



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

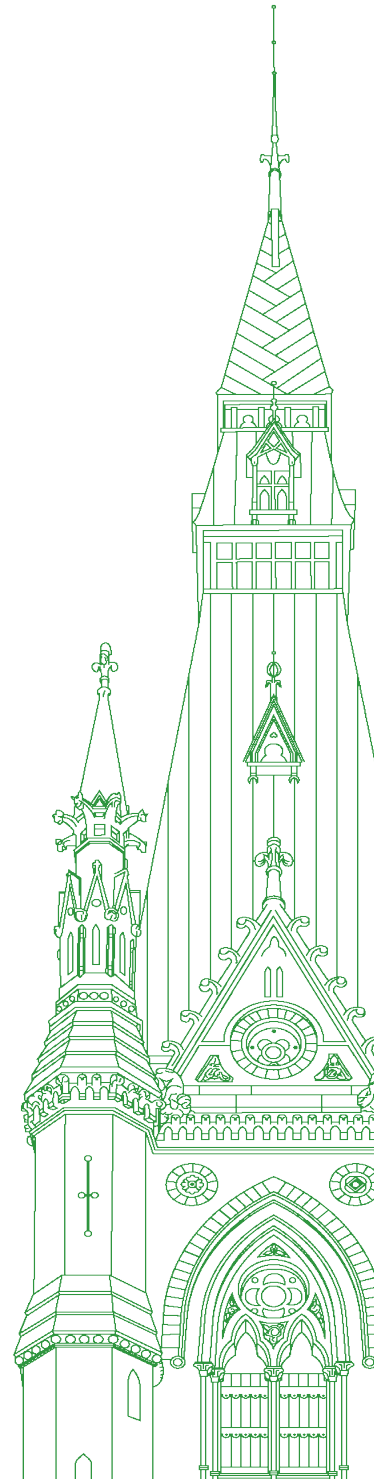
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Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

The House met at 12 p.m.

Prayer

• (1200)

[*English*]

RECALL OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Deputy Speaker: Colleagues, before we begin our proceedings, I would like to say a few words.

We all recognize that this is a highly unusual sitting, given the extraordinary circumstances in which we all find ourselves presently.

[*Translation*]

As a result, you will notice that the arrangements we are used to are different today. We are fewer in number and other special measures have been put in place based on the recommendations of public health officials.

[*English*]

To that end, I understand that there will be agreement to see the application of Standing Order 17 suspended for the current sitting to allow members the practice of social distancing. I encourage all members to follow this and other recommended best practices during today's proceedings.

[*Translation*]

As a result, any member who wants to speak or address the Chair can rise from any seat in the House.

[*English*]

In addition, we will suspend the sitting every 45 minutes for approximately one minute in order to allow employees who provide support for the sitting to substitute for each other safely.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Finally, I would ask all members who are tabling a document or proposing a motion to sign the document and bring it to the Table themselves.

[*English*]

I wish to inform the House that pursuant to Standing Order 28(3), the Speaker sent a notice calling the House to meet this day and I now lay this on the table.

[*Translation*]

What is more, on Sunday, March 22, 2020, the Speaker sent every member a message explaining why the House was being recalled. I would also like to inform the House that, as part of the steps taken by the government under Standing Order 55(1), the Speaker published a special Order Paper and Notice Paper giving notice of a government bill.

[*English*]

I also wish to lay upon the table a letter from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, dated March 22, 2020.

[*Translation*]

I recognize the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you suspend until later today, to the call of the Chair, after consultation with the House leaders.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the House will remain suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 12:06 p.m.)

• (1825)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 6:25 p.m.)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House continue to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment and that, following the adoption of this order, the sitting be suspended to the call of the Chair after consultation with the House Leaders.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous of the consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

House of Commons

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: As a result, the House is suspended.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 6:25 p.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 3:15 a.m.)

* * *

• (2710)

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I have the honour to table a notice of a ways and means motion to introduce an act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

* * *

• (2715)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in an unprecedented crisis that is affecting all Canadians. It is therefore our duty to work together to quickly provide emergency aid. That is why you will find that there have been discussions among the parties and that there is unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House:

(a) the application of Standing Orders 17, 36(8)(b), 39(5)(b) and 56.1 be suspended for the current sitting, provided that the responses to petitions and questions on the Order Paper otherwise due shall be tabled at the next sitting of the House;

(b) ways and means motion No. 4, notice of which was laid upon the table earlier this day, be concurred in, that a bill based thereon in the name of the Minister of Finance, entitled An Act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19, be deemed to have been introduced and read a first time and ordered for consideration at second reading later this day;

(c) following the adoption of this order, the House shall resolve itself into a committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic for a period not exceeding one hour and provided that the Chair may preside from the Speaker's chair; that during the proceedings of the committee, the Chair shall call members in a fashion consistent with the proportions observed during Oral Questions; no member shall be recognized for more than five minutes which may be used for posing questions to a minister of the Crown or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of the minister; members may be permitted to split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the Chair; and at the conclusion of the time provided for the proceedings, or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the committee shall rise;

(d) when the committee of the whole rises, the House shall begin debate on the motion for second reading of the bill referred to in paragraph (b), a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may speak to the said motion for not more than 10 minutes, followed by five minutes for questions and comments; provided that members may be permitted to split their time with another member; and, at the conclusion of the time provided for the debate or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, all questions necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill shall be put without further debate or amendment provided that, if a recorded division is requested, it shall not be deferred and that, if the bill is adopted at second reading, it shall be deemed referred to a committee of the whole; deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, deemed read a third time and passed;

(e) when the bill referred to in paragraph (b) has been read the third time and passed, the House shall adjourn until Monday, April 20, 2020, provided that, for the purposes of any Standing Order, it shall be deemed adjourned pursuant to Standing Order 28, and, for greater certainty, the provisions of paragraphs (m) to (p) of the order adopted on Friday, March 13, 2020, remain in effect;

(f) if, during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the Speaker receives a notice from the House leaders of all four recognized parties indicating that it is in the public interest that the House remain adjourned until a future date or until future notice is given to the Speaker, the House will remain adjourned accordingly, provided that (i) in the event of the Speaker being unable to act owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker or either of the Assistant Deputy Speakers shall act in the Speaker's stead for all the purposes of this paragraph, (ii) in the event the House remains adjourned beyond April 20, 2020, pursuant to this paragraph, the words "May 1" and "May 31" in Standing Order 81(4)(a) shall be deemed to read "May 27" and "June 15", respectively;

• (2720)

(g) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the House may be recalled, under the provisions of Standing Order 28(3), to consider measures to address the economic impact of COVID-19 and the impacts on the lives of Canadians;

(h) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance shall each convene a meeting of their respective committee (i) at least once per week, unless the whips of all four recognized parties agree to not hold a meeting, and (ii) within 48 hours of the receipt by email, by the clerk of the committee, of a request signed by any four members of the committee, that during such meetings, committee members shall attend and witnesses shall participate via either videoconferencing or teleconferencing, that the committees meet for the sole purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided that, for greater certainty, each committee may receive evidence which may otherwise exceed the committee's mandate under Standing Order 108(2), all such meetings shall be made available to the public via the House of Commons website, and notices of membership substitutions pursuant to Standing Order 114(2) may be filed with the clerk of each committee by email;

(i) starting the week of March 30, 2020, the Minister of Finance or his delegate shall provide the Standing Committee on Finance with a bi-weekly report on all actions undertaken pursuant to parts 3, 8 and 19 of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act and shall appear before the committee to discuss the report, provided that, until April 20, 2020, or any date to which the adjournment period is extended pursuant to paragraph f), if committee is not satisfied with how the government is exercising its powers under the Act, it may adopt a motion during a meeting by videoconference or teleconference to report this to the House by depositing a report with the Clerk of the House which shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House on that day;

(j) upon the presentation of any report pursuant to paragraph i), the Speaker shall recall the House to consider a motion to take note of the report of the committee which shall be deemed to be proposed and have precedence over all other business that day, provided that proceedings shall expire when debate thereon has concluded or at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment and that at least 48 hours' notice shall be given for any sitting held pursuant to this paragraph;

(k) the Standing Committee on Finance be instructed to commence a review of the provisions and operation of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act within 6 months of the day on which the Act receives royal assent and to report its findings to the House no later than March 31, 2021, provided that the report may be deposited with the Clerk of the House when the House stands adjourned and it shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House on that day;

Government Orders

(l) within 30 sitting days of the resumption of regular sittings of the House pursuant to paragraph e) or f) of this order, the government table a comprehensive report of all activities undertaken pursuant to the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act and that this report be permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Finance; and

(m) the House call upon the government to provide regular updates to representatives of opposition parties on its management of the COVID-19 pandemic, including a bi-weekly conference call between the finance critics of recognized parties and the Minister of Finance.

• (2725)

That concludes the motion, and that is our government's emergency response to help Canadians. We will get through this difficult time together.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order for clarification. I just wanted to clarify part c). The House leader said that we would be resolving into committee of the whole for a period not exceeding one hour. I believe translation said one hour and 45 minutes, so perhaps the House leader could clarify that.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed for one hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

(Ways and Means Motion No. 4 concurred in and Bill C-13 deemed introduced and read a first time)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to an order made earlier today, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(House in committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair)

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleagues in the official opposition for all their hard work throughout the day. I want to thank the members of other parties as well as we tried to find a resolution to a problem that was created when the government decided to add additional measures to its financial assistance package.

[*Translation*]

We recognize that many Canadians are going to face a great deal of difficulty in the days and weeks ahead, and we are ready to help find solutions.

[*English*]

We recognize that Canadians are going to face a great deal of difficulty in the days and weeks ahead and we are here ready to help find solutions. That is what we were expecting to do. The Liberals have now agreed to our grave concerns about the types of sweeping power they were going to give themselves, we do find that we are in a position where we are able to support this going ahead.

That being said, I do have a number of questions for my colleagues across the aisle. As they will well know, many businesses are on the brink of bankruptcy. Many businesses have been told that they must close their doors. Restaurants and other types of businesses in the service industry are facing a great deal of hardship. The government's original proposal was to provide a 10% wage subsidy. I believe the ministers would acknowledge that the situation has changed from those early days and in many cases that will not be sufficient to help individuals stay employed.

Will the government consider other additional measures that would keep small businesses afloat during this difficult time? We have called for not only the raising of that wage subsidy, but also to have GST rebated to the small businesses that have collected that GST over the past few months. That would provide them with a great deal of cash flow that would be able to assist.

Will the government be willing to entertain that type of measure?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the place I would like to start, of course, is to recognize the nature and the scale of the challenges we are facing today. I want to acknowledge that even with the enormous challenges that Canadians are facing and the significant issues our economy is facing, we still do not know and cannot know the depth and duration of the challenge we are facing. How we must protect ourselves is by ensuring that we, together in this House, have the capacity to deal with this on behalf of Canadians.

In that regard, I am obviously pleased that we are moving forward with the legislation proposed today. It will allow us, with the oversight of this House as appropriate, to come forward and make sure that we can protect Canadians in the short term through health measures that are of critical importance, in the medium term as we think about how we deal with our economic challenges, and more importantly, prepare ourselves for opportunity to come out of this challenge in a way that will show the strength of Canadians and Canada for today and for tomorrow.

Government Orders

We have put forward measures here today that we believe are going to enable us to support Canadians and also support Canadian businesses. We think that is the way we should be moving ourselves forward. We have put forward measures that will provide every Canadian who is finding himself or herself away from work because of sickness, quarantine, supporting an elderly parent, supporting their children who might be away from school due to sickness or just because they are away from school, or importantly, if they are away from work because they cannot actually be at work or their employer has asked them to—

• (2730)

The Deputy Chair: I have to allow for one more question from the Leader of the Opposition. There is the same amount of time for asking the question, basically.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has one minute to ask a question.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Chair, I will acknowledge that we are in agreement with much of what the finance minister has said. I think we are heading into some uncharted territory. There will be many Canadians who have never looked to government before for assistance who will now be looking to government. We must make sure that we find a way to provide that support to them, and help to keep people in their apartments and homes and able to put food on the table.

One way to ensure that the effects of this downturn last even longer is if the government or our central bank were to consider a quantitative easing measure. That is a guaranteed way to make sure that the lingering effects of this downturn will last years and years beyond what it needs to.

Will the finance minister commit to assuring the House that quantitative easing, printing money, is not something the government would support and certainly not something that the government would request the Bank of Canada to consider?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, first of all, to continue where I left off, our measure would ensure that every Canadian who is off work for any reason, which means they are not going to be able to have the income that they previously had if they had income the year before, will be able to get a wage subsidy. That, of course, will be very important in allowing them to deal with the challenge that they are facing. This would not only provide the employee with support, but would also ensure that the firm they work for is able to have that kind of support through those funds. That we see as critically important. It would allow those firms to have the people off work who need to be off work and the ones who are at work not at work.

With respect to anything to do with the Bank of Canada, I think it is important to note that the Bank of Canada is independent of government and will remain so under this government.

The Deputy Chair: I will remind members that it is five minutes for questions and comments together. If the question is posed for two minutes, then there is up to two minutes to answer. If there is only one minute left, then it means there is only 30 seconds to ask a question and 30 seconds to answer.

I would ask people to be mindful of the time and to look at me so that I can give them the signal.

The hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Morneau, as you know, we are experiencing a pandemic of unprecedented proportions that is putting the economy on hold. Nearly one million people have submitted employment insurance claims. People are worried because they cannot get in touch with anyone at EI. They want to know when they will be getting their cheques.

Mr. Morneau, what will your government do to speed up the process and make sure people get an answer?

The Deputy Chair: I would remind the hon. member for Joliette to address his questions to the Chair.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, in committee of the whole, I believe we are allowed to use people's names.

The Deputy Chair: I can confirm for the hon. member that he must address his questions to the Chair and refrain from naming individuals in the House.

• (2735)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, it is my understanding that, in committee of the whole, we are allowed to name individuals.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Joliette does not have the correct information. He must address his questions and comments to the Chair and refrain from calling members, including ministers, by their names.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, that is a very important question. We know that access to these funds is very important to all Canadians who are struggling because of COVID-19. That is why we came up with a simple and rapid solution to ensure that people receive this money over the next two or three weeks. We are aiming for the first week of April. This is very important to them, and very important to our economy.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I want to thank the Minister of Finance for reassuring the public in that regard.

It is important to ensure that no one falls through the cracks. We need to think about the unemployed, about the workers who have not accumulated sufficient hours to qualify for EI, and about self-employed workers. A program will be created for those individuals.

However, I am thinking of small business owners, who often do not even have any employees. In the technical briefings we have had so far, we have been told that when it comes to registered small businesses, people will not be eligible for the income support measure. Restaurant owners are often forced to shut down and will no longer have any income.

Aside from possibly deferring tax payments and granting access to loans, will there be anything else for these individuals, like the income support measure?

Government Orders

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we continue to come up with ways to ensure that our small and medium-sized business owners are in good shape.

To be eligible, individuals must have earned \$5,000 or more in the past 12 months and find themselves with no income as a result of COVID-19. Those are the conditions. A small business owner therefore has the same access to benefits as anyone else. That is very important.

Of course, we will continue to think of ways to ensure that all Canadians are able to deal with this difficult situation.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I want to thank the Minister of Finance for that clarification. This will ease a serious concern felt by many people in our communities.

With regard to the income support measure and payments, we are still waiting for the calculation grid. In the technical briefings, we have not yet been told what the calculation grid might look like or when we will have access to that.

Can the Minister of Finance indicate, first of all, what the calculation grid might look like, and second, when we might have access to that grid to assess the sums that might be available?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we know the situation is changing rapidly. We therefore need more information. We will make an announcement when we are ready. It will be in the next few days, certainly. I know this is very important. We are working on getting the exact numbers very soon.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Chair, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

We know that in the last week alone nearly a million Canadians applied for EI. Canadians are faced with an impossible choice: Do they stay home and help prevent the spread of an illness but risk not being able to pay their rent or put food on the table or do they go to work and risk the spread of the illness to their loved ones and themselves? People cannot wait until April or May for help. They need help immediately. There are many workers now who are in the gig economy, freelance and contract workers who need immediate supports.

Will the Minister of Finance consider our proposal to send, while we are in this crisis, \$2,000 to each Canadian monthly and an additional \$250 for each child? This form of universal basic income would provide direct support to Canadians who desperately need it.

• (2740)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we are ensuring that all Canadians who are impacted by COVID-19 are in a situation where they can face up to this challenge.

The announcements we have made with this legislation allow us to create a benefit for everyone who has been in a situation where they previously earned revenue of \$5,000 or more in the past 12 months, and because of sickness, because of quarantine, because they need to stay home to protect themselves and their family because their employer has asked them to stay home, and they are not receiving revenue as a result. Those people will have access to the

benefit. That we think is critically important. I can assure the member that in that way we have in fact taken his very legitimate question and come up with a solution.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, I have spoken to indigenous leaders across the country. They are highlighting some serious concerns they have. Because of historic and ongoing injustices, indigenous communities have inadequate access to clean drinking water, housing, and health care services. As a result, leaders are concerned their communities will not be able to deal with COVID-19 if they are exposed and it starts to spread. They are concerned about the lack of resources, equipment and supplies.

What is the plan to ensure that indigenous communities get the supports they need? I also want to make it clear that isolation tents are not going to cut it. What is the plan to help indigenous communities in this crisis?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, in a time of challenge like we are facing, we recognize that Canadians in many different situations are facing extreme challenges which we have never seen before. We recognize that indigenous peoples, first nations, the Inuit nation and the Métis nation are indeed facing real challenges, especially when they live in places that are remote or unable to access appropriate health care. When we came out with our measures, we recognized this. We recognized it by putting more than \$300 million into our package. We also recognized that we need to work together to consider the specific situations that people are facing in particular parts of our country.

We will be doing that right now, over the course of the next number of days. I would invite the member opposite if he has suggestions to get them to me and we will most certainly consider them.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, one of the big concerns we have is that while we are dealing with the immediate crisis of COVID-19 and the immediate impacts on society, we also need to make sure that we have a plan once this immediate health care issue is dealt with and we look at the recovery.

People need to know that they will have a job to return to. A lot of small businesses are struggling right now with the impacts of COVID-19. What I am suggesting to the government is that we need to increase the wage subsidy. Right now the government is proposing 10%. We are suggesting that what is needed is at least a 75% wage subsidy or more. Will the government commit to increasing the wage subsidy to at least 75% to help small businesses and ensure that workers have a job to return to?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, this situation is moving quickly. I appreciate that all of the members in this chamber have not in any way had the opportunity to fully understand what it is we are trying to achieve.

Government Orders

We are, in fact, delivering a wage subsidy directly to Canadians. What we are doing is making sure those Canadians who are furloughed from their employment, meaning they are not separated from their employment but they are off work and not able to get income from their employment, whether it be because they are at home or whether it be because they are sick, in those situations they will be getting the emergency benefit that we are proposing.

In that way, we can ensure the wage subsidy is not only that amount, but for employees who stay at work, it is the additional 10%.

• (2745)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Chair, I would like to direct my question to the Minister of Employment.

Applications for regular EI have overwhelmed the system and no one can get hold of Service Canada to apply. With a whole new benefit, how will the caseload be managed to ensure that people can apply and how are staff resources being redirected to support Canadians?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Chair, we have intentionally created this new benefit separate from the EI system so that we can continue to process claims that were filed before March 15, and we can continue to process claims for other benefits, like maternity and parental benefits, since March 15. Any claim that has been filed since March 15 will be channelled into this new Canada emergency response benefit, and any EI claim that is filed between now and when this new application for this benefit arises will be also channelled into the new benefit.

I can assure members that we have redirected every single possible resource to Service Canada. I do not have the exact number, but I think it is about 1,300 people who have been redirected to work on processing these claims and answering these questions. We have had an enormous volume of EI claims. We have had an enormous number of questions to Service Canada. We are doing our utmost to answer them and respond as quickly as possible.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, many people who are about to go on parental leave have been laid off and have had to start EI, which will reduce the time that they can be on parental leave. Will their leave be extended to ensure that they can take their planned time with their new child?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, any EI entitlement that a worker currently has will not in any way be impacted by the new Canada emergency response benefit. Whatever someone is entitled to now he or she will be entitled to after the 16 weeks.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, last Friday the government announced temporary foreign workers already here would be extended from one year to two, and in certain industries it will be easier and faster to bring in a temporary foreign worker. We see in this legislation tonight, under the definition of “worker”, it says “resident of Canada”.

Does this new benefit apply to citizens and permanent residents or to anyone who lives here, such as those on a work visa?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, the intent behind this new benefit is to deal with the crisis we are facing. We have created a new benefit, and the idea behind the new benefit is with respect to anyone who has received revenue of \$5,000 or more in the last 12 months and anyone who has found themselves in a situation where their income has gone down to nothing as a result of COVID-19. That is the attestation we are asking the individual to make. We would then adjudicate that claim on a simple form that would allow us to move forward to get the individual the money as rapidly as possible through the Canada Revenue Agency, which is the system that is the largest and most robust that the government has.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, we are looking for clarity. Will people who here as temporary foreign workers who lose their jobs be able to apply for this benefit, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, as I said, the criteria are as I laid them out. We also need to recognize that in a time of extreme challenge, a time in which we are working to make sure we protect Canadians facing challenges as a result of this coronavirus, we need to move fast and we need to find a way to get revenue and sources of income to people as rapidly as possible.

We are working to make sure all the details are deliberated on and delivered as soon as humanly possible.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, this bill states that one would not be eligible if one received employment insurance after one's employment ceased. Will a fisher or someone in the tourism and hospitality industries who was laid off last year, received EI and has now exhausted it, and the job that person expected to have this summer is gone due to COVID-19, be eligible for this benefit?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, given the member's fact pattern, if that individual met the eligibility of 15 years of age, earned \$5,000 in the past year and was a resident of Canada, I believe, to the best of my knowledge, yes.

• (2750)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Chair, my question is for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Given the current situation, has the minister established a contingency plan with the private sector in order to protect and maintain operations in critical infrastructure sectors, such as ports, airports, power plants and railroads?

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, we are working with the whole of government in reaching out to all of the 10 critical infrastructure sectors in this country to ensure continuity of supply and services throughout the country. It is being very carefully monitored and we are working diligently to ensure all critical infrastructure sectors will be maintained.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, it appears at the moment that the larger provinces like Quebec and Ontario, which have resources, are in control of the situation. However, we know that the smaller provinces will need some help.

Is your government able to help them without invoking the Emergencies Act?

The Deputy Chair: I would remind the hon. member that he must address his comments to the Chair.

The hon. minister.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, I am pleased to advise members that I am in contact with our provincial and territorial partners several times each week. We have been working very closely with them, listening to their concerns and responding to any requests they may have. We have the ability, through the Emergency Management Act, to provide resources to a province should it be necessary.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, over one million Canadians returned to Canada between March 14 and March 20. In just one week, one million people crossed our borders. Some border officers have said that many people entered the country with visible flu-like symptoms.

Knowing that the virus entered Canada across the border, did the minister recommend that the Prime Minister close our borders at the outset and require travellers to self-isolate?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, based on the advice we have received from our public health officials, all persons entering Canada are, first of all, asked with respect to their symptoms whether they have a headache, fever or any other symptoms of COVID-19. If they do, they are immediately directed to a public health referral to receive further inquiry and treatment, if necessary.

Every person entering Canada from an international destination, the United States or anywhere else in the world, is also advised to enter into a 14-day period of self-isolation. As they enter, people are required to acknowledge that they have been asked about symptoms and to acknowledge that they have been given the advice to pursue 14 days of isolation.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, according to some experts, family violence is expected to increase as a result of consequences related to the virus, isolation and everything that goes along with

that. I am wondering whether the government has planned any additional measures to keep vulnerable women, seniors and children safe.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, this is something that we are quite aware of. We know that all kinds of violence increase when people are under stress. We also know that issues around substance use and mental health are exacerbated when people are under tremendous stress.

That is why we are working with my colleague, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality, to ensure that we have partnerships in place to support people who are vulnerable in these circumstances.

I will also say that we are working very diligently on a mental health act that would be available to all Canadians in the days to come. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment, and we want to thank all the organizations that are working so hard to protect the safety of both women and children.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, we have learned that when cargo ships dock in Canada, disembarking crew members are not being screened. Does the minister have any information about that?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, under international law, when a ship arrives at a port, the people who work onboard the ship have access to the port for a very short period of time. We are abiding by that at this time. We will continue to monitor the situation, but we have a duty to comply with international law.

• (2755)

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Madam Chair, many Canadians are stranded abroad, worried and wanting to come home at the first opportunity. I would like to extend thanks to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his collaboration and the information he has given in working with all of our colleagues in the House to get as many Canadians home as quickly as possible.

We also recognize that there are many Canadians abroad who may have to stay in place. I am wondering if the minister could give them advice and identify what kind of support his office could offer them.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the member for the great collaboration. What we are doing is probably the largest repatriation effort in Canada's history, in peacetime at least.

I want to say that no one is going to be left behind. We are doing, as the member said, the largest repatriation. We are helping people to come home.

For those who will not be able to come home, we will provide consular services, wherever they might be. We have already worked with our missions to identify what we can do, and we will continue to help Canadians wherever they might be.

Government Orders

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, during this crisis, there will be a need for critical medical items, many of which are not manufactured in Canada. Will the government ensure that those critical items are manufactured in Canada?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, in fact, procurement of medical devices, including personal protective equipment, testing kits and a number of other items that are in desperate need all around the globe, is a major preoccupation of mine. Certainly my department, in partnership with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, is looking at domestic manufacturing of many of these items. I am very encouraged by the volume of manufacturers and suppliers who have stepped up to be part of a Canadian solution in this time of immense need.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, with many of these items in short supply and supply chains under strain and borders closed, could the minister shed some light on whether those items will remain in Canada?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, the organizations that have offered to support the manufacturing of medical devices and other kinds of things that we need in Canada for this unprecedented public health crisis recognize that this is about making sure that Canadians have what they need and that Canadian health care workers have what they need.

I want to thank all of the manufacturers who have been so incredibly prompt to ensure that we know about their abilities and plans. We will be working with them very closely to help accelerate access to those products.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, how will the government ensure that these critical items are distributed to appropriate organizations according to priority and need at a fair price, rather than on first-come, first-served basis or going to the highest bidder?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, the federal-provincial-territorial partnership is one of the ways that we make sure that equipment is distributed according to need and population size. Those conversations are ongoing. There are working groups at every level of government on this issue of procurement and distributing these items in a way that actually meets the need of the community at the present time. We will continue that work with our partners to make sure that, as we see this pandemic evolve in Canada, we have resources in the right spot at the right time.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, finally, how quickly will we see those manufacturers able to get into motion and will the government will be setting the levels they will be required or asked to produce to? Will the government be buying and setting those levels so that they know what amounts to produce—and how quickly will we be seeing that?

• (2800)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, the short answer is yes. We are working very closely with the identified manufacturers who have come forward to date to ensure that the product they are manufacturing meets the specifications of the practitioners who will be using it. We will continue that work to make sure that what they design is what Canada needs.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Chair, Albertans have been struggling for years. The unemployment

rate of young men has been approaching 20%. Nearly \$200 billion in oil and gas projects have been cancelled or stalled, and 200,000 Canadian oil and gas workers have lost their jobs in just the last five years, and this is all before COVID-19. Albertans need help.

What is the government doing to help Albertans during these unprecedented times?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, the member opposite points out an enormous challenge that we are facing in Alberta.

I would say that there are three things facing Alberta at the same time, particularly for the energy sector. We have a situation where we have the lowest prices that we have seen in a long time because of the OPEC challenges that are going on, we have equity markets around the world that are in turmoil, and on top of that, obviously, we have COVID-19. This is a real challenge.

We are working right now to think about how we can ensure that the oil and gas sector, the energy sector, has adequate access to financing so that it can bridge through this period. Of course, the measure we are putting in place will allow every worker who is off work as a result of this situation to get the benefit so they can face up to supporting their families in a challenging time.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, Albertans need a plan to receive the money the government is laying out, and not have to play a game of wait and see. Similarly, there is \$21 billion worth in energy projects in the queue for regulatory review, with at least one waiting for cabinet approval. The government can direct regulators to speed up the reviews while maintaining the evidence and science-based approach with the highest standards, which Canada is renowned for.

Will this government fast-track major energy projects to get Alberta's energy sector back on its feet to get people working again and the Canadian economy going now and in the future?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we are in an emergency setting. We know that we must deal with the challenges facing people across the country. However, yes, we have significant challenges in Alberta that we must deal with on an emergency basis, and that is exactly the approach we are taking.

When I talk about ensuring that we can support the energy sector with the kind of opportunities that will allow it to bridge through this difficult time, we are doing that literally as we speak. We continue to work on this, and I will have more to say in the very near term about how we can support that sector and, importantly, the workers who are recognizing that they do not currently have potential opportunities and who need opportunities for the future.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, hopefully we will hear that sooner than later.

We already know that unemployment is at unprecedented levels and that people are struggling to pay their bills. The carbon tax makes these bills even larger at a time when every dollar saved is crucial for Canadians to be able to provide for their families. Will the government postpone the 50% increase in the carbon tax scheduled for April 1?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we are doing everything we can to make sure that our economy is resilient in a time of challenge. I think it is important to recognize that as we look to putting money into the economy and into people's hands, we need to make sure that we are doing things in a way that makes sense. We are adding government resources into the economy where appropriate.

I think what everyone in the House knows and what we need to continue to remind Canadians of is that the approach we have taken toward the pricing of carbon means that while people do put some money into those carbon prices, they do get that money back, meaning that that money actually stays in the economy.

The Deputy Chair: There is one minute left. The hon member for Edmonton Mill Woods.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, on Monday the Minister of Agriculture announced additional funds for Farm Credit Canada, but producers need cash flow now to pay for spring inputs like seed, fertilizer and fuel. How will the funds for Farm Credit Canada be allocated and how quickly? Will these be interest-free loans and will all commodity groups qualify?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we recognize that sectors across Canada are facing challenges as a result of COVID-19. That is the why, with respect to the Crown corporations, we have changed the policy so that we can actually remove the limits. That will mean that Farm Credit Canada has more access to capital so they can put that out to work in the agricultural sector, which we know will be very important. We will be working with them to make sure that they have that access to capital immediately.

● (2805)

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

My question is for either the Minister of Employment or the Minister of Finance. Can small business owners collect the emergency support benefit at the same time they need to run a business? Must they not be working to get the benefit or can they work to rescue their business while collecting the benefit?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, the conditions that we are laying out are very simple. If someone has been in a position where, over the last 12 months, they have earned \$5,000 or more, and if they find themselves with no income as a result of COVID-19 because they are at home, or perhaps, for example, their business does not have any revenue, they will be able to go forward and get that benefit. That means that an individual who runs a business that has no revenue now, but did have revenue before, will be able to apply for that benefit.

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Chair, interest rates on BDC loans are too high. What is the plan to bring them down so that Ottawa does not cripple small businesses?

Government Orders

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we are obviously making sure as we move forward with our plan with the business credit availability program that access to those funds is on a commercial basis. That is the way the BDC works. We will be working to make sure that happens while supporting credit guarantees behind it to ensure that the credit actually gets out to the market.

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Chair, unfortunately, rates as high as 17% are just too high when you add in that variable. Large businesses can see relief in this package, individuals can as well. What about small businesses? How are we going to help small businesses, micro businesses and mom-and-pop operations bridge this economic shock beyond the unemployment measures and other similar measures? What are we doing to help small businesses?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, there are a number of ways.

First, of course, we are helping by supporting employees so that small businesses can actually have their employees off, if they have employees. That is critically important.

Second, we are helping with a wage subsidy for any employees who stay.

Third, we have also said that we are going to defer any taxes owing up until August 31, which is important.

We are supporting small businesses in multiple ways and we remain open to considering things that we might need to do in the future to ensure that we have businesses that are able to bridge this gap.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Chair, COVID-19 is having immediate and devastating impacts on the tourism industry across Canada. Hotel and accommodations, restaurants, resorts and other attractions are all being hit hard by this terrible virus.

With the busy summer tourism season quickly approaching and no end in sight from COVID-19, can the government provide details to assure workers in the tourism industry that there will be an economic aid package provided to them, similar to or greater than what was provided after the SARS outbreak in 2003?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, again, the conditions under which people would be able to get the new Canada emergency response program aid are that they need to satisfy just two simple conditions. They need to have had \$5,000 of income in the last 12 months and they need to find themselves in a position where their income has gone to nothing as a result of COVID-19. Those are the conditions. It will be available to Canadians across the country.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, the crisis is putting a massive burden on municipalities. Municipalities are being asked to help fund food banks, help the homeless, and to cancel water, sewer and garbage collection bills, and even property taxes. What is the government's plan to increase funding to municipalities to allow them to continue to help Canadians get through this very challenging time?

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Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, that is a really important question.

In our response to COVID-19, one of the things that our government has prioritized is to make sure that we are there for our vulnerable populations. This means that we are proposing to invest \$157.5 million in flexible funding, in the federal anti-homelessness response, which will go to help directly 58 communities to ensure that our vulnerable populations, especially the homeless population, are taken care of in this difficult time.

• (2810)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, could the government tell me what measures it is going to put in place to help protect seniors, who make up a very vulnerable part of our population?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, again that is a very important question.

We are making sure that we fund those vulnerable populations and work with communities across the country that are setting tables, to make sure that there is coordination to ensure that Meals on Wheels and other important programs for seniors continue.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

I have three quick questions for the Minister of Finance.

First, when will the government release the budget? Second, will it release a revised fiscal and economic update? Third, if so, when will it do that?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we are obviously in unprecedented times. We are dealing with this emergency immediately, and that is why we have moved forward with this plan.

We will be coming forward with some details about when we can move forward on an economic and fiscal plan. In a very dynamic economic situation, we want to carefully make sure that we have the appropriate information to make those plans. We are looking forward to doing that when the House resumes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, this pandemic may push certain provinces into bankruptcy. What planning is the government undertaking in the event a province needs support?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, it is absolutely the case that a number of our provinces are facing significant challenges immediately. I would say that all provinces are facing challenges because of the reduction in income that they are going to see. We have done numerous things to help. We have been working together with the Bank of Canada to make sure there is access in the capital markets for provincial debts. That will help them to fund their finances during a difficult time.

Of course, we are working more directly with provinces. One of the advantages of the bill we have put forward is that it would enable us to continue to do so.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, food processors have been asked to maintain current staff levels to ensure Canada's food supply. Apparently, CFIA recently decided to reduce hours for inspec-

tors in response to COVID-19. This is reducing food processing capacity. Will the government do something about this situation?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I know that my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, is working on this problem as we speak. Canada's food supply is integral to the health of Canadians and we are doing everything we can to ensure that the food supply chain remains strong and viable.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Chair, Canada must look at international comparisons and copy strategies used by countries that have been successful in controlling COVID-19. South Korea provides one such example. Its approach emphasizes widely available testing and tracking of the spread of the virus, making people aware of specific places where they might have been exposed and providing them with the test results as quickly as possible. This targeted testing and tracking approach has helped South Korea turn the corner. Taiwan's approach has been similar and similarly effective.

Has the government studied, and is the government preparing to adopt, the very successful containment model used by Asian democracies which also have more experience at pandemic control?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, in fact, that is exactly what we are doing. We are studying a number of models that have been successful. Of course, their epidemiological curve is different from ours and their outbreak scenario is different from ours, but nonetheless, there are many ideas that are being shared across the globe.

Obviously, this is the first pandemic of this size in over 100 years, and with the lack of a vaccine or other treatments that reduce severity, social distancing and other kinds of methods around tracking the disease are all we have at this point.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, to emulate these models we need to have widely available testing and that just is not the case right now. Compared to the South Korean model, we have had very restrictive testing protocols in Canada. One front-line physician told me that he has to tell patients that they probably have COVID and should self-isolate, but there is not the capacity to test them in certain situations.

What is the government's plan to massively ramp up our testing capacity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, in fact, we have conducted well over 120,000 tests to date. I would note that it is more than the United States has done in total. In addition to that, we have fast-tracked approval for new testing kits in Canada that will make a variety of options in terms of testing more plentiful across the country. We are working with our provincial and territorial partners to make sure that we have a strategy that makes sense for our country.

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• (2815)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, those numbers are not enough and the U.S. comparisons are not enough.

I have a quick question for the finance minister.

We know that the charitable sector is going to be struggling. Groups have proposed matching programs as well as an increase to the charitable tax rate in order to stimulate the charitable tax sector. What measures are being contemplated to support the charitable sector?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, that is a really important question.

We have been consulting with the non-profit and charitable sectors to hear their concerns around how they are able to remain resilient and bounce back from the challenge of COVID-19. As we look at assisting them, we have to make sure that we are guided by the expertise on the ground and also make sure that we increase the impact of every dollar that we invest.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Chair, I am happy that we are here in the House. It is late and it has been a long day, but I know that Canadians across this country are looking for action, so I am glad that we are here getting this important step done.

One of the concerns I want to bring to the House today is that there are people who are ineligible for the supports. They do not qualify for EI or the emergency support benefit. I am talking about folks like travel agents who earn commissions. They will continue working unpaid as people are cancelling all of their vacations right now, which means their commissions are being returned. Also, there are people who rely on tips for their income who will now barely see 30% of their income. There are people who are facing reduced work hours and income but are still working to support Canadians and do not have enough to pay their everyday living expenses.

I would like to hear from the government how those people are going to be supported through this crisis.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, this is an important question.

We want to assure Canadians that we are creating this benefit with the goal of making sure that the people who are directly impacted by COVID-19 are supported. Again, whether someone is a travel agent, or whether someone is in a small business or in any form of the gig economy, if they have had \$5,000 of income over the past 12 months and if they do not have any income as a result of COVID-19 and their income goes away, they will, in fact, be able to go forward and get that benefit to support themselves based on this new situation. We are ensuring that this is the case. We will continue to make sure that we consider other issues as we move forward to protect Canadians.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Chair, another group of people I am very concerned about during this process is Canadian seniors. The reality is that they are the most vulnerable of all of us. We want to protect them and see them safe through this trying time.

Many seniors across this country are doing their best to follow all public health guidelines. They are trying to stay safe and in their

homes, but this means for many of them having things delivered, and paying extra costs for delivery, and looking at people to do tasks for them that they can no longer do for themselves. Many seniors are on a fixed income. They often are close to the poverty line. I am wondering if there is any way that we are going to see seniors supported in this time.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, one of the measures that we put forward is an increase in the GST low-income credit.

This increase in the GST low-income credit helps a very large number of seniors who are challenged, some 80% to 85% of individual seniors and 40% to 45% of seniors who are in a couple. This will have a significant impact on helping them through this challenging time. Recognizing that their sources of income, such as the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, stay along with their situations, they are not experiencing a decline in revenue, and the large majority will experience an advantage through the one-time GST low-income tax credit that we are doing in the month of May.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Chair, another serious concern that I have across this country is the issue of housing.

We know that many people are facing significant vulnerability in housing, and we are hearing that not everybody is being allowed by the banks to defer their mortgage for six months. Deferrals will still accrue interest, and some banks are actually saying that the amount due will have to be paid in a lump sum at the end of the deferral period, all while people are unable to work or sustain the income that they had before. Other jurisdictions have already said that there will be blanket freezes on all mortgages, with no accrued interest or lump sum payments. This is happening in other countries. I am really curious as well about what kinds of resources there will be for people who are renting.

These issues are continuing to grow. I would like to know if the minister will mandate a freeze on all mortgages and find supports for rental housing.

• (2820)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we need to look at both categories: the people who have mortgages and also the people who are renting.

For those people who have mortgages, the reason we worked together with the CMHC to create the appropriate capacity for the banking sector to defer mortgages was that we recognized this was exactly the challenge. I know that the banks are experiencing large volumes, and that is a challenge we are all facing, but I also know that they will be able to defer mortgages.

With respect to rents, we continue to work on this challenge. Of course, one of the main features of our emergency benefit is to get money into people's hands as rapidly as possible. Additionally, not having to pay taxes now means they can defer those if they have them so that they can have more access to funding.

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[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Chair, Quebecers are proud of our aerospace industry. The nearly total shutdown of the aviation industry, which is also struggling, will hit Quebec and Canadian companies and their tens of thousands of employees really hard.

Earlier today, Bombardier announced that it is suspending operations at its facilities for at least a month. The industry is struggling with health issues linked to COVID-19, supply chain issues related to delays and restrictions, contract issues because of the slowdown and delivery problems due to travel restrictions.

In Europe and the United States, the aerospace industry enjoys special status. Does this government recognize that the aerospace industry is a strategic industry and that it could therefore deploy the measures needed to support it?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we know that COVID-19 is creating serious difficulties for some industries. Of course, the aerospace industry will bring in less revenue and face significant challenges.

We will work with the various sectors to ensure that they have access to the funds needed during this crisis. That will certainly be the case for the aerospace industry.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his response.

My next question relates to agriculture. Some measures have been implemented, but farmers want the agri-invest program to be enhanced by 5%, with no matching funds from businesses. That would help them with cash flow without making them go into debt. Will the government commit to that?

I am thinking of the announcement made by Farm Credit Canada on Monday. Only 30% of Quebec farms are registered with Farm Credit Canada. In addition, that agency does not have enough staff to respond to everyone on the ground.

What does the government plan to do in that regard?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we know that the agricultural sector is very important and that it will face significant challenges as a result of COVID-19. That is why we have changed the eligibility criteria for mortgages and loans with Farm Credit Canada. We will continue to work with farmers. Of course, if there are things we need to do to make sure everyone is in good shape, we will consider every option.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I would first like to know how much time I have left.

The Deputy Chair: You have over a minute and a half.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Madam Chair. That is generous. I will speak very slowly. I had planned on sharing my time, but in the end I will be using it all.

I would like some clarification on the benefits for self-employed workers. If a worker does not have any income, he or she is entitled to the special benefits, but what if his or her income drops by, say, 80%? Would this self-employed worker be entitled to the tax benefits?

• (2825)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, that is an important question. We determined that it was crucial to have a simple application process so that people could get money as quickly as possible. That is why we chose two eligibility criteria for the benefits: having earned \$5,000 in the previous 12 months and having zero income.

I know that there are other support measures for low-income people, including increasing the Canada child benefit and improving the GST/HST tax credit. We will also be allowing everyone, both businesses and individuals, to defer paying their taxes until August 31.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Chair, people across the country are worried. They are losing their jobs and they need a clear message that they will have quick access to the promised assistance. We know that 80% of Canadians are \$200 away from insolvency every month. The government needs to cut red tape and get these cheques to Canadians. We will go after fraudsters later, if necessary. There are other urgent issues right now.

When can Canadians expect to get the financial assistance they need?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, absolutely, our goal is to make the process very simple and effective so that those who are really struggling can get the money as quickly as possible. We have found an effective solution. In the next two or three weeks, but ideally in the next two weeks, those who are without income because of COVID-19 will have money.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, is the April 6 date announced by the Quebec premier realistic?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I will be very clear. We are working every day to make sure that the many people who are struggling will have access to the money. We are working every day to set a date. As soon as we have an exact date, I will announce it.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, two hours ago I got a message from a business owner who cannot sleep. He has 450 workers to lay off and another 100 to lay off early next week. He has serious doubts about the financial assistance that will be available for his employees in the next two or three weeks while they await the first cheques. He said that he cannot get any answers.

Can someone answer this employer and tell him what will happen? Will the one-week waiting period be maintained for employers and employees who will need money quickly?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, if the member wants to send me the question, someone on my team will be able to answer directly.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, the Government of Quebec has done an excellent job managing the crisis and has confirmed that 200 infrastructure projects are awaiting federal approval. The same number are waiting in Ontario.

Will the Minister of Finance commit to approving these projects in the next 15 days so that people can be put to work when possible?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, the situation right now requires us to take emergency measures and that is what we are looking at today. We will certainly have to take other measures to address the challenges that will arise in the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, my next question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

What is the government doing to ensure that temporary foreign workers and seasonal agricultural workers from countries that have closed their own borders will be able to come to Canada to help with this year's harvest?

We have to feed people, and we need human resources to do that.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, in a crisis like this, we must ensure that our economy and food are secure and that Canadians remain healthy.

I will work with my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, to ensure that foreign workers' home countries allow them to leave, so that they can come help Canadian farmers.

● (2830)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, my next question is for the Minister of Finance.

Does the government plan to allow Canadians to withdraw from their RRSPs without paying taxes, similar to the first-time home buying process, so that they can have fast access to capital?

They could pay it back in 10 years. That would certainly help some families who need money.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we decided to implement measures that will help people immediately and that will benefit the people who have no income because of COVID-19. We will certainly look at different approaches. For now, we think that we found an approach that works, given our current challenges, namely getting money quickly.

We will look at different ideas in the coming days.

[English]

The Chair: It being 4:30 a.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, the committee will rise.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACT

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that Bill C-13, An Act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to an order made earlier today, a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may speak to the motion for not more than 10 minutes. This will be followed by a period of five minutes for questions and comments. Members are permitted to split their time with another member.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is a challenge unlike any other we have ever faced. Canadians are worried about

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their health and the health of their loved ones. I understand what people are going through in one sense. Two of my own loved ones are facing this disease right now: one of my sisters who lives in Europe and a godson in the United States. They are both doing well and I know they will get through this, but it is a reminder once again of how this disease is impacting so many people.

We are all in this together. Canadians are worried about the economic impacts as well, keeping a roof over their heads and putting food on their tables. While we do not yet know the full economic impacts, I want to tell Canadians that our government is prepared to do whatever it takes to mitigate the impacts.

[Translation]

Last week, our government announced significant economic measures to support Canadians and ensure that no one is left behind. With the bill introduced today in Parliament, we are taking the next steps to implement our plan to protect Canadians and the Canadian economy during this period of uncertainty.

[English]

This legislation aims to provide timely support to Canadians and to make sure that we all have the tools necessary to support them, as well as businesses, as things continue to rapidly evolve in these very uncertain times.

I would like to outline how this will help Canadians worried about their health and their ability to pay their bills.

[Translation]

Canadians' health is our top priority. The bill gives me and the Minister of Health the power to request funds to support the federal government's efforts to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19.

[English]

This legislation proposes to provide one-time funding of \$500 million through the Canada health transfer for provinces and territories to ensure that our health care systems across the country have the resources they need.

My colleague, the Minister of Health, has been in constant communication with her colleagues. We are in this together. We must continue to work together. This means ensuring that our health care systems have the funds they need to treat patients and continue to deliver world-class care.

We also know that many Canadians do not have access to benefits when they are sick. No Canadian should have to choose between buying groceries and taking care of his or her health. It is not good for that person or for our communities.

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We are proposing the new Canada emergency response benefit. It is a simpler and more accessible version of the previous two benefits, the emergency care benefit and emergency support benefit. We want to ensure that all Canadians who cannot work because of COVID-19 and who do not have access to paid leave or other income support get the support they need in a simple and rapid way.

This approach supports any Canadian who finds themselves in a situation in which they lose all of their income due to COVID-19, and supports every Canadian business by protecting every employee. It is a wage subsidy delivered directly to people.

Canadian workers who are sick, self-isolating or quarantined, looking after a sick family member or who have been furloughed or terminated because of COVID-19 would be eligible. This includes workers who are still employed but are not receiving income because of work disruptions related to COVID-19. This would help businesses keep their employees as they navigate these difficult times and make sure that they can quickly resume operations when the time is right. It would also support working parents who have to stay home with their children without pay because schools and day cares are closed.

For workers eligible for employment insurance sickness benefits, we are also proposing to waive the requirement for claimants to provide a medical certificate.

For low and modest-income Canadians, we are proposing a special top-up through the GST credit by early May. This would double maximum GST credit payment amounts. On average, for those benefiting, this measure would put almost \$400 more in the pockets of single individuals and \$600 for couples.

• (2835)

[Translation]

For families with children, our government has proposed a temporary increase to the Canada child benefit. Parents will receive an additional \$300 per child, starting in May.

Our government is proposing a six-month moratorium on Canada student loan repayments, with no interest, for those now making payments. This will give nearly one million Canadians an additional \$160 a month for this entire period.

[English]

Canadians who owe personal income taxes and Canadian businesses that owe corporate income tax will not be required to pay it until August 31. This would free up \$55 billion and keep that money circulating in the economy.

We need to help our businesses weather the storm, keep Canadians employed and make sure Canada's economy remains strong and stable.

On top of our direct support to people, which would benefit every business that must furlough employees to maintain operations, this legislation proposes a wage subsidy for small organizations for them to help Canadians working.

We also understand that businesses may require more liquidity during this time, so we are leveraging the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada to work with pri-

vate sector lenders to coordinate financing solutions for Canadian businesses. They are highly capitalized and well positioned to respond.

With this legislation, we would be making amendments that would give us the necessary flexibility to help businesses, through EDC and BDC. These changes would also allow BDC to provide more financial support to Canadian businesses and give EDC the flexibility to deliver financial and credit insurance support to affected Canadian companies. This important legislation would provide these two institutions with additional resources to respond to the needs of businesses as necessary.

We know that access to financing is crucial right now for businesses across the country.

[Translation]

On top of these changes, the government has implemented the business credit availability program. Through this program, the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada will work closely with private industry to coordinate financing solutions for Canadian businesses.

This program will be particularly helpful to businesses in sectors facing serious short-term challenges, such as the tourism and the oil and gas sectors.

Through this program, Crown corporations will make more than \$10 billion in additional support available to businesses of all sizes that are struggling with credit.

[English]

The Canada Account is an important tool that can support Canadian companies with financing and guarantees. With the potential economic impact of COVID-19, there could be an increased demand for Canada Account financing. We are proposing to strengthen our ability to act through the Canada Account.

We also recognize that farmers and the agri-food sector will need access to financing. We are proposing to strengthen Farm Credit Canada to support the sector during these times.

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The government is also taking action to help the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation increase liquidity in the financial sector by providing stable funding to banks and mortgage lenders to support continued lending to Canadian businesses and individuals. This work is absolutely critical. To this end, the government is launching an insured mortgage purchase program to purchase up to \$50 billion of insured mortgage pools through CMHC.

The proposed actions announced today represent direct support to Canadians and Canadian businesses to help protect jobs and to ensure that Canadians have the money they need during this challenging time.

• (2840)

[*Translation*]

I should point out that Canada is in a very good position to make these investments. Canada has the strongest record in the G7 and has the financial capacity to support its economy throughout this difficult period.

[*English*]

By working together, we can face up to this global health and economic crisis from a position of strength, give confidence to markets and help Canadians receive the support they need to weather the crisis.

I am asking my hon. colleagues from all parties to support this legislation. There can be no delay. I am confident that all parliamentarians will rise to the occasion. Canadians are counting on us.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I could take off my partisan hat for just a moment, we all recognize what a difficult time this is for the country, the world and the Canadian government of any political stripe. This is a very heavy load to bear. I am glad we can be here together, not always agreeing, but agreeing on one thing, that we are putting the needs of our fellow Canadians first and foremost.

My question has to do with small businesses. They seem to have been neglected in the finance minister's bill. Small businesses are the backbone of our communities. Whether it is small restaurants, coffee shops or nail salons, these are folks who employ one to three people. They have been neglected. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance what the Liberals are going to do to help small businesses right now who need some support?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question. We are trying to make sure that we support small businesses through this very challenging time. We know that many if not most small businesses are employers. They may be sole proprietors, but they may be employers. That is why we are delivering a wage subsidy directly to their employees if they are unable to work as a result of COVID-19. We know that this will support their ability to maintain that employment as we come out of this. That is critically important. The employees who keep working will have a 10% wage subsidy. Of course, we are making sure that they do not have to pay their taxes until August 31.

We remain open to considering additional measures, because this is a very dynamic situation. That is something we continue to work

on to make sure that we are supporting people during this challenging time.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate having the opportunity to discuss this bill and debate it in the House today and at a later period of time.

I would like to echo the comments of my colleague just now and ask the minister about small businesses. I have heard from so many in my riding of London—Fanshawe that a 10% wage subsidy is simply not enough. Knowing what small business owners put into their businesses, it is their dream and everything that they have in many cases, they want to save their employees and not to have to lay them off.

Therefore, will the government at this time at least consider the 75% wage subsidy that our party has introduced?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear that any employees of these small businesses that do not have revenue as a result of COVID-19 will be getting direct support, which is a wage subsidy directly delivered to the employee. For the employees who are still there, of course that is also important.

We are trying to ensure that this is something that employers have the capacity to manage through. That is the reason we have been working so hard to make sure that the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada have access to capital and can deliver that access through the business credit availability program and the current banking relationship that the small businesses have.

We know these measures, in tandem, will support people through a difficult time. We are going to continue to think about ways we can support Canadians, the people who are off work and businesses, through this challenging time.

• (2845)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the sentiment that these are very trying times, and it is very reassuring to see this House come together and to see all parties working collaboratively together.

There is no doubt that right now, out there, there is a lot of anxiety and worry. The minister has mentioned a number of individual items that he is proposing in this legislation.

I would like to ask him more broadly what his message is to people out there, such as small business owners or individuals who are feeling that anxiety right now. What is the message he wants to deliver to them from the government?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost the message I want to get out to Canadian businesses is that we have a strong and resilient country. We have a tremendous starting point: Our health system is strong, our financial situation is strong and we have a banking system that is literally the best in the world. These are important assets as we face this challenging time.

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The reason it is so important to have a strong financial position as a country is that in a difficult time, such as the one we are facing right now, it means we have the capacity to act and to continue to act, because that financial capacity allows us to face today's challenges and the continuing challenges that we will have to face together. Therefore, we have put forward measures that are very significant. They include \$55 billion in tax deferrals, direct support to individuals, and support to businesses. We will continue to think about additional measures we can take as we face this situation. We do not know the severity of the situation and we do not know the duration, and that is why we are maintaining our ability to address a dynamic situation with dynamic measures.

We know our approach will get us through this time. It will help Canadians bridge this time to a better future.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that I speak for all parliamentarians when I say that those Canadians who are affected by the COVID-19 virus are in our thoughts and prayers at this time. I know that our actions, whether on the government side of the House or on opposition benches, must continue to be guided by our shared desire to protect the health and safety of all Canadians and to support them through the global pandemic.

These are unprecedented times, warranting an unprecedented response both from governments and the Canadian people.

[*Translation*]

We know that this crisis is affecting Canadians across the country.

[*English*]

Almost a million workers have already been laid off, stores and restaurants have been told to close their doors and Canadians have been asked to stay at home.

[*Translation*]

We also know that our economy is taking a hit in this crisis and that the coming months will be very difficult.

[*English*]

While we are all aware that more needs to be done, and we have all heard of isolated incidents of people not following public health advice, overwhelmingly Canadians have risen to the challenge and have shown the care and compassion for which we, as a country, are so well known.

In these trying times, now more than ever, we see the strength of our communities and appreciate our true Canadian heroes: truck drivers, farmers and factory workers keeping our supply chains running at all times; companies stepping up, ensuring workers get paid, even if their doors are closed; grocery stores, pharmacies and cleaning staff working to keep shelves full and doors open; and restaurants offering takeout and delivery to those who need a hot meal.

Perhaps most importantly as we consider the health crisis, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the doctors, nurses, hospital staff, public health officials and first responders working around the clock to keep us all healthy and safe.

I had an opportunity to speak with the president of the Ontario Medical Association last week about what doctors urgently need from the government in fighting this pandemic. Those needs must be met.

The president mentioned the need for greater information-sharing tools so that tracking of cases can be done more quickly, so that when someone has a positive test result, the medical and health agencies can work backward and find out who that person was in contact with and do it through a much faster response mechanism. He also spoke to the need for equipment that must be procured now, before the number of cases escalates. I hope the government takes those concerns very seriously.

Our researchers in the scientific community will also play an essential role in fighting this pandemic and ultimately developing a vaccine.

• (2850)

[*Translation*]

I also want to acknowledge the leadership shown by provincial and municipal elected officials across the country. While the federal government took its time, the provinces acted quickly, taking advantage of their constitutional powers on health and education, particularly through the police and local services. Each province has tackled its own challenges and proposed new, innovative approaches.

[*English*]

Canadians are worried. They are worried for their health and the health of their loved ones, for their jobs and for their futures, and they are looking to us for action.

Conservatives have been flexible in our approach, while also continuing to ensure government oversight. When we agreed to the extraordinary suspension of Parliament, Conservatives insisted that the government be subject to substantial accountability measures, including the condition that the Auditor General would audit any new spending and that parliamentary committees would be able to review all of that spending when Parliament resumes.

We also agreed to bring back the House of Commons this week with only a small number of members present. We were prepared to quickly pass the measures that the Prime Minister had announced to date.

What we were not prepared for was the government's attempted undemocratic power grab. The Liberals shamefully tried to use a public health crisis to give themselves the powers to raise taxes, debt and spending without parliamentary oversight. However, after hours of negotiation, the government now has backed down from that position, and Conservatives have secured the following concessions.

We demanded that the government remove the section that would have allowed it to raise taxes without parliamentary approval, and the Liberals have agreed.

We demanded that the government walk back its unlimited spending powers and that special warrants expire on June 23, 2020, instead of September 30, 2020. The Liberals agreed.

We demanded that the government include explicit reference to putting taxpayers' rights first, and the Liberals agreed.

We demanded that the government must put sunset clauses in its legislation, a point that only the Conservative Party raised.

[*Translation*]

We demanded a sunset clause to ensure that the new powers will not remain in place for several more years.

[*English*]

We demanded that the government be accountable to Parliament through regular reports to the House of Commons health and finance committees, and that the finance committee have the right to recall Parliament if we identify any abuses, and the Liberals agreed.

Our effective opposition has also gotten the government to reverse course on other policies.

Let us remember that it was just a short while ago in this House that Conservatives were calling for stronger action to protect our borders. We were the ones who were asking tough questions as to why flights coming into Canada from hot spots around the world were continuing to be allowed. We proposed the idea of restricting travel much earlier. The government's initial response was that closing borders and restricting travel was not an effective way to fight this virus. It turns out that this was exactly what the Liberals were forced to do, just a short while after making those statements.

We asked about the impact of the border closure on the temporary foreign worker and seasonal agricultural worker programs, and the government made exemptions.

[*Translation*]

We demanded that the government put an end to illegal border crossings, in particular Roxham Road, and it is only thanks to us that the government has listened.

[*English*]

We have also called on the federal government to increase support for small businesses and workers, and I remain hopeful that the government will implement our suggestions.

Conservatives are focused on putting forward constructive solutions to ensure that no one falls through the cracks. We will also continue to ask questions on behalf of Canadians and ensure that the government's response includes clear timelines so that Canadians know when they can expect to start receiving support.

Many of us are looking at models around the world, and we hope that the government can look to countries that had effective measures at the front end and were then able to relax some of their restrictions on the economy much more quickly. I know one of my hon. colleagues has already raised the examples that we can look to in Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, where there were a large number of tests being done, as well as rapid information sharing and rapid tracking of individuals who had tested positive so that they could identify who in the community was exposed. Those are

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some of the measure that we needed to see implemented much more quickly so we could quickly get to the point where our economy can get back on its feet.

While the government is looking for ways to do exactly that, I again want to urge it to do everything that it can.

I know that the Minister of Finance said earlier that the Bank of Canada is independent of government. While that is true to many degrees, there are ways that the government can take steps to ensure that quantitative easing is not an option that the government is looking at. Every time that has been tried in the past, it has led to many negative consequences for years longer than the economic crisis that justified those moves. We know that there is a huge crunch right now in the credit markets and we know the government will be looking to ways to address that, but simply printing more money is not the way to do it. I hope the Liberals take that into account.

We are here to be co-operative as they look to provide support to individuals and to help people pay their mortgages, pay their rent, pay their utilities and put food on the table.

• (2855)

[*Translation*]

We will be there to help and to propose solutions to ensure that Canadians can keep their homes. We will work with the measures that provide direct assistance to the Canadians affected by this crisis.

[*English*]

I want to thank all my colleagues for being here throughout the day.

I again remind the government that the assistance part of this legislation could have been passed 12 hours ago, but we will acknowledge the progress that has been made and the spirit of co-operation that I see in the hon. government House leader. I want to thank him for all his efforts throughout the day. It has been a lot of hard work and there have been a lot of moving pieces in a lot of ways. Those of us who have been here since the start of the day are grateful that this assistance will be able to flow into the hands of Canadians.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the co-operation that we are seeing throughout the House truly is remarkable.

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I would suggest, perhaps in contrast to some of the comments from the Leader of the Opposition, that we saw the government bring forward a plan. It was a plan that the government thought was in the best interests of Canadians. I realize that the opposition had some issues with some aspects of that plan. They made their concerns known, and I think that was really important. What we should take from this is that in a time like this, even with the circumstances that we are in, democracy works. The opposition can do its job and push back on the government, but we can come to a compromise and move forward. I do appreciate that.

Earlier on in the debate today, the Leader of the Opposition questioned the 10% subsidy that was going to be given to small business employers specifically. He suggested that maybe that should be increased slightly. Can he expand on that and suggest where he sees that going?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify something. It is not the fact that the Conservatives had issues with what the government proposed, grabbing for itself unprecedented powers: it is that Canadians had a massive problem with what the government proposed.

While we may be thankful that we have arrived at a place where we can allow this legislation to go through, I would suggest to the hon. member to do everything he can with his colleagues to point out that there was a tremendous amount of goodwill throughout the last few weeks. If the government had proposals and ideas of how it would like to have greater flexibility to address this crisis as it unfolds, to do so through the normal channels of conversation that had already been established would be far preferable to surprising the opposition in the short amount of time that we had before the House was coming back.

I just leave that with the hon. member. I hope he can take that message back to the rest.

• (2900)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the Conservative Party for his speech. I would nevertheless remind him that raising doubts as to the independence of the Bank of Canada twice in a matter of minutes is not the right message to send to the markets.

As far as his intervention on Roxham Road is concerned, I would remind him that the Conservative Party is not the only one to have spoken up about this. The Bloc has been on this from the start.

The same goes for the negotiations that led to this bill. When I compare this morning's version of the bill to the one we had 12 hours later, I see that some changes were made, but they are minor. For example, when the leader of the Conservative Party talks about changing the date from December 31, 2021 to September 30, 2020, the end of this summer, that change was already included in this morning's version of the bill.

Was this a case of much ado about nothing, or were we dealing with a paper tiger all along?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has it all wrong.

His leader left the negotiations. He gave the government free rein. Maybe he decided to go out for a meal instead of representing his caucus and his constituents.

We made a different choice. We decided to stay here to ensure that we have a better bill for Canadians.

There are a lot of differences between—

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all acknowledge that the COVID-19 crisis is going to put a lot of Canadians in a difficult position, particularly when it comes to housing. The government suggested that voluntary measures on the part of banks to defer mortgages is good enough. Does the member agree with the government that this is going to be good enough?

We believe that we need to go further and mandate that mortgages be paused and that there be a break on rent to ensure that people are not evicted during this crisis.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, we certainly agree with the objective of what the hon. member is talking about. In the best course of action now, I believe we are talking about an unprecedented involvement in many aspects of the economy that the government has never tried before. Even the most ambitious previous Liberal governments that would have loved more control over the economy did not try it.

In the situation we are facing, there very well may need to be short-term solutions to keep people in their homes. We agree with the objective, and I think now is the time to have our colleagues on the finance committee look at some of the tools that can provide a short-term benefit to allow the government to get in to help people through this crisis and then to get out so that we can return to a normally functioning economy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the hour, this is a very important time in the House. We are facing an unprecedented health crisis, one I never would have imagined in my lifetime. It is a global pandemic. An extreme situation such as this demands extreme measures and that is what we are talking about today.

Above all, I am pleased that the approach being taken to deal with this global crisis puts health above the economy. The economy is extremely important, but this new virus will have a devastating impact on public health and result in countless deaths if nothing is done about it. I commend the fact that we have decided to join in solidarity to get through this crisis and minimize the number of deaths by putting health ahead of the economy. The Bloc and I commend that.

Obviously it takes courage to make this decision because the consequences to the economy are severe. We can do all the analyses once this is over. Let us hope that this ends as quickly as possible. I am confident that once COVID-19 is contained and dealt with the economy will bounce back quickly. I am sure of it. Until then, let us bring in support measures, extreme measures. No one should be left behind. No one should be abandoned. No one should be forgotten.

In that regard, I applaud a number of the measures set out in this bill. We were worried about workers who did not accumulate enough hours to have access to employment insurance, but there is something for those people. Obviously, there are measures for everyone with health problems or those who have come into contact with someone who may have contracted COVID-19 or is in quarantine. These are important measures. The same is true for self-employed workers who did not register for employment insurance and who therefore do not have access to it. These people will be covered. Many such measures are being put in place.

People's biggest concerns, what we are hearing about in the media and through the calls we are getting at our offices, have to do with efficiency and timelines. People are really worried. They heard about the measures that have been announced on the news, but they were not told when or how those measures will be implemented. It is more complicated. Obviously, if a million people file a claim for employment insurance, Service Canada offices are going to be extremely busy and the phone lines will certainly be jammed. However, I think that we really have the duty to rise above partisanship and find ways of improving the process to provide more information, shorten wait times, reassure people and ensure that they get their first cheque as quickly as possible.

There are also measures for businesses. I am thinking of the lines of credit that the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada can provide. That is important. I am also thinking of the banking systems agreement. I hope that Mouvement Desjardins, Quebec's largest mortgage lender, will be included in the agreements. That is extremely important for Quebec's economy. All of these things will enable financial institutions to ensure cash flow, to make agreements with businesses and individuals who are finding it difficult to make payments in the short term. Let us hope that the six-month deferral period will be enough. If not, we can revisit that issue during the second phase of our plan.

Obviously, I am concerned about entire sectors of our economy. In the agricultural industry, our farmers are very worried. One measure was announced on Monday, but for now it does not seem to be enough to reassure the agricultural community. Everyone is anxious right now, and feeding the population is fundamental. That obviously goes hand-in-hand with health. We therefore need to ensure that our farms get through this crisis without any problems.

• (2905)

In that regard, it was suggested that the government enhance the agri-invest program by 5% without requiring businesses to match those funds. That would give businesses liquidity without making them go into debt. Earlier, in committee of the whole, I got the impression that the government is not going to move forward with that measure for now. I am asking the government to reconsider.

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We need to think about the major sectors of the economy. I am particularly interested in Quebec's major industries. We cannot underestimate the importance of the aerospace industry. I was pleased to hear the finance minister recognize it as a strategic industry. This means that, if ever that industry is in trouble, assistance plans will be put in place, as they are for all strategic industries.

It is really important to make sure no one is left behind and to reassure the public.

We are facing an extreme crisis that is creating an extreme economic crisis. We all hope we can get through this as quickly as possible. We will have to create an array of new tools to help us with that.

We know that income support is important during an economic crisis. Businesses need support. They are having a lot of problems. We must therefore continue to innovate in order to get through this crisis as quickly as possible.

As a general rule, economists will say that every crisis is an opportunity to shape the economy of tomorrow. I hope that we will take this opportunity to transition toward a greener economy more quickly.

Our thoughts are with everyone directly or indirectly affected by the pandemic.

I hope that we in the House can set partisanship aside and work together even better than we usually do.

• (2910)

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I think that we share many values.

As members from Quebec, we acknowledge the work of all health care professionals and those who are working hard to keep Quebecers and Canadians safe.

The member spoke about the importance of putting health ahead of economic interests. I agree with him because this pandemic is a serious problem throughout the world.

I would like to give him the opportunity to elaborate on the importance of the well-being of Quebec, Canada and the entire world.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. He represents the riding where I have my secondary residence. I am lucky to receive his very informative householders.

We need to take care of people who are at risk. Collectively, we are going to have to make huge sacrifices. For example, Quebec decided to put its economy on hold for three weeks in order to slow the spread of the virus. That is a collective choice that we decided to take together. The goal is to save lives and keep people healthy. In my opinion, that is a much more important value than economic values.

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Once the pandemic is behind us, we can look forward to a quick economic recovery so that we are all in good health and have money by the new year.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about the importance of setting aside partisanship when we work to address a crisis like this. We worked very hard.

Today, the House Leader of the Official Opposition and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons worked very hard to improve this bill so that it responds to Canadians' expectations as effectively as possible. We do not agree on everything, but I think that we improved the bill together.

Not playing politics does not mean abdicating one's responsibilities. Why did the Bloc abdicate its responsibilities by failing to participate in the negotiations and not taking a seat at the negotiating table?

The negotiations between our two parties ended at 2 a.m. Why was the Bloc not there?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We negotiated the day before. We were in constant contact with the government. We were fine with this morning's agreement, which was quite similar to the agreement before us tonight. We believe that we need to move forward in this time of crisis and that the situation is urgent. We are thinking of those who have filed EI claims and who are wondering when they will get their cheque.

We want to expedite the process, not slow it down by 12 hours or more. Since the Conservative Party was the one holding up the process, we decided that it should be the one to consult with the government and then update us on the new changes.

We were informed of each iteration. We participated in the meeting with the Minister of Finance and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons at every stage so that we were well aware of what was happening and could share our opinions.

We were there the whole time, but we were ready sooner. As I said earlier, this 12-hour delay was a matter of partisanship. I am looking at what this bill contains compared to what we had before us this morning. I will not comment on the fact that the Conservatives took 12 hours and almost derailed the entire day, which should have ended a lot earlier, but I have my—

• (2915)

The Deputy Speaker: We have just enough time for a quick question. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a lot from my constituents specifically about the Canada Post Corporation, and the fact that it is not taking the proper steps to ensure the safety of its employees and its clients. It is not providing protective equipment or sanitizing depot buildings and vehicles. It is insisting letter carriers and mail-service couriers enter businesses throughout their routes, visiting all of those people every single day, and my constituents are really quite concerned.

I am wondering if the hon. member has heard that from some of his constituents and if he agrees that the minister has responsibility to ensure the safety of Canada Post workers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent intervention.

Obviously the priority at this time is public health. We have to take measures, including for Canada Post. We need measures and the necessary funding for everything my colleague just listed because we cannot allow essential public services to become a contamination vector.

We have to reassure the public. People who get their mail have to be safe. Mail carriers that I know need to be kept just as safe as the workers in the rest of the public service.

I totally agree that measures need to be taken.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this moment to acknowledge the depth of the crisis that our country is facing and that the world is facing. The impacts of COVID-19 are gripping the world in a crisis, and Canada has felt the impacts and will continue to feel those impacts.

In this crisis, there are many people we need to thank, and I want to take a moment to thank, first and foremost, the health care workers who are running toward the fire and putting themselves at risk to keep us healthy. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart, on behalf of all New Democrats.

I also want to acknowledge that the health care workers who are putting themselves at risk have one clear request of us, and we owe it to them to respond to this request. They are saying that they are willing to put themselves at risk, but they need us to do our part to prevent the spread of this illness: to take social distancing seriously, to prevent the spread of this illness by limiting contact with others by staying at home, and by doing such basic things as washing our hands thoroughly and avoiding touching our faces. We owe it to these workers to do that at a minimum.

I also want to take an opportunity to thank all the people who are keeping us fed, from the transportation and supply chains to farmers and grocery store workers. They are heroes. I thank them for keeping our communities fed.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank public health professionals who are sharing information and providing reliable and practical guidelines on what we can do to ensure our safety and that of others.

I want to thank the businesses that have decided to offer their help in this crisis, including the distilleries that are making hand sanitizer and the auto parts manufacturers who are modifying their production line to make medical supplies.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Finally, I want to thank Canadians. In this moment of crisis, we have seen incredible acts of kindness, compassion and generosity. We often hear people talk about the world needing more Canada, but right now Canada needs more Canada. We have seen the generosity from neighbours who have stepped up to help those they do not even know to ensure that they get groceries, and the kindness between community members to lift each other up at a time when people are going through so much difficulty. I want to thank Canadians who have risen to the occasion during this crisis.

We have seen some great work done in Parliament. I want to acknowledge the Prime Minister, the ministers and all parliamentarians in this House who have done so much work for their communities. I want to thank them. I want to give a particular shout-out to the House leaders and whips who have worked so tirelessly today to get us to this point where we are able to move forward with this legislation.

When these measures were first put forward, New Democrats made it clear that we would be supporting all measures to help out Canadians during these difficult times. I want to acknowledge that the government has shown that it is interested in helping Canadians, but if it truly wants to help Canadians, we need to do more and we need to do it faster. We have outlined some priorities that speak to the needs of Canadians.

Right now, Canadians need money in their pockets immediately. They need to know that they will have a job to get back to once this crisis is dealt with. Finally, and most importantly, Canadians need to know that they have a safe place to live and are not at risk of losing their homes. We have proposed three things to deal with that.

First and foremost, we need to make sure that we send direct financial support to Canadians right away, which is why we are calling for a universal basic income that will send \$2,000 immediately to all Canadians and an additional \$250 for children. This is an immediate, direct financial support to Canadians who need it right now. We can deal with those who may not need this at the time of taxation and recoup that additional amount.

Second, we have suggested that to ensure Canadians have a job to return to, we need to augment the proposal around wage subsidies. The current proposal is 10%, which small and medium-sized businesses have said is not enough to ensure that they can keep their workforce going. Right now, for a small business, it is crucial to maintain the workforce. The idea of rehiring and retraining would be devastating to a business. This is why we are calling for the government to follow other countries around the world who have increased that wage subsidy proposal to at least 75% or more. That is what we are asking this government to consider to give small businesses some help.

Finally, to help out businesses, families and people who are either in a business or at home, we need to ensure that there is a pause or a break on rent and mortgages. We need to make sure that there is a ban on evictions. People need to know that they can stay in their home, and this is crucial.

● (2920)

[Translation]

We not only have to get money to people as soon as possible, but we also have to do everything in our power to reduce their expenses. There are good measures to help ease the pressure, such as suspending student loan payments and allowing individuals and businesses to defer their income tax payments.

[English]

What we need to do is make sure that people have money in their pockets and that we are limiting the money that is going out of their pockets as much as we can during this crisis.

When we look at the reality that we are faced with right now and at the struggles that Canadians are faced with right now, we see that Canadians are being asked to make an impossible choice: They have to decide whether they should stay at home while not knowing if they can afford to pay rent or put food on the table, or whether they should go to work and risk exposing themselves or their loved ones to an illness. That is an impossible decision. We know that this is an impossible decision because we hear the stories.

I remember being at a bakery just a couple of days ago. Young workers there told me that they were afraid to go in to work. They worried every day when they went to work about being exposed to the illness, but at the same time they were afraid that their bakery might be shut down and that they would lose their jobs and not be able to pay their bills.

One of my colleagues told me that in her neighbourhood, the longest lineups were not for groceries. They were not in front of the grocery stores. Instead, they were in front of the payday money-lending stores, because people are struggling for access to money at this point. While people wait for the measures in this legislation to take place, to get that crucial funding, people are going to turn to money wherever they can get it. That often means credit card companies or low-interest loans.

We have a responsibility here to ensure that credit companies and payday lending companies are not able to exploit people in desperate times. We have an obligation to ensure that they are not charging these interest rates anymore.

I also heard the finance minister talk about working with banks to ensure that there are mortgage deferrals. That is simply not working, and it is not good enough. We need to see a pause on mortgages. We need to see a pause on rent. We need to ensure that people can be in their homes.

It is more critical than ever to ensure that people are able to stay in their homes, and it is not just a moral responsibility: It is also a public health responsibility to ensure that people remain in their homes.

Government Orders

How can someone self-isolate if they do not have a home? If we do not take measures right now to ensure that people are not struggling to keep their homes and if we do not freeze rents or put a pause on rents and mortgages, we are going to have not just a health care crisis, but a homelessness crisis of epic proportion. That is why I am calling on the government to take real steps immediately to work with all levels of government to ensure that people have a break on their rents and their mortgages.

We have also spoken with indigenous communities that are deeply concerned that they have inadequate access to housing, to clean water and to appropriate health care resources. We need to make sure that there is a real plan to respond to the needs of indigenous communities.

When it comes to dealing with this health care crisis immediately, we are taking some bold steps and we need to make sure we are doing everything we can, but when we look beyond this health care crisis to the stimulus afterward, we need to make sure that the focus is on workers, not on CEOs or shareholders. We need to make sure that the stimulus that we put in place is going to encourage jobs for people and ensure that they have a livelihood.

● (2925)

[*Translation*]

We can stimulate the economy and do the things that can transform our country, fight against the climate crisis, build housing, invest in public transit, make it easier for Canadians to use renewable energies, and make our homes and buildings as energy efficient as possible. We can also invest in child care services that every family can afford and provide our children with the quality education they deserve.

[*English*]

We also know that our health care system is under a deep burden. We see the impacts of decades of governments that have been cutting health care funding. We need to make sure that our public institutions are protected. That is why we have been calling for investments in our health care system.

I will wrap up with this—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. We have gone past the time. I thank the hon. member for Burnaby South.

Before we go to questions and comments, we are going to have a momentary pause while we switch up the operator in our wonderful staff who have been helping us here over the last several hours. They are doing a terrific job.

The interpreters and the rest of the team here have also stayed here all day since starting at noon, so thank you very much.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I echo the comments of the leader of the NDP that Canadians have risen to the occasion. I have dealt with a lot of worried and anxious Canadians about the times they face, and it is always concerning to see that. However, one of the other things I have seen is Canadians coming together and being Canadian in a way that,

quite frankly, I feel I have not seen in a very long time. It is very inspiring to see that. It gives me great hope, and I know that we will come out of this on the other end stronger than when we went into it.

The leader of the NDP brought up the basic income guarantee in his speech. I am wondering if he can comment as to whether he thinks that we would have been better prepared going into this crisis if we had had a basic income guarantee in place.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, yes, absolutely we would have been better prepared if we had a stronger social safety net. What this crisis has shown is that our social safety net is not as robust as it could be.

I also believe that we have an opportunity right now to do something pretty incredible. Faced with this crisis, we have a decision to make: Do we choose to invest in people and make the right decisions to prevent the loss of life? We know our health care systems are stretched thin, and the potential spread of this illness could mean a serious potential of loss of life. We have a choice to make. If we make the investments now, if we make the right choices now and provide supports for families and for people to stay in and have confidence that they will not lose their homes, we can make sure we get out of this crisis and save lives.

That is why I call on all Canadians who believe in this value we all share about wanting to take care of one another. I believe that is a Canadian value. I believe in Canadians and I believe we will rise to the occasion.

● (2930)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to the attention of this House a concern of mine. Part 18 of this proposed bill would give the minister of employment and social services the power to change a law. The minister could amend, add to or remove provisions of a law simply by getting the consent of the finance minister and the Treasury Board president and issuing an order. This is unprecedented, and it could very well be unconstitutional.

To be clear, part 18 of this bill would allow a minister to bypass Parliament and amend a law by order. While I support the parts of this bill that would aid Canadians in this crisis, I cannot support part 18, and therefore I cannot support this bill.

I am wondering if the member could comment.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, we are in a national crisis and a global crisis in which we are facing unprecedented problems. People are struggling with unprecedented issues, so in this time, it is important for us to take bold measures.

While the government has proposed some strong measures to help Canadians, what I am calling for is more immediate help and more help. We need to do everything we can right now to stop COVID-19 in its tracks, and that means giving people the ability to stay at home. People cannot do that without financial supports.

Government Orders

I believe we have an opportunity now to do what is right to save lives. To do that, we need to make sure that people have money in their pockets, that they have a job to get back to and that their homes are protected. That is what we need to focus on and that is what I am asking the government to focus on as well.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, my first question was about guaranteed liveable income or a universal basic income, so I thank the member for responding to that. I am happy to see support in the House, and perhaps we could have further discussions about what that could look like in Canada moving forward.

I have a question about equality across regions and provinces in accessing materials and supplies for dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. There are concerns in New Brunswick that we do not have the public purse to acquire supplies directly at some of the high costs for things we are going to need moving forward.

Can the member comment on reassurances for some of the smaller provinces that are dealing with this issue as well?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, the member for Fredericton does an incredible job in her community. I want to thank her for bringing up the important issue around making sure that in a country as vast and diverse as ours, all regions are able to access the supports and equipment they need to be able to serve their communities.

This issue is of vital importance, and we need to continue to be vigilant in assuring that the government responds in a way that gives all regions, territories and provinces access to the resources they need to be able to respond to this crisis. This is a serious issue. It is a question of life and death, and I believe that if we make the right choices, we can ensure that all Canadians get access to the help they need and that we can deal with COVID-19 in a way that will allow us to walk out of this with our heads high.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to speak here today on this important issue.

We certainly are in unprecedented times. It is remarkable for me to be here today representing my own riding while also carrying the weight of those living in the ridings of my Green Party colleagues, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands and Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I have also been asked to share these comments on behalf of the independent member for Vancouver Granville.

I would first like to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. It is essential that we remember the historical and ongoing implications of those words and the responsibilities we bear toward indigenous communities across the nation, especially as we face this unprecedented crisis.

I know I am not alone in having made this bizarre trek to Ottawa to be present here for these proceedings. I made the 10-hour trip by car with my husband and two boys.

• (2935)

[*Translation*]

We stopped only to get gas and take a break. We followed all the recommended hygiene measures.

[*English*]

Of course, we did our best to entertain a toddler and a seven-year-old for 10 hours in the car. I think of the many families and households across the nation who are answering difficult questions from their children and trying to keep them entertained. I feel that too. I want to let the children of Canada know we love them and we are here for them too. We know this is a difficult time.

I would like to take this opportunity to also humbly thank many, many people: the front-line workers staffing our hospitals, stocking our grocery stores and keeping our communities safe; the businesses and educational institutions that are answering the call and mobilizing in a warlike effort to provide and manufacture and supplies that we need; Dr. Tam and her team for coordinating our public health response, as well as Dr. Bonnie Henry of B.C. for her incredible work; the tireless efforts of our cabinet ministers and their staff to coordinate a response to COVID-19 across government departments; and my colleagues here in this House and those practising social distancing at home for proving that in the face of a national crisis, we can and will work together for the people of this country.

We gather in these extraordinary times to pass extraordinary legislation. It will allow the federal government to reach out and help Canadians directly with their personal finances. It will allow help to reach the self-employed, small and medium-sized businesses and large corporations. I am very relieved that a compromise was found that allows us to pass this legislation today, albeit a bit later than we had hoped.

It is a fundamental principle of Westminster parliamentary democracy that Parliament controls the public purse. We cannot, even in a public health emergency, convey unprecedented powers without any oversight and without any criteria limiting those powers to any government, no matter how well-intentioned.

This is a defining moment for our country. I am prouder than ever before to be Canadian and to see the expedited response to this crisis. I am also so proud to be from New Brunswick. I commend Premier Higgs and chief medical officer Jennifer Russell for declaring a state of emergency. To the decision-makers of the neighbouring Atlantic provinces of Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and Newfoundland, I commend them all for making the difficult decision to close provincial borders to further protect citizens. I thank them for their leadership.

Government Orders

We have now seen more than a week of social distancing, of closures and restrictions. It is now the time for all Canadians to comply and do our part to get us through this together. Effective suppression would mean fewer cases of coronavirus, a fighting chance for our health care system and the humans who run it, a reduction in the number of total fatalities and a reduction in collateral damage. As well, it would give us the time for infected, isolated and quarantined health care workers to get better and return to work.

[*Translation*]

Canada has been quick to respond so far. Inevitably there are lessons to be learned to ensure that we are better prepared for this type of disaster in the future.

[*English*]

I am here to work collaboratively with my colleagues in government, but I must also point out the ways we need to improve so that we can get this right for Canadians.

I am sure we are all in the same boat when it comes to the level of correspondence with our constituents over the past few weeks. We have been hearing a lot of concern. One thing the situation has made clear is the inequalities within our society. COVID-19 has amplified the challenges people are already facing.

[*Translation*]

I am thinking of the Canadians who are living in poverty, especially those who are homeless.

[*English*]

Working Canadians have been laid off or are facing reduced work hours, particularly at a time when they feel financially insecure. Older Canadians living on a fixed income are worried about their pensions and investments. Indigenous peoples are facing heightened challenges in their communities.

[*Translation*]

It is not easy for Canadians living in rural areas to access health care services.

[*English*]

Permanent residents and other newcomers worrying about family abroad are trying to get home amidst travel cancellations. Our charities and not-for-profit organizations are losing their donor base right now and really need our support. We must also stay vigilant against those who want to profit from this crisis, and they are out there.

We are facing this giant together, but from very different vantage points. Almost a million people have applied for employment insurance. Our Green Party has been proposing a guaranteed livable income for Canadians for years, and if we had a GLI in place now, we would easily be able to ramp up payments to people facing layoffs and reduced hours without clogging the phone lines of Service Canada and scaring people who are afraid in their unique situations, leaving them without support. The government measures announced are now taking time to roll out because we lack the infrastructure to quickly disseminate direct payments to Canadians. We need to have a closer look at this issue.

It is also clear to me that if we had already made much-needed improvements to our health care system in areas that have been advocated by professionals, such as improved infrastructure, preventive health care and pharmacare, we would be much better situated to address the needs of Canadians in this COVID-19 crisis.

Best estimates of what lies ahead vary widely. We can all agree that the more we are able to maintain social distancing among those who are asymptomatic and maintain isolation for those who have symptoms, the greater our chances are of getting through COVID-19 without overwhelming the system. The extent to which individual Canadians and businesses can follow the advice provided depends on the extent of their financial ability to do so. People have to be in a financially secure position in order to take the public health advice.

When we talk about the economic impacts, it seems we have left some things out.

We have discussed a few of them here today. Renters, both residential and commercial, need measures to protect them from landlords who are not passing along the goodwill of the banks or who do not have the goodwill of their bank. New Brunswick and a few other provinces have made it illegal to evict tenants for nonpayment of rent. These measures are good, but they need to be standardized across the country.

[*Translation*]

We must do more for the small and medium-sized businesses that keep our economy moving.

[*English*]

As Dan Kelly, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, says of the wage subsidies, "It's the right measure, but it's the wrong amount."

Our assistance measures for businesses are being dwarfed by steps taken or being contemplated elsewhere. For example, in Denmark the government is offering up to 75% of wages, with the maximum payout per employee 10 times higher than the current offering in Canada. As well, there seems to be nothing for unincorporated businesses that have employees. This is a big concern.

New Brunswick is allowing small businesses to defer WorkSafe New Brunswick premiums for three months. The federal government could do the same for EI, CPP and HST.

Government Orders

These are trying times, but we do see examples of hope all across the country. I have seen jingle-dress dancers standing out in their yards dancing for all of our collective healing. I know that we have seen churches, synagogues, mosques and other places of worship adapting to a new reality and being steadfast in their support of spirituality and faith, which we need now more than ever.

These are emotional times for citizens as well, and we also must consider their mental health. We should get outside if we can, but we must maintain our social distancing. We can go for the online museum tours. Online zoo tours are happening. I have seen people making badminton nets out of tape. We can play Hide the Potato.

[*Translation*]

I have also seen people making Portugese-style or Quebec-style tortillas.

[*English*]

We are finding really creative examples to deal with this crisis. Let us keep it up. I urge us all to call neighbours, check in, do Face-Time with grandparents. We all have a responsibility here. Let us stay connected. Isolation can be a really difficult thing for each of us to face.

Many of us are setting an example by operating from home as well, and we can continue to play a leadership role here by exploring digital options for the work we do here in the House. Let us continue to have that conversation.

Today means passing this motion to ensure Canadians have the financial resources they need to make ends meet while we rigorously follow the advice of public health experts. We will get through this if we stick together, even if that means standing apart.

• (2940)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate hearing the member's contribution to this debate this morning.

She did mention inequality. There certainly are a number of different inequalities in this country, things that all of us here would like to address. One of them that I have heard from people is the difference in high-speed Internet access in many rural areas.

I would like to ask the member a bit about New Brunswick. Many people are finding some comfort, when they self-isolate to protect their families from COVID-19, in being able to communicate with the outside world through the Internet and in being able to make a living through telework. What are the member's thoughts on that?

I know that in my province of British Columbia, particularly in certain parts of my area, such as Logan Lake and Princeton and Keremeos, this is a big challenge.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, I come from rural New Brunswick, where we have faced issues with high-speed Internet access for quite some time. I know that people are trying to work from home or trying to do Zoom conferencing and find ways to communicate in this new reality that we are facing, and it is creating difficulties. We have not been able to communicate through phone calls with our staff members or other colleagues in Parlia-

ment. We need to look at what these services can provide to our rural communities as well as all of Canada with this new reality that we face.

The bandwidth just cannot handle what we are currently seeing. There is a surge of people binge-watching Netflix or whatever for entertainment purposes, and then there is certainly our work at home that we will need to be doing for who knows how long. We also need to ensure that everyone has access to those crucial connections to the people they love. I hope that we will continue to have these conversations in the House.

• (2945)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member in particular on her 10-hour car ride with two young children in the car. Being in a family with three children, I know how trying that can be. I congratulate her on that.

On the topic of children, I think that quite often in this discussion about what is going on with this crisis, we are neglecting to focus on what children might be going through. I am curious as to what her message is to children, as a parliamentarian and a leader in her community, and as to her message to parents who have to deal with children who might be experiencing more anxiety now as a result of all this.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, as a mom of a seven-year-old, I have seen that the seven-year-old understands more than the two-year-old about what is happening. He chats with his friends on his headset when he is playing video games to entertain himself during this time, and I have heard him ask his friends if they are worried about the coronavirus and if they are scared. I wait to hear what the response is and how he might handle that question, and I hear him reassuring his friends and saying that it is okay, that we are going to get through this and that there are people trying to help.

That would be my message. It is that even the kids know how hard everyone is working toward this common goal of fighting COVID-19 as a nation. That is what it is going to take to really get us over that peak: staying together, understanding how important it is to heed the warnings of public health and ensuring that we do stay connected.

My other message would be to change the narrative a bit about the social distancing. Let us focus on the physical distancing with social connection, because that is so crucial right now. We really need to protect that.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the incredible speech given by the member for Fredericton, touching on the trials of a family coming from 10 hours away and the hope that we have in coming together, while maybe physically standing apart. That was a beautiful analogy.

Government Orders

In our coming together, once we get past the first stage, the impacts of COVID-19 directly on health, there will be a second phase when we look at stimulus to get people back to work and ensure that people have good jobs. On that stimulus, I want to hear the member's thoughts on how we can ensure that the help goes to workers and does not end up giving a blank cheque to corporations without ensuring that guarantees or strings are attached to assure people and workers that they are going to have jobs.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

I have been asked by the media and some of my constituents about some of the comments that are floating around about perhaps bailing out the oil and gas industry or other corporations that are involved in different sectors.

My response is that we should first look after the individual Canadians, the workers. They certainly do need jobs to go back to. We just need to be really careful about the future that we are planning.

My hon. colleague from the Bloc mentioned that an economic crisis sets the stage for what is to come, so this is the time for us to make really bold changes to what we want to see in our future here in Canada. I think those bold changes include looking at expanding other sectors.

Of course, I am very supportive of things like renewable energy and other ways that we can maximize our energy output and still have Canadians feel that we have a great role to play on the global stage, but I feel we need to be careful about where we place our investments, understand how the markets are fluctuating and understand what that looks like moving forward in response to COVID-19.

We need to be cautious, but we need to focus first and foremost on the workers and the individual Canadians who need money in their pockets now.

• (2950)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:50 a.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the taking of the divi-

sion on the motion for second reading and referral to a committee of the whole of Bill C-13, An Act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that Bill C-13, an act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19, be read the second time and referred to a committee of the whole.

The Deputy Speaker: The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in the committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, deemed read at third reading and passed.)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to adjournment, on behalf of all members, I want to extend our appreciation, as has been mentioned here many times today, to the dedicated employees of this place and in our constituencies who continue to support members in their service to Canadians during these extraordinary circumstances.

[*Translation*]

I would be remiss if I did not express my sincere appreciation to the front-line health workers, public health experts and first responders across Canada for their courage and the boundless energy with which they protect the health and safety of Canadians.

[*English*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made earlier today, the House stands adjourned until Monday, April 20, 2020, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:52 a.m.)

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