. Measures have been put in place by Service Canada to provide us with better support. At the Canada Revenue Agency, things are more difficult, particularly because the parliamentary line has been closed.

Is the Canada Revenue Agency planning to better equip parliamentarians in a timely manner?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my honourable colleague for sharing this reality that affects his region.

I'll talk to the Minister of National Revenue. We want to ensure that we continue to provide services to Canadians, as we should.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Chair, Canada's emergency commercial rent assistance may not necessarily achieve its objective. In fact, many landlords will not agree to reduce their rents by 25% and take on the extra paperwork. It is likely that the government will have to force landlords to comply.

Could there be other ways to help the commercial tenants?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, as I said earlier, we recognize the challenges facing Canadian businesses and owners. We have reached an agreement with the provinces and territories to implement the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance for Small Businesses program. This support is provided by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in cooperation with the provinces and territories. We will provide refundable loans to commercial landlords who, in turn, will reduce their tenants' rent by 75%. We encourage landlords to continue to provide these services and support.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Martel, you have 10 seconds to ask your question if you want an answer.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Chair, Canada's emergency commercial rent assistance unfortunately does not include outdoor businesses that rent land for commercial activities during the summer, such as mountain biking centres.

Will the owners of these leased lands be eligible for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Madam Minister, you have ten seconds at your disposal to answer that question.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, given that brief timespan for my answer, I will check and convey that information to my colleague.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, at a meeting in B.C. in January, the government told provincial and territorial attorneys general and solicitors general that they would be consulted before any firearm regulations or legislation was announced.

Can the minister tell the House if the provincial attorneys general and solicitors general were consulted before the announcement last Friday?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Bill Blair: I am happy to advise the member opposite that I did bring this to the federal-provincial-territorial discussion with ministers responsible for public safety, and I've had a number of discussions with them before and since that announcement.

• (1500)

Mr. John Brassard: The question was about attorneys general and solicitors general, Madam Chair. When were they told?

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, yes, of course we advised them of our intention, and frankly it wasn't a secret. As you may recall, we ran in the last election stating very clearly that we intended to prohibit military-style assault weapons. We advised the ministers responsible in each of the provinces, and they were also notified before the order in council was published.

Mr. John Brassard: In fact, they were told an hour after the announcement was made on Friday, Madam Chair.

Has the Minister of Health spoken with the Alberta health minister about serological testing not yet approved by Health Canada?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable Minister of Health.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I regularly meet with my provincial counterparts across the country, as a matter of fact, at least once a week. In addition, we have regular bilateral conversations about a number of items.

As the member of Parliament knows, there are a number of tests that are currently being assessed by Health Canada, and Health Canada will do its due process to ensure that these tests are accurate and do not pose any risks to Canadians.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, respectfully, that took twice as long as what my question was.

Premier Kenney of Alberta, and other premiers, including Premier Moe, questioned why Health Canada is refusing to accept the approvals for use of tests for COVID-19 by peer organizations such as the European Union and the United States Food and Drug Administration.

Given the recognized urgent need for proven rapid, mass and accurate testing, could the Minister of Health please explain why these other 'blue-chip regulatory agencies' approval is insufficient for the Public Health Agency of Canada, and what special testing is being done by Health Canada that is superior to these internationally recognized agencies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I think all Canadians would want to be assured that any medical device has been reviewed by Health Canada professionals to ensure its safety and efficacy.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, it's agreed by experts all over the world that the key to bringing control to the COVID-19 pandemic is the use of rapid, mass and accurate testing.

When will Health Canada approve the use of proven serological tests to provide the mass testing that is required to protect those seniors who are detached and alone, many dying in their residences, and to allow the Canadian economy to reopen?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I'll just let the member know that in fact it's not serological testing that would be rapid and provide that kind of immediate answers for seniors; it's actually point-of-care testing, which is under development.

As the member opposite knows, there are a number of tests that have been approved by Health Canada, in fact, at least 13 to date, some of them point-of-care testing. There is a Canadian supplier we are working with to ensure that we can actually facilitate access to those testing approaches across the country.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, last week in question period, the health minister stated that Health Canada would only approve for use COVID-19 detection technology that was manufactured in Canada. Now, with the failure and recall of the detection system, what other made-in-Canada solutions is the Minister of Health offering to Canadians for testing?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, we're working with a number of manufacturers across the country, researchers included, to ensure that we have new and innovative testing capacity as we go forward.

This is a complicated area, as the member opposite probably understands. It also involves ensuring that provinces and territories have laboratory capacity and health capacity to ensure that they can maximize the use of these tests.

We continue to do this work. We fully agree that testing is part of the strategy to ensure that we can live in the new normal with COVID-19.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, I have a quick question. Is the government considering opening up interprovincial trade barriers to make sure that the power of the Canadian economy can help us recover from this COVID-19 crisis?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, our government is very much in favour of lifting barriers to trade between provinces, and that is a discussion we are having with the provinces. Some premiers have unilaterally lifted trade barriers among themselves, and I encourage all premiers to do that.

The Chair: That's all for now.

We will move on to the take-note debate.

Pursuant to the order made on April 20, the committee shall now consider, for not more than two hours and 10 minutes, a motion that the committee take note of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Each recognized party shall be allotted 30 minutes for debate, which may be shared among members of that party. A total of 10 minutes shall be allotted for debate by members who do not belong to a recognized party.

• (1505)

[Translation]

I now yield the floor to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to be splitting my time with two of my colleagues.

I would like to begin by thanking my fellow citizens of Laurier—Sainte-Marie. I am proud to be able to represent them in the House.

I am very pleased to be here with you to continue the important work of Parliament and its committees, while respecting public health and physical distancing guidelines.

I'm going to talk briefly about our creative, cultural and heritage industries, our sports organizations and the media sector.

As you can imagine, like many others, these organizations and companies are facing a major crisis that stems from COVID-19, the biggest crisis in our recent history. All of us, as elected officials in our democracy and on behalf of the Canadian people, have a role to play in helping our creators and the sports community get through this ordeal and come out of it bigger and stronger.

Of course, it will be a challenge to ensure that these organizations and the professionals who run them emerge from the crisis to find their audiences and supporters, but I know we can do it if we all pull together.

On April 26, artists from across Canada did what they do best: create, move and inspire us. They came together virtually and gave us a memorable concert, *Stronger Together, Tous ensemble*. They put a balm on containment. At the same time, they helped us to feel a little less alone, more connected, more supportive.

Isolation and an economic shutdown are a new reality and like you, all Canadians, we are still learning. We have to do our best and as much as we can during this period of great uncertainty. In fact, that is what our artists and athletes are doing. Their spirit of initiative, their resilience and solidarity are a source of inspiration for our work today. Let's try to act like them and for them.

In Canada, we recognize that the cultural sector in all its diversity of expression, the museum sector and sports are a force for developing our communities and our identity. They ensure a strong, active and healthy Canadian society.

In addition to being a key economic driver, culture is a pillar that holds our communities together and keeps them united. We need that more than ever in these difficult circumstances. Unfortunately, the arts, culture, heritage and sport, an inherent and essential part of our communities and Canadian culture, are harshly affected by the pandemic.

Leaders of these creative businesses and sports organizations are reporting major financial losses as a result of the measures being put in place, which are necessary for ensuring the health of the Canadian public. For example, all public events such as concerts, festivals and various performances have been cancelled. Film and television production is on hold, museums are no longer hosting activities and several businesses are posting a significant decline in their ad revenue among other things.

We can expect Canada's creative industry to suffer growing financial pressure. In one month, losses are estimated at \$4.4 billion and roughly 26,000 jobs. In three months, they are estimated at \$13.2 billion and roughly 81,000 jobs. Some businesses are able to recover from these losses with help from the government and through loans and support from the private sector. It is precisely to reassure and maintain our thriving cultural and sports sector that we reacted quickly and urgently. We are here for our athletes and artists when they need us the most.

[English]

As you may know, as soon as containment measures were announced in Canada, I held a virtual press briefing to reassure our entire cultural and sports sector. I wanted to guarantee to them that government funding would be maintained, regardless of the circumstances.

The work and mandate of Canadian Heritage has not changed. We are here to support the arts, culture and sports sectors. We have ensured that funds from grants and contributions continue to flow and we remain available to work with our partners to determine the best way forward.

The Government of Canada is also working hard to roll out its COVID-19 economic response plan. This plan includes direct support for every affected Canadian, including those in the arts, culture and sports sectors. It includes the Canada emergency response benefit for workers who lose all or part of their income because of the pandemic. The benefit applies to wage earners, contract workers and self-employed individuals who would not otherwise be eligible for employment insurance.

Note that after receiving input from the industry, we announced that royalty payments would not be included in calculating the income eligible for benefits. As someone who has published three books, I understood this very clearly. This means that artists and creators will not be disadvantaged because of work they did months ago.

In addition to these emergency benefits and the credits and exemptions we have provided for all Canadians and Canadian businesses, we have introduced targeted measures for our cultural and sports sectors. On April 17, our Prime Minister announced a \$500-million emergency fund for our cultural, heritage and sports organizations in recognition of their importance to our society. This assistance is intended for institutions that suffer or will suffer income losses related to COVID-19. We are doing everything possible to stay in touch with our partners and the organizations we support to address their most pressing concerns.

This measure will provide financial support that ties in with existing measures in response to COVID-19 pertaining to salaries and fixed costs. The fund will be administered by Canadian Heritage, with the support of our partners, notably the Canada Council for the Arts. We will work with the culture, heritage and sports sectors to clarify the terms and conditions of this financial support. Supplementary to this, the Canada Council will also provide \$60 million in advance funding to help cultural organizations and artists who receive council grants to meet their immediate commitments.

Our government, through Canadian Heritage, is also investing \$3 million in several organizations through the digital citizen initiative to help combat false and misleading COVID-19 information, as well as the racism and stigmatization that we have seen spurred by the crisis. This support will help fund activities such as public awareness tools and online workshops to help Canadians become more resilient and to think critically about COVID-19 disinformation. Funded projects will reach Canadians on a national scale and a local scale, online and offline, and minority communities in both official languages, and indigenous communities.

We are also providing support for broadcasters. The Government of Canada has waived part 1 licence fees for the 2020-21 fiscal year. This amounts to \$30 million in assistance to our broadcasters.

An independent panel of experts will also make recommendations to the Canada Revenue Agency on the implementation of the tax measures for print journalism announced in budget 2019. This panel is now in place and we have made several adjustments to the tax measures to better meet the needs of the publishing and journalism community. To give just one example, new publishers and media outlets that receive support from the Canada periodical fund will be eligible for Canadian journalism labour tax credits.

Finally, the vast majority of the \$30 million invested by our government in a national COVID-19 awareness campaign will be invested in Canadian media, in television and radio, newspapers, magazines and digital media. The revenue generated by this campaign will provide our media with a breath of fresh air.

Canadians are facing one of the greatest challenges in our history. Our artists, our creators, our athletes and our amateur sports community are showing us many examples of solidarity. Together, alongside them, we will meet this challenge.

I invite you to envisage the sport and culture sector as an ecosystem, rich in its diversity but fragile. Together let's continue to protect it.

• (1510)

[Translation]

The Chair: The Minister of Indigenous Services.

[English]

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Kwe. Tansi. Ulaakut.

• (1515)

[Translation]

Hello.

[English]

I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

As of May 5, we have seen 161 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in first nations communities on reserve and 16 in Inuit communities, focused in the Nunavik region.

I also want to take a second to address what was made public a few days ago with respect to a false positive case in Pond Inlet. This was confirmed, luckily, earlier in the week, to the relief of many Canadians. Again, the lesson from this is that we need to stay vigilant, because we know that the pre-existing conditions in these communities make them exceedingly vulnerable. Vigilance is key, particularly with a pandemic that we have yet to fully understand.

[Translation]

In order to help indigenous communities cope with COVID-19, our government has provided more than \$740 million in direct support to help first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities address their public health needs.

So far, more than \$59.8 million has been used to buy equipment for medical personnel and to support community-led preparation measures. This money is in addition to the investments made in budget 2019, in which our government provided \$79.86 million for health emergency readiness. These investments helped in developing a network of regional coordinators and enhancing the ability of first nation communities to deal with health emergencies and pandemics.

Indigenous Services Canada continues to maintain a stockpile of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer to give to first nations communities dealing with a health emergency situation. This stockpile is available to first nations communities that might need personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of health care workers and others supporting the delivery of health services in an emergency health situation, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

[English]

As of May 5, yesterday, we have shipped 731 orders for personal protective equipment, including hand sanitizers, N95 masks, isolation shields and gloves to first nations communities with five orders in progress. The amounts constitute more than 167,850 gowns and more than 202,000 surgical masks to complement supplies provided by provinces and territories. We continue to respond quickly to requests and to assess them within a 24-hour turnaround time.

I would like to underscore that many communities and service providers are adapting their operations to respect the requirement for physical distancing. National indigenous organizations, such as Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and First Peoples Wellness Circle, have developed a series of resources related to COVID-19 that are available to everyone online.

One of our supports has been to financially assist the First Peoples Wellness Circle in developing an online platform for its network of local, multidisciplinary mental wellness teams that are currently offering services to 344 communities. We've increased the

number of crisis intervention counsellors on shift at the Hope for Wellness helpline, which is now receiving more than 100 calls or chats a week linked to COVID-19. This experience of self-isolation and physical distancing of family members who may be at higher risk or might fall ill can have a significant and real impact on mental health. We recognize this and are engaged with partners to support solutions to address and bolster mental health, particularly for youth.

[Translation]

Support for aboriginal youth is another priority sector. The department is working with its indigenous partners, including youth organizations, to support and promote indigenous resources for young people.

[English]

For example, the Canadian Roots Exchange has set up the creation community support fund to support youth mental wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic with local solutions. Similarly, We Matter is an indigenous-led youth organization focused on life promotion and messages of hope and resilience. They have developed tool kits for youth, teachers and support workers to help youth and those who support youth.

[Translation]

We are aware that post-secondary students are facing an unprecedented situation because of COVID-19. On April 22, the Prime Minister announced up to \$9 million in funding for post-secondary students and recent graduates, including aboriginal students.

Nevertheless, we know that many aboriginal students are dealing with specific and unique situations either related to financial stability, job opportunities or simply the chance to continue their studies as planned. That is why an additional \$75.2 million will be provided specifically in support of first nations, Inuit and Métis post-secondary students as they deal with COVID-19. This amount is in addition to the existing financial aid programs for aboriginal post-secondary students. This support could be used to cover the cost related to buying computer equipment as courses move online, registration fees, groceries, support payments, housing and transportation, and, should graduation be delayed, cover an extra year of university and related expenses.

At the end of the day, this assistance is meant to ensure that post-secondary aboriginal students can continue or begin their studies as planned despite the obstacles put up by COVID-19.

• (1520)

[English]

We are also taking steps to support indigenous-owned businesses during this crisis. The Government of Canada will provide up to \$306.8 million in funding to help small and medium-sized indigenous businesses through the network of aboriginal financial institutions that offer financing to indigenous businesses. This measure will help an estimated 6,000 indigenous-owned businesses during this difficult time and will hopefully provide the stability they need to persist.

Indigenous businesses, including indigenous government-owned corporations and partnerships, are also now eligible to apply for the Canada emergency wage subsidy to support them in their efforts to retain and rehire laid-off employees and weather their current challenges. Taxable indigenous government-owned corporations are already eligible for the wage subsidy.

The government has also established a business credit availability program to provide \$40 billion in additional support through the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada, which are working together with private sector lenders to coordinate credit solutions for individual businesses. Some indigenous businesses may be able to leverage these solutions as well.

As you may recall, on March 18 the Government of Canada allocated \$305 million towards a new distinctions-based indigenous community support fund to address immediate needs related to COVID-19 in indigenous communities and among urban indigenous populations. This funding is part of the COVID-19 economic response plan and is in addition to needs-based support for first nations and Inuit health and emergency management.

As part of this indigenous community support fund, we are working to support first nations off reserve and urban indigenous populations. We recently concluded proposal-based processes to distribute \$15 million to organizations that provide critical services to first nations off reserve and to indigenous peoples living in urban centres. So far 94 proposals by organizations from coast to coast have been supported through this fund. This includes support for friendship centres as they continue their important work to serve urban indigenous communities in the face of this pandemic. We know that friendship centres are playing a crucial role in providing key support, which ranges from delivering food to families, young people and elders to responding to calls for assistance to providing support for mental health and cultural support for urban indigenous communities.

As our response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues and adapts to new data, we ask indigenous communities and partners to continue to assess their evolving needs. We ask them to reach out to their regional departmental contacts so that we may assist them in supporting community members.

I want to take this final moment, Mr. Chair, to express again my deepest sympathies to the Canadian Armed Forces. Our thoughts and prayers go to the military personnel who lost their lives in the helicopter crash in the Ionian Sea, and their families. Canada is grieving with them as we all try to come to grips with this tragic accident.

Let me conclude by saying that the government has designed and supported the measures I've described earlier today to provide timely and direct support to all Canadians in response to this unprecedented crisis. These measures offer timely financial support to indigenous peoples in Canada in particular, no matter where they reside. We are working with our partners for all Canadians.

Meegwetch. Nakurmiik. Merci. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: I will now give the floor to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance.

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Chair.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis. More than three million people around the world have been infected, including more than 60,000 in Canada. Sadly, more than 4,000 Canadians have died from this disease. Naturally, the health and safety of all Canadians remain our top priority. We are constantly looking for ways to slow down the spread of this deadly virus. The pandemic affected large and small businesses around the world overnight and continues to have a devastating impact on the global economy.

Fortunately, our government has taken strong action to soften the blow of the crisis on Canadians by providing direct support of more than \$140 billion to individuals, families, and businesses. This is one of the most comprehensive plans in the G7.

It has been eight weeks since the Prime Minister gave an overview of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan seeks to limit the spread of the virus in our country and protect citizens, families, businesses and the economy.

• (1525)

[English]

Over the past two months, the government has developed and implemented policies that have expanded and enhanced Canada's emergency response plan. No Canadian should have to choose between protecting their health and putting food on the table. The government has designed and launched a series of measures, including the Canada emergency response benefit, to provide timely and direct support to Canadians in response to COVID-19. This benefit, which provides \$2,000 to individuals who have lost their employment, has supported over 7.5 million Canadians. These measures will help meet the cash needs of Canadian households and help ensure that Canadians can pay for essential needs like housing and groceries during this difficult time.

Mr. Chair, I would like to tell this House and Canadians about some of our key measures.

[Translation]

Families are feeling the social and economic repercussions of COVID-19 on their lives. Parents are concerned about being able to feed their family and they try to find creative ways to play the role of teacher and facilitator to their children. This is a difficult time for many families and we must continue to help parents and invest in our children.

This month, families who receive the Canada child benefit, or the CCB, will receive up to \$300 more per child to help relieve some of the extra pressure caused by COVID-19. As you know, the CCB is a monthly non-taxable payment provided to eligible families to help them cover the costs of raising children under 18.

Ever since this benefit was implemented in 2016, it has had a positive impact on family incomes. This assistance measure puts the emphasis on families who need it the most, as low- and middle-income families receive the highest payments. This year, eligible families will automatically receive this one-time additional CCB in their May payment. People already receiving the CCB do not have to file a new claim to get this one-time enhancement.

This measure represents an addition \$2 billion in support for families across the country. It will help families deal with the cost of raising their children during this difficult time. It is just one of the countless measures the government has put in place to help families overcome this crisis.

[English]

In addition to this one-time CCB increase, we have provided individuals and families of low and modest incomes with a special top-up payment through the goods and services tax credit. This measure has provided, on average, close to \$400 for single individuals and close to \$600 for couples. In my riding of Ottawa—Vanier, this has helped families during these very difficult times.

We also understand that Canadians may be challenged in filing their taxes this year. That is why our government has also extended the tax filing deadline for individuals to June 1.

It is one more way that we are easing pressures on Canadians during this pressure-filled time.

We have heard that post-secondary students are feeling the economic impacts of COVID-19. Many students were preparing to start a summer or co-op job in May, and are now worried about how to pay rent and cover basic living expenses. Recent graduates are struggling to find meaningful work. This is a critical point in their lives. We must do everything possible to support the future of the next generation.

In order to ensure that post-secondary students are able to confidently continue their studies in the fall, the government is proposing significant measures to support them. From students who were counting on their summer employment to pay for their tuition, to recent graduates who were planning to start their careers, the government has their back during this challenging time. That is why I was pleased to rise in this House last week to speak to the \$9-billion

plan to help students and recent graduates get through the next few months.

Because of COVID-19, there aren't as many jobs for students as last year. Without a job, it can be hard to pay for tuition or for day-to-day basics. We have proposed the Canada emergency student benefit, which would give students \$1,250 a month from May to August, with additional support for students with dependants or disabilities.

At the same time, we're creating and extending up to 160,000 jobs and other opportunities for young people in sectors that need an extra hand right now or are at the front line of the pandemic. If students prefer to volunteer and help in the fight against COVID-19, they'll be eligible for a \$1,000 to \$5,000 grant through the new Canada student service grant.

• (1530)

[Translation]

We are also helping businesses pay their employees even though they cannot open their doors. The Canada emergency wage subsidy is a subsidy of 75% of a salary for a maximum of \$847 a week, for employers of all sizes and all sectors that have experienced a decline in their gross income of at least 15% in March and 30% in April and May. We created this subsidy to prevent new job losses and to encourage employers to rehire the workers they had to lay off because of COVID-19.

[English]

Our action also stands to have far-reaching implications. More workers will keep their jobs and more employers will be in a better position after the crisis, when the economy rebounds.

[Translation]

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Every sector of the economy and every region of Canada has suffered the consequences. The government will continue to assess the repercussions of COVID-19. We are prepared to take other measures as needed and we will continue to do so to support Canadians throughout the entire pandemic. We will ensure that our economy remains resilient during this difficult time.

We will get through this together and when this crisis is over, we will be in the best position to bounce back together and continue to build a stronger country, one where everyone can succeed.

[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Ms. Shin.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to share this time with my colleagues from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan.

As I rise to speak in the House today, I do so with deep gratitude. I am grateful for the privilege of serving my constituents in Port Moody—Coquitlam, Anmore and Belcarra during these unprecedented times. I am grateful to be here in the chamber, where the dignity, dreams, lives and hopes of the people are shaped by the laws we make in this great democratic institution. I am proud to be Canadian more than ever before, because I see people in our country and in my community putting their compassion, generosity and resilience into action in a time of great need. I am humbled by the honour of serving my country in a time of adversity.

I'd like to take this time to thank the health care practitioners and staff at Eagle Ridge Hospital for their daily sacrifice. I'd like to thank the first responders and essential workers in my riding, who keep us safe and fed, and maintain a certain level of normalcy for us in a time of instability. Thank you all for putting yourselves at risk on the front lines as you take care of us. You are the heroes in this war against COVID-19.

I'd also like to say a special thank you to all who have been showing great initiative by raising support for food banks through virtual concerts and galas. I'd like to thank Share Family & Community Services and other societies and groups in my community for continuing to meet the needs of food and security for the homeless, seniors and vulnerable families. I'd like to thank individuals and groups for their efforts in making homemade masks and donating them to health care workers and seniors.

There is another demographic of vulnerable Canadians who are facing unprecedented struggle right now, and that is the business community. With so many shutdowns, revenue losses and the challenges of paying rent and utility bills, all the while facing disappointment over gaps in the emergency benefits that disqualify some business owners.... I recognize it's a process, but it's been a daunting one for several weeks. Therefore, I'd like to thank Michael Hind and the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce for doing an excellent job of keeping business owners updated on different government benefits and encouraging the people. To the sponsors of the shop local campaign to help urban businesses survive the pandemic, thank you for giving hope to our entrepreneurs. Canada needs our businesses to survive past this pandemic.

In the midst of struggle, there have also been moments of celebration. I'd like to congratulate Dr. Mary Anne Cooper, a resident of Port Moody, for receiving the B.C. Achievement Community Award. We celebrate her exceptional contributions to our local heritage and our green spaces, and her advocacy for seniors.

I'd also like to congratulate Novo Textiles, a company in my riding of Coquitlam that, without government funding, has managed to retool their factory to manufacture surgical masks. They are now supplying masks to the B.C. Provincial Health Services Authority, Alberta Health, Nova Scotia fish-processing companies, B.C. Search and Rescue, and the Port of Vancouver. In a short time, they'll be manufacturing N95 masks using a Canadian machine and Swiss-made fabric that has a strong antiviral and antibacterial effect that can kill bacteria upon contact.

This success story and the similar stories that are starting to pop up across our nation demonstrate not only their efforts against COVID-19 but also their entrepreneurial, innovative and pioneering spirit, which is the essence of the Canadian spirit. I'm so proud to see it happen right here in my own community. It was a privilege to be part of expediting the process for Novo Textiles' transition to becoming one of Canada's first manufacturers of N95 masks.

In continuing to celebrate our Canadians, I'd like to wish all members of the Dutch, Asian and Jewish communities a happy heritage month, and celebrate their history, culture and contributions that enrich and strengthen our country.

This week we also observe Mental Health Week, and I'm so glad to hear in the House many sensibilities spoken about this. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested many aspects of our human condition. It has particularly had a toll on our mental health individually and collectively. There's been a lot of shock and change, and much to grieve and process.

● (1535)

It didn't even dawn on me personally until I went to Vancouver International Airport for my flight here and saw the empty airport and recognized the situation we truly are in and the vulnerability of our economy. I did not see people, the crowds that I'm used to seeing, which mark a healthy industry. We are in challenging times.

I recently spoke with a non-profit organization, Not 9 to 5, that advocates for mental health awareness and support for the hospitality industry. Of the many industries hit by COVID-19 shutdowns, the hospitality industry is perhaps one of the most vulnerable. It's certainly an important part of my constituency and of British Columbia.

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, substance use, socio-economic insecurity and unemployment are high risk factors for suicide and suicidal behaviour. According to Not 9 to 5, the hospitality industry already had a severe mental health crisis on its hands before the coronavirus pandemic, but now with the added challenges of isolation and anxiety caused by the pandemic, a rise in suicide rates is expected.

This points me to a greater overarching pandemic. Hospitality is one industry, but Canadians at large are facing an unprecedented time of trauma, fear, anxiety and hopelessness with all the challenges of financial loss, isolation, fear of the COVID-19 virus itself and uncertainty about the future. I know many have not had a chance to grieve and come to terms with what's happening right now. In a matter of weeks and months, I don't even know what that will look like.

It is at a time like this that I feel that it is important for us as parliamentarians, and especially for the government being in a position to take action, to really consider the long-term impact of this crisis pertaining to mental health and to perhaps view the situation as an opportunity to do a reset in how Canadians perceive mental health and how we respond. It is perhaps not something that should just be left to the provinces. Instead there should be a federal framework that we can provide not only for immediate intervention but for long-term solutions.

I would ask all members across all aisles to consider what that framework would look like, to not only help Canadians through this pandemic but also set a long-term course through which mental health care is accessible and part of everyday care like physical health care.

In 2006, the Conservative government proposed legislation for a mental health act. We acknowledged the need for oversight on mental health, but it's been 14 years. We need to revisit mental health and take it to the next level. There's no better time than the present, and if necessity is the mother of all invention, let the necessity of oversight and funding for mental health care today, in partnership with all tiers of government and front-line organizations, mark its beginning.

Today there is another pandemic that is running parallel to COVID-19 and that is the pandemic of domestic abuse. In 2018 about one-third of all violent crimes reported to the police were committed by intimate partners.

COVID-19 has created a perfect storm for domestic violence to escalate. Tri-City Transitions is a women's shelter and service provider for families and victims of domestic violence in my riding, and I'm grateful that my community has an organization like Tri-City Transitions, which has programs for immediate needs and long-term restoration and has served the community for 45 years. I spoke with Carol Metz, who has worked for many years for the shelter, and in a Zoom interview, she stated that since the COVID-19 pandemic caused social distancing and shutdowns, they have opened 20 new cases. Families are being strained relationally, and even the most solid relationships are being tested.

While emphasizing the need for more long-term programs to support women, who form 80% of the victims in intimate partner violence, she also stated the need for programs to help the abusers deal with the issues that translate into their anger, violence and abusive behaviour.

While the government has stated that the funds are flowing to the bank accounts of shelters and sexual assault centres, we don't know the details of how the support is being distributed, so there is no way of determining the gaps. It is time to take a deeper look at do-

mestic violence and deal with these issues or else we will have a whole generation of families with PTSD and all kinds of trauma. The cycle needs to end. We need to mitigate now with solutions that speak not only to immediate relief but also in the short term and long term work toward restoration.

● (1540)

I'm glad to see the initiatives the government has undertaken to bring more awareness, but it needs to go deeper. Counselling is a journey that needs to begin and end with consistency, and I hope some of the counselling will provide long-term journeys to help people find stability in those counselling relationships.

Moving forward, I hope that during this Mental Health Week all members will give deep thought to what mental health care should look like today and for the next generation.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Chair, I am tabling, in both official languages, a revised version of part of the response to the order of the House of March 9, 2020, which was deposited electronically with the Clerk of the House by the Minister of Finance on April 29, 2020.

Because of the atypical work arrangements put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were technical difficulties with the translation of certain parts of these documents, such as authorization to translate a section of the documents not having been received when the documents were submitted. These problems have now been resolved, so I am tabling these documents.

The Chair: We'll continue with the speeches now.

Mr. Martel, you have the floor.

● (1545)

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Chair, it's an honour to sit in the House today and voice the concerns of the people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord in these uncertain times.

Parliament never closed down before. This is a first. With the nation in crisis, Canadians looked to their leaders. Sadly, for several weeks, we were at an impasse with the government, and we couldn't move forward on the issues that matter to them.

I went through this as a coach. It's not easy to innovate and improve when you're surrounded by people who think exactly the same way you do. That's why we fought so hard to be here. We would have preferred to meet several times a week, but we'll take what we can get.

During question period, I raised several issues that affect both individuals and businesses. I realize these are exceptional circumstances, that we're all moving forward together in uncertainty, and that the government is doing its best to help people in need. However, I would like the government to co-operate more with the Conservative opposition, because I believe we could all contribute to finding positive solutions to the COVID-19 crisis. The government would do well to work with us for the good of Canadians without wasting parliamentarians' time on partisan issues like controlling law-abiding gun owners.

That being said, in the spirit of collaboration, I want to highlight certain problems with the government's usual programs. We hope to enhance these programs to help a larger number of Canadians. I think that parliamentarians could be the government's greatest allies in the fight against COVID-19. We're the ones who listen to the problems brought to us by individuals and businesses and help them find solutions.

At Service Canada, measures have been taken to better support us as parliamentarians. At the Canada Revenue Agency, it's a little harder, not least because the parliamentary line has been shut down. Right now, people are falling through the cracks, and we're the only ones who can help. We realize that the government is announcing programs quickly, without necessarily having all the details, in order to respond as fast as possible. However, many Canadians are being left behind.

I know that our public servants are working very hard these days, but I think they should have the right to interpret vague regulations somewhat broadly. For instance, I'm thinking of people who were forced to apply for EI because of the rail blockades and people with above-average foresight who self-isolated before March 15. Unlike most people, they're not eligible for the CERB.

With regard to help for individuals, I'm shocked that the government provided such generous support for students, the very people who work for our essential services during the summer. They're the least vulnerable to COVID-19, yet they're the ones getting the most encouragement to stay home. The government is pandering to the lowest common denominator instead of incentivizing work. It's clear that certain businesses will struggle and won't be able to re-hire their usual staff. We absolutely need to add an incentive to work. For instance, why not offer more loans and grants to those who choose to work this summer? That's the kind of policy that will minimize aid for youth and reward those who worked on our farms, in our businesses or even in front-line health care.

I would also urge the government to work with the provinces to increase support for seniors during COVID-19. Seniors are in forced isolation and are the most vulnerable to this virus. Many are being forced to buy electronic devices, get Internet installed to stay connected with their families, and do their grocery shopping online for their own safety. This crisis is increasing their expenses. Will any help be planned for them?

Now I'll turn to businesses. The Canada emergency business account is a good program, but it's far too restrictive. Why doesn't this program do anything to help start-ups that are newly established, businesses that unfortunately didn't have time to spend \$20,000 on payroll this year, businesses run with a personal chequing account,

businesses whose employees are issued T4As or are on service contracts, or businesses that pay themselves in dividends or revenue sharing? There are many different ways to run a business in Canada. I'm sure the Minister of Finance is aware of that.

• (1550)

Many businesses are falling through the cracks, even though it would be easy to provide them with a \$40,000 repayable loan. It wouldn't be hard to improve the program. This program could be the difference between surviving or not for some businesses.

Speaking of businesses surviving, many of them were hoping to get the emergency wage subsidy to keep their employees on the job and keep our economy going. I see two huge gaps in this program.

First of all, why are non-arm's length businesses not eligible for this assistance? That makes no sense. The government is literally interfering in the management of Canadian businesses. Whether they're arm's length or not, they need help.

Second, for non-arm's length employees, they're being asked to look at the average earnings between January 2020 and March 2020. Many businesses in the tourism sector, including campgrounds for instance, have lots of seasonal workers who don't work between January and March. Under this rule, they won't get any wage subsidy.

As a final point, I'm a little puzzled by the emergency commercial rent assistance. Why is it that the government thinks it can interfere in the lease between two businesses and force landlords to accept a 25% rent reduction? The government is playing a dangerous game. It should either help tenants with 50% or 75% of the rent, or provide loans to landlords until their tenants can pay their rent again. However, forcing landlords to lower rents completely undermines the rule of law. This could be a very slippery slope. I therefore urge the government to approach this with caution and review the program's structure.

I really hope the Liberal government will consider my suggestions. After all, the issues I've raised here are not unique to Chicoutimi—Le Fjord; they exist across the country. Although this is the right thing to do, these programs will be enormously expensive for Canada, and we can't afford to pass this debt on to future generations. Already our tax system isn't very competitive compared to the rest of North America. Our tax system is cumbersome and inefficient. I would therefore caution the government against raising taxes in any way that would further squeeze Canadians and hurt our economic recovery.

In terms of a recovery plan, I urge the Liberal government to expedite infrastructure projects, to make it easier to invest in Canada and, most importantly, to support the private sector natural resource development projects worth around \$200 billion that are currently being studied in Canada, such as the GNL Québec project in my riding.

Before the COVID-19 crisis struck, GNL Québec enjoyed around 68% support in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region. This major green project will be ready for construction in 2021 and will definitely give the Canadian economy a boost.

In my region, we've been less affected by COVID-19, as everyone has been reviewing their hygiene practices. This is a perfect opportunity to decentralize investments in large urban centres and move them towards the regions. With programs that are more flexible and better suited to rural realities, the regions could take a leadership role in Canada's economic recovery.

If another wave of this or another health crisis were to strike one day, the regions, which tend to be more isolated, could help ensure a strong economy if the urban centres have to come to a standstill. I therefore urge the government to be bold and support investment in the regions. That is how we'll be able to reach our full economic potential and quickly pay down the enormous debt weighing down our country.

The COVID-19 crisis is unlike anything we have ever seen in the 21st century. We understand that the government is in a difficult situation. Today I want to reach out to the government and encourage it to remain open and flexible and consider some of the proposals I've suggested. I am confident this would help many people and many businesses, and that these recovery plans would help the country get back on track quickly.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in this debate. It was a privilege to share my constituents' concerns at this historic time.

[English]

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I too, like so many of my colleagues before me have said, am extremely pleased, to be here today, albeit with a significantly reduced number of people in this chamber. I recall the first time I stood in this House to make some comments. It was over 16 years ago. I was intimidated. I was awestruck. I didn't know exactly what I would say and how I would get the words out of my mouth. I do recall standing up and seeing a lot of empty chairs in front of me.

I'd like to say to everyone here that, even after 16 years, it's apparent that I still have the ability to draw a crowd.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: So to the people who are here today, I thank you for it.

Mr. Chair, we are living in a strange, strange world. I think everyone here knows that. No one can deny that. It's almost like the world has been turned upside down.

Who could have predicted, a scant two months ago, the type of world we are living in right now? Who could have predicted, two months ago, that we would be living in a world where there was a global lockdown, a world where people could not leave their houses, were told by their governments not to leave their houses, couldn't go next door to a neighbour's place to have a cup of coffee, couldn't ask their grandchildren to come over for a visit, and couldn't attend a funeral? Nobody could have predicted that.

Who would have predicted, two months ago, that literally tens of millions of people would lose their jobs literally overnight? Who would have predicted, a scant two months ago, that today over three and a half million people would have contracted this deadly virus? There's a death count in most democracies and the industrialized world, in fact in countries throughout our globe and throughout our planet; people are still dying because of COVID-19. Who could have predicted that? The answer, of course, is no one.

What have we done as a country? What have other countries done in terms of trying to combat this? I have to say that generally speaking, most countries that I am aware of have done good to exceptional jobs. They put in health protocols to help flatten the curve of this pandemic. They also did other things from an economic standpoint to try to support their citizens. They got money out the door to support those who lost their jobs. They got money out the door quickly to support those who had to close businesses.

Those economic initiatives were not only necessary; they have worked. The problem and the difficulty is at what cost, and at what cost economically? We are looking at a situation now in Canada where this year's deficit alone will be somewhat north of \$250 billion. That figure is rising, and the spending tap has not been turned off yet. Was it necessary? Yes. But what will happen two months from now? The day of reckoning has yet to come upon us, but it will.

I want to spend the remainder of my time here to just reflect for a few moments on what this government has done to try to prepare for the situation that we find ourselves in now from an economic standpoint and compare that with a previous government, the government that I was a part of for nine years. I can tell you that despite the government's rhetoric that their own initiatives financially put their government in a good fiscal position to withstand something like we're seeing today, they did not. Yes, it's true that the net debt-to-GDP ratio is around 30%, in the low thirties. The government keeps touting that as an example of how their economy, while they were governing this country, was doing a good job.

I agree that the economy seemed to be humming along, but what this government will not say to Canadians, will not remind Canadians, is that in the first four years of this government's mandate, from 2015 to 2019, this government added over \$70 billion to the Canadian debt. Any economist, any financial analyst, will tell you that during good times, that is the time when governments should be putting money aside for a rainy day. It should be paying down debt and saving money for the future in case a recession or some other unknown or untoward calamity washed up on our shores.

• (1555)

Right now it's not just raining; it is pouring. The government was, despite its rhetoric, in my view, completely unprepared from an economic and fiscal standpoint to deal with the situation that we have before us today.

How will we recover? That's a question I want to ask this government when the time is right. I recognize that now is not that time. Let's compare for a moment the situation this government finds itself in compared with some of the initiatives that the previous Conservative government embarked upon from 2006 to 2015. When I was first elected in 2004, we were in a minority situation, but we formed a government in January 2006. I can remind members that, in the first two years of our Conservative government, we paid down \$40 billion of debt while at the same time reducing the GST from 7% to 5%.

In 2008-09, there was a recession that washed up on our shores, as it did throughout the world. That was the global recession caused by the subprime mortgage crisis initiated in the United States. As a government, we recognized we had to do something. We borrowed \$50 billion to put into the economy as stimulus, primarily using infrastructure projects across Canada that were shovel-ready. What happened? It worked. Our economy came out of the recession before any other country's in the world. By the time we left office in 2015, we were back into a balanced budget.

That's fiscal responsibility and that's fiscal restraint, two themes I don't think this government truly understands.

I point out to members that, during our first four years in opposition after the 2015 election, we consistently asked the Minister of Finance when the government's budget would be balanced. There was steadfast refusal from the finance minister to answer that question. I'm sure it was not because the minister didn't want to answer the question. It was because he didn't know the answer to the question. He could not provide an answer as to when the government's budget would be balanced.

Think about that for just a moment. Arguably, the second most influential and powerful person in Canada, the finance minister of Canada, was not able to answer a simple question: When will your budget be balanced? If it was bad enough back then, when the economy was in relatively good shape, how will the Minister of Finance answer that question today? How could he possibly answer that question?

There are only two options that I see this government has as we move forward, as we hopefully leave the health crisis, the pandemic know as COVID-19, behind us. That is to do one of two things, either cut spending or raise taxes. My colleague who spoke before me already indicated that raising taxes would simply not be the right move right now because of the negative impact it would have on the Canadian economy. That leaves option number one: to reduce government services. I have never seen a government more unlikely to do that than the government sitting across from me today.

I look upon members opposite and ask them to think long and hard. What initiatives must they be faced with? What will they do to make sure that Canada's economy not only gets back on its feet, but that we start dealing with the massive debt we'll have to deal with. It's not me, not my children, not even my grandchildren. It's probably my great-grandchildren who will have to pay off that debt. That's an unfortunate circumstance that this government, in part, brought upon itself.

• (1600)

Mr. Chair, Canadians deserve better.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now go to Ms. Larouche.

• (1605)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to inform you that I'll be sharing my time with my honourable colleagues from Joliette and Jonquière.

I must humbly admit that I'm surprised to find myself here again, for the third time since this crisis began, talking about the precarious situation facing seniors. We are meeting again today in circumstances that are as exceptional and dramatic as ever. At the risk of repeating myself, I only hope that we actually get something done this time and that the government will finally address seniors' concerns.

I feel I have a duty to fight for those who helped build Quebec, and even Canada, as we know them today. People aged 65 and over were born between the 1930s and 1950s, times of great upheaval and great change everywhere. These individuals definitely contributed to the Quiet Revolution and its repercussions. They have witnessed the birth and evolution of the welfare state.

Now they are seeing the flip side. They have contributed their entire lives to this society of solidarity, but at the end of the day, there is not enough money for them. These are our parents, our grandparents and even our great-grandparents. The rapid, furious pace of our so-called modern life has gradually pulled us further away from them. Many of them are really and truly alone.

I'm still young, and when I look at the current situation, I don't want to grow old in a world like this, where institutionalized ingratitude allows a certain degree of dehumanization. I'm not talking about professional and family caregivers. On the contrary, they are also victims. I'd like to see seniors get some of their dignity back. They obviously need us; they need us to bring in immediate, direct measures.

The current crisis is causing serious economic hardships for seniors. Some people seem to think that the economic shutdown does not affect seniors since they're no longer in the workforce, but that isn't true. First of all, a good many of them, mostly older women, do still work, which just goes to show, I think, how urgent these measures are. If they receive pension income and yet still feel the need to work, clearly, their income support is not enough.

On top of that, their investment income, in other words, the savings they accumulated for their retirement precisely so they wouldn't have to work or receive the guaranteed income supplement, has been decimated. Most seniors live on a fixed income, their pension, but the cost of living is going up for everyone, whether it be the cost of rent, groceries, medication and services.

In 1975, old age security covered 20% of the average industrial wage. Today it covers 13%. This means that old age security is often not enough to keep people from living in poverty. Increasing seniors' incomes will not only give them a decent standard of living, which they have long deserved, but will also help them deal with the current crisis. The Bloc Québécois has considered this a priority since long before the current crisis and has been asking for improvements to the guaranteed income supplement.

During the election campaign, the Liberals seemed to be aware of the problem and promised to increase old age security by 10%. If they had actually done so, this measure would have definitely made a huge difference in the current crisis. In committee last Friday, the president of the FADOQ network, Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, urged the government to keep that promise. However, that commitment was limited to people aged 75 and over, which makes no sense. We must not discriminate based on age and create two classes of seniors. Seniors also have needs. They don't all live in long-term care centres or posh seniors' homes. Ageism will not encourage the proper treatment of seniors.

The first obvious conclusion is this: Seniors are also greatly affected by this crisis, not only economically speaking, but also in terms of their daily life, considering the lockdown and isolation. They're no longer getting help from their family members or home care, for instance.

Another aspect I want to talk about is the fact that the economic crisis stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic will unfortunately put many businesses in a precarious situation. Workers and, more importantly, pensioners with those companies will once again be the hardest-hit. They risk losing their pension funds or a large part of those funds.

That is why the Bloc Québécois has been proposing measures to protect investment income when stock markets plunge since long before this crisis began. Again in committee last Friday, the president of the FADOQ network, Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, also expressed support for the measure the Bloc Québécois has proposed in House, namely that pensioners be considered preferred creditors in the event of bankruptcy, by amending the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies Creditors Arrangement Act.

• (1610)

This brings me to the second conclusion: Even retirees with a pension plan are not immune from the potential financial consequences of COVID-19.

We have to face the situation with a clear head and acknowledge our problems, but this is not the time for partisanship. In any case, that is not what we usually do. I therefore reiterate our willingness to work with the government so we can find solutions now. At the very least, a decent income could have helped seniors deal with the crisis on their own, plan more effectively for their confinement, stay connected with family and friends, for example through the Internet, and purchase essential goods online. This economic security and the reassurance that they weren't completely alone would have done much to reduce this stress, which they don't need at this stage of their lives.

We appreciate that the government welcomes and listens to our proposals. As parliamentarians, we want to contribute as much as we can. We have an extraordinary role to play and an exceptional forum, and we have a duty to use them wisely.

The third conclusion is that the current situation is only exacerbating a problem that has been plaguing us for a long time. It's sad that it took a health crisis for the government to act and for all of us to become collectively aware of the situation of seniors and the people around them.

In the face of these three conclusions, doing nothing is not an option. In fact, doing nothing was not really an option before the crisis and neither are further delays. Given that various segments of the public received assistance relatively quickly, every day that no assistance reaches those who are the main victims of this health crisis makes the government more unworthy of its mandate.

Rather than taking our criticism as a guide to act often too late, wouldn't it be better for the government to get us directly involved? Maybe then we would be able to act in a timely manner. If the government is short of time or creativity, it can take advantage of our strength as a group and ask other parties to help.

There are solutions. Increasing retirement income is an option that has been advocated many times by our party and is supported by such organizations as the FADOQ. Moreover, this increase was a promise made by the Liberal Party during its election campaign. All we have to do now is to implement it.

Because seniors are not just an economic weight but a grey source of strength, and because they have the right to age with dignity, let's act now.

The Chair: Mr. Simard, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad you're back. I almost missed you. I'm happy to see you again today.

I will start by commending the work of the essential services workers in my riding, who do a fantastic job and who have to go to work, sometimes even despite the incentives to stay home, such as the CERB. I think they are very brave people who have their priorities straight.

Before I start my speech I would like to make a brief aside.

Several people in my riding have called my office for information on the CERB. One of them was a gentleman who was working under the table. He thought it was totally unfair that people who do not declare their income do not have access to the CERB. I lectured him a bit by telling him that when he goes to the hospital and uses public services, our taxes pay for those services.

I find it rather ironic that earlier, in response to some questions, I heard members opposite say that we were going to allow companies registered in tax havens to benefit from the measures the government is implementing. Let's just say that this is a tad inconsistent with the lecture I gave this citizen who works illegally. I would even say that this encourages people to work under the table. In any event, there is someone better placed than me, my colleague from Joliette, who will be able to explain it to you later.

This time last year, if I had told anyone that we were about to have one of the worst health crises in Canada, probably no one would have believed me. That's what a crisis is like. As long as it is just a possibility, we pay no attention to it. We are living through this actual, real crisis, which some people predicted by talking about a possible SARS pandemic. They had already given us an indication of how this could develop.

I am thinking of what we did a little earlier when we marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands. When we're in a crisis or a war, sometimes we tell ourselves, "never again". We want to make sure it never happens again.

I will use this as a starting point to discuss what role science might play in this crisis. I am my party's critic for science and innovation.

Let's just say that we, as public policy-makers, have a moral obligation. We must ensure that the current crisis never happens again. The direct consequences of this crisis are very problematic. We only have to think of our seniors who, as my colleague said earlier, are being left to cope on their own because we need to implement health measures. How are we going to resolve this situation? Health care funding will certainly be part of the solution. I will come back to that.

I would like to come back to the approach my party has taken since the beginning of this Parliament.

The Bloc Québécois has committed to co-operate with the government. This has earned us some successes, especially in the aluminum file. However, I feel that we need to revitalize this approach of co-operation. To help solve this crisis, our party could make a contribution, as it did for the implementation of the CERB, by putting forward its ideas.

I would like to brainstorm with you and share a few points with the government about a strategy to recover from the crisis.

A crisis occurs in two waves. During this first wave we are experiencing, the government acted in reactive mode, in other words, it responded by putting out fires. That is what it did in part by introducing the CERB and the Emergency Wage Subsidy. It had to deal with the most urgent situations. In the second wave of the crisis—and this is where things will get interesting for us—we will instead rely on an analytical or prospective mode, to use big words. In short, we will try to "understand", "prevent" and "anticipate", and we will propose concrete, feasible solutions.

● (1615)

To that end, we cannot avoid engaging in a serious reflection on research, since it is effectively through research that we can manage to control something like the current pandemic.

I therefore see two major approaches to overcoming the crisis. We will have to develop mechanisms that will help us control infectious diseases, but there is also another interesting approach that goes hand in hand with economic recovery. What will we learn from the crisis? Maybe something as abstract as climate change can become more real to us. As part of the economic recovery, we will have to use our scientific resources to find ways to prevent future uncontrollable crises, such as global warming.

There are then these two major aspects, but I am still a bit concerned because, earlier, our friends in the Conservative Party talked about the public debt as a way out of the crisis. I am well aware that public debt rises in times of crisis, but the federal government should not go back to its old ways of cutting transfers to the provinces. That is what led to the fiscal imbalance, which has resulted in chronic underfunding of health care. We are now suffering the consequences of this in Quebec. This underfunding has led to inadequate services in some seniors' centres. We will have to pay particular attention to this. It is true that we do not have unlimited resources and that we must ensure that public finances are sound, but we must not go back to a fiscal imbalance and the underfunding of health care.

There is another important issue to consider as we work to exit from the crisis. I fear that the government will decide to invest massively, as it has already done to some degree, in oil and gas. The oil sands are no longer a profitable source of energy. It would therefore be an obvious mistake, in my opinion, to want to save the oil sands as a way out of the crisis, when there are other very attractive economic sectors. I am thinking in particular of the forestry industry, which is very promising. It would be a good strategy to invest in the forestry industry as we emerge from the crisis. We should think about wood construction and forest biomass utilization. These are very promising sectors that are not unique to Quebec. They can also stimulate the economy in British Columbia. There is a whole area of research focusing on the forestry industry to help make the energy transition a little smoother. If the government decides to go in that direction, we will certainly work with it. There is then that possibility for bringing the economy out of the crisis.

I have one minute left and I haven't gotten to the main point of my presentation yet. We also have an opportunity when it comes to health care. Today, I told the Minister of Health about a Quebec initiative involving a biobank that would work in the sequencing of the COVID-19 virus. I hope that the government is also prepared to support this initiative, which is already backed by the Government of Quebec.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that we are prepared to work with the federal government if it commits to harmonizing the recovery from the crisis with the fight against climate change, which is not consistent with cuts to health care. If that is the case, the Bloc Québécois will be there to help.

● (1620)

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, many emergency economic measures have been adopted to date, but more needs to be done. Think about our seniors, lobster fishers, researchers and workers in the tourism, cultural, media, agricultural and forestry industries.

The Bloc Québécois expects the government to present an economic update before the summer. We are not talking about the budget, which we expect in the fall with a vision for the economic recovery. We want an update now because we want to get an overall idea of the situation, of the current circumstances and of all the emergency measures that have been adopted piecemeal.

We also expect the government to tell us its intentions for the summer. Will it extend the emergency measures? Will it extend them for specific sectors, such as tourism? Since the Minister of Finance has certain powers, we are asking him to share his intentions with the House.

In that regard, we are in the early stages of an economic recovery, but it may be slow going. Some restaurants will continue to make take-out meals and may soon open their dining rooms but only on Saturdays and Sundays. They will begin to hire their employees back, but only part time. It will be the same thing for hotel operators, who will also be hiring staff back part time. The same goes for SMEs and the manufacturing sector.

We can therefore expect a timid recovery with part-time workers. On one hand, that is encouraging because it marks the beginning of a return to a new normal. On the other hand, it creates new concerns because part-time workers may not earn enough to pay their bills but may earn too much to continue to receive the Canada emergency response benefit. I am therefore asking the government to adapt its emergency programs to take into account the part-time nature of the recovery. The health of our economy depends on it.

That is why we are asking the government to provide an economic update before the summer.

The time for the economic recovery will be in the fall. Hopefully the worst of the crisis will be over by then. It will be the beginning of a new normal. That is why the Bloc Québécois expects the government to table a budget when we return to the House in the fall to present its vision for that recovery. An economic recovery is an opportunity to lay the foundation for the economy of tomorrow. It is time to imagine the future we want. It is time to look forward.

Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter spoke of creative destruction. Economists use this expression to explain how economic crises are an opportunity to lay a new foundation for the economy of tomorrow.

Without in any way diminishing all of the problems this crisis has created, this pandemic also represents an opportunity to develop a vision for the economy of tomorrow, which should not cling to industries of the last century that are destined to disappear, with or without a pipeline. Tomorrow's economy involves embracing the clean energy transition and encouraging our businesses in that sector, which can shine on the international stage. Earth must make that change to respond to the environmental crisis. Quebec has everything it takes to succeed in that regard.

Tomorrow's economy involves supporting emerging technology companies and the innovation and research sector. It also means stepping up to help Canada's aerospace industry, which produces the cleanest aircraft in the world. Once again, Quebec has everything it takes to embrace this change. We will see whether the neighbouring government is up to the task.

The economic recovery also involves ensuring sustainable local agriculture and strong regional economies. That can be achieved through universal access to high-speed Internet. It is time high-speed Internet was considered an essential service, just as electricity was in the past.

The economic recovery involves supporting our culture and our artists. It also involves recognizing the role of our local and regional media outlets. In a time of fake news and conspiracy theories, reliable information must also be considered an essential service.

We also need to rethink our tax system. The report of the expert panel on sustainable finance provides food for thought in that regard. We need to think about that.

The current crisis brought to light the underfunding of the health care system. Ottawa originally committed to covering half the costs of the health care system. Today, it contributes only about 20% of the total cost and that contribution continues to drop every year. It is time for that to change. We need to be ready to deal with the next health crisis and, to do that, we need to strengthen our health care system.

The current crisis also reminds us just how unfair the tax system is. Everyone is paying his or her share except Toronto's big banks and the multinationals, which use tax havens. Now, in a time of crisis, they are asking the government for help, but the rest of the time, they are nowhere to be found. That needs to change.

We will have a \$250-billion deficit. That means everyone needs to contribute and it will not longer be acceptable to use tax havens to avoid paying one's fair share of taxes.

• (1625)

In an interview with Gérald Fillion, tax expert André Lareau, who specializes in tax havens, indicated that \$350 billion Canadian is sheltered in only 12 tax havens. Businesses use tax havens for activities related to financing operations and intellectual property.

Mr. Lareau also indicated that the government is aware of all the Canadian money that is being sheltered in tax havens but that it is not taking any action. He added that, given the current deficit, it is high time the government made a major change. He believes that, if we do not take this opportunity to change things, we will never change them. It is high time the government made things that are immoral illegal.

After the 2008 crisis, OECD countries created a working group to crack down on tax havens, or BEPS. We hope that the current crisis will be the time when the government makes the use of tax havens illegal. France, Denmark and Poland will not provide aid to companies that use tax havens. Belgium, Italy, the United Kingdom and the European Union are currently considering the issue. Here, nothing is being done.

As I said earlier, the *Journal de Montréal* reported that businesses using tax havens will finally be able to benefit from federal assistance. After suggesting that the government would be placing restrictions on that, the Prime Minister changed his mind. That is unacceptable.

Canada is lagging behind other OECD countries in the fight against tax havens, and even when it comes to the illegal use of tax havens.

The Minister of National Revenue can boast all she likes about how her agency is doing more, but the numbers do not add up. For example, the \$1 billion announced to crack down on tax cheats includes the salary of the person who was hired to replace someone who was retiring. That is ridiculous. This is not new money. It is nothing like what is being done in the United States or Europe.

The government also has a lax approach when it comes to credit card companies. They are doing what they want and getting off scot-free. In Canada, interchange fees are 10 times higher than they are in Europe and Australia. The government needs to act as quickly as possible. Visa and MasterCard are taking too much of our businesses' profits. Use of these credit cards is widespread in this time of crisis. Action is urgently needed.

Even today, my nation must rely on Ottawa's goodwill. The room to manoeuvre is here. In times of crisis, a central government is in the best position to implement emergency and recovery measures. The Bloc Québécois is satisfied with the various measures taken to date. The Bloc is also proud that it was able to contribute, in its own way, in order to better meet the needs of Quebeckers. However, that does not change the fact that the administration of my nation depends on the goodwill of its neighbour.

We have to accept decisions that we find unsatisfactory. Take for example the underfunding of our health care system. Ottawa is pulling out at the expense of our seniors and our sick. High-speed Internet is another example. Since Ottawa is giving Bell and Rogers carte blanche, our regions are paying the price and are not developing their full potential. Finally, let us also think of our farmers, our artists, our seniors and our media outlets.

I spoke about the government's lax approach to credit cards and the legal use of tax havens. In 2020, we are still not masters in our own house.

That being said, I would like to recap. We are asking the government to present an economic update by this summer so that we will know what direction it is going in and we can get an overall idea of the situation. With regard to the vision for the recovery, we expect the government to present a budget when the House comes back in the fall.

• (1630)

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go to the hon. member for Burnaby South, Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much.

I'll be sharing my time with my honourable colleague, the MP from Nunavut.

We've said before that during this crisis people are struggling and that during the immediacy of the crisis we need to focus on three things: We need to get money in people's pockets; we need to make sure they have a safe place to live; and we have to make sure that there are jobs for people to return to.

Now we're talking about a potential return to work. In order for people to return to work, they need three things. They need to know that their work is safe: They need to know that if they go to work, they're not going to get infected or sick and that they're not going to spread infection to their loved ones when they come home. They need to be safe. In addition, there's no option: All workers in Canada need paid sick days. If a worker is sick and needs to stay home, they should not be forced with the impossible decision of "Do I go into work and risk spreading an infection to my colleagues, or do I stay at home, not knowing how I'm going to pay the bills?" That impossible choice should no longer be a reality for Canadians. Finally, we need to make sure that children are safe and that parents can go back to work knowing that there is child care for their kids.

The Conservatives talked about, essentially, making people so desperate that they have to go to work, that they're willing to work in dangerous conditions: take away benefits from workers to make them go back to work. That is dangerous, and that is irresponsible. That is not the way to get people to work. The way we ensure that people get back to work is making it safe to work and making it so workers are not putting themselves in danger. Making people desperate to work is not the way forward.

Talking about the safety of workers, we have some really troubling examples of what happens when workplaces are not safe. I want to talk about Hiep Bui. She was a worker at the Cargill meat-processing facility in High River, Alberta. She became infected with COVID-19 at her workplace and she died. She immigrated here from Vietnam. She was 67 years old, and her husband misses her desperately. The plant where she worked is the site of one of the largest COVID-19 outbreaks in Canada at a workplace. Over 900 workers have tested positive so far. The fact is that workers should not have had to risk their lives going to work.

[Translation]

On Monday, that plant reopened its doors after being closed for two weeks. Workers and their union expressed concern about the inability to contain an outbreak in the plant and said that they are worried that the illness will continue to spread. This is a national problem. The virus has spread at other plants too. We need a national plan to keep our workers safe.

[English]

Cargill isn't the only food-processing plant where workers are at risk. We've spoken to union leaders and the UFCW president, and they have asked the Prime Minister to use the authority that the federal government has to ensure the safety of food to also ensure the safety of workers. Now, to the assertion that the federal government could use its authority to ensure that food is safe to also ensure that workers are safe, the Prime Minister responded by saying no. He said that our responsibility, his job, is to protect the food, not the workers. That is simply inexplicable. How could a workplace pass a food safety inspection if workers are getting sick in such huge numbers? If workers are sick and the work conditions are not safe, then the food obviously is not safe either.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced funding for food-processing centres, which is good, but no plans to keep workers safe. Again, this is wrong. Workers want to go to work. Workers want to be able to contribute, but they also want to be safe. If these plants are getting federal money, then the federal government has a responsibility to ensure that the workers at those sites are safe.

• (1635)

The government can't wait until the next outbreak to then raise the alarm bells. The government must respond now.

[Translation]

It is very important that Canadians have a safe food supply, but we cannot ensure food safety without ensuring the safety of workers. The lives of workers must be the number one priority. No workers' lives should be sacrificed.

[English]

New Zealand has put in place a national plan to ensure there is a COVID-19 safety plan for all workplaces, making sure that they're safe. Now, what the federal government needs to do is work with all provinces and territories, with unions and workers and businesses, to ensure the same exists here in Canada. Every worker needs to know that they have the right to refuse work that's dangerous, and they need to know the government has their backs. In addition, I want to make sure the government commits that no worker who refuses to do unsafe work will be denied the CERB.

In addition to being able to go back to a safe workplace, where workers are confident that they're going to be safe, workers now more than ever need to have paid sick leave. I'll admit that in the past there was a different notion around sick days. I remember that going to work when not feeling well was a badge of honour, an example of strength, and I would just tough it out. However, we have to change this mindset. Going to work with symptoms when one risks infecting someone else—a colleague, people at the workplace—is actually not the right thing to do. Many people don't have the privilege to just stay at home when they're sick. For them, there is that impossible choice of going into work and potentially getting sick or getting someone else sick, or staying at home and not being able to pay the bills because they're not getting paid to stay at home.

The government offers some paid leave, but it's not enough and it's not available to all workers. What I'm calling for, what New

Democrats are calling for, is that, at a minimum, all workers need to have access to 10 paid sick days. If we look at that as a work-week, and we include weekends, that would give a worker over 14 days so that they can rest, heal, get better and then return to work.

We need to have a commitment from the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to develop this plan, to ensure that all workers can stay at home and still pay the bills if they're sick. No one should have to be forced to make that impossible choice.

[Translation]

We know that not all employers will be able to pay for sick leave because of the current crisis. We should plan to expand the employment insurance system and other types of assistance to help in the short term. The employment insurance system must also be modified so that it covers all workers. We cannot force people to make an impossible choice between working while sick and paying their rent.

• (1640)

[English]

Finally, in order to get back to work, parents need to know that their children are cared for. This crisis has shown how essential child care is. The economy doesn't work if parents don't work, and parents don't work without child care.

What we've seen in this pandemic is that in many ways women are bearing the brunt of the pandemic. Women are more likely to have lost their jobs in the last couple of months as a result of COVID-19. Statistics Canada released its March jobs report, which showed that six out of 10 jobs that were lost were lost by women. Women are also working in high-risk fields: hospitals, long-term care and grocery stores.

[Translation]

Without child care, more women will be forced to leave the labour market. Many day care centres are in trouble and many have been closed. Some have lost critical funding. Without a federal commitment to child care, it will be very difficult for people to return to the labour market.

[English]

We are calling for the federal government to put in place a funding guarantee for child care centres, so that child care centres can continue to operate, employ staff and be ready to open up. We also need to build an accessible, universal child care program as part of the recovery. We know that the impacts of this pandemic have affected women, specifically disproportionately affected women, so we have an obligation to respond in kind with investments in child care, with investments that will allow women to take part in the workplace and ensure that there are child care centres available so parents can get back to work.

I've taken a moment to talk about what it takes for workers to get back to work. Again, I want to be clear. Workers want to get back to work, but in order to do that they need three things: They need to know that their workplaces are safe; they need to have paid sick leave; and they need to know that their children are safe and that there's child care available.

Again, some people are going to talk about incentivizing work by removing benefits like the CERB. All that does is make workers desperate, so desperate that they're willing to put their lives in jeopardy or at risk, so desperate that they're willing to accept low wages with no benefits, benefits like paid sick leave.

[Translation]

The Canada emergency response benefit of \$2,000 per month is equivalent to \$12.50 an hour for a full-time worker. That is less than minimum wage in most provinces. If workers earn less than that at work, the solution is to increase wages, not to decrease or take away the Canada emergency response benefit.

[English]

We must make workplaces safe, we must give workers paid sick leave, and we must make child care available and accessible.

Canadians want to get back to work. Let's make sure that when they get back to work, they stay safe and they stay healthy.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We'll go to the honourable member for Nunavut.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I carry a lot of passion and strength, and I think the majority of that comes from my family but also from my constituents.

Before I really dive into anything, I just want to mention a couple of things.

I often wear these earrings, made by a young lady in Nunavik, who is working on graduating and has young children with her. My support of her means that she is able to attend school. The sealskin bracelet is from a Canadian Roots Exchange event that brought together hundreds of individuals, indigenous and non-indigenous, from across the country. I wear a HopePact bracelet from the We Matter campaign, which promotes youth by creating positive messages to share with one another. Often for indigenous peoples we see very devastating rates of violence and suicide, so it's a platform that allows for positive messaging to be sent out. In regard to yes-

terday, as well, I also have on a MMIWG red dress to show support and solidarity with our stolen and missing indigenous sisters, and to promote that awareness as well. I have *kamik* or sealskin boots on, which you can't see. Those come from Arviligjuaq. It's really important and it directly, in my view, reflects the challenges we face all too often as indigenous peoples, but also the beauty and strength that comes from it.

When I walk around, and especially here in the House of Commons, I like to think that I'm representing more than what you sometimes see me standing here for.

COVID-19 and our time during this pandemic have done a lot to highlight all the inequalities that we see in my riding, throughout Nunavut and throughout Inuit Nunangat, throughout communities that contain a majority of indigenous peoples. This pandemic has done nothing but shine that bright light on things we often hear, especially here in the House of Commons, which we know are still issues.

The frustrating aspect about that is that there are a lot of things that could have been prevented if measures had been taken so that my constituents weren't as frustrated or stressed or scared. There are so many unanswered questions, Madam Chair.

These inequalities are something we've been experiencing in the territory for decades and on which we've been needing action for a long time. When I'm talking about action, I'm talking about basic human rights. I'm talking about the fundamental aspects of being a human being and being in this country and being a Canadian. I'm talking about year-round clean drinking water. I'm talking about being able to afford to feed yourself and your family. I'm talking about a safe place to live. That is not what I, as the representative of an entire territory, should be standing here talking about in 2020. If we are going to come out of this pandemic in a manageable state, the federal government must address these basic human rights that we need to see more of throughout my riding.

Frustratingly, we've been seeing funding being promised but not actually coming to the territory. It has been asked for three times. One of my colleagues asked during a finance committee meeting when the territory could expect to see that money. I asked at my committee as well. And here I am asking for a third time, still with no answers.

Luckily, we do not have any confirmed positive cases yet. We had an incident in the territory, in Pond Inlet, that was deemed to be a false positive. Pond Inlet is also already facing major issues with water infrastructure and access to clean drinkable water. They have been facing these since October, well before this pandemic.

I would really love to give credit to the Government of Nunavut, to the chief public health officer and to Pond Inlet for reacting so quickly and already having their plan in place, and using the limited resources and equipment they have to respond to it so well.

• (1645)

As I've also mentioned...and I hope I don't have to do it for much longer, but I'm going to do it until it's something that is actually addressed. For so many of my constituents, so many Nunavummiut, primarily Inuit, and we see this throughout Inuit Nunangat as well, throughout the four regions, housing is a major issue. It's the lack of housing, and also housing that is black mould-infested. I get dozens of pictures all the time, and it's absolutely appalling what people are living in. We know this is an issue, and we've heard it from multiple individuals in the House of Commons that we know these are still issues.

The last federal budget, unfortunately, resulted this year in even less housing than we've seen in previous years. Already we have that glaring gap, but we're seeing things being cut from us.

The rates of respiratory illness are very high in my constituency. Tuberculosis, for Nunavummiut versus non-Nunavummiut, is still 290 times the rate. I believe it's even worse in Nunavik. Tuberculosis is an issue throughout Inuit Nunangat, and we continue to see.... I don't even know if I can say "failed efforts", because I don't even know how much effort has actually been put in.

Nunavut unfortunately only has seven ventilator units. If there are any more pressing health concerns that might require even minor surgery, things like having a child, most often we see people having to leave the territory. Can you imagine having your first child and not being able to be around your family and friends, because you can't even have a child in your home community?

Health services have been very much lacking for a long time. We need further clarification as to how and when the federal government will make key items like personal protective equipment come to the territory. That is something that I know is pressing throughout the country, but these are also opportunities to start initiatives where we get to work with our seamstresses. We can promote items that create the well-being of the community, that sense of community.

We've been waiting for critical answers on resources and services for weeks from multiple ministers. As I have said before, I continue to see no concrete answers. A lot of the time we are forced, as Nunavummiut and Inuit, to accommodate a southern way of thinking or a southern way of doing things, when accessing resources and services is already so limited. A lot of the time it doesn't even make sense. It doesn't have the culture of humility aspect.

As I had previously mentioned, medevacs and serious conditions need to be sent out of the territory. As of right now, my riding has one of the most, if not the most, restrictive travel policies around it. All of the surgeries that can be put on hold are now put on hold. We need to ensure that when we come to what our new normal is we are not facing backlogs and we don't have people who potentially have serious illnesses now because they've had to wait for their surgeries or their follow-ups. We need to make sure there is a plan for individuals past this pandemic.

We see a lot of wait times for getting our testing results back. Luckily, I have very patient constituents in my riding, because it's frustrating. The housing that I've mentioned, already being in overcrowding, already not having as much access to food, to water,

these are all issues. How can we be asking Canadians to do these things when those services and resources are not even there to begin with?

During normal times, Nunavummiut in some communities in particular, more than others, especially during our spring melt, see that inconsistency of clean drinking water year-round. This is when we see a lot of boil water advisories. This is when we see infrastructure often failing because of our circumstances in the north.

• (1650)

How are we supposed to ask a community to make sure they're constantly washing their hands and to make sure they're disinfecting and keeping their homes clean when the community doesn't even have the infrastructure to provide accessible clean drinking water?

I also had the opportunity to talk at committee about Internet service in my communities. It's not great, to put it nicely. I don't know if I could participate in virtual Parliament from my riding. I cannot confidently say that I could. The number of megabits per second and that kind of stuff in some communities is absolutely devastating.

Now, a lot of the time we talk about individual effects. What we don't talk about are the bigger items. When you're applying for Government of Nunavut identification or your driver's licence, because of the lack of bandwidth it actually gets sent down here to Ottawa and then sent back to our communities. We have people who wait months. I have constituents reaching out to me who are sometimes waiting for over a year for their piece of ID.

How are they going to access the many things that are tied to that? There are so many things you need that information for. I guess it's a glimpse of the reality that something as big as that, which should be accessible, is not. Also, how are we going to ask you to work from home on that poor bandwidth? How are we going to ask you to access online resources for your children in school? These are the kinds of things that aren't taken into full consideration, I think, especially when it comes to my riding. Even though it seems like one smaller aspect, the trickle effect, with the connectivity that it has to so many other issues in my riding, is very alive and well, unfortunately.

Take access to banking services, whether online or not. In my hometown, I've been with a particular bank for a number of years. I could never access that service except by phone, because we don't have a branch in my hometown. The next branch is a 40-minute plane ride and about an \$800 ticket. That doesn't make sense. Accessibility is something that is so key, and it is something that is very much failing in my riding.

We have seen announcements made, like the \$25 million for the nutrition north program. That program does not at all address the root cause of food insecurity in my riding. There are so many issues in that program already. Layer on a pandemic, and it doesn't make sense for my riding and my constituents even more so.

As I mentioned, the Government of Nunavut is still waiting for the \$30.8 million that was promised out of the \$42 million requested. I hope to have an answer soon on that. I will keep pushing until I do. We're still waiting to hear more information about the support from territorial grants and the Canada emergency student benefit, in direct relation to providing assistance to our students.

We are still seeing so many holes in the small business loans. CERB sometimes is inaccessible for my constituents. I have so many jewellers, carvers, musicians, artists, artisans and so many other people being left out. This is across the country as well. Many indigenous artists and artisans are falling through the cracks.

With all this being said, I would like to try to put it into perspective as, I guess, a race. Let's say we were all lined up together and were told this at the start: "Please step forward if you grew up in a safe, comfortable home that wasn't overcrowded." I would need to stand back. "Step forward if you've never been affected by suicide." I would need to step back. "Step forward if you can afford to feed your family." In so many instances, I, as a representative of my constituents, would be at that same line while so many other people would be way ahead of me already.

That's the gap right there. That's what we need to close.

• (1655)

Help me assist my constituents to have an equal starting line so that they are able to do the things that we all should be able to do in life as Canadians with every equal opportunity.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable member for Vancouver Granville.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, *gilakas' la*. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Our nation and the world, our ways of being, indeed our humanity, are being tested as we respond to COVID-19. This is unprecedented in recent times and our response will have far-reaching implications for the years to come. I think we all understand the gravity of the weight we feel in this place to get it right. Our hearts go out to all those suffering with the virus. We recognize the sacrifices being made to protect those most likely to succumb to the disease, it being not about what I can do for myself, but about what I can do for others.

We must also acknowledge the government, supported by civil servants, for the unprecedented steps it has taken to establish numerous emergency relief programs, from CERB to CEBA to mental

health programs and many others. The emergency programs are helping, and new programs have been created and, aided by this place, adapted as needed.

That said, there are issues. My constituency office, like those of all MPs, has heard from many, including seniors, who are still struggling and are in need of government support. There are ongoing challenges for small businesses in meeting the criteria for CEBA, and there are issues about rents and what constitutes a livable income.

What is more, after some two months of extreme social distancing measures, the residents of Vancouver Granville, like all Canadians, are eager for some normality to return to their lives. While we wait for a vaccine, we turn our minds to what comes next as we move from the emergency response to the new normal, the end of the beginning, as has been said.

Clearly, physical distancing and proper hygiene are the new normal as we learn to live with COVID-19. In some cases, it will need to be institutionalized, particularly within situations of congregate living. Within long-term care facilities, there should be national standards that provinces adhere to in order for them to get a portion of financial support earmarked for elders. Further, there should be some standardization of pay, benefits and schedules for personal support workers.

As to the timing and the extent of removing restrictions, we of course must continue to be guided by science and our health experts. We must not be tempted to make the mistakes that are being made in some other jurisdictions. We do not save jobs and the economy by sacrificing lives.

As the pandemic has evolved differently across Canada, given our geographical and political diversity, the plans of the provinces and territories to reopen their economies will not be, and do not need to be, the same. However, given our system of co-operative federalism, there is a role for federal coordination. We are all connected and our Constitution protects mobility rights. We still need more efficient ways to test and track, and that need is national in scope. As electronic tracking and contact tracing become more widespread, we must be mindful of privacy rights and how we use data. We may need to regulate.

There is much to consider as we plan out our post-COVID economic strategy. Under the new normal, and even after restrictions have been lifted, it is unlikely that we will see people simply returning to life as before, at least not until a vaccine is found. Even with an optimistic 90% return to the pre-COVID economy, it will not be the same. There are longer-term fiscal implications. The federal debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to be 48.4% in 2020-21. While manageable, this is certainly not ideal, especially if we factor in provincial, municipal and indigenous debt. We need to consider the fiscal tools available to support provincial and other governments beyond the current transfers and stabilization mechanisms.

Other fiscal measures may be required. Some are suggesting raising the GST. What we do know is that the current level of expenditure to get us through the initial period is not sustainable.

At the same time, some are also leading us to consider new ways to deliver assistance to Canadians, such as potentially establishing a basic livable income, something that other nations are also considering.

• (1700)

Moving forward, not all businesses will survive, despite the emergency measures. We will need to decide what industries and businesses we offer additional support to, and under what circumstances. We should be providing essential products and services, and if we do intervene, it should be primarily through equity investment.

I certainly hope the Minister of Finance will be tabling the 2020 budget soon. We need projections, and we need to debate our plan.

Every day in Vancouver, as I know happens elsewhere, we make noise at 7 p.m. to support front-line workers. When I hear this, I cannot help but think how work is valued and how it is paid. While we show gratitude reflective of our reliance on each other, the gratitude is not matched in wages. In our society, we need to reward work on a different value system. We need to understand this and we need to be reflective.

Yes, we all support the middle class and those working hard to join it, but what this pandemic has shown us is that it is really the working class and the most vulnerable who need our help. Societies are judged by how they treat their most vulnerable. If we had a society that truly supported one another, that had great health care for all, especially for our seniors and the most vulnerable, health care that provided them with the safety, care and attention they deserved every day, this crisis likely would not have been as much of a struggle for those people. If we cannot see that now, then when will we ever see it? If we are able to do something during a pandemic, then why not permanently?

Thankfully, and mindful of Alert Bay in my nation, there have not been major outbreaks of COVID in indigenous communities across Canada, but this could change. We must remain vigilant, and we must support indigenous communities that are taking steps to protect their communities from COVID-19 and affirm their inherent right to do so.

There are also growing mental health concerns in terms of isolation, particularly in remote communities. The pandemic only high-

lights the ongoing need for true reconciliation and a rights recognition framework so that we can properly address issues of overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, poverty and good governance.

Bringing back our economy is also a necessary lens through which we must view our post-pandemic socioeconomic plan to follow the lead of nations like Germany. The Prime Minister often says that the environment and the economy go hand in hand. The truth, and what this virus is showing, is that the environment, of which we are all a part, dictates the economy, and it will continue to do so more dramatically as our temperatures increase.

While stories of dolphins in canals in Venice may have been premature, the planet does appear to be healing. This is not to suggest for a moment that we should not restart our economy. Quite the contrary, but what it does make you think about is what sort of economy we should be restarting. It also makes one think about how we measure social well-being and success. It is not just about growth in the GDP.

GDP per capita has historically been used to make assumptions about the standard of living within a nation, the assumption being that the higher the per capita amount, the better the standards are. However, as I read in a recent article, GDP has mixed results when trying to measure the social well-being of a population. As an economic tool, it only makes assumptions about the basic standards of living, which can be different across the socioeconomic spectrum of a nation. Moreover, better standards of living do not necessarily equate to increased social well-being. We need to ensure that we look at this idea.

When we look at the crisis through the lens of our international relationships, it is coming at a time when democracy is under pressure and when the international rules-based order is being challenged and power is shifting. In many ways, COVID-19 is about a brewing perfect storm internationally. When the vaccine does ultimately come, Canada can show leadership and insist that it be made available to populations with the greatest need.

We have a lot to do, as members of Parliament in this House, and I know that when working together we can achieve many great things in terms of responding to this pandemic in a way that ensures we are caring and compassionate. As Bonnie Henry, our amazing public health officer in British Columbia, always sums it up: Be calm, be kind and be safe.

Gilakas'la.

• (1705)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Thank you very much. Thank you all very much for your collaboration, and thank you to our interpreters.

The committee stands adjourned until tomorrow at noon.

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