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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 12, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday, March 10, the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon pointed out that the French version of Bill C-19 at subclause 239(2) does not have the same meaning as the same subclause in the English version.

We agree that on reading the bill, we see a significant difference between the two versions, because the receipt and counting of the special ballots do not appear to be done by the same body depending on the language in which one reads the bill. In one, it is the office of the returning officer in the riding, and in the other, it is in the national capital region. That is an anomaly and a significant flaw in the bill, and it has hindered debate in the House because, depending on which version an MP reads, French or English, they will have a different understanding of the special ballot voting process.

The problem is that at this point, members have no way of knowing the government's actual intention with respect to the administration of mail-in ballots.

As a side note, I would add that this is further evidence of the complexity and challenge of conducting parliamentary proceedings in both official languages. It also demonstrates the importance of paying close attention to this issue so that members can participate effectively and properly in parliamentary proceedings. The ultimate goal is to ensure that all of our constituents, whether francophone or anglophone, are properly represented regardless of the language in which their MP works.

As Bosc and Gagnon point out at page 734 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the Speaker can issue a ruling on this point, even going as far as directing that the order for second reading be discharged if a bill is in incomplete form.

This raises some important questions. Is the legislator's intent expressed in French or in English? Does the legislator think in French or in English? Finally, which version—French or English—should take precedence over the other?

I would ask you, Madam Speaker, to rule on this issue to ensure, at the very least, that the government will recalibrate and that members of the House are all on the same page as we continue to debate Bill C-19.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I thank the hon. member for bringing this matter to the Chair's attention.

The Speaker will rule on this issue.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (additional regular benefits), the Canada Recovery Benefits Act (restriction on eligibility) and another Act in response to COVID-19, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 11, Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (additional regular benefits), the Canada Recovery Benefits Act (restriction on eligibility) and another Act in response to COVID-19, is deemed concurred in at report stage on division.

(Motion agreed to)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 11, the House will now proceed to the third reading stage of this bill.

[*English*]

Hon. Deb Schulte (for the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion) moved that bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is quite a pleasure to speak to Bill C-24 at third reading.

Government Orders

Earlier in the week, I spoke on Bill C-24 at second reading. Back then, I emphasized how important the legislation was to the Government of Canada. Since the very beginning of the pandemic, the Prime Minister has made a commitment to have the backs of Canadians. Once again, we have legislation before the House that is absolutely critical with respect to supporting Canadians today and continuing to do so going forward.

When I spoke on the bill earlier in the week, I was somewhat upset and I expressed my feelings about the Conservative Party and how it was filibustering important legislation on the floor of the House of Commons. In fact, I recall citing a tweet by the member for Kildonan—St. Paul about importance of the legislation for workers. However, the Conservatives were filibustering important legislation during the pandemic, and we witnessed that during the debate on Bill C-14. At the time, I indicated that the only way the House could see legislation passed was if the Conservatives were made to feel ashamed of their behaviour. I am pleased that it would appear as if the Conservatives saw the merit, through a bit of shaming, in allowing the bill to pass. It is important to recognize that.

If we review what has taken place during the week, there are some encouraging signs, at least from some of the opposition parties. However, that is not universally held. I am afraid that the Conservatives still feel obligated to play that destructive force on the floor of the House of Commons, and I will expand on that.

Bill C-24 would provide badly needed funds, essential funds, to thousands of Canadians in all regions of our country. To see how we should proceed, all we need to do is look at the desire and what we have seen this week. I will cite a few examples of that. The reason I am doing this is because I want to encourage members of the Conservative Party particularly to recognize the true value of legislation like Bill C-24, and it appears the member for Kildonan—St. Paul has recognized it, and to see the value in passing it.

The best example I can think of is something that took place yesterday. We had very important legislation, Bill C-7, which is literally on life and death, before us. Because we are in a minority situation, it does not take very much to prevent the government from passing legislation. However, in this situation, the Bloc, indicated that it supported the legislation and would assist the government to bring forward closure. Had we not received that support, we never would have been able to advance it through the House of Commons and people would have been denied the opportunity to have access to this through this legislation.

● (1010)

Earlier in the week, we also had some indication from my New Democratic friends about Bill C-5, important legislation that is not necessarily as direct as Bill C-24 is with respect to the pandemic. Quite possibly it could be somewhat of assistance indirectly during the pandemic.

In this situation, the New Democrats said that they would like to have unanimous consent to allow that additional debate and ultimately see Bill C-5 passed in the House. Of course, much like with the Bloc's suggestion, the Conservatives outright said that they did not want anything to do with it. Again, it is not to come across as not being grateful for the Conservatives recognizing the importance of Bill C-24, but it is more so to encourage the Conservative Party

to look at what other opposition parties are doing to facilitate the passing of important legislation.

Bill C-24 was recognized the other day by the Conservatives when they stopped debate, allowing it to get out of second reading so it could go to committee. As a result, we are now at third reading stage today. We know that if the Conservative Party wanted to do more, it could.

For example, look at what the Conservatives did with the Canada-United Kingdom agreement, which is critically important legislation. It would have a direct impact, even during the coronavirus pandemic. The Conservatives requested unanimous consent for a motion with respect to the trade agreement, and we supported it.

It is important to recognize that my New Democratic friends, who have traditionally voted against anything related to expanding trade relations, also supported the motion to see the bill on the United Kingdom trade agreement pass through the House of Commons even though they opposed it. It is important to recognize that. The NDP and the Bloc have, on occasion, have recognized what I have been saying to the House for quite a while, which is that the behaviour of the Conservatives has not been favourable to the House of Commons in passing the legislation that is so badly needed to support Canadians during this difficult time. They have gone out of their way to frustrate the House of Commons and our desire to see important legislation like Bill C-24 passed.

I will continue to remind my Conservative friends that they have an important obligation to Canadians, as the government has since day one, to focus their attention not on an election, but rather supporting Canadians. One of the ways they can do that is by providing support on legislation such as this.

When I spoke on Bill C-24 earlier in the week, members of the Conservative Party were somewhat critical of me, saying that the government had just introduced the legislation so how could I expect them to pass it, implying that I was maybe not being as principled on enabling members to speak to important legislation. I want to assure members of the House that I have always been an advocate for members of Parliament to express themselves on legislation.

● (1015)

Many would say that I have no problem expressing myself on a wide variety of issues on the floor of the House. I am very grateful for the position that I have been put in by the Prime Minister and the support I get from my caucus colleagues. I often speak on behalf of many of my caucus colleagues in expressing frustration and in expressing support for initiatives that are being taken on the floor of the House of Commons.

The bill was introduced for the first time in February, and nothing would have prevented further discussion and additional debate if in fact—

Government Orders

• (1020)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary for a point of order from the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I am calling the member out on relevance. He is supposed to be speaking to the bill, but the only thing he is doing is talking about closure and trying to justify what the government did to Canadians last night.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On that point of order, Madam Speaker, I do not know if the member was here physically for previous debates on this issue, but if she had been aware of those previous debates, she would know that the Conservatives have been talking only about the timelines associated with this debate, so the member is actually directly addressing what a number of Conservatives have raised in regard—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is a matter for debate.

I will let the parliamentary secretary proceed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let me pick up on what my colleague just referenced.

The Conservative Party, as opposed to talking in great detail about Bill C-24, took the opportunity to be critical of me, although I have somewhat thick skin, by making accusations that we were trying to rush this bill through and that we were not allowing enough time. Maybe I was a little too harsh in my criticisms of the Conservatives. A number of them took a few shots at me, and that is fine. I am very comfortable with that.

The legislation is worth the effort. The Liberal caucus recognizes that this legislation has to pass in the House of Commons. We need it to pass, and I believe that a majority of members of the House will in fact support this legislation. Why? It is because it is putting money in the pockets of Canadians and it is responding to issues that have come out of the pandemic. If we were to review the debates at second reading, I suspect we would find a universal feeling that there is nothing wrong with the legislation, other than the fact that maybe we could be doing more, as my New Democratic friends have said.

A good part of what I am saying is to continue to nudge and encourage my Conservative friends across the aisle to look at what is taking place on the floor of the House of Commons and behave in a fashion that would allow for important legislation to pass. If they want more debate on government legislation, they should stop playing some of the games that we have witnessed.

For example, the concurrence motions have taken away at least a couple of days, many hours of debate on government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Again, Madam Speaker, the member has to speak about the current bill. He has not heard any resistance that Conservatives are going to vote one way or another. He is talking about the concurrence motion now. All he is trying to do is justify what the government did on Bill C-7. Part of the reason we wanted more debate on Bill C-7 was the fact it was supposed to undergo a five-year review, and that was not permitted.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): In answer to the hon. member's point of order, I remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that debate at this stage of the legislative process focuses on the final form of the bill. If that issue could be addressed, it would be much appreciated.

• (1025)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I do not have any problem talking about Bill C-24. I hope the interruptions and the time the member has taken will not be taken away from the limited amount of time I have to speak to this legislation.

I can assure the member I was not talking specifically on closure at the time she interrupted my speech, and I would ask her to be a bit more patient as I try to make the points that I think are really important. I would even suggest that she bring back to her caucus the thoughts and themes I tried to amplify over the last week regarding the behaviour of the Conservative Party on the floor of the House of Commons, the importance of providing support to Canadians and the fact that actions speak louder than words. Ultimately, that is why it is so critically important for bills like Bill C-24 to be passed. If time permits, I will provide further comment on this issue.

With respect to Bill C-24, there is support that goes far beyond the chamber. I cited some specific quotes from Canada's labour unions the last time I spoke; members can go back to that if they want to get a sense of what unions are saying about the legislation.

It is important for us to recognize that Bill C-24 would amend the Canada recovery benefits in three different areas: the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery caregiver benefit and the Canada recovery sickness benefit, which would extend employment insurance. I have already made reference on a couple of occasions to putting additional financial resources into the pockets of people who need additional support. The bill would amend the Employment Insurance Act to temporarily increase the maximum number of weeks for which the regular benefits of employment insurance may be paid for up to 50 weeks for claimants. That would put real dollars into pockets.

We often hear about the need to deal with individuals who have chosen to leave Canada and have treated it as an essential trip. Concerns were expressed that when they return and go into quarantine, it should not necessarily be the taxpayer who should be paying for it, whether directly or indirectly, so there are measures within the legislation to take that into consideration.

There are other benefits within the legislation. We would be increasing, as I said, the number of weeks available for employment insurance. There are supports for sickness benefits. The bill would also facilitate access for self-employment workers, for example, who have opted in to the EI program to access special benefits. It would do this by lowering the threshold workers must meet in order to qualify for the \$7,500 to \$5,000 in net self-employment earnings in 2020. There are some really good things in this bill.

Government Orders

In short, it is a part of the bigger picture of supporting Canadians. We saw that support from the beginning of the pandemic with the creation of the CERB program.

I have listed three other recovery programs. We are supporting workers directly through things like the emergency wage subsidy, but also indirectly with programs that also support small businesses, because supporting small businesses also supports workers and our economy.

• (1030)

The emergency rent subsidy program, the business account program, the credit availability program and the relief and recovery fund are all programs that required legislation at some point. In many ways, especially toward the beginning of the pandemic, we have seen a great sense of co-operation and support. Much of this could not have been done with the support that came initially from the opposition.

My appeal is that since we are still in the pandemic, Canadians still need us to work together. That is what I am asking. I am asking for the House to continue the same attitude that we had at the beginning of the pandemic. Canadians recognize that we are still in the pandemic, and we still need to work together in order to minimize its negative impacts.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with the House this morning.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is clear to me in listening to the member's repeated speeches this week that Conservatives are living rent free in the member's head.

Given that the EI program is funded by premiums paid by employees and employers and given that this year the premiums will not be enough to cover the costs of the EI programs, what is the government's plan to make up the shortfall in future years? Will premiums be drastically increasing or is the government considering a one-time payment to shore up the EI program?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I am a bit concerned with the question. Is the Conservative member trying to imply that we should not be making changes to extend EI?

I would encourage the member to reflect on his own constituents. He will then find that there is a real need for this extension. The good news is that in time, we will see a national budget, and that will set an outline that will provide all sorts of opportunities for hope from coast to coast to coast as the government continues to fight the pandemic and at the same time look at ways in which we can build back better our economy—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments; the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague has a lot to say about the Conservatives' supposed filibustering tactics.

Essentially, the purpose of Bill C-24 is to once again provide support to those who have been hit hard by the pandemic.

This week, the Liberals had the opportunity to do just that by supporting the Bloc Québécois's motion to increase the old age security pension by \$110 a month for people aged 65 and up. Why on earth did the Liberals vote against that?

Yesterday marked the one-year anniversary of the pandemic. Those who have been hardest hit by COVID-19 are seniors. Our seniors are already anxious about their health, and now, thanks to the Liberals, they are also anxious about their finances.

Why not support our seniors during this pandemic, as the Bloc Québécois requested?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I can assure the member that this government has been supporting our seniors. We understand the situation they are in and we have supported them significantly. I am sure that as we continue to go forward, we will see ongoing support for seniors.

This support is not new. Even before the pandemic, we saw historic increases, particularly in the guaranteed income supplement, which lifted literally hundreds of thousands of seniors out of poverty in our first mandate. That is not to mention the hundreds of dollars of additional money given to every senior in Canada as a one-time—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

• (1035)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about the EI sickness benefit. Twice now the House has voted for that benefit to be increased to 50 weeks, and it seems that it would have been a very easy addition to this legislation.

Could the parliamentary secretary speak to why his government has ignored the clear desire of the members of the House?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I do not believe one can accuse the government of not being there to support workers in Canada. We have brought forward progressive legislation. We have made adjustments to the CPP to ensure workers today will have more in the future when they retire. We have been encouraging provinces to do what we are doing, by providing additional support for workers who are sick. I would encourage my friend to talk with some of his provincial counterparts, as they also need to play a role in providing support for people who fall sick in the workforce. The provincial governments have more jurisdictional control over a larger number of workers, so I think we should continue to work together in advocating for workers and trying to protect their interests. I know this government, the Prime Minister, my caucus colleagues and I will be doing just that.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member has indicated that speaking to this legislation is worth the effort. I am pleased that he spent a portion of his time on this issue. I agree with him that COVID is a huge issue and we need to be there for Canadians.

Mental wellness is at an all-time low in Canada, so my question for him is this. If the legislation is worth the effort, why was there no effort on the side of the Liberals to stand up and speak to Bill C-7 and the huge changes made to it in the House yesterday?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I did have the opportunity to speak to the legislation. The member will find that in a minority situation the only way legislation can pass is if we have not only government members, but also opposition members supporting it, and there were.

On the issue of mental health, this is a government that has invested more money in mental health than Stephen Harper did in 10 years as prime minister, and we—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, when we saw how ludicrous it was to pay \$1,000 to people returning from a non-essential trip, the government was quick to announce that it was prepared to introduce a bill.

However, it wanted to pass that bill quickly, which would have required the unanimous consent of the House. We did not agree with that principle and told the government to introduce a bill to allow us to put the matter to bed quickly. The government waited until this week to do that.

Why did it take the government two months to get around to this?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, part of it is because games are being played by the opposition, in particular the Conservatives. For example, we were supposed to be debating Bill C-19 the other day, but a concurrence motion was moved, which prevented us from being able to debate that bill.

There are only so many days in the House in which the government has the opportunity to bring forward legislation. At the first opportunity we get to bring forward legislation, we attempt to do it. There is other legislation we have to try to get passed. Do members remember the days and hours the Conservatives held up Bill C-14? That prevented us from being able to look at other pieces of legislation. It is a finite amount of time. That is the reason why I spent as much time as I did at the beginning—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said the work we do in Parliament has a direct impact on our constituents. When it is delayed, they suffer because of that. At our staff meeting yesterday morning, one of our staff was saying she was getting a lot of calls from people who were

coming to the end of their EI and, because they were on CERB and then CRB, they could not go back on EI.

How important is it to pass this legislation so people can get the extensions they need? Could the member comment on that real-life situation?

• (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member has summarized the essence and importance of the bill in one minute, which took me almost 10 or 15 minutes to do. He is right on with his comments. I very much agree with him. It is critically important that we, as a collective House, recognize the legislation for what it is from that one-minute summation and get the job done. Let us support Canadians. Let us pass the legislation and Canadians will benefit from it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, speaking of real-life situations now and of workers who need our help, particularly those who are having trouble accessing employment insurance, there is a new e-petition out that I am proud to sponsor for one of my constituents.

The situation faced by long haulers is of serious concern. In this country, we need federal help to identify persistent symptoms of COVID after an individual is no longer infectious. We have to stop describing people as either active COVID cases or recovered. There are many people who have not recovered, and they are falling through the cracks.

I would urge the parliamentary secretary, within his caucus, to encourage the Minister of Health and all involved to protect these very vulnerable Canadians at this time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I truly appreciate the question. At the end of the day, we often refer to our health care workers as heroes, and they are.

However, we underestimate just how important our long-haul truck drivers are to our country, to our nation. I would like to thank them for the absolutely critical role that they have played in our economy and in our society. Of course we need to ensure that we do whatever we can to support that industry.

I give my word and my commitment to advocate very strongly for our long-haul truckers as—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona on a point of order.

*Government Orders***POINTS OF ORDER**

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I think the member for Winnipeg North will want to know that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands was referring to long COVID, a new medical condition that is emerging in the COVID crisis. I do not believe she was referring to long-haul truckers, although there may be some long-haul truckers who also have long COVID.

I want to address the point of order raised on Wednesday with respect to Bill C-19, on behalf of the NDP, to note that it is unfortunate that there appears to be a discrepancy between the two translations and that the mistake was made.

As the Speaker prepares a ruling on the matter, I would just signal that New Democrats are prepared and would like to see some kind of solution that does not see the bill set back at all. It is an important bill, particularly in light of the Prime Minister's refusal to commit to not calling an election unilaterally.

It is important that this legislation progress. We would like to see a resolution to this matter and a ruling that enables the possibility of parties working together to not set the progress of the legislation back at all, so that we can continue to move it along and have the conversations we need to have among the parties to ensure that we can agree on a fair set of rules for a pandemic election, should one come to pass.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I thank the hon. member for his contribution. It will be duly noted for the Speaker.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (additional regular benefits), the Canada Recovery Benefits Act (restriction on eligibility) and another Act in response to COVID-19, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to put further remarks on the record concerning Bill C-24, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, the Canada Recovery Benefits Act and another act in response to COVID-19. The four main changes in this legislation are as follows. It amends the EI Act, to temporarily increase the maximum EI benefit period from 26 weeks to 50 weeks for the period beginning September 27, 2020, and ending on September 25, 2021.

It also temporarily reduces the earnings threshold to \$5,000 from an original \$7,550 for self-employed workers who have opted into the EI special benefits period beginning on January 3, 2021, and ending September 25, 2021.

It also closes the leisure travel loophole in the original legislation that was passed in September, which permitted leisure travellers, when they were quarantining for two weeks, to access the CRB. As we know, this seems immoral and unethical. Thankfully this legislation moves to close that. Conservative members raised the alarm

on this loophole in December and January and here we are, three months later, finally closing that loophole.

The act would also bring in the Minister of Health, by amending the Quarantine Act, and the Canada Border Services Agency, by amending the Customs Act to share Canada recovery benefit application information. It would seem that this, in particular, is how they are going to audit applicants if they have applied for these monies following travel. Of course, there is essential travel for the purpose of supporting those with medical needs, or seeking medical treatment outside of the country. Obviously we understand that sometimes those benefits are necessary when returning from quarantine but certainly not from travel, as Conservative members have been raising for a number of months.

There has been a lot of discussion this week, particularly from Liberal members, which really began very aggressively this past weekend. The Prime Minister commented on this, and the Liberals really seem to want to paint a narrative that Conservatives were obstructionists on this legislation. This is completely untrue, and we worked very closely with parties to ensure that this was passed. I would point out that the first opportunity to debate the bill in the House was Monday. That was five days ago, and here we are. It has gone through second reading, to committee, and now back to third reading in only five days. I will remind members of the House that this is \$12.1 billion of spending that went through the legislative process in five short days.

Conservatives understand, as do Canadians, that the onset of the pandemic was an emergency situation. We were trying to get money out the door to the nine million Canadians who were instantly laid off because of pandemic closures. We can understand that legislation was rushed through at an unforeseen speed compared with normal legislative levels. Members of Parliament who have been here far longer than I will recognize that the speed of legislation passing in the House this past year has been exponentially higher than at any other time, probably, in Canadian history.

However, it is now a year later, and that excuse to pass legislation quickly, which of course diminishes oversight capabilities and our democratic process in the House substantially, is beginning to lose its steam. Again, in a panic situation that made sense.

That is why I was quite disappointed that the bill, which expands EI benefits from 26 weeks to 50 weeks, took so long for the Liberals to bring forward. In September, we came together as parties and voted in favour of the switchover from CERB to the CRB and EI extension. The EI extension was for 26 weeks, or half a year, which brought us to March 28 when those EI benefits would begin to run out, about two weeks from now.

Government Orders

The odd thing is that we knew the second wave was coming. With second waves, we saw incredibly strict lockdowns that lasted for months. In Manitoba, we saw very strict lockdowns and non-essential services were shut down. We saw stores where non-essential items were taped up and we could not buy them, at least not in person. People were ordering them online, but we could not go into a store and buy non-essential items. Restaurants were closed. It was incredibly strict for a number of months. That began in mid- to early November across the country.

We would think that with some foresight from the Liberal government, the 200,000 expert civil servants it has, and the access to international economists and notable financiers, it would have thought maybe half a year for EI benefits would not be enough. In my opinion, those discussions should have started in November. Maybe they did, but it took far too long for the Liberals to finally bring forward legislation that extended those 26 weeks to basically a year: 50 weeks, which was needed.

● (1045)

In November, these lockdowns were coming and people went through the holidays, and now some regions of the country are still in those lockdowns. Anyone would think that maybe that second wave would take away millions of jobs, and that is what happened, as we saw historic employment losses. I think 213,000 jobs were lost in that period. One would think that the Liberals, with all of the experts at their fingertips, would have established this legislation earlier; yet it was not brought forward until the end of February. Again, the first opportunity to debate it was on Monday. As I mentioned, the legislation would extend EI to 50 weeks, which would bring us to the end of September.

When legislation was first brought forward in September, while I cannot know what the Liberals were thinking, I would expect they thought that the situation in six months would hopefully have improved and that we would start getting those jobs back. Then again with the second wave, one would think that maybe this was going to go down and not up and that we were not going to get those jobs back. That is when this legislation should have been planned.

When we spoke to the Canadian Labour Congress officials at committee, they mentioned that they had raised the alarm with the Liberal government in early January that far more than 26 weeks was going to be needed. We know that the Liberal government is closely monitoring the labour market, so again I just do not buy it that the end of February was the earliest the Liberal government could have brought this forward. It has been done under the wire to ensure that it passes before the EI benefits run out on March 28. That is lightning speed, passing this five days from when we first debated it.

Here we are. It went through second reading, zoomed through committee and now we are at third reading. It is going to go to the Senate and I hope and pray that people get the benefits they need. There are three million Canadians who are depending on this money.

Again, \$12.1 billion for this bill was approved. That is \$6.7 billion for the CERB and \$5.4 billion for the EI extension. The only way to change the EI extension was through legislation, and we understand that. The CFIB and labour groups are supportive. As the

minister has pointed out to me and others, Bill C-24 is 11 clauses, but it is 11 clauses at a very steep cost.

I appreciate the robust debate, although it is very limited, we have had in the last five days. It is absolutely necessary. I very much hope that the Liberals did their due diligence on this, that we are not missing something and we will not be here in a month or two months from now fixing something that perhaps could have been caught had we had a longer time, perhaps an extra couple of weeks, to debate this. I think I have belaboured that point enough for now.

There is another issue with this, though, that I have addressed with the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion and the government several times over the last number of weeks. My colleagues in the Conservative caucus, as well, have brought up this very critical issue. The issue is the problem between the CERB and EI. If someone does not qualify for the EI extension, they can go on the CERB. However, if they have had an EI account or an EI claim recently, there is this very archaic EI technology that sort of hangs them up. They will have their EI account pending open; then they try to get the CERB, which families desperately need but cannot then get it because there is some sort of technology problem there.

I asked the CRA officials about it this week, and they said that millions of people do not have this problem. They are very proud, as they should be, to have gotten a lot of money out the door for people who need it. The official pointed out that there are only a couple of thousand people who are dealing with the CERB-EI issue.

Again, that is a couple of thousand Canadian families who are absolutely dependent on this funding and cannot get it because of this weird technology issue. If work had been done on this technology issue a year ago, recognizing that the archaic EI system would be put under a tremendous strain and they had planned for this and invested more money in technology than they have so far, which so far been ineffective at fixing this problem, I wonder if this problem might have been prevented.

Government Orders

I continue to raise the alarm on this, as do my Conservative colleagues, and yet it is just not getting fixed. The CRA told me that there is this number at ESDC that people can call. I asked the minister and she had not heard of it. Her officials checked and there is no number, but they have a task force to fix this.

• (1050)

Madam Speaker, I will mention on the record some of the people who are being impacted by this. I believe it is very relevant to Bill C-24 because this is the CRB-EI bill and yet there is a CRB-EI technology issue that is preventing thousands of Canadians from getting the support they desperately need and have been promised by the Liberal Government.

Laura has a sick 13-year-old daughter at home and is unable to claim the Canada recovery caregiver benefit because of this open EI claim issue. Jennifer, a young mother from the Windsor-Essex area, was forced to rely on credit cards because she kept getting bounced between departments. We hear this a lot. There are people being kicked around, being told that the government cannot deal with it and that they should call another person, and they call that person and are told to call another person.

Adam and Michelle, a Winnipeg couple with a newborn baby, have been calling CRA in shifts. We know, at tax time, calling CRA is an absolute nightmare. Right now, it is a nightmare times 1,000. People are calling, getting put on hold for four, five, six hours and getting disconnected passed around to other people. People are sort of kicking the can down the road and being told that some other bureaucrat will deal with it. I find it absolutely unacceptable that people are waiting for this money they have been promised. They need it. They have been laid off through no fault of their own and yet they cannot get through to the CRA.

There is nowhere physically that they can go. Service Canada has been closed for a year. There is nowhere they can go to ask someone to please help them. They cannot get through to a real person who can give them answers, and there is just really no fix for this. The minister has committed to fixing it, but there is no deadline for when that is going to happen and these people have been left with no option.

The last thing I will say about this is that there is a further complication. There is MyCRA account, which I have been locked out of as well, but over 100,000 Canadians' MyCRA accounts have been hacked, and so they have been locked out of them too. Apparently the CRA is telling people to go online and deal with it, but then 100,000 people have been locked out of their CRA accounts. I guess there are cybersecurity issues in this country and over 100,000 people's tax accounts have been hacked. That very serious problem is further impacting progress and payments for these thousands of Canadian families. I wanted to address this issue yet again and urge the Liberal government to do whatever it needs to do to fix this problem.

I would like to talk about what is not in this bill but should have been, or at least should have been part of the Liberal talking points, and that is how we get out of this. How do we get three million people currently relying on benefits off the benefits and back into the workforce? I do not know. I have yet to hear a plan, and that is of particular concern to me and I know opposition parties, in partic-

ular, the Conservatives. Now that it has been a year, we are raising the alarm. Where is the jobs plan on this?

The numbers are really astounding. We have spent unbelievable amounts of money. There are 3.17 million Canadians on some form of temporary COVID-19 assistance, and we know that over 831,000 people were on the CRB during the period of February 14 to 27. There are almost 1.8 million unique applicants for the CRB and \$12 billion has been spent to date, which is double what was originally planned by this date, according to the parliamentary budget office. There are currently over 2.3 million beneficiaries of EI, with \$20.21 billion being spent on them since September 21. These numbers are so huge, I cannot quite wrap my head around them, and more is being announced. As I have said today, we are to spend about \$12.1 billion as a result of this bill. Based on the track record over the last year of cost overruns, it is going to be significantly more than that.

I firmly believe that Canadians do not want to be sitting at home on employment insurance or the like. I do believe people want the integrity and honour of having a job. I do not think Canadians want to be sitting at home. From what I hear from my constituents, people are going a bit crazy at home, because they are stuck there with no jobs and the kids are out of school. It is absolutely unbelievable the stress that young parents in particular are under right now. I could get into that and go on, honestly, for days about the horror stories I have heard of the stress this is causing Canadians and my constituents.

The minister said yesterday at the HUMA committee that she did not want to come back to renew these supports via legislation despite rapid collaboration at committee. She made that commitment, in saying that she did not want to have to come back to fix some problem with this straightforward piece of legislation. I hope she is right. I hope we did not miss something and in a month from now to have to come back at lightning speed to fix this again, but we very well may.

Statements by Members

• (1055)

The problem is that in Bill C-24 there is essentially a sunset clause of September 25. That is when these CRB-EI benefits will come to a close. That is about six or seven months away, so I think we can all hope and pray that people will not need these supports then and that there will be jobs coming back. As I mentioned in my speech on Monday, September 25 kind of coincides with when the Liberal government has reportedly promised that every Canadian will be vaccinated who wants to be. I guess we could infer that if everyone is vaccinated, we could get the economy back to normal and jobs could come flowing back, but the Liberal government has not actually made that a definitive promise, that when everyone is vaccinated the economy can open up as normal and we can go back to normal. I do not know why it has not given us some sort of measures—

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the member. She will have four minutes to complete her speech after oral questions.

We go now to statements by members.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge Park.

in Business week. More than ever, we need to embrace opportunities to celebrate women who are leading and inspiring in our communities.

Some of the inspiring women in my community who are great role models are Barrie police chief Kimberley Greenwood; Barrie deputy fire chief Carrie Clark; Dr. MaryLynn West-Moynes, president and CEO of Georgian College; Janice Skot, president and CEO of RVH hospital; Barrie councillors Ann-Marie Kungl and Natalie Harris; Oro-Medonte councillors Tammy DeSousa and Cathy Keane, and Springwater township deputy mayor Jennifer Coughlin and councillors Wanda Maw-Chapman and Anita Moore. This is an amazing list of women leading in my community. I could go on, but there are too many to name in the time I have.

We still have ground to cover, but I am proud to be a part of a community that encourages women in positions of leadership. I send my thanks to all the inspiring women in leadership roles and the example they provide for all.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Girmalla Persaud, executive director of the Malvern Family Resource Centre and a community builder, on her retirement. Girmalla is a friend, mentor and leader. I have had the honour to work with her for over 20 years, and I have witnessed the transformative work that she has undertaken.

Girmalla became the executive director of MFRC 35 years ago, with just two employees and some rented space. Girmalla advocated for MFRC to have its own building, and in 2014 that dream was realized with the completion of a state-of-the-art, 20,000-square-foot space that offers intergenerational programming for toddlers, seniors and everyone in between. She transformed a fledgling organization to one that has over 65 staff and has helped so many turn their lives around.

Girmalla is blessed with an amazing partner, Rohan. She is also blessed with two sons, Robin and Devin, and their partners. I send my thanks to Girmalla for making our community better. I wish her happiness and joy in her retirement as she spends more time with her granddaughters, Nariyah and Savana.

* * *

WOMEN LEADING IN BARRIE—SPRINGWATER—ORO-MEDONTE

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, March 8 was International Women's Day and marked the start of the Barrie Chamber of Commerce Women

* * *

NATALE BOZZO

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to pay tribute to Natale Bozzo, owner and founder of the famous SanRemo Bakery. Natale tragically passed away with COVID-19 on February 18.

Natale was an incredibly hard-working man and an outstanding baker. He had a passion for food and the way it could bring a smile to anyone's face. He was as tough as steel and had a heart of gold. His passion was being at the bakery, as he loved bringing joy to people through his food. The number of condolence messages that have poured in in these past weeks show the love that our residents truly have for this great man, a great baker. He was selfless and taught his family to value everything, no matter how big or small.

With humble beginnings at the age of 15 in Canada to opening his own bakery, the SanRemo Bakery, in 1969, Natale had come a long way. He leaves an amazing legacy behind. Our sincere condolences go out to his loving wife, Nicoletta; his sons, Robert, Nicholas and Edward; and the entire family.

*Statements by Members***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the world is facing a global climate emergency, and the IPCC has said wealthy countries like Canada must cut their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030.

For the last 20 years, Canada has failed to bend the curve on its GHG emissions. As Tommy Douglas said in 1971:

...if we could mobilise the financial and the material and the human resources of this country to fight a successful war against Nazi tyranny, we can if we want to mobilise the same resources to fight a continual war against poverty, unemployment and social injustice.

Seth Klein, in his book *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*, has put forward four markers to get the job done: spend what it takes to win; create new economic institutions, such as a new generation of Crown corporations to get the job done; move from voluntary and incentive-based policies to mandatory measures with clear near-term dates; and tell the truth about the severity of the crisis and what is required to rise to the challenge.

* * *

[Translation]

MAURICE COHEN

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I wish to pay tribute to Maurice Cohen, a great Saint-Laurent man who passed away on March 5. Maurice Cohen was a man of the people and loved by all for his availability, his congeniality and his sympathetic ear. I will be forever thankful for his support and kindness.

He was borough councillor for Saint-Laurent for 35 years, never hesitating to stand up for the interests of the people of Saint-Laurent. Known for his involvement in the Jewish community, Mr. Cohen co-founded the province's first francophone Jewish public school, École Maïmonide de Montréal, and later the Petah Tikva Community Centre. Maurice Cohen was a caring and active man and will always be a role model and a source of inspiration to me and many others in Saint-Laurent.

On behalf of myself and the House, I offer my deepest condolences to his wife Raymonde; his children, Jacques, Gilles, and Thierry; and his entire family. Let us remember Maurice Cohen for all the good he brought—

• (1105)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

* * *

[English]

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, last night the Liberals rammed through a radical expansion of medical assistance in dying to include mental illness, demonstrating the height of recklessness on the part of this government. After all, only months ago, the Minister of Justice said that such an expansion would be fraught with risks, yet the Liberals proceeded anyway, absent a meaningful parliamentary study, absent a

consensus among experts and in the face of leading mental professionals who have said that persons suffering from mental health challenges will prematurely end their lives.

Last night's vote demonstrates what happens when a government puts blind ideology ahead of evidence-based decision-making. Shamefully, Canada's most vulnerable will pay the price.

* * *

THE GREAT LAKES

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week was Great Lakes Week. To mark the occasion, legislators and advocates from Canada and the United States met to plan for the future.

In Canada, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Group, which I have the honour to co-chair, held the binational, multipartisan meeting with 75 members of Congress, Canadian MPs, senators and binational groups such as the Great Lakes Commission, the IJC and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. At the core of our discussion were the benefits of binational co-operation. For example, 2022 marks 50 years since our Prime Minister's father signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement with our U.S. neighbours, an example of binational co-operation truly at work. Despite this example of success, there is much yet to do.

The lakes are an economic engine and a binational treasure that need our help. I look forward to the next budget and to Canada's strengthened Great Lakes commitment.

* * *

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we all know, March 8 was International Women's Day.

From Agnes Macphail, the first woman elected to this chamber in 1921, to the first gender-balanced cabinet in the G7, Canada has come a long way, but there is still a long way to go before women are genuine equals both in society and in political life.

Not a day goes by that I do not give thanks for the strong, capable women in both my personal life and my professional life. From my mother, who put herself through university after she had children so she could become a social worker, to my wife, who runs the largest medical dermatology practice in northern Ontario, to my daughter, who is studying business and playing university hockey at the University of Montreal, I am blessed with role models.

[Translation]

In recognition of all the strong women in my life, I applaud all women for their perseverance and determination day after day. We must continue to advance equality for all.

Statements by Members

[English]

On this International Women's Week, let us remember that empowering women and girls to equally participate in economic, social and political life benefits everyone.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we arrive at a sad milestone this week, the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadians are looking to the government for leadership and metrics for reopening our economy.

The world has had the tools to combat this virus for some time, with rapid testing and effective vaccines, but the government has been slow to implement both and has increased the suffering of Canadians because of it. Our businesses and exporters must make decisions for the upcoming summer. They need to know what the benchmarks are for reopening. When can they travel to meet face to face with customers to take orders, keep their businesses and maintain their export markets?

Other countries are so far ahead of Canada in terms of vaccinating their populations that our business community is at serious risk of being left behind in the global marketplace. This week, as the United States finishes fully vaccinating almost 34 million people to Canada's half a million people, our businesses want the Liberal government to be transparent and tell them what criteria are being used to reopen our economy.

* * *

• (1110)

NOWRUZ

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House virtually to speak to Nowruz. On Saturday, March 20, at 5:37 a.m., those of Persian, Kurdish, Turkish, Azari, Baluch, Afghan and Pakistani descent in my riding of Richmond Hill, across Canada and the world will be welcoming spring, joining at the haft-seen table and celebrating the new year of the Persian calendar.

Next Tuesday night at the Chaharshanbe Suri fire festival before Nowruz, many families will participate in the practice of the jumping of the fire chanting, [*Member spoke in Farsi*]. As we jump over the fire and light the candles at our haft-seen tables, we hope that the light and reviving of the nature will take away all the darkness and sorrow of the past year and bring forth lightness, hope, health and prosperity.

[*Member spoke in Farsi*]

* * *

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Liberals invoked closure on their motion that significantly altered Bill C-7 by expanding medically assisted death to those with mental illness. They did so at the absolute last moment possible in the parliamentary process.

I have received hundreds of emails, letters and calls in opposition to Bill C-7, in particular from persons with disabilities and groups that advocate for them. Many of them wanted more time to speak out in committee against Bill C-7. The government has now expanded Bill C-7 so that MAID will be accessible by those with mental illness. This was done with no consultation directly on this issue in the House of Commons.

I call upon the government to actually listen to those who are raising concerns with the changes made by Bill C-7 and be willing to address them through the upcoming parliamentary review.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal firearms bill, Bill C-21, will ban outright all airsoft guns, most BB guns and some paintball models in Canada, which are toys. This is not just a plan to destroy a pastime enjoyed by over 64,000 players in Canada; the Liberal law risks an entire industry worth \$100 million to the Canadian economy, and \$10 million of that is in Quebec alone.

Half the businesses in Canada tailored to these harmless hobbies expect to close for good. That includes businesses in Lakeland, such as Xcalibre Paintball in Boyle, Alberta. Many business owners say Bill C-21 is the bitter end of airsoft and paintball in Canada, and that includes most BB guns, which most of us probably remember target shooting pop cans with as kids.

Because of the Liberals, 1,500 Canadians will likely lose their jobs, and for what? The Liberal plan is to take legal firearms off the ranges and ban toys, while leaving illegal guns in the hands of gangs and criminals and reducing penalties for serious and violent crimes. It just makes no sense.

* * *

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, my office is receiving hundreds of messages every day about dental care. One senior said, "I live on a tight budget. In January of this year I needed serious dental surgery." To afford the \$1,800, she is living frugally by cutting her own hair, turning down her heat and walking rather than driving.

Oral Questions

Marisa needs over four thousand dollars' worth of dental work, but she gets only \$1,000 for dental every two years on disability. She is in extreme pain. Diane in Powell River worked for 41 years in an office, and her retirement income is \$1,400 a month. Every six months she pays \$264, which she cannot afford, to take care of her teeth. She needs to replace two old fillings, but at almost \$400, how can she?

Many constituents have said their last visit to the dentist was five years ago or more, with some saying it was 15 years ago. It is time we add dental care to the mix. Canadians are suffering without it. People's health depends on it.

* * *

[Translation]

CHRISTIE INNOMED

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wanted to rise today to highlight the extraordinary initiative of a business in my riding. Indeed, Christie Innomed and its president, Martin Roy, have generously donated 16 refurbished laptop computers to community organizations in Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

I am proud that my team and I acted as facilitators between these organizations and Christie Innomed. Thanks to these technological tools, seniors, disabled persons and the homeless will have greater access to the world. In addition, the company has suggested that they might be making further donations in the coming months.

Better still, the employees are following this example of generosity and have expressed their desire to volunteer in our community. This remarkable collaboration is strengthening the social fabric in our riding, giving the most vulnerable people a sense of belonging. This initiative is making a difference and is a wonderful example for everyone to follow.

I would like to thank Mr. Roy.

* * *

• (1115)

JOCELYN PAUL

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, Jocelyn Paul has just been promoted to lieutenant-general in the Canadian army. Jocelyn, whom I have known since we were teens, is a member of the Huron-Wendat nation of Wendake. He is proud of his roots and of his nation. Throughout his 35-year military career, he has carried out his duties with honour and dignity.

I got hundreds of comments on my Facebook page this week from people like Patrick Bédard, who served with him in Afghanistan in 2009. He said, and I quote, “When Jocelyn returned to Canada, he took the time to come see how I was doing and how my rehabilitation and recovery were going. He also spoke with my wife and children. This was greatly appreciated and is a testament to this warrior's sense of humanity.”

There are nearly 3,000 indigenous people serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, and there are programs to encourage indigenous peoples to enlist, such as the Carcajou program. Luc O’Bomsawin, an Abenaki man who sadly died a year ago, was a driving force behind this program.

As Jocelyn says, “What you [indigenous peoples] are doing by joining the Canadian Forces is what our ancestors have been doing from the very beginning.”

Lieutenant-General Jocelyn Paul is a source of pride and inspiration for his nation, our army and our country. Congratulations, Jocelyn.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 VACCINES

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to thank the countless women and men in Halton region and across Canada who are working non-stop to get our seniors and most vulnerable vaccinated. As of March 11, 17,884 Halton residents 80 years of age or older have booked their appointments to get vaccinated.

Hard-working Halton paramedics like Lindsay Henderson and Vanessa Vis, led by Greg Sage, and Halton public health staff, led by Dr. Hamidah Meghani, have been vaccinating seniors and priority health care workers daily and will continue to do so as more vaccines roll into Halton.

I also want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, who has worked tirelessly to bring vaccines to Canada. This week, Halton region will be receiving its first shipment of Moderna and an increase in vaccines in the following weeks.

I thank everyone who continues to keep us safe. Together, we will get through this.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, our Canadian military is embroiled in yet another troubling situation.

Yesterday, the CBC released the testimony of a retired military sexual assault investigator who says that Canadian army officers interfere with investigations into sexual assault cases. Worse still, we have learned that while civilian courts have a conviction rate of 42%, in the army only 14% of cases end in conviction.

When will the government take serious and effective measures to address cases of sexual assault in the armed forces?

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have no tolerance for any form of sexual misconduct. This is something we take very, very seriously. I want to acknowledge the courage of the survivors who have come forward. The minister has always ensured that any allegations that are brought to his attention have been reported to the appropriate authorities to begin investigations regardless of rank or position. Every person deserves a safe work environment.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, if the government were really as serious as the member claimed, it would not have appointed someone who had to resign a few weeks later because they are currently under investigation. That is so typical of the Liberal government.

This week, on *La Joute*, a television program on TVA, Jean-Marc Lanthier, a retired lieutenant-general, had some very harsh words to say about the prevailing situation, calling it a terrible shock to the institution and a major crisis, and saying that it undermined the credibility of the leaders, of the institution.

Why are former commanders of the Canadian Forces so outraged by the way the government is mismanaging the army?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government has no tolerance for any form of misconduct.

It is absolutely unacceptable that anyone who makes allegations of sexual assault or harassment be subjected to intimidation or threats. Although changing the institutional culture is a complex process that takes time, the time for patience has passed. We must make sure that anyone who wants to come forward feels safe to do so.

The women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces have our complete support to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was astounded to hear the member say the time for patience has passed.

Need I remind everyone that the Minister of National Defence knew there was a problem for three years but did nothing about it? The Prime Minister said he knew nothing about it for three years, then he said his cabinet knew about it, but he did nothing. When retired lieutenant-generals say something is not right, that means the government must act.

The Prime Minister is so concerned about his own image, but is he aware that Canada's image has once again been tarnished by his irresponsible government?

• (1120)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I said that the time for patience has passed.

All allegations brought to our attention were immediately reported to the proper authorities. In fact, the day after informing the minister about his concerns, the former ombudsman was contacted by the Privy Council Office to begin an investigation.

Politicians should not be doing the investigating. All allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment are always reported to the proper authorities.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe the parliamentary secretary is standing up and defending the actions of the Prime Minister of this country and the Minister of National Defence of this country, when they not only turned a blind eye, but continue to cover up these serious allegations. Maybe she can say it was not their responsibility to investigate, but it was the Prime Minister's responsibility and the Minister of National Defence's responsibility to follow through and ensure that this was investigated, that this woman was taken seriously and that she was not disregarded. By not doing so, they shamed and hurt—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the minister has said repeatedly, any allegations that were brought forward were immediately put to the proper authorities. In fact, the very next day, after informing the minister of his concerns, the former ombudsman was contacted by the PCO to begin an investigation.

I think we all agree that politicians are not the ones who should be conducting these kinds of investigations. Every single investigation of sexual misconduct and harassment is always referred to the appropriate authorities.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, well, as it turns out, the way the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence handled General Vance's allegations is basically how they handle most sexual misconduct: by doing the worst thing a leader could do when faced with harassment allegations. They say it is not a big deal and maybe she experienced it differently, then cover it up, claim it is not their job and allow it to continue.

That is what these two Liberal men did, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence. There is no defence for it.

Why did they fail the men and women in uniform so badly?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know it is evident in the Canadian Armed Force that there are cultural problems of intolerance, harassment and abuse, which are completely unacceptable. We are examining various measures to ensure that there are tangible supports for those who come forward with allegations of assault or harassment.

Oral Questions

It is clear that the measures we have done already, and those are many, since being in government have not gone far enough and have not moved fast enough. As we have stated, the time for patience is over. We will move faster.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, on March 25, the Government of Quebec is going to table its budget. That means that the federal government has less than two weeks to announce that it will do its part during the pandemic by increasing health transfers.

We are entering the second year of COVID-19, so we cannot stress enough that this is a public health crisis. It is a battle being waged by health care workers, so it comes with health care costs.

Will the government announce its intention to increase health transfers before March 25?

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, governments at all levels are working together to keep Canadians safe from COVID-19. As part of our response to the pandemic, we announced our \$19-billion safe restart agreement to help the provinces and territories restart their economies safely while we continue to respond to COVID-19. This funding is in addition to the \$40 billion we already provide the provinces and territories each year through the Canada health transfer.

We will keep working with the provinces and territories so that we can fight COVID-19 together.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are talking about health transfers, so I will try again.

Quebec is going to table its budget on March 25, and Ontario is tabling its budget one day earlier. I repeat: Quebec and all the provinces are calling on the federal government to do its part by increasing health transfers.

If the government does not at least announce an intention to increase transfers within the next two weeks, then Quebec and the provinces will have to make tough choices to once again compensate for federal underfunding.

Will the government finally announce that it understands the pressure that the pandemic is putting on health care workers and that it is going to—

• (1125)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have sent billions to support the provinces and territories through the safe restart agreement and to help health care systems

across the country. We provided additional support in the fall economic statement. We will continue to be there for Canadians, all Canadians, to keep them safe from COVID-19.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, when the heritage minister appeared on the show *Tout le monde en parle* last November, he said that web giants would finally be forced to pay taxes as of the next budget. Surprise, surprise, the Liberal government just ruled out tabling a budget in March, so this is being postponed once again.

It turns out that the Prime Minister is not the only one who wants a spring election. The crooks who run the web giants and rake in huge profits year in and year out must be on their knees at St. Joseph's Oratory, praying that they will get to keep saving billions of dollars in taxes.

The minister promised Quebecers that GAFA would be taxed soon. When will he deliver on that promise?

[English]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we all have a choice of whether to complain or take action for change. Our Broadcasting Act has not been revised since 1991, when we were still renting movies from stores rather than streaming services. Times have changed, and we are modernizing the Broadcasting Act to make sure that web giants pay their fair share for our Canadian stories and music. I hope the member opposite will be willing to commit extra hours at committee so that we can act together for the necessary changes to our outdated Broadcasting Act.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, B.C. prawn fishers are worried about their livelihoods, as DFO is changing its interpretation of the prawn fishing regulations, which have been in place for 50 years with no issues. In two days alone, I have received over 1,000 emails from those in my region.

Changing the regulations without reason or warning would be devastating. Will the minister explain what is happening at DFO? How many announcements will she make with no plan in place? Will she give assurances to workers that their jobs are not on the line?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government supports a precautionary approach to fisheries management, one that prioritizes the health and conservation of stocks.

Monitoring and enforcing size limits within the commercial prawn fishery are a critical part of this approach, as it helps ensure the prawns are being harvested sustainably.

We have assured industry that the coming season will be a period of transition and awareness as we work together towards a long-term solution.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week, the European Union and the United States announced sanctions against the Russians responsible for their repression of Alexei Navalny and protesters, yet Canada remained silent.

Human rights activist Vladimir Kara-Murza called Canada's reluctance baffling and inexplicable.

Why is the government not working with our allies to maintain rules-based international order?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada strongly supports the decision made by the United States and the EU on the adoption of sanctions against the Russian officials responsible for the arbitrary detention, prosecution and attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny. Two of the four individuals targeted by the EU have already been sanctioned by Canada.

When it comes to further sanctions from Canada, all options are on the table. We continue to call on Russian authorities to immediately release Mr. Navalny and all those being detained for exercising their rights of freedom of speech and assembly.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government is not acting multilaterally. Last month, the FBI placed Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin on its most wanted list for interfering in the 2016 U.S. election. Twitter released evidence that Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency has targeted Canada with thousands of disinformation tweets.

Oligarchs target Canada with disinformation, target members of the government and undermine our democracy, yet the government fails to sanction them. Why is the government not working multilaterally in joining our allies and applying Magnitsky sanctions on oligarchs like Prigozhin?

• (1130)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said, we have already targeted two individuals with sanctions. The EU had them on its list.

We will continue to keep every option on the table. We will continue to work multilaterally and continue to express our strong concern so that Russian authorities immediately release Mr. Navalny and immediately allow those who are being detained to exercise their rights of freedom of speech and assembly. We will continue to do this and do it multilaterally in constant conversation.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, last month, Parliament recognized that a genocide against Muslims is taking place in China. This week, a coalition of experts, including two former Liberal ministers of justice and a former Liberal minister of foreign affairs, concluded that a genocide is taking place. This week, the United States called out China at the United Nations for this genocide. Yesterday, Roméo Dallaire, who witnessed the Rwandan genocide, said a genocide is taking place and the government must act.

When will the government recognize that a genocide is taking place in China?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the member knows that I take this issue very seriously, as does our government. We are aware of the independent reports and are aware of comments made by others, and we will continue to address the situation.

It has been addressed by this Parliament. We take these issues seriously. As we have repeatedly said, we remain deeply disturbed by troubling reports of human rights violations in Xinjiang, and we take allegations of genocide very seriously. We will work in collaboration with allies and others to make sure that we have those opinions expressed clearly and strongly to China.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced that from now on, indigenous fishers would have to keep to the same fishing seasons as traditional fishers in the Maritimes and Quebec. There was a public outcry to this announcement in all of the coastal communities affected, both indigenous and non-indigenous, which were upset that they had never been consulted.

Now that the government has made this unexpected statement, what does it plan to do to ensure the survival of all of the coastal communities that depend on the same resource?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is committed to an approach that recognizes first nations treaty rights, that focuses on conserving and ensuring the sustainability of fish stocks, and that allows for stable and transparent fisheries management.

Fisheries officers are responsible for enforcing the Fisheries Act for all fishers, and anyone fishing without a licence is subject to sanction. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is committed to working with all parties to ensure a safe, orderly and sustainable fishery for everyone.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, on March 3, DFO tweeted a statement from the fisheries minister that was supposed to be “a new path for First Nations who want to fish in pursuit of a moderate livelihood this season.” Indigenous and non-indigenous harvesters have rejected the minister's statement, and now she is the only one on her new path.

No Canadian wants to see a repeat of the chaos that the minister's mismanagement created last fall, but her inability to provide any clarity is only increasing uncertainty and tensions. We know that where there is uncertainty, there will be instability.

When will the minister provide a clear and full plan for implementing treaty rights for the sake of all harvesters?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the court affirmed the first nations treaty right to fish, and we have never stopped working on implementing that right.

This is a path that allows first nations to exercise their right safely this season before a final agreement is negotiated. Seasons ensure that stocks are harvested sustainably, and any approach has to be based on conservation of stocks and stable and transparent management of the fishery.

- (1135)

[English]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Madam Speaker, on March 3, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard issued a statement that was supposedly meant to bring clarity and certainty ahead of the spring lobster fishery. This 180° change in direction has failed to set a path that would bring back peace, security and fairness for all participants in the lobster fishery.

We did not get an answer for the member for Tobique—Mactaquac. However, could the minister confirm today in the House when the details of her so-called interim plan will be finally disclosed?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is committed to adopting an approach based on recognition of first nations treaty rights, conservation and sustainability of fish stocks, and transparent and stable management of the fishery.

Lobster stocks are healthy, and this approach, which includes established fishing seasons, will ensure that stocks continue to be harvested sustainably and will ensure stable and transparent management of the fishery. Conservation is a priority for all fishers, including first nations, and they will all benefit from an orderly and peaceful fishery.

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, thousands of people discovered they were victims of CERB fraud and would have to pay income tax. Then the CRA investigated and decided, based on its findings, that the victims will not have to pay that income tax.

The problem is that the investigations are taking forever. The deadline for filing tax returns is coming up soon, but the CRA is telling victims to pay and be reimbursed later.

This fraud is the government's fault. It chose not to check CERB claimants' identity. Can it show a little respect and leave the victims in peace during the investigations?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the CRA is very serious about protecting taxpayers' information. It has put in place robust safeguards to identify fraudulent emergency and economic recovery benefit claims. Canadians who receive a T4A for CERB payments they did not claim should contact the CRA as soon as possible. Victims of fraud will not be held responsible for any money paid out and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is obviously not calling on the Canada Revenue Agency to support these victims of fraud. It is taking a tremendous amount of time.

Victims of CERB fraud should not have to pay taxes on money they never asked for and never received, even if Ottawa is promising to reimburse them. People have seen how the government did with the Phoenix pay system. They have no idea how many months, years or even decades it will take for them to get their money back.

The government is the one that decided not to check CERB claimants' identity so that it could get the money out to people quickly. That was the government's choice, and the government needs to take complete responsibility for it.

Will the government leave fraud victims in peace until the investigation is complete?

[English]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will repeat these lines in English, just so I am clear. The Canadian Revenue Agency takes the protection of taxpayer information very seriously. We have put in place robust safeguards to identify fraudulent emergency and recovery claims. We will work with the victims of fraud and they will not be held responsible for any money paid out to scammers using their identity.

HEALTH

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals defend their hotel quarantine program despite reports of sexual assault, scarce food and water, unsafe living conditions and unanswered calls for help. This week the Liberals admitted they had no science or data to back up their hotel quarantine rule in the first place, but the public safety minister also said that home quarantines were “working”. The only evidence the Liberals really have is this: their mandatory hotel quarantine puts Canadians in danger.

Will they shut it down right now?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada has some of the strictest travel and border measures in the world. However, with new variants of concern, we know that we need to take further steps to protect Canadians from COVID-19 and COVID-19 variants. We have been clear from the start of this pandemic that no one should be travelling. Doing so can put people and their loved ones at risk. We will always act to protect Canadians.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Madam Speaker, throughout this pandemic we have consistently seen the government institute policies without taking into consideration the impact they would have on women. The government's continued refusal to do a GBA+ analysis on its policies has resulted in women being placed in unsafe isolation scenarios that leave them vulnerable without the assurances they need to feel protected.

When will the Liberal government suspend its hotel quarantine and do a rigorous review of this policy, including a GBA+ analysis, to ensure women are safe and secure?

• (1140)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her hard work and passion on the GBA and women's file. I would like to give her confidence that since 2018, the GBA+ lens has been put on every guiding framework for budgeting processes in Canada. It promotes equality throughout the federal budget process.

Since 2015, nearly 200,000 public servants, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff have taken the GBA+. I encourage everyone to do so.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government has completely bungled its quarantine hotel scheme. The Conservatives have been calling for a post-arrival testing regime since the beginning. The Calgary International Airport pilot project showed that this could be done successfully.

I recently met with travel agents to discuss the impacts of COVID on the sector and its path to recovery.

When will the government abandon its failed hotel quarantine debacle and instead implement post-arrival testing?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada has some of the strictest travel and border measures in the world. New variants of concern have made it very important that we take further steps to protect Canadians from COVID-19. We have been clear from the start of

Oral Questions

this pandemic that no one should be travelling. We have to get that message through. Doing so can put people and their loved ones at risk.

From the start, we have had the safety and health of Canadians in mind, and we will always act to protect that.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, with all due respect, the answer to that question is absolute garbage. I ask him to get off the talking points. Canadians returning can drive across the border and avoid this quarantine hotel. It is politics above science. We actually have something that will work: rapid testing for pre-departure and arrivals.

When will the government admit that this is politics over science and cancel this horrendous hotel quarantine program?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just for a moment, let me clarify that it is that party on that side of the House that has always put politics over science.

From day one, our response to COVID-19 has been guided by science and evidence. We are working closely with provinces and territories to ensure they have the tools to respond to COVID-19, and that includes millions of items of PPE, rapid tests, millions and millions of rapid tests, and on-the-ground support through the Canadian Red Cross.

This gives me a moment to thank our amazing health care workers, caregivers and essential workers for their tireless efforts in these challenging—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The hon. member for Victoria.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canada has missed every single climate target. We are the only G7 country whose emissions have actually increased instead of decreased since the Paris Agreement.

Oral Questions

The world's top climate scientists are telling us that the next 10 years are the most important. We need climate action, a just transition for workers and climate accountability now, not a decade from now.

The Liberals promised milestone targets every five years, but then left 2025 out of their climate bill. Are they that scared of accountability or do they not agree that the next 10 years are the most critical? Why will the Prime Minister not commit to a 2025 target?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act has robust accountability and transparency. Just to name a few aspects, it has a legally binding process for the federal government to set climate targets and bring forward plans to meet those targets, rigorous ongoing progress reports, yearly reports by the independent advisory body and ongoing audits by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development.

The minister has been very clear in his willingness to consider amendments, but those amendments can only begin to be considered by the committee. I hope the member, her party and other climate supporting MPs in the House join us in moving this bill to committee as soon as possible.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday, more than 30 organizations called on the Prime Minister to support a temporary waiver of certain intellectual property rights at the World Trade Organization.

The TRIPS provisions treat vaccine technology and knowledge as the private property of pharmaceutical companies, but the research was paid for with \$100 billion of public funds from across the world, including Canada.

The purpose of the vaccine is not to pad the pockets of multinational corporations; it is to protect public health and get the economy back on track.

When will the Liberals stop putting profit before people and sign on to this important initiative?

• (1145)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Innovation and Industry), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is important for our government that there is a just global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Canada is a strong proponent of a multilateral rules-based system within the WTO context. We are committed to ensuring strong, resilient global medical supply chains and have reached out to the waiver proponents to better understand their concerns.

* * *

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week we are celebrating women and the role they play in our society. While we have made a lot of progress towards equality, we know we have a lot of work left to do. The COVID-19 pan-

demic is disproportionately impacting women, as well as racialized and indigenous communities. Some are calling it the “she-cession”.

In December, the government launched the 50-30 Challenge to encourage gender parity and representation at the decision-making table. Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry please provide an update on this program?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Innovation and Industry), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her tireless advocacy and for her very timely question.

Research, as she knows full well, shows that diversity in leadership leads to better business outcomes. To this end, our government launched the 50-30 Challenge several months ago. This program seeks to amplify the voices of women and other under-represented groups in our corporate boardrooms. The member will be happy to know, as will other Canadians, that to date, 1,000 Canadian companies across our country have not only—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, in 2018 the Liberals attempted to cut \$2.5 million from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's accessible book program, but the disability community fought back. Non-profits NNELS and CELA now administer the program and provide three million Canadians who have reading disabilities with access to books and resources at no extra cost to them.

This year, in the middle of the pandemic, the Liberals plan to cut \$4 million from NNELS and CELA. These organizations provide access to Braille, audio books and other accessible reading materials to Canadians with disabilities. This cut is just wrong.

Will the minister commit to restoring their funding, yes or no?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we strongly believe that everyone should be able to access information and reading material. That is why we signed on to the Marrakesh treaty four years ago and why we have been working closely with all stakeholders, including disability groups and the publishing industry, on an agreed-upon plan to transition the industry to one in which books are born accessible.

We know that the pandemic has impacted the timeline and the realization of this transition and we are working with stakeholders to ensure that they are supported and that alternate-format materials remain available. I am confident that we will find a solution—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, he did not answer the question.

Many seniors across Canada are like my 98-year-old grandmother, living in long-term care homes with limited social and family contact that has been further reduced by the pandemic. Many have visual impairments or are legally blind. They are dependent on much-needed accessible reading materials that are provided through the CELA and NNELS organizations.

This is even more critical in rural Canada, where access and resources are limited, yet the Liberal government has decided to cut \$4 million in essential funding for them. Why? My 98-year-old grandmother and millions of Canadians want to know.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I stated prior, we strongly believe that everyone should be able to access information and reading material. I am confident that we will find a solution that keeps us on the path to accessible publishing and we will continue to work with our partners in the disability community to make sure that we have a barrier-free and accessible Canada.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, to the demands of Canada's Iranian and Jewish communities that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps be added to Canada's list of terror groups, the minister deflected, saying four proxy IRGC agencies, including the Quds Force, are already listed. That listing, by the way, was in 2012, by our Conservative government, and when this House voted overwhelmingly to list the IRGC in its entirety, the member for Scarborough Southwest cast a yea vote.

Can the Minister of Public Safety explain his change of mind?

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the list of terrorist entities is an important tool in preventing crime in Canada and granting authority to our intelligence agencies.

Oral Questions

We rely on the expertise of those agencies to ensure that any new organizations are added to the list, and I can assure members that our intelligence and law enforcement agencies are doing an outstanding job of protecting Canadians and keeping us safe.

* * *

[*English*]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, Essex-Windsor has one of the largest advanced manufacturing hubs in Canada, with over \$3.3 billion in GDP and 1,000-plus manufacturers creating thousands of high-paying jobs. This does not include those servicing these businesses, its supply chain and those who export their services to the U.S., accounting for another \$1 billion in GDP.

When will the government end punitive measures at the border and designate the owners, employees and customers of these businesses as essential commerce?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to take this question from my colleague, because supporting small businesses and our exporters is exactly what the government has been doing since day one of the pandemic.

I would be happy to sit down with my colleague opposite to discuss these particular issues.

Let me remind all members of the House of the fantastic news we received this morning regarding our job numbers. We now have the lowest unemployment rate since the start of the pandemic. This is good news for Canadian workers and for our exporters. I would like to thank all Canadians for helping us create 260,000 jobs in February.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, there is nothing more quintessentially Quebecker than the sugar shack as a business model.

It might even be too quintessentially Quebecker. As the Bloc Québécois has repeatedly pointed out, sugar shacks are falling through the cracks when it comes to help for businesses, and Ottawa never seems to know what we are talking about.

Oral Questions

Sugar shacks make their entire annual income in two months in the spring. This means that after losing the entire 2020 season during the first wave of the pandemic, they are going to lose another full season with the second wave.

When will the government bring in targeted assistance for sugar shacks?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we all want to support our sugar shacks.

I know how important this industry is here in Quebec. I would like to remind my hon. colleague and all Quebecers that Quebec's unemployment rate sits at 6.2% today. This is roughly the same unemployment rate as that before COVID-19, and we are very proud of our entrepreneurs, including our sugar shacks, who continue to work hard to create jobs.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, we must act now. The situation for sugar shacks is urgent because 75% of them could go bankrupt this spring if the government does not do something about it.

As sugaring season begins, I would remind the government that the majority of Quebecers are locked down in a red zone. Sugar shacks could lose all of their sales two years in a row and there is no federal assistance that meets their particular needs.

Part of Quebec's identity, part of our land and heritage that is enjoyed around the world, is at risk of disappearing. When will the minister do something?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that our sugar shacks are an important sector of activity for our rural regions.

We want to help them through different programs, as we have been doing with several small businesses. I would like to take this opportunity to note that the maple syrup industry had a record year last year. I want to congratulate the sugar shacks and we will continue to work on this.

I also want to encourage all my colleagues to rise to the "sugar shack at home" challenge. It is a great way to support our sugar shacks.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals are seeking to target law-abiding firearms owners with onerous new rules, all the while eliminating mandatory jail time for serious firearms offences, including weapons trafficking and robbery with a gun.

Why is it that when the Liberals talk about getting tough on guns, they mean getting tough on law-abiding Canadians while going soft on criminals?

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are in no way targeting legitimate, law-abiding firearms owners, such as hunters and farmers. That is neither our intention nor the effect of the bill we introduced. We know the Conservatives want to weaken gun control in Canada, whereas we have always sought to strengthen it.

That is not all we are doing. We are investing in our border services and law enforcement agencies, such as the RCMP, so they can crack down on smugglers and traffickers. In fact, Bill C-21 increases the penalty for arms trafficking and smuggling from 10 to 14 years. These measures strengthen gun control, which the Conservatives did not—

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

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, on this fine Friday, I have one little question for the Liberals: Who will pay the federal debt?

All the Liberals have done since coming to power is drive Canadians deeper into debt and line the pockets of their Liberal pals. This is unprecedented. While the Liberals throw money at their friends, the debt is skyrocketing. What comes next?

Canadians will have to pay the Liberal debt because debts must be paid, along with hefty interest.

When will the Liberals release their reopening plan and economic recovery measures to protect future generations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I must once again tell our esteemed Conservative colleagues that it is important—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister is having connection issues. We can hardly hear her.

[English]

I believe you have connection issues, Minister. We are hearing you very badly and in slow motion.

[Translation]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, should I continue, or do you want me to ask another colleague to respond?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I think it would be best to have someone else respond.

The hon. Leader of the Government in the House.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would ask my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis where, exactly, he would make cuts.

Canada is making investments to help society as a whole, including our seniors, young people and families, through programs like CERB and the wage subsidy. In all of this, our main goal is to leave no one behind and to be there for all Canadians.

Can my colleague tell me where he would make cuts?

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again Canada could fall behind as a result of the Liberals' weaker version of NAFTA. After a three-year grace period, there will be tariffs if we do not regionally source the vast majority of lithium for electric vehicles.

The government makes big plans and promises for a green transition, but there is a problem: Approval for new projects will take at least three to 10 years. The anti-pipeline Impact Assessment Act is also creating uncertainty for the Liberals' green transition.

Will the Liberals finally admit it is time to repeal Bill C-69?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we committed to Canadians that we would not only take action to reduce our GHG emissions and meet and exceed our Paris Agreement targets, but also do so by growing the economy at the same time. That is what we are delivering on and have delivered on over the last five to six years. Just look at our most recent strengthened climate plan, which not only shows in detail how we are going to reach and exceed our Paris Agreement targets, but also how we are going to create well-paying jobs in the process. It is what Canadians expect from us and it is exactly what we are going to deliver on.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, over the past year, we have all recognized the importance of being active and getting outside, in accordance with health guidelines, of course.

Canadians are starting to think about the kinds of investments that could contribute to a strong and sustainable economic recovery. I was pleased to learn that the federal government will be making a significant investment in what is referred to as active transportation.

Could the Minister of Infrastructure tell us more about how the government plans to help expand networks of community pathways across the country?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

We are the first federal government to commit \$400 million to building and expanding better pathways and bike lanes.

Active transportation is fun, healthy and better for the environment. It helps Canadians save money and makes communities more accessible and more connected. The projects can be done quickly, and they create jobs and foster economic development, while leaving communities healthier and more connected.

* * *

● (1200)

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, Enbridge's Line 5 is critical national infrastructure, but like the entire Canadian resource sector, it faces phasing out because of the Liberals' energy policy. The minister has said, "We are fighting for Line 5". However, Canadians are asking if the Liberals actually back this pipeline or if it is simply another hollow and hypocritical promise like their failed silence on Keystone XL. Maybe they only care about fighting when it affects regions of the country where they actually get a few votes.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Line 5 is non-negotiable. People will not be left out in the cold. There are hundreds of thousands of homes on both sides of the border that depend on it for heating. Tens of thousands of jobs on both sides of the border depend on it. We take threats to Canadian energy security very seriously. We are standing up for energy workers.

Crude oil exports, by the way, are at pre-pandemic volumes, with four straight months of GDP growth and 6.1% growth in the last quarter, the largest of any sector in our economy by far.

We are proud of our energy workers. They are leading the way.

Oral Questions

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government has indicated that it plans to finally move forward with a parliamentary review of Canada's medical assistance in dying legislation, nearly one year late. Persons with disabilities and mental health advocates are worried that their concerns will continue to be ignored. They are concerned that engaging in the process will be a waste of their time. Can the minister confirm that all options will be on the table in this review, including reversing some of the changes pushed through in Bill C-7?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday, we moved a very important step closer to passing the critical changes to medical assistance in dying, through Bill C-7. We listened through this process to more than 300,000 Canadians. We heard from countless experts. We spent more than 45 hours of debate on this important legislation. However, the job is clearly not done yet.

We finally brought the unfortunate obstruction by the official opposition Conservative Party to an end in the House. Now it is up to the other place, the Senate, to complete this bill's journey so that these critical changes can become law and suffering can end for Canadians.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, last night, Canadians watched on *The Fifth Estate* as Jessica Miller revealed her experiences of sexual abuse by a superior while at sea. Under the guise of Operation Honour, she hoped for justice. Instead, like so many others, her perpetrator received a code of conduct discipline violation, no criminal charges and a move to a posting of his choice.

The minister sat on his hands for three years after learning of sexual misconduct allegations against General Vance.

Why is the minister failing to protect women in the military?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that every single woman who serves this country in the Canadian Armed Forces deserves to be safe while doing so. We have no tolerance for misconduct. It is unacceptable that anyone with these allegations of assault or harassment who comes forward would themselves be victims of bullying or threats. Though institutional culture is complex and change takes time, as I said earlier, the time for patience is over. We need to make sure that everyone who comes forward feels comfortable doing so, and I encourage them to come forward.

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SENIORS

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, seniors have faced immense difficulties during the pandemic. They have needed extra support to deal with the challenges created by COVID-19. The New Horizons for seniors program is an example of the community-level projects we can fund to make a difference

in people's lives. Can the Minister of Seniors please tell us what this program is doing for seniors in my riding and across Canada who need support in their day-to-day lives?

● (1205)

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his important question and his advocacy on behalf of seniors.

The pandemic has been hard on all of us, but it has been hardest on seniors because they are at a greater risk. Our government was able to quickly enable organizations to modify New Horizons for Seniors projects. Our fantastic community partners took projects that were meant to be done in person and moved them online, or shifted to address new needs like the delivery of groceries or medication. In total we funded over 2,000 New Horizons for Seniors projects, and in the coming weeks we will be announcing additional projects to support seniors across the country.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government has failed to take action on systemic racism against Mi'kmaq fishers in Nova Scotia and now, instead of engaging in a nation-to-nation relationship, it is imposing unilateral decisions on them that continue a pattern of paternalistic and oppressive behaviour. That is not reconciliation. The minister has failed to protect Mi'kmaq fishers and uphold treaty rights and her latest decision could lead to more harm and violence against indigenous peoples.

If this is the government's most important relationship, when will the minister reverse her unjust decision that will punish Mi'kmaq fishers?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Supreme Court has affirmed the treaty right of first nations to fish, and we have never stopped working to implement that right. It is a way for first nations to exercise their right safely this season, before negotiating a final agreement. Fishing seasons guarantee that stocks are harvested sustainably, and any measure that might be taken must be based on conservation of fish stocks, in view of stable and transparent fisheries management.

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Ind.): Madam Speaker, we know that reliable, public transportation will be essential as we build toward economic recovery. Public transit links can widen people's job search area and is essential for lower-income groups who lack access to vehicles. Tech companies in the Waterloo region have also advocated for increased public transportation, as highly skilled workers are more likely to travel longer distances for well-paying jobs.

Can the minister please explain what the government is doing to help ensure that we have cleaner and more sustainable transit?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler for his commitment to public transit. Good transit, like the ION LRT in Kitchener-Waterloo, helps people get around the community whether they are heading downtown to the university or over to the Kitchener market. This is about getting cars off the road so that people do not waste time and money in traffic polluting our air.

Last month, our government announced almost \$15 billion in new funding for public transit to support major projects like subways, LRTs, zero-emission buses, and bike and walking paths. That funding will start immediately so that we can create good jobs building out public transit all across Canada.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am rising to respond to the point of order raised by the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon respecting an error in Bill C-19, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response).

While it is unfortunate that the English language in subclause 239(2) contained an error, the French language in subclause 239(2) is indeed the correct version. The government intends to address this inconsistency at committee.

In his intervention, the member refers to Standing Order 68(3) respecting blank or imperfect bills. This Standing Order, which dates back to Confederation, was added to the rules of the House to address extreme situations where a blank or imperfect form is in possession of the House. I can assure the House that while there is an error in subclause 239(2) in the English version, the bill was in its final form when it was introduced and read a first time.

I would like to draw to the attention of members a Speaker's ruling respecting imperfect bills. In January 1987, during a point of order, it was alleged that there were two imperfections in a government bill, specifically that a blank occurred where a sessional paper number should have appeared and that a memorandum of understanding was not contained in the bill. The Speaker ruled that these anomalies did not render the bill imperfect with respect to Standing Order 68(3).

Points of Order

I suggest to the member that anyone would be hard pressed to name one government that could claim to have an immaculate legislative agenda that did not contain any errors. In fact, the House has a process to correct these errors in statutes. The miscellaneous statute law amendment program, which was established by the Department of Justice in 1975, is a periodic legislative exercise administered by the legislation section of the Department of Justice. It is used to correct anomalies, inconsistencies, outdated terminology and errors in federal statutes. The reason this program was established is that mistakes happen.

In the case before the House, this error was identified during the second reading stage, and as a result, it can be fixed during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill at committee. That is what the government intends to do.

The proper course of action in these situations is to report an error of this nature to the minister responsible or to the parliamentary secretary responsible. Unfortunately, that did not occur. The member making a comment to a government member during the debate does not suffice.

In conclusion, I submit that Bill C-19 is in proper form and that the government will address the inconsistency during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill at committee.

● (1210)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I thank the hon. member for the comments. We will add them to others, for the consideration of the Speaker.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, I thank my hon. colleague for his position. We welcome the fact that the government is taking this very seriously. Our member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon is a very good MP who is working hard to be sure that our job is done correctly.

[Translation]

I want to thank the member and the parliamentary secretary for stating the government's position on the point of order we raised through the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. Our colleague worked very hard to ensure that the work we do here as parliamentarians is done properly. I think everyone understands that the point of order was of critical importance.

Madam Speaker, we look forward to your ruling on this.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The Chair takes all of that into consideration and will get back to the House.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, entitled "The Human Rights Situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration: the third report, entitled "Supplementary Estimates (C), 2020-21", and the fourth report, entitled "Main Estimates, 2021-22".

[Translation]

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to the main estimates 2021-22, and its seventh report in relation to the supplementary estimates (C) 2020-21. The committee has considered the estimates referred by the House and reports the same back without amendment.

• (1215)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, entitled "Supplementary Estimates (C) 2020-21: Votes 1c, 5c and 10c under Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food".

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to the supplementary estimates (C) 2020-21.

[English]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee advises that pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business met to consider the items added to the order of precedence on Monday, February 22, and recommended that the items listed herein, which it has determined should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the report is deemed adopted.

* * *

PETITIONS

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to present petition e-2928 on behalf of post-secondary graduates in 2020.

The petitioners faced a very difficult job market as a result of the pandemic. They would normally receive a grace period of six months to make payments on their student loans, which happens to overlap with the six-month grace period the government instituted. However, of course, six months later the job market was very difficult. The petitioners are calling for an extension of the non-repayment period so that their usual period does not overlap with the exceptional period.

I note that this is less than what the government committed to on November 30, when it committed to eliminating interest on repayment for the federal portion of student loans for 2021-22. We are eagerly awaiting those policy changes as well.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be tabling five petitions in the House today.

The first petition is with respect to the Uighur genocide and calls on the House to recognize that Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China have been and are being subject to genocide.

The petitioners call upon the government to apply Magnitsky sanctions against those responsible for perpetrating this genocide. This aligns with reports that officials in the EU are proceeding with sanctions and also with the recommendations in the excellent report from the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, which has just been tabled.

• (1220)

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition raises significant concerns about Bill C-7, which just passed the House last night. The bill would bring in the possibility of same-day death by eliminating the 10-day reflection period. It risks making disabled Canadians second-class citizens when they access the health care system and undermines suicide prevention work through the changes related to mental health.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition highlights organ harvesting and trafficking around the world. The petitioners call on the House to act by adopting Bill S-204, which would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ when there has not been consent. It also contains provisions by which someone could be deemed inadmissible to Canada if they had been involved in forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth petition highlights the humanitarian and human rights crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to be actively engaged in various ways in that very serious situation, and to be engaged with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments in trying to respond to it.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fifth and final petition I am tabling today is about Bill C-6.

The petitioners agree with the objective of the bill to ban conversion therapy. However, they are very concerned with the incorrect definition used in it, which, inadvertently or not, would end up banning many conversations and discussions that really have nothing to do with conversion therapy as it has been classically defined. The petitioners call on the government to act to fix the definition and to proceed with banning conversion therapy once the definition is corrected.

I commend all five of these petitions to the consideration of hon. members.

FALUN GONG

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present, both substantially the same.

The petitioners take note that the Magnitsky law, or the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, exists in Canada and sanctions officials for gross violations of human rights. They take note that for the last 21 years, China's Communist parties have tortured and killed large numbers of those who practise Falun Gong.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to sanction a number of Chinese officials listed in the petition.

Routine Proceedings

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I have the honour to virtually present petition e-3054, which was initiated by Scarlet Osborne, a business owner from Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast in my riding.

The petitioners request that the government support new hospitality businesses that are currently excluded from the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency business account and the Canada emergency rent subsidy due to having no revenue in 2019 or in January or February of 2020. They further ask to adjust the eligibility for the Canada emergency wage subsidy and Canada emergency rent subsidy on an industry-specific level for such businesses that can indicate non-reversible, pre-existing commitments. Finally, they request that the government implement an alternate method for calculating the Canada emergency wage subsidy and rent subsidy rates for these new businesses.

FALUN GONG

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, like many of my colleagues before me, I rise to table a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians who wish to bring to the attention of the House the plight of Falun Gong practitioners in China, who continue to be persecuted by China's Communist regime in Beijing. That persecution has entailed, among other things, orchestrated torture and executions, including for the purposes of organ harvesting for sale on the international market.

The petitioners ask that the Government of Canada apply tough legal sanctions against the individual perpetrators of these crimes, including those who are listed, by name, in the petition. The sanctions the petitioners have asked for include the freezing of assets in Canada, Magnitsky sanctions and blocking entry into Canada of any Chinese Communist officials who are implicated in these atrocities. There is no way these officials should be travelling to or doing business within Canada.

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to table this petition initiated and signed by my constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

The petitioners are highlighting that proactive, holistic health practices play an important role in building immune system strength and help to keep people healthy. There is not enough focus on proactive health and wellness care.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to increase the focus on educating and empowering Canadians on holistic approaches to optimize and maintain their natural immunity and well-being and to include proactive health and wellness care practices in the Canada Health Act and enhance access to these services.

Routine Proceedings

• (1225)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 357.

[Text]

Question No. 357—**Mr. Warren Steinley:**

With regard to the Keystone XL pipeline expansion project: (a) did the government take any action or make any representations to the Office of the President-elect or to President Joe Biden's transition team to try to save the Keystone XL project, prior to the cancellation of the permit on January 20, 2021, and, if so, what are the specific details; and (b) if the answer in (a) is negative, why was no action taken?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following reflects a consolidated response approved on behalf of Global Affairs Canada ministers.

With regard to (a) and (b), Canada's ambassador to the United States, Kirsten Hillman, and her team at the embassy, have worked closely with the Government of Alberta's Washington D.C. office, with the energy sector, and with colleagues at Global Affairs Canada and Natural Resources Canada in Ottawa, to make the strongest possible case for the Keystone XL project with the incoming Biden team, the transition team and their advisers. This has included meetings with transition team members and advisers who are now inside the administration. The embassy also worked with labour and trade unions that were making the case for the project. The Prime Minister raised the issue directly with the President-elect when they spoke on November 9. Additionally, prior to the President's decision, members of the Prime Minister's staff raised the issue directly with the President-elect's staff. Canada believes there was a strong case to be made for Keystone XL, but the President made a campaign commitment and was determined to fulfill that commitment. As we engage with the new administration, the Government of Canada will continue to advocate for the importance to the U.S. of Canada's energy resources and the strong climate policy framework under which these are developed.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if a revised response to Question No. 186, originally tabled on December 9, 2020, and to Question No. 284, originally tabled on January 25, as well as the government's response to Questions Nos. 356, 358 and 359 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 186—**Mr. John Barlow:**

With regard to expenditures on social media influencers, including any contracts which would use social media influencers as part of a public relations campaign, since December 1, 2019: (a) what are the details of all such expenditures, including (i) vendor, (ii) amount, (iii) campaign description, (iv) date of contract, (v) name or handle of influencer; and (b) for each campaign that paid an influencer, was there a requirement to make public as part of a disclaimer the fact that the influencer was being paid by the government and, if not, why not?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 284—**Mr. Ron Liepert:**

With regard to government expenditures on aircraft rentals since December 1, 2019, broken down by department, agency, Crown corporation and other government entity: (a) what is the total amount spent on the rental of aircraft; and (b) what are the details of each expenditure, including (i) amount, (ii) vendor, (iii) dates of rental, (iv) type of aircraft, (v) purpose of trip, (vi) origin and destination of flights, (vii) titles of passengers, including which passengers were on which segments of each trip?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 356—**Mr. Warren Steinley:**

With regard to the use of government aircraft since April 1, 2020: (a) how many times have government aircraft travelled outside of Canada since April 1, 2020; and (b) what are the details of the legs of each such flights, including the (i) date, (ii) type of aircraft, (iii) origin, (iv) destination, (v) purpose of the trip, (vi) names of passengers?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 358—**Mr. Scot Davidson:**

With regard to expenditures on social media influencers, including any contracts which would use social media influencers as part of a public relations campaign, since October 23, 2020: (a) what are the details of all such expenditures, including the (i) vendor, (ii) amount, (iii) campaign description, (iv) date of the contract, (v) name or handle of the influencer; and (b) for each campaign that paid an influencer, was there a requirement to make public, as part of a disclaimer, the fact that the influencer was being paid by the government, and, if not, why not?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 359—**Mr. Scot Davidson:**

With regard to the use of transport or passenger aircraft, either owned or chartered by the government, between November 1, 2020, and January 25, 2021: what are the details of all flight legs, including the (i) date, (ii) type of aircraft, (iii) origin, (iv) destination, (v) purpose of the trip, (vi) names of passengers, (vii) vendor and cost, if aircraft was chartered?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (additional regular benefits), the Canada Recovery Benefits Act (restriction on eligibility) and another act in response to COVID-19, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to put further words and remarks on the record regarding Bill C-24.

I would like to conclude my remarks with what I touched on before question period. It is imperative, and it is the responsibility of the Liberal government, to bring forward a coherent strategy to bring back jobs in Canada.

It has been 12 months, an entire year, since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic. We saw lockdowns and restrictions come to Canada, which have completely altered the everyday lives of Canadians, some in very negative ways, as we have heard from parties on the floor of the House of Commons regarding what has been happening to constituents in that time.

Although we have been able to work together as a House of Commons, there is increasing pressure on the government from all parties that it bring forward a plan for jobs. Bill C-24 would have been the opportune time, given the one-year anniversary since this all began, for it to have brought forward a plan.

All we really heard this week, in honour of International Women's Day, was the announcement of a task force comprised of 18 women, which sounds great, to give the government some advice on how to help women out of the economic downturn they are experiencing. Of course, we know women have been disproportionately impacted. In fact, over 100,000 women have left the job force altogether because there are no jobs available to them.

With respect to immigrants, 4% of our permanent residents have left Canada. Usually, we have a 3% increase per year, but 4% have left this year because there are no opportunities for them either.

We know young people, newcomers and women are all being impacted. Those who are the most vulnerable have been made more vulnerable in this economy. I would urge the Liberal government to bring forward a coherent strategy to bring back jobs.

This is very pertinent to Bill C-24 because of its sunset date. These CRB and EI extension benefits only go until September 25. That is just over six months away. What is going to happen after that? Is there going to be a roll-off strategy? Is the Liberal government expecting millions of jobs to miraculously return?

We know that over 800,000 jobs have already disappeared altogether. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the CFIB, has said that up to 220,000 small businesses may be eliminated because of the pandemic and up to three million jobs will disappear as well as a result.

Government Orders

It is incredibly important that the Liberal government bring forward a plan to Canadians. It may turn to its \$100 billion it announced in the fall it was going to use for stimulus, which is great, but we do not just need billions of dollars of stimulus. We need an actual strategy for industry to unleash the 20-million-person workforce in our country and get them back to work so every industry, our economy and our country are working once again. That is what I would like to see.

I hope the Liberal government has heard these pleas and will bring forward a strategy to give Canadians hope. Canadians really do need that plan, and they need hope.

• (1230)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech was a very thorough, information-packed and concisely addressed, unlike that of the parliamentary secretary who preceded her.

On behalf of dozens of my constituents in Thornhill, I would also like to thank her for bringing up the contradiction regarding the people who left the CERB, made an application to EI as directed, were refused EI access and were directed to apply for the CRB and were denied. They have been left in limbo for months because of a computer glitch showing an EI account was left open.

I wonder if the minister addressed this problem, which she promised to fix more than a month ago, when she appeared before committee yesterday.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, it has been such a pleasure to work with the member for Thornhill over the last year and a half. I consider him very much a mentor. It has been such an honour to learn from him and his esteemed reputation, his knowledge. I thank the member.

To his question, I have raised this concern several times with the minister and the response I keep getting for CRB-EI issue and thousands of Canadians not being able to access any of these programs as a result is that they are working on it, that there is a task force. Then one department will say that there is a number and another department says that there is no number, but there is a task force.

There is no end in sight for these individuals, thousands of people, single moms, young parents. I do not know why there is not more urgency. I find it incredibly disappointing. I will keep on it.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two questions.

Government Orders

The first one is related to the sickness benefits. I know her party supported the proposals in the House that sickness benefits be increased. I want to ask her whether she is sincere in that, knowing that so many people have relied on sickness benefits during this pandemic and they have run out. Is the Conservative Party fully in support of increasing sickness benefits under EI?

Second, given the pandemic, many Canadians have had to rely on employment insurance. I know through my own experience as a member of Parliament during the Harper years that the Conservatives were not very helpful to people who relied on employment insurance. Is there a change of heart in the Conservative Party on the importance of EI for workers?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, the Conservatives absolutely support getting help to Canadians that need it, particularly in this incredibly difficult time when there are very little alternatives. We have been disappointed repeatedly that the Liberal government comes forward, announces all these programs, yet leaves thousands and thousands of Canadians behind, much like the CRB-EI issue.

Yesterday, in the HUMA committee, the member's hon. colleague from Elmwood—Transcona brought forward an amendment to Bill C-24, which the Conservatives were prepared to support, for a prescribed illness, injury and quarantine. Unfortunately, the Liberal government resoundingly put a stop to that, very disappointingly. We were prepared to support the NDP amendment.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for hard work on this file. I find it interesting. The Conservatives have been calling for fixes to Bill C-24 for quite some time. The Liberals have been calling us obstructionists, yet they are the ones filibustering at committee.

Could my hon. colleague and friend address some of those hypothetical statements that the government has been alleging over the last number of weeks?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, it has been great to get to know the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot over the last year and a half. We were elected at the same time. Yes, he hits on a very good point. They have stopped now, but over the last week, the Liberals were calling us obstructionists. Of course, we know that is completely untrue. We were very prepared to work with them.

I did not get into this in my speech, and I will not really get into this now, but I want the member to know that there were a lot of Liberal shenanigans going on at that committee. It was very disappointing to hear the Liberals, on one hand, publicly talking about collaboration and then, on the other hand, taking underhanded, behind the scenes actions to undermine the effectiveness of Conservative members, undermining the collaborative nature that we were hoping to have with Bill C-24.

Thankfully, we are very strong on the Conservative side. Ultimately we did collaborate, and here we are debating this at third reading.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, unfortunately, workers across Quebec and Canada are

waiting with bated breath to see whether the House will pass Bill C-24, which is currently before us.

These people are holding their breath because they are desperate to know whether they will receive EI benefits. The number of weeks of benefits they were entitled to have run out, and phones are ringing everywhere as people try to find out what tomorrow holds.

Bill C-24 answers that question by extending the EI regular benefit period to 50 weeks. The bill will also fix something that we, the Bloc Québécois, have been calling on the government to fix since December by creating an exemption so that people will no longer be able to claim the \$1,000 Canada recovery sickness benefit when they return from a non-essential trip. That is the essence of the bill.

Once again, we think it is regrettable how often since the beginning of the crisis we have had to rush back to the House to ram through bills that make all the difference for workers who are waiting with bated breath.

Some members may recall that I spoke in this chamber on September 26, 2020, when the House resumed after prorogation. For weeks, we had been urgently calling on the government to pass Bill C-2, the purpose of which was to make the EI program more flexible and implement the three new benefits we are all familiar with, namely, the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit.

Back in September, I began my speech with these remarks:

Sometimes the saying “better late than never” applies, but not here since it is too late for the bill before us. In fact, the three economic support benefits in this bill, which affect thousands of workers and were announced by the government on August 20, are still not in place, while the CERB ended yesterday.

That is the situation we find ourselves in and it is utterly deplorable. I am outraged.

Bill C-24 changes absolutely nothing. We have time; we would have had time to reflect on and think about the best measures to put in place for EI, this enormous program, so that workers, people who are ill and people on maternity leave will not be left wondering what will happen to them from one day to the next. We are simply putting off the problem every month through these temporary measures, when we should be introducing the permanent, structuring and useful measures that reflect the true reality of work for the people concerned.

I am outraged. My colleagues know me and may be sick of listening to me, but I am not done. Since my work in the House began, I have probably uttered the term “employment insurance” 200 times. I was thinking that perhaps I should start saying “unemployment insurance” and maybe that term would resonate with people.

Government Orders

• (1240)

I often say that we must be open, as legislators, to settling once and for all the issue of permanently increasing sickness leave benefits to 50 weeks.

I have been calling for this from day one for a reason. I strongly believed that the government would rise to the occasion during this crisis for which our EI program is inadequate. It could have taken the opportunity to change EI instead of viewing it as a threat and taking a piecemeal approach. The government had that mandate.

The pandemic is a convenient excuse for everything, and we are told that the crisis needs to be managed. That is what we are told when we point out that there needs to be a significant increase in the old age security pension. There has never been a measure brought in to permanently and predictably increase the pension. Temporary measures are brought in instead. The same goes for the Canada health transfers.

This same government had a mandate in 2015 to review the EI program. It has received countless reports and solutions for making the program suit the reality of the workforce and to address the fact that many people are ineligible.

This is unacceptable for a so-called social program designed to protect workers. The government had that mandate.

The minister found the mandate a bit too late, after the throne speech. The government claims to be working on it, but we know that the bill before us is another temporary measure that will expire on September 25, 2021, if I am not mistaken. It is March now, so there are six months left.

What is the government's plan beyond September 25, 2021? Has the government calculated that the job market will have recovered and that the existing EI system will be adequate?

The answer to that question should be “no”, because the system is inadequate. The system is based on the number of hours worked, which clearly needs to be changed.

I gave the House some examples on Monday. With the system that is now in place, women who hold what are increasingly non-standard, part-time jobs are finding it difficult to qualify for EI. Women take maternity or parental leave, using up their weeks of benefits, after which they cannot qualify for EI. If they lose their jobs, they are refused regular benefits. This flaw must be addressed.

Seasonal workers suffer a loss of revenue between periods of employment and end up without EI because of the gaps during which they were not working. This is also something we have to put an end to. No worker should have to go through that.

For them and for sick, suffering or injured workers for whom 15 weeks are not enough, temporary measures are insufficient. There needs to be a real system that will guarantee them 50 weeks of EI benefits.

That is the mission of the Bloc Québécois, a mission that outlines a vision, is promising and takes the reality of the people we represent into account.

In Quebec and Canada, workers are the lifeblood of our job market. We see how essential all of these people are in the health care, social services and other sectors. They are essential because they contribute to our economic strength, our social strength and the strength of our labour market. There has to be a balance, and we need permanent changes. I cannot emphasize that enough.

We will vote in favour of Bill C-24 because, as I said on Monday, we have no choice. Is there any other choice?

• (1245)

If we do not vote in favour of this bill, workers will find themselves without any income tomorrow morning. What is more, many people have reached out to us via telephone, press release and other methods to tell us just how necessary these measures still are.

That is why we are going to vote in favour of Bill C-24. It is not because we like the way the government is forcing us into this. On the contrary, I think that the government could and should do things differently. It has everything it needs to present a much more permanent and strategic vision in the future. I am calling on the government and urging it to do just that, when it has the opportunity to do so in the very near future in the next budget.

My Bloc Québécois colleague's bill, Bill C-265, could really make a difference by increasing EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks. That was yet another opportunity for the government to take action because it was an election issue last time around. There were plenty of commitments, promises and mandate letters, but nothing was done because the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and action had to be taken. The thing is, taking action during a pandemic does not mean doing the same thing forever after. It means thinking about what the future should look like and coming up with much more strategic measures. That is what people expect.

That is why I am working so hard and with such determination to make sure nobody else falls through the cracks. I also want to make sure that, in the course of our very important legislative work, we are never again called upon to rapidly approve a government bill to meet needs and achieve goals. We condemn that approach.

Even so, we support the bill because we would never abandon thousands of workers whose EI benefits will come to an end tomorrow morning and who will be left without an income to make it through this crisis.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member her opinion on the role of the opposition in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

The NDP thinks that Bill C-24 should include a provision on extending EI sickness benefits. In my opinion, it is our duty as politicians and members of the opposition to look for opportunities to push the government to include such measures.

Yesterday I presented an amendment to this bill in committee, which the chair ruled out of order because of a monarchist tradition here in Canada requiring royal assent. I think that tradition does not serve the interests of democracy. It is perfectly reasonable for an opposition politician to push the government, even if that means upsetting the prerogatives of the Crown a bit, in order to advance a good measure that would benefit Canadians.

My colleague chose to vote against the amendment and I would like her to say a few words about the role of the opposition and the degree to which we should look for opportunities and work—

• (1250)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. I have to give the member the opportunity to respond.

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his pertinent question on a topic I want to address.

Yesterday in committee, I heard someone say that the job of the opposition is to oppose, but that is not how we see it. If that were true, we would essentially be constrained. The opposition's job is to suggest solutions and a vision, and to ensure that bills have every chance to be passed in the best possible way. I also want to bring up the use of the word “opportunity”. There is opportunity, and then there is opportunism.

Yesterday, at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I did not vote against the NDP's amendment, since it was ruled inadmissible, but I did think it was opportunistic. The NDP's amendment was an opportunistic attempt to build up political credibility that it had lost, maybe, using a bill that had a different objective. As I said, however, the amendment was inadmissible, so I did not vote against it.

As I said yesterday, I voted on the opportunity to strengthen Bill C-24 so that the House could pass it the following morning and extend the EI regular benefit period to 50 weeks.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her very fine speech and on the excellent response she just gave.

I would like her to tell us more about her view of the lack of permanent changes to EI, given the long-standing, desperate needs and the fact that the funds are available. It must be said that there is enough money in the EI fund. We can afford to implement the changes the Bloc Québécois is asking for, such as extending the sickness benefit period.

How do we explain the government's refusal to make permanent changes when the funds are available?

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I confess I would love to have an answer, because I really do not understand this situation. If the issue of EI reform had only come up recently, I could have said that we should perhaps take the time to examine it, but this problem is nothing new.

My colleague is absolutely right. The battle over extending the special EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 has been going on for years, especially since the arrival of the Bloc Québécois, which is forcing the issue.

The money is indeed available. The government says it would be complicated to implement all the necessary reforms. For goodness' sake, it has had plenty of time to take care of it. What is the holdup?

When there are no crises, the government does not worry about EI or the unemployed. It should start worrying, because this change is urgently needed. I would say that it is a matter of political will and that the government has the means to offer something much more secure and permanent.

• (1255)

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for saying the words “employment insurance” and “unemployment insurance” so many times in the House. I will never get tired of hearing them because, as she said, this is an essential program.

She raised the issue of seasonal workers. Mine is a huge riding that depends on the fishing, forestry and tourism industries, among others. That will never change.

I think that wanting to provide benefits at certain times is a good thing, but I want everyone to be able to put food on their tables. People in my riding have to live with this uncertainty every year, with no action from the government.

I would therefore like to hear what my colleague has to say about land use and about the discrimination that exists, to some degree, toward certain ridings, people living in remote areas and women.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague. I wish I had more time.

I am thinking about unemployed seasonal workers. Nothing has ever really been done about this issue, which is major. Unemployed workers in these sectors have to deal with an EI system that is unfair in terms of the benefit amounts and duration. The government has tried to fill in the gaps with pilot projects that were extended but never improved upon.

To find a lasting solution to the issue of seasonal workers—and there are many of them—we need to agree on eligibility criteria and a number of weeks of benefits that match the reality of these workers' jobs. This would be a way of truly recognizing the vital importance of these sectors. We need to be fair, remedy this problem and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. We have time for one last question.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, how can we pressure the government to extend sickness benefits?

Yesterday, I thought I saw a way to make it happen. I know the Bloc Québécois has the same goal. That is not the issue. I am not suggesting the member was opposed to that goal per se when she voted against our amendment, but we need to be strategic.

We need to put public pressure on the government to keep its promises. We think it is our job to exert pressure, but we need the support of other parties that want the same policies. Amending this bill would be a form of public pressure.

We have a bill, and I know the Bloc Québécois has one too. However, it will take time—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I will leave it up to my hon. colleague to develop these strategies within the NDP.

I do not think the Bloc Québécois needs the NDP to develop its own strategies and positions. These kinds of questions, aiming to trip up one's opponents, probably make for good video clips on social media, but we do not need the NDP's advice, morals or strategies.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be rising so soon on third reading of this bill, in that the NDP recognizes how important it is that these measures come into place to support people who, facing the end of their regular EI benefits in a very difficult economic context, need an extension of those benefits to take place. New Democrats have been very happy to support that measure and to work collaboratively to see the bill pass quickly.

That said, there are a number of things that are not in this bill that New Democrats think are a problem. The problem is not just in the sense of missed opportunities to make progress on some long-standing issues, such as the EI sickness benefit, but also in the sense of being a problem for many people in crisis right now as a result of the pandemic. To be sure, that relates to the EI sickness benefit, because there are people facing long-term conditions such as cancer who have had their normal course of medical treatment prolonged due to delays in the medical system caused by COVID.

It is also the case for people who are facing a new condition, long COVID. Even though the really intense initial period of sickness may have passed, there are some serious long-term recurring chronic conditions that are presenting themselves, whether as fatigue or shortness of breath or things of that nature. Those folks are falling through the cracks because Canada has not yet recognized long COVID as a condition. We have seen some leadership in other countries in creating specialized clinics and getting on track to research what this means as it emerges, but Canada, unfortunately, is not among those countries.

What that means is that private insurers here are able to say that people are not suffering from a condition they recognize, and so people are not getting access to their private benefits. It also means

that folks have been falling through the cracks in some of the government benefits as well.

In the case of long COVID in particular, people who are facing these kinds of symptoms do not know when the symptoms are going to crop up. Sometimes it is very often and sometimes it is more infrequent. The symptoms appear sporadically, so people are not able to search for jobs because they cannot tell an employer in good faith that they are going to be able to regularly report to work. A condition of the Canada recovery benefit is that people actively seek work.

These are how those kinds of cracks develop. It is why the NDP thought it was important in the early days of the pandemic, and we argued very vigorously for a more universal approach, one that would capture all of these different kinds of situations, not because we had identified them all in advance but because we knew there would be unique challenges and situations that we could not hope to identify in advance. That is why a universal approach to income support would be better—one that would capture seniors, for instance, who did not lose their jobs due to COVID but had to face additional costs. It is the same for people living with disabilities and for other groups, such as students.

That is why New Democrats thought a universal approach was important. It was a very conscious decision of the Liberal government not to adopt that approach. We have spent a lot of time worrying about the people who are falling through the cracks and a lot of time fighting for policy solutions that will help them, but we are just not seeing enough of those solutions in this bill. Who does it leave behind? It leaves those people behind.

I have heard the government say how important it is to move this bill forward, and we agree completely. I think it is fair to say that virtually all of the government speeches today at third reading condemned the Conservatives for their procedural delay tactics on a number of bills in the House, saying that they really should not be doing that with Bill C-24 because it is very important to get it passed.

We heard that at committee yesterday. I had proposed a very simple amendment, and this talk about delay and about the importance of getting this done came through, even though there is really no disagreement, and we see that with this bill. All parties have worked to get this bill through very quickly.

The fact is that we are only on the sixth sitting day since first reading of the bill. It is atypical for Parliament to have a guaranteed passage of a bill, but let us be clear that the bill is already guaranteed to pass at the end of the day, and rightly so. I am glad for that.

I hope all this talk about delay around Bill C-24 is not disingenuous. It is certainly misguided. I am trying to be parliamentary, despite the facts that I am trying to describe.

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● (1300)

What I am trying to say is that I have heard very clearly from Liberals that they are very concerned about all the people on EI regular benefits who are facing a deadline at the end of the month. That is a concern we share. However, I would put to the government, what about the people who have seen their EI sick benefit expire already? Those people are already in the situation the Liberals are beseeching us to avoid when it comes to people who are on EI regular benefits. Not only do they find themselves in that situation, but also find themselves gravely ill with various kinds of conditions.

We really think it is important and have really been hoping that it be addressed, particularly because the government did not table this bill right away in January. In particular, we knew that we wanted to address the issue of people using the sick day benefit to self-isolate after non-essential travel. There was all-party agreement that this was not an appropriate use of that benefit. It was not foreseen when the benefit was negotiated and designed.

We had hoped that the delay meant the government was going to address some other very urgent and pandemic-related issues with simple solutions, like extending the EI sick benefit to 50 weeks, something that the House of Commons has already expressed support for, first by majority vote in favour of a Bloc Québécois opposition day motion, and then by unanimous consent. There was a unanimous consent motion reaffirming the House's commitment to that motion. Twice now the House has called for this. Once the government opposed it, and the other time it did not.

I do not know what more it would take to get this extension of the EI sickness benefit done. We have unanimity, apparently, in the House of Commons. We have a bill designed to reform the EI Act. We have a very simple legislative change that needs to be made. It needs to be implemented and although there can be complications in its implementation, let us get the ball rolling. It cannot be implemented until we make the legislative change.

The Liberals could propose an implementation date, a coming into force date, something they think would give them a reasonable period. We have the commitment now in Parliament. Let us get the legislative job done and assign a date for government to implement it by.

We have to get going on this. It is just wrong, frankly, to have a whole bunch of sick Canadians who have been advocating for this, some of them for years, and to cause them to continue to not only have to deal with their illness but also to become political advocates to get something done on which there seems to be widespread agreement. It is cruel. We had an opportunity yesterday to do something about it.

We know that bills and proposals that require public spending cannot be introduced by anyone but the government; yet members do it. The Bloc Québécois members have been very keen to remind us all that they have a private member's bill to extend the EI sickness benefit to 50 weeks. They will also have to reckon with the fact that that private member's bill, to be votable at third reading, will need a royal recommendation.

I have a private member's bill to extend the sickness benefit to 50 weeks. I know that if we get through that long process in the course of a Parliament, which would be lovely and I hope that we do, it would also need a royal recommendation. At that point, I will fight as hard as I can to find a way to either get the recommendation or some way around it.

It is ridiculous that a long-standing tradition that goes back to when we were ruled by a monarch, by hereditary right, could get in the way of democratically elected representatives doing the right thing on the EI sickness benefit. I think that is ridiculous. I have been frustrated in other fora, frankly, with the way that some of our long-standing traditions, whether for prorogation or dissolution of Parliament or royal recommendation, get in the way of democratic decision-making. I would add the Senate to that list as well.

There are a lot of ways in Canada where the democratic will of Canadians, expressed through their parliamentarians, their members of Parliament are thwarted by some of these traditions. I like a lot of the traditions in the House. I am a believer in Parliament. However, I do not think that means that we should self-censor and not challenge those things when they get in the way of what is in the best interests of people in Canada.

● (1305)

I do not apologize for taking that thought to the government. I do not apologize for being willing to challenge those things and to try to seize on any opportunity I can to get good things done, like extending the EI sickness benefit to 50 weeks, which I know many members share across party lines as a goal in the House. I will continue to do that and to try to come up with new and creative ways of doing that, instead of just doing those things that so far have not been working. I think this was a missed opportunity. While I am glad for all of the people on EI regular benefits and we will continue to work in the spirit of collaboration to protect their interests and to protect their household finances, I am not going to do that by passing over in silence the incredible missed opportunity that we have had on the EI sickness benefit here.

I would be remiss also if I did not mention something that I spoke to it in my last speech. I think it bears repeating. There was time taken to table this bill. We have known for a long time now that there were a lot of people who were struggling financially before the pandemic and who have ended up applying for the CERB. In some cases they were told to. In fact, mean, a lot of provincial social assistance programs require people to apply for any other income assistance benefit they could be eligible for.

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The application for CERB was a no-fail process. It was that way for the right reasons: the money needed to get out quickly, and all of that. What that meant is that in some cases people who were on social assistance were required by their provincial government to apply for the CERB and then got it. Now they are being told to pay it back. While they were receiving it, they were not receiving their social assistance. Where is the money supposed to come from?

This is not a new problem. We have known that this was shaping up to be a problem a long time ago. Campaign 2000 was calling for an amnesty as early as last summer, so this is not a surprise. It is not something that caught the government off guard, unless it was not paying attention in the first place and ought to have been. This is something we could have been doing in this legislation to address a very urgent need. I was frustrated to hear the minister responsible for this bill characterize the bill as just narrowing down and focusing on what is urgent.

The plight of sick Canadians who need a benefit to help them keep their homes while they deal with their illnesses in the context of the pandemic and who have already been cut-off from their benefits is urgent. If this is not urgent, I do not know what is. It is the plight of low-income Canadians who were told by provincial governments they had to apply for CERB, or of kids aging out of foster care at 18 in the pandemic, who were told that before they apply for social assistance they had to apply for the CERB, and who are now being told to pay it back with money they do not have. They are facing crushing debt. Even if they do not have to repay it by the end of this tax year, having that hanging over their heads is going to make it really hard for them to get a decent start in life. We all know that. Someone would have to be pretty darn rich for a long time to think \$14,000 in debt does not matter and can be brushed off.

I know the former minister of finance forgot about a \$40,000 bill, but that is not the situation of most Canadians, not at all. It is a debt of \$14,000, \$16,000 or \$18,000 for a young person who just aged out of foster care and cannot get a job because of the pandemic, and who is wondering what their future looks like and may be told by the Canada Revenue Agency, a pretty serious organization in this country, that they are going to owe that \$14,000 or \$16,000 until they can pay it off. When is that going to be? When they get their first job in this difficult economy, whenever that will be, they will have to pay for their rent and food. It is not as if all of those wages are going to be available for them to pay back their debt to the Canada Revenue Agency.

I think there is a legitimate question here about the public interest and the extent to which Canadians are really going to benefit from the government's demand for this money back from the people who cannot pay it back. Given the time that has been taken, not only from January until now to prepare this bill but also the time we have lived through since the pandemic began, particularly since the first extension of CERB in the summertime when groups began to identify this problem and call for amnesty, there have been lots of opportunities to figure out how to do it and to present a coherent plan to Parliament that would work. There has been lots of time to quantify this problem. I asked the minister yesterday if she had an idea of how much money Canada would make if all the people who

need a low-income CERB amnesty repaid their debt tomorrow. How much money would that be?

● (1310)

We do not have an answer to that. I hope they will follow up with an answer and I hope they do have the answer, because it seems to me that unless that is a compelling number, we should not be worrying a lot of people who are already struggling with the anxiety and real financial challenge of what, on the government books, would be a relatively small debt, particularly relative to all the spending that has taken place to get us through the pandemic.

The government will know I am not criticizing that spending. There are aspects of it I might criticize, particularly the money that was set aside for the WE Charity that never resulted in any concrete or tangible benefit to Canadians or Canadian students. In the details, there are criticisms to make, but we are not opposed to the idea that the government needed to step in to provide a lot of support to get our economy and Canadians through this.

This is relative to that spending and the work that the country is going to have to do to manage its finances going forward. We should be letting these folks off the hook for something that, in some cases, was frankly beyond their control. I do not think they were acting in bad faith. Being compelled by provincial governments to apply for this benefit is not something they could just say no to, because then they would not qualify for provincial assistance. They cannot just walk out on the street and get a job, so I ask what they were supposed to do.

Can we not extend some compassion to the folks in this situation in this difficult time and clear that debt, instead of making it a 20-year project for them to pay off with whatever small amounts of disposable income they may have and get for themselves? Instead of sending all of that to the CRA, they might be able to keep some of it for themselves or to invest it in something that improves their situation in life or affords them some opportunities to live a little and enjoy their life, as they work hard to try to get by. Those are the kinds of small, but important and tangible things that we would potentially be taking away from some of our most vulnerable people, when we refuse the idea of an amnesty.

I think that is important to bear in mind, because we do not just have a financial responsibility here, but I think this has been a time when members of Parliament and the government have been, and ought to be, called to meet the moral responsibility of this place and to really think about the long-term interest in people. I think that if we do not proceed with this kind of amnesty, we would be failing people in that regard.

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I just want to end on that note. Yes, these are important reforms. Yes, we needed to move forward quickly. We have done that in good faith. We in the NDP have tried to use the opportunity to press other important and related issues. Unfortunately, we did not find enough support on the other benches to make that happen. We stand ready to help the government quickly, in the fastest way possible, expand the EI sickness benefit. The only thing getting in the way yesterday at committee was the need for a royal recommendation. The only thing getting in the way was the fact that the government is not on board. If the government would kindly get on board with helping out sick Canadians, as is the will of the House of Commons, we will act as we did on Bill C-24 to move that through quickly and without delay, so that those folks who are already not receiving any kind of income assistance could get it.

I hope that some of the issues that we have been able to raise in this debate have been heard by the government and that we will soon see some kind of concrete response in legislation, in the case of the EI sickness benefit. If they are able to do the CERB amnesty without any legislation and it can happen more quickly, that would be awesome. We would support that too, but if there is legislation required, we would hope to see it come forward quickly. We regret that this was not already a part of the legislation before us and that we were not able to make it part of it, but let us get on with making sure that we are not just talking about who the government has decided to help through all of this, but that are actually filling the cracks so that there is not a long list of people who need support and have not received it.

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been an advocate for workers in Canada in very real ways. We can talk about sickness benefits and pension benefits, such as the CPP. The Government of Canada has stepped up, and has been able to deliver.

One of the things I want to make very clear for the member, as I did the other day, is that the sickness benefit would be best served if we also had the provinces, which are responsible for representing a much larger labour pool. Ultimately, we need to see Ottawa working with the provinces to develop a sickness benefit program so that all workers would benefit from it. Canada's national government is moving forward on the issue, and there is a lot more to be said about that than what we have seen at the provincial level.

Is the member familiar with any province of any political stripe where we have actually seen an enhancement of sickness benefits for provincially regulated workers?

• (1320)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, to be perfectly frank, that is not what I have been monitoring. What I have been monitoring is the EI sickness benefit, which is available to all Canadian workers who pay into employment insurance. There was a commitment by the Liberals in the last campaign to extend those benefits. The benefit period was 15 weeks before the election. It is still 15 weeks. We have been calling, and the House of Commons itself has called, for it to be longer.

I am glad that this issue is on the mind of the member, but I will believe it when I see it. We just missed another opportunity to get it done. I do not know how many opportunities have to blow by before we actually get it done. The House is ready to go on this. Where is the government?

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to pick up on some of the frustration that the member clearly showed in terms of how the government has managed itself, on this issue and many others, throughout the pandemic.

It seems like the Liberals talk a lot about team Canada, and they want to see a team Canada approach, but their version of that is for all the opposition members, without question, to follow what the government is doing. We know that time and again, all opposition parties have brought forward very important changes to legislation and have improved legislation over and over.

I am wondering if the member can speak again to the importance of working on these measures together while ensuring proper debate and discussion, and on his frustration with some of the antics of the government over the past few weeks.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I am certainly happy to reflect on that question.

Parliament, at the best of times, is a challenging place. There is no question about that. People who have very different viewpoints and wishes for the future of the country, in terms of what direction it ought to go and how we ought to manage our affairs, disagree. However, I think that we all ought to come with a strong sense of public interest and responsibility to work together. Sometimes that has gone well during the pandemic, and sometimes it has not.

I have seen the government play some real games. These long waits and then presenting legislation at the last moment, trying to get everybody to rally around it, are very frustrating and have caused us to not be able to do the best work possible. I have seen some opposition parties, perhaps most especially the Conservatives, play some pretty silly games in the House with certain things as well.

Something gets lost when that partisan, political machine gets going. Newfoundland right now is trying to conclude an election, and it is not easy. We need to keep in mind that any federal election is also happening in Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is going to be happening in places that are contending with the virus just as much as Newfoundland, or more so.

We need to figure this out on all sides of the House, come to the table and try to put our solutions forward. That does not mean that we cannot push. It does not mean that we cannot be very assertive sometimes, but we need to find a way to work together and get the best solutions for Canadians.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, as a critic, the member for Elmwood—Transcona provides such clarity and conscience to the recommendations and the work he does at committee. We heard him talk about the cruelty of the way this program has been set up to continue to exclude Canadians who have been absolutely excluded from this economy and from Liberal supports.

Sometimes things get lost in the jargon and in the jurisdictional debate of the federal government. Can he speak plainly about how his amendment would have helped alleviate the suffering of people who could have had access to this program, had the government found the courage to support it?

• (1325)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, plainly speaking, we are talking about anybody who has been paying into EI, who has a serious chronic condition and would qualify for continuing to get some employment insurance payments while they could not work because they were sick. Right now, they can only do that for 15 weeks. We already know that, even outside pandemic times, this is not enough time. We know there have been delays for people getting treatment because of the pandemic. We know people need a longer period of time when they can access those benefits. We are talking about making those benefits available for a longer period of time so people can do what they need to, to get well and then go back to work.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I agree with the hon. member about an amnesty for low-income people who received CERB. I agree with him about extending EI benefits, and I know there has been a call for it. I met recently with a consortium of 17 women's groups from Quebec asking for EI reforms. The Canadian Labour Congress has been asking for this.

What does the hon. member think about EI funds being raided by subsequent Conservative and Liberal governments and used as a piggy bank to pay down debt, to deal with the deficit or to use for other programs? Should the EI funds be in an independent fund that cannot be touched? This is an insurance program that workers and employers are paying into.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, the answer is absolutely yes. Something we have advocated for, for a long time, is protecting that fund. To quantify some of that, from the mid- to late 1990s, when the Liberals started raiding the EI fund, right through to the end of the most recent Conservative era, over \$60 billion was taken out of the employment insurance fund, even as the ability of workers to access that fund diminished.

Pre-pandemic, only about four in 10 workers who paid into EI would be eligible for EI if they were laid off. It is ridiculous to have an insurance program in which only 40% of payees can access the benefit. That was happening while governments were taking money out of that fund, which was supposed to be there for workers, and spending it on things such as corporate tax cuts.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, 60% of student loan borrowers are women. They hold the vast majority of student debt. Of the student debt in Canada, a recent report showed that men have about \$1.4 billion, while women hold a staggering \$2.2 billion. This means they accrue more interest and have

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more trouble paying it off. Women make up two-thirds of the people on repayment assistance, and this results in an even bigger gender wealth gap.

The missing pieces in this bill, extending EI benefits and CERB amnesty, are measures that would make a huge difference for struggling Canadians but especially for women, who have been particularly hard hit.

What does the member think the message is, especially to young women who are going deeper into debt, when the Liberals and the self-proclaimed feminist Prime Minister will not implement these policies and instead break their promise and refuse to freeze student loans and end interest for good?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, we know the pandemic has had a disproportionately negative effect on women and racialized Canadians. If the government would undertake a gender-based analysis of a CERB amnesty, it would find that it would have a disproportionately great benefit for women and racialized Canadians. It is another reason I think a low-income CERB amnesty is a question of social justice, with a negligible financial cost relative to what the government has been spending, and there is no good reason not to do it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 1:30, pursuant to order made Thursday, March 11, Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (additional regular benefits), the Canada Recovery Benefits Act (restriction on eligibility) and another Act in response to COVID-19, is deemed read a third time and passed on division.

(Bill read a third time and passed)

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• (1330)

[English]

CANADA PENSION PLAN INVESTMENT BOARD ACT

The House resumed from December 7, 2020, consideration of the motion that Bill C-231, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act (investments), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the last time I spoke to this bill was in 2020, and I am resuming where I left off at that time.

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The CPPIB's investments have been consistently drawing above-average rates of return. The fund, combining both the base CPP and additional CPP accounts, achieved 10-year and five-year annualized net real returns of 10.5% and 9.6%, respectively.

The CPP fund is now at \$556.7 billion and the chief actuary, during her last independent review, confirmed that the plan continues to be sustainable for the next 75 years at current contribution rates. This means that Canadians can have confidence that the CPP will be there for them when they retire.

[Translation]

Let us take a closer look at Bill C-231.

This legislation proposes to amend the investment policies, standards and procedures established by the board of directors of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to ensure that no investments can be made or held in entities that have performed acts or carried out work contrary to ethical business practices or have violated human rights, labour or environmental laws.

The bill's intent is certainly noble and laudable, but I believe that it needs to be examined carefully to ensure that there are no unintended consequences. For instance, by prescribing certain investment policies, will this bill conflict with the independent governance of the board?

It is worth repeating that this independent governance is an important element of the board's success and effectiveness. While the board is accountable to federal and provincial finance ministers, it operates at arm's length from these levels of government. The board's investment decisions are not influenced by political direction, regional, social or economic issues, or any non-investment objectives whatsoever. This bill could set a precedent and lead to further calls to restrict the board's activities.

Such a change would certainly threaten the board's independence, but could also threaten the long-term viability of the Canada pension plan.

[English]

I would also like to point out that the bill does not set an objective standard with which the CPPIB can comply. The bill would introduce a legal requirement to prohibit investment in entities that undertake unethical business practices, without defining this term. This lack of specificity could open investment decisions up to challenges or litigation from stakeholders. Additionally, we need to consider whether the bill would create an uneven playing field at the investor level and at the company level.

At the investor level, it would be unfair to target only the CPPIB since its competitors, such as other Canadian and foreign pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and major institutional investors, would not be constrained by these rules.

Finally, an amendment such as the one proposed in this bill would require the consent of seven out of 10 provinces, having at least two-thirds of the population of all provinces, in order to come into effect.

• (1335)

[Translation]

The CPPIB explains rather transparently on its own website the policies, resources and strategies it applies to account for environmental, social and governance factors in its investment decisions, as well as the measures it takes as an asset owner.

In fact, the CPPIB recently published an update to its sustainable investment policy that reflects its growing conviction of the importance of accounting for environmental, social and governance risks and possibilities within an increasingly competitive commercial business environment.

The CPPIB is an active member of the Financial Stability Board's Task Force on Climate-Related Disclosures, a founding signatory of the Principles for Responsible Investment network and a partner of the OECD project on long-term investment by institutional investors.

[English]

The government is committed to strengthening public pensions and improving the quality of life for seniors now and for generations to come. This includes enhancing the Canada pension plan, which will raise the maximum CPP retirement benefit by up to 50% over time. The enhancement represents a major strengthening of one of the three pillars of Canada's retirement income system, along with the old age security program and voluntary tax-assisted private savings. It will significantly increase retirement security for Canadian families, particularly middle-income families and families without workplace pension plan coverage.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to note that Canada's seniors worked hard to support their families, build strong communities and contribute to the growth of our economy.

Although many people plan on closing the professional chapter of their lives, especially low-income seniors, retirement can be an intimidating prospect that comes with the risk of financial insecurity and a feeling of isolation.

Thanks to the measures that the government has put in place since 2015, we are helping seniors keep more money in their pockets, receive the CPP benefits to which they are entitled and remain active in their community.

[English]

We know that the funds in the Canada pension plan are in good hands and that the plan is actuarially sound for several generations to come. The CPPIB should be allowed to continue to fulfill its mandate free of interference. I therefore encourage hon. members to carefully consider the bill before them.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is once again an honour to be able to rise in this place and enter into debate. Today, we are discussing the private member's bill, Bill C-231.

To provide context to this bill, it is basically proposing a number of amendments that, quite frankly, I would suggest have a laudable objective of ensuring that dollars from the fund that pays the Canada Pension Plan are not being spent in a way that contributes to the commission of human, labour or environmental rights violations; contributes to the production of arms, ammunition, implements of munitions of war prohibited under international law; or benefits individuals or acts of corruption under the Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act. The bill we are debating suggests a laudable goal. It is unfortunate that the bill itself would not provide the ability to accomplish those things.

I will stop there and explain a bit for those who are watching how the CPP, Canada's pension plan, works. Canadians employed across the country pay into the Canada Pension Plan fund. That fund, a number of decades ago, was made non-political through the establishment of the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board, the CPPIB. That board is there to ensure something very important, which is that the dollars paid by Canadians into the Canada pension plan are invested independently of the hands of politicians that would try to use those dollars for possibly activist or corrupt causes.

That separation is important to ensure that, ultimately, taxpayers and employees who pay into the CPP with their Canadian dollars can trust this fund. I appreciate that the previous member mentioned that the fund currently stands at a value of approximately \$556 billion. That is more than half a trillion dollars, not of the government's money, but of the hard-working women and men from across the country who have contributed to that fund.

Every Canadian expects that government and all its facets, including organizations such as the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, will conduct itself in an ethical and virtuous way. We hear often today about causes such as ESG, or environmental, social and governance, investing in ESG causes. This is to ensure that dollars are invested in a way that does not negatively impact the environment or people in developing countries, and that it does not benefit corruption. That is a fair discussion to have.

However, the problem with this bill is that it more or less says what we want to accomplish but, and there is a big "but" here, it does not provide a framework to ensure that. Specifically, I have heard often from members of all other political parties in this House about how there are so many significant challenges regarding investments or actions related to the energy industry.

I will unpack that for members here today. There are many that would suggest that a dollar invested into anything related to energy

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is a dollar too much. The problem with this bill is that it would empower politicians to determine whether investments could be made in something like Canadian energy.

The devastating consequences that would have on our economy cannot be understated. Further, it would have devastating consequences in our world. Canada is a world leader on exactly what I talked about earlier, ESG, environmental, social and governance, causes. Canada is already a world leader on that, and we are always striving to do better as well. This bill would empower a bureaucrat or politician to make a determination as to what should or should not be invested in based on the political whims of a cabinet minister.

● (1340)

I appreciate the fact that the Liberals seem to not be in support of this bill. That is good, because it is troubling when I hear Liberal cabinet ministers talk about our needing to use things like the CPP to build our green future. I can assure members that if the Liberal government had its way, Alberta would be shut down. It is tragic that these activist pursuits are being conflated with the actual good practices that protect something Canadians need to depend on. Empowering activists' ability in regard to investments that are one of the most important and sustainable parts of Canada's social infrastructure would be tragic for the future of Canada. It would basically turn a half-a-trillion-dollar fund into a weapon for activist causes. That simply cannot stand.

My hon. colleague from Carleton dug into some of the impacts that could result from this type of legislation, specifically the broader definition of what is described in this bill as unethical business practices. When the CPPIB was asked about that, it said very clearly that using such a broad definition would mean that it could not invest in some of the top companies in our nation. The consequences of that would be dramatic. I shudder to think about the fact this weaponization of half a trillion dollars, not of government money, not of an activist cause's money, would put at risk the futures of seniors, present and future, who depend on this money. Further, if we look at how some of these causes have been implemented throughout history and the rhetoric that has resulted, it is certainly not in the best interests of Canadians.

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The left talks about wanting bigger, more generous social programs, and it is fair to have those debates, especially at a time when Canadians have demanded much from their government, but the Conservatives have been very outspoken on ensuring the efficient and effective delivery of those programs. We could go on at length about our criticisms of how the Liberals have mismanaged much of the spending over the last year or so, but what I find ironic is that the left will talk about these laudable initiatives, which is fair, as few Canadians would disagree with the fact we want ethical investments and to ensure environmental sustainability, but that when it comes down to the very foundation of accomplishing what is being talked about, it would result in instability. That is no more present than the fact that in my home province of Alberta we are a leader in the world when it comes to the environment.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I can hear my friend from the NDP laughing at this. I would remind him that we can actually produce net-zero oil in Alberta. I hope that he will join me in celebrating that incredible technological accomplishment.

The Liberals want bigger, more generous social programs without ensuring a sustainable and secure way to deliver those programs not just today, but also financing them into the future and ensuring that there is sustainability and security going forward. It is a tragic irony to see that this bill fails to address the specifics of what would be a laudable goal, on which it simply fails to deliver.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was caught off guard by my colleague's closing statement to the effect that Alberta is a leader in the world when it comes to the environment, but I will pull myself together and start my speech.

Bill C-231 is a worthwhile bill, and I thank my colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for introducing it in Parliament.

I think one of the best ways to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions is to stop funding the companies that produce them. This seems logical to me, and I think it goes without saying. Almost everyone believes that the environment is important. The environment is almost as widely loved as apple pie. Everyone loves the environment, except maybe the half of this Parliament and this country who think that funding our own extinction is the best way to support our economy.

The bill we are debating today would, in a small way, address that dogma, which is so unbelievably persistent. Every single day we lose more opportunities to protect the environment. That is why I agree with the principle my colleague has proposed. His bill is creative and, even though it does not directly affect Quebecers, I recognize that every small step matters.

That said, I am once again disappointed in this government. Instead of taking real action on the environment, it is still thinking small, and when it does act, it acts on structures rather than taking steps that would have a direct impact. While Quebec and most provincial governments are already taking action, successive feder-

al governments have had poor track records, regardless of political stripe.

Let us get back to the topic at hand. Today, we are asking a very relevant question: Should we let the billions of dollars saved by Canadians outside Quebec be spent just anywhere in the name of a completely outdated economic growth model, or should we set limits to ensure the Canada pension plan investment board invests responsibly?

I personally support the latter option. In its most recent recovery plan, my party asked the government to stop investing in fossil fuels, whether it be directly or indirectly, through subsidies or tax benefits. We believe that this money would be better spent on the transition to clean energy, which would pay off handsomely. The bill introduced by the member from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford is consistent with the simple idea I mentioned earlier, which was to stop funding polluters.

However, I am a bit saddened to see that Bill C-231 really has no teeth. Ultimately, if the Liberals vote in favour, it would be one of those small measures they could boast about having brought in. We need to keep in mind that the proposed restrictions on investment decisions would not change much in the Canada pension plan portfolio. In short, the bill would be nothing more than virtue signalling to clear the government's conscience. Here are some reasons why.

Let us start with arms companies. It is unlikely that funds from the Canada pension plan's portfolio are currently invested in companies that manufacture weapons or that violate human rights, but let us take a moment to really savour the irony of the fact that Canada sells weapons to Saudi Arabia, only to turn around and congratulate itself on forbidding the CPP investment board to invest in arms companies.

I still agree with the substance of the bill, but when it comes to companies that violate human rights, once again, this all looks good on paper. My colleague must be a fan of dark humour, because we both know perfectly well that this Liberal government could not even be bothered to create an office of the Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise with adequate power to punish offending companies. Worse still, most of the countries where these companies that violate human rights are surreptitiously registered have no legislation governing them. In practice, I do not know who will decide whether the board can invest in a company or not, but the government certainly will not help it figure that out.

Similarly, targeting companies that violate environmental or labour laws means getting involved in a long debate about the facts. Moreover, these companies are allowed to anchor their logistics chains in countries with very sketchy environmental and labour practices. We have only to think of China, with everything going on in Xinjiang with the Uighurs. Other than NGOs, nobody is exposing problematic companies and practices.

• (1350)

That is particularly difficult when it comes to the environment, because there would have to be environmental laws in the first place, as well as reason to believe that those laws have been broken. Unfortunately, the one depends on the other. We would also need whistle-blowers, who, let us be clear, risk their careers and their lives by speaking out.

Nothing in this bill would prevent the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board from investing even more heavily in oil companies, as long as they are not obviously breaking any environmental laws; in mining companies, as long as they are not officially eliminating opponents to their projects; or in arms manufacturers, as long as they are manufacturing the non-lethal parts of tanks. We therefore have no way of resolving the real problem.

I would like to add that I am surprised that the bill contains no mention of companies based in whole or in part in tax havens. If we are going to virtue-signal, we might as well have included that too.

If I were unkind, I could say that the bill is extremely idealistic because the problem is much too big to be solved within the scope of one section of an act. However, I am kind. Although this is a small step, it is a step in the right direction. Enshrining the concept of sustainable, responsible investment in federal legislation is objectively a good thing, and it is better than nothing.

However, let us keep in mind what this government is doing right now. The government says that Canada is not selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, only Jeeps. The Prime Minister clearly said it during the 2015 election campaign.

I would call a Jeep with a machine gun in the back seat a weapon. If I were to drive around Lac-Saint-Jean in a Jeep like the ones currently being sold to Saudi Arabia, there is a good chance that I would quickly be arrested, and rightly so.

From 2017 to 2020 alone, this government subsidized the oil and gas industry to the tune of almost \$24 billion. During that same period, the government provided just \$971 million to the forestry industry, even though this industry can play a role in the energy transition because it combats greenhouse gases and because many oil-based products can be replaced with wood by-products. I want to point out that 75% of that money is in the form of loans, so the government will get its money back.

If we trust the government's figures, the bill seems good. The bill needs some teeth, though, and we know that this government cannot be trusted when it comes to investments in the oil and gas industry, the environment, human rights or arms.

In summary, I agree with the principle of Bill C-231 because, although it is just a small step, it is at least a step in the right direction.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by just acknowledging the arguments put forward by my friend from the Bloc Québécois, who suggested that because he is a nice person, he would not want to suggest that this

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bill is somehow engaged in what he called “virtue signalling.” He raised some points around virtue signalling, and said that because he was nice, he would not say that.

In response, because I am also nice, I would suggest that he is actually not being naive about what is before us here today.

I am proud to rise on Bill C-231, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act in relation to investments, which has been put forward by the very learned MP from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, who is bringing to us today a very serious response to all of the rhetoric we hear in this House about an international rules-based order.

The CPP is one of the largest pension funds in the world. As we have heard in the debate today, it totals almost half a trillion dollars. Bill C-231 seeks to amend the investment policies, standards and procedures of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, which manages the funds not needed to pay current beneficiaries. The amendments will require a proactive approach to due diligence with consideration towards ethical business practices in environment, labour and human rights.

As New Democrats, we understand that Canadians expect the investments of the CPP fund to be carried out with certain principles in mind. Despite its adherence to policy on responsible investing, this investment board has billions of dollars of our pension funds tied up in the oil and gas sector, weapons manufacturing, and other companies that do not always operate within ethical business practices. These include corporations that have been highlighted by the Public Eye Awards, which focus a spotlight on companies that have some of the very worst human rights and environmental records, and mining companies that have received single-digit scores on the Responsible Mining Index.

The Liberal Party talked about the lack of specificity. We heard that, in fact, from our friends in the Bloc. Let us be clear about specificity. I am going to take my time to drill down into what some of these examples might look like.

I will begin by saying that I think my Conservative friends missed their opportunity in this debate, which was to point out the cognitive dissonance of the Liberal government in having before us gun restriction laws on assault rifles and assault weapons while simultaneously, under our current laws, allowing the CPP to invest in these very weapons.

According to a CBC article in 2019, “Canadians who want to steer clear of investing in gun companies are out of luck if they pay into the Canada Pension Plan.

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“CPP owns shares in American firearm manufacturers, including the parent company of handgun manufacturer Smith & Wesson, assault rifle maker Ruger, and Olin Corp., which produces ammunition for the AR-15, the weapon of choice for many perpetrators of mass shootings.”

The Alberta pension fund does not even own these shares anymore. The B.C. pension fund and Quebec do not own any.

It appears, then, that there is a bit of a consensus among provinces. We heard the Conservatives suggesting that we would have to get consensus on this stuff. It appears that the consensus is already there, because even those provincial pension funds think that these companies are too hot to handle. The CPP owns more of gun companies than BlackRock Asset Management Canada Limited.

As Canadians who pay into the fund, we are by extension the shareholders in the companies that benefit from the fund's investments. There is a lot of influence that could be had by divesting from companies that conduct themselves unethically or violate human rights or labour or environmental laws.

I have heard the Conservatives talking all week about virtue signalling. That is a very problematic term, and yet here they are, talking about Magnitsky sanctions against state operators who are involved in these human rights abuses. The hypocrisy is that the Conservative caucus fails to hold to account private corporations around the world that are involved in these types of atrocities and human rights abuses. They want to have a free market for international crime when it comes to profit, but when it comes to state actors, they want to pretend they are on the side of international human rights. We know this. We have heard it this week.

Divestment would be an opportunity available to us through amending section 35 of the CPPIB Act, which is what this legislation seeks to achieve by requiring the board of directors to take a proactive approach in ethical investments.

● (1400)

Let us look at a few of the examples of the types of impacts being experienced around the world.

Last week, the Peruvian organization, Derechos Humanos Sin Frontera/Human Rights Without Borders, wrote an open letter to the Peruvian delegation at the Prospectors & Developers Association's convention in Toronto and a more detailed letter to the Canadian mining company Hudbay. The letters denounced police repression against locals peacefully protesting stalled negotiations between Hudbay and the province on a framework agreement for the company's mine in Peru. At least 17 protesters were injured.

This speaks to a story we hear in Canada. We know that in the global south many of these people in these places like Peru are indigenous people. These are violations of the UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In the same way the Liberal government would violate indigenous rights in this country on behalf of oil and gas by refusing to provide free, prior and informed consent, it is more than willing in the CPP to take its investments abroad and do the same.

MiningWatch Canada in its mandate letter talks about creating better control for corporations. It states that Canadian mining companies operate around the world and dominate in the amount of capital raised in exploration. Bay Street funds the mining sector globally. However, there are no regulations in its activities to prevent it from profiting from weak protections for the environment, workers, indigenous peoples and human rights in the host countries.

In April 2019, the Liberal Minister of International Trade commissioned an external legal review to advise him on how to best equip the Canadian ombudsman for responsible enterprise with sufficient tools to engage in credible and effective investigation of alleged human rights abuses and to ensure that he had the powers to compel witnesses and documents. True to form, the performative Liberal government would like to speak the language of justice and human rights, but when it comes down to actually putting teeth in legislation to hold big businesses and corporations accountable, the Liberals do the sleight of hand. They say one thing to the public and they do something else when it comes to creating systems that will hold these people accountable.

For a year and a half, the government buried the results of the timed-bound external legal review and failed to give CORE the powers that were promised and the reviews that were confirmed as needed.

Last February, the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, which works tirelessly to ensure that Canadian mining, oil and gas companies respect human rights and the environment, when working abroad, stated, “The Government of Canada has caved to industry demands and is ignoring and concealing expert legal advice it commissioned on how to give the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) the powers it needs to do its job.”

The government has legal advice. When it talks about us not having specificity, we have these frameworks in place. The government just fails and refuses to act on them. The Liberals have the legal advice by the McIsaac report and for over a year and a half, they have failed to act on the report's findings and make that report public. The report had to be leaked by civil society just to see the light of day.

“By ignoring and hiding its own expert advice, the federal government is showing it is more interested in appeasing the demands of the mining industry than upholding its human rights obligations or making good on its promises.” That was a quote from Emily Dwyer, the coordinator for the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability. She states, “The Government of Canada has turned its back on the communities and workers harmed by Canadian companies overseas.”

The element of the bill seeks to ensure labour rights are respected. This would have a positive impact by leveraging the CPP, which has funding purchasing power and the ability to punish corporations, through our divestment, with poor human rights track records, where labour practices are discriminatory against women. The government is a self-proclaimed feminist government. The Liberals have the ability to provide these GBA+ analysis that they talk about abroad, yet they refuse to act.

As New Democrats, we want a Pension Plan Board to take a proactive approach and due diligence in its investment policies. We want to leverage the half a billion dollars of investment and we want to ensure that all the companies have ethical business—

• (1405)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to join the debate today on the private member's bill of my hon. colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. It raises some important questions on the role of the Canada pension plan.

I believe that the vast majority of Canadians do not want their money invested in companies that do business in a way that is abhorrent to Canadian values. Increasingly, Canadians, especially younger Canadians, are insisting that their entire portfolio be invested in companies that have robust environmental, social and governance standards. Some studies have shown that over 75% of those born after 1965 see it as increasingly important to consider ESG standards when investing and that responsible investing is the way of the future. Members can firmly count me as one of those people.

Canadian banks are starting to take note, but they too have a long way to go to meet this growing demand. Definitions of responsible investing by the big five banks still allow them to invest in areas that may run afoul of the topics that Bill C-231 brings forth.

Portfolios should not only put their money in companies with strong ESG standards because there is a growing demand from consumers. We know that companies with strong ESG standards tend to vastly outperform the market, and evidence demonstrates that a better ESG score translates to about 10% lower costs of capital. The reasons for this are obvious. These companies have cost efficiencies from use of inputs and other resources, better regulatory relationships and investment optimization, and less overall risk when robust ESG and anti-corruption compliance measures are in place.

As the world swiftly transforms to a lower-carbon and net-zero future, companies that currently actively manage their emissions

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can assure their investors that they will be prepared for regulatory risks down the road. In this regard, Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, former governor of the Bank of England and current UN special envoy on climate action and finance, said, “...those who invest in [achieving net zero]...and who are part of the solution will be rewarded. Those who are...still part of the problem will be punished.”

Just as Canadians want their private money invested in companies that are not complicit in human labour or environmental crimes, they also expect that public money, especially their pensions, will follow similar guidelines. That brings us to the matter at hand today.

The Canada pension plan has steadily grown over time, and its returns have vastly outperformed the market average. The CPP Investment Board was created as an organization independent of the government in 1997 to monitor and invest funds held by the CPP. The board reports quarterly on its performance and annually to Parliament through our Minister of Finance, and board members are appointed by the Minister of Finance in consultation with the provinces and a nominating committee. Its model is recognized internationally for sound management and governance, and its independence is highlighted as one of the reasons for this. As of the end of last year, the assets under management of the CPP exceeded \$475 billion.

While the CPP has provided strong growth of pensions over time, the changing nature of investor preference is not isolated to private banks. Canadians are also expecting that their investments are not unduly put at risk through exposure to companies that are not prepared for the energy transformations that are currently under way, or that could be debarred or otherwise ostracized for committing acts of bribery or human rights abuses.

In terms of monitoring investments, the CPPIB currently asks that companies report material ESG risks and opportunities relevant to their industry and business models. It has also indicated a preference for companies to align their reporting with the standards of the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board, or SASB, and the Financial Stability Board's Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures, or TCFD.

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Both SASB and TCFD have created standards for businesses to identify, manage and communicate financially material sustainability information to their investors. Generally, they divide climate risks into two major categories: risks related to the transition to a lower-carbon economy and risks related to the physical impacts of climate change. Where companies in its portfolio do not follow such a standard, the CPP has the ability to utilize its proxy voting rights to push for disclosure along these lines and to improve ESG performance more widely. While completely divesting a company holds appeal to many, oftentimes much more can be accomplished from driving change in practice and reporting as a shareholder, as unpopular as that can sometimes be.

The approach that CPP takes on climate involves bottom-up assessments for new investments from the perspective of climate change and a top-down approach to measure its entire portfolio risk over time. This is smart from both an environmental and economic perspective, and it has informed a couple of notable shifts.

● (1410)

The first is a steady departure from fossil fuel investments. Last May, former CEO Mark Machin noted that fossil fuel producers and services made up only 2.8% of the board's investments as of March 31, 2020. That is a reduction of 4.6% from two years earlier.

The second, as showcased in the CPP's latest report on sustainable investing, is that investments in global renewable energy companies more than doubled to \$6.6 billion in the year to June 30, 2020. These are important changes because the numbers show that renewable energy investments are greatly outperforming those in the fossil fuel sector. Reports have shown that over the last five years, investments in fossil fuels have yielded an average of a 7.2% loss, while renewable energy investments have grown by 73%.

Of investments in the last year, the top 30 global clean energy companies have grown between three and four times in size. I know this very well because I have some of these leading clean-tech companies, Carbon Engineering for example, in my riding.

We need transparency in markets so investors can adequately assess risk of carbon exposure. The driving force behind the creation of Canada's expert panel on sustainable finance in 2018 was for it to make recommendations that could scale and align finance in Canada with our country's climate and economic goals.

Among the 15 recommendations outlined to attain our goals, the panel recommended we embed climate-related risk into the monitoring, regulation and supervision of Canada's financial systems. It further recommended that we promote sustainable investment as business as usual within Canada's asset management community.

This is also one of the reasons to support Bill C-12, Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, which, among other things, would require the minister of finance to report annually on how it is managing its financial risks and opportunities related to climate change. This obligation would require the government to report on all of its operations, including Crown corporations such as Export Development Canada and the Business Development Bank of Canada.

I believe that this disclosure should extend to CPP. Canadians should have a full picture of the climate-related risks associated with their investments, both those made in Canada and those made internationally, as well as the areas where we can profit. CPP officials have been leading calls for such disclosure within that portfolio. The same can be said for ensuring that CPP does not support companies that are committing human rights abuses and risk undermining our proud commitment to upholding human rights in the world.

The current government has already introduced numerous policies and mechanisms to make sure that Canadian companies are not complicit in human rights abuses in Canada and abroad. Notably, to further strengthen Canada's commitment to responsible business conduct, we appointed a Canadian ombudsman of responsible enterprise in April 2019, whose duty it is to review claims of alleged human rights abuses rising from the operations of Canadian companies abroad in the mining, oil and gas, and garment sectors. Following credible reports of human rights violations affecting Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinxiang, China, Canada adopted several measures to address the risk of goods produced by forced labour from any country from entering Canada and to protect Canadian businesses from becoming annoyingly complicit in the abuse.

A further step I would like to see this Parliament take is to adopt Bill S-216, an act to enact the modern slavery act and to amend the Customs Tariff, which would impose an obligation on entities to report on the measures being taken to prevent and reduce the risk of forced labour or child labour being used at any step in the production of goods in Canada or those imported into Canada. Like Bill C-12, the standards contained in the proposed modern slavery act should apply to the CPP. These disclosures are not just about the moral imperative. Any smart investor seeks to understand the level of risk in its investments, and the CPP is no exception.

To the bill itself, I very much agree with its intents and purposes. Few Canadians would believe we should support businesses running afoul of the human labour or environmental abuses it mentions. I do, however, have serious concerns about the way it has been drafted. The language of this bill is dangerously vague and overly broad in stating that:

...no investment may be made or held in an entity if there are reasons to believe that the entity has performed acts or carried out work contrary to ethical business practices....

This could include just about any unsubstantiated report rather than actual, factual occurrences. To ascertain when there may be a reason to believe something had occurred could result in absolute paralysis of the CPP. As well, companies would be considered guilty until proven innocent.

● (1415)

It also does not define what would constitute a human labour or environmental rights violation that would bar investment. For example, I think we can all agree that we do not want to invest in—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak on this bill introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. Bill C-231, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act (investments), which introduces an obligation on behalf of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to take into account matters they say they take into account on environmental, social and governance issues; however, they are not required to take these into account, because they are governed by rules that tell them what their mandate is and what principles they have to use with respect to investments.

It has been suggested by other members, particularly from the Liberal government side, that having controls on investments would not interfere with the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board's investments being done in accordance with financial principles. The only rule that is passed in the mandate of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board is very important for us to understand. It says this mandate is:

...to invest the assets of the CPP Fund with a view to achieving a maximum rate of return without undue risk of loss.

It has regard to:

...the factors that may affect the funding of the Canada Pension Plan and its ability to meet its financial obligations [on any given business day].

As we know, it has been a very successful investment board. It has made good returns on behalf of the Canadians who rely on the Canada Pension Plan for their pension, and is sustainable, according to a recent audit, for the next 75 years, at the existing rate of contributions. That is a very positive thing, but there is no obligation.

We just heard the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country say that using ethical, environmental, social and governance issues as litmus tests for investments actually helps. That is a good thing. That is good to know, so people should take comfort in knowing that if obligations are imposed on the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to follow these guidelines, it will not result in a loss of income or a loss of benefits to the beneficiaries of this fund: the people of Canada to whom this is important.

We have a situation today, in Canada and around the world, with huge investment funds such as the Canada Pension Plan Investment

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Board, nearly worth more than half a trillion dollars, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, the Alberta pension investment fund, which has been spoken of, and the B.C. pension plan. These are huge pension funds that can influence what happens in the investment world, not only in Canada, because their investments are not restricted to Canada or Canadian corporations. They are worldwide. Diversity in investments is always recommended to individual investors as being a good thing. Other countries are doing the same thing and investing around the world.

The fact is that there needs to be some control on this to ensure, first of all, that the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board has the power to make choices based on matters involving ethical, environmental, social and governance issues, as well as human rights issues. It needs to have that power because, under its mandate, in some cases it could be required to invest in a company that was violating human rights but was providing a bigger rate of return than a company that was not. We see that possibility throughout all kinds of industries, whether weapons industries or others that support the military.

I wanted to use my time to talk about one particular human rights situation that is very relevant to this bill: the situation in Myanmar, where significant human rights violations are going on. We have a genocide before the International Criminal Court, which Canada supports, and a military that has significant investments that return money to it and allow it to conduct its genocide and take over the country and not rely on public funds. It has significant investments, some of which are held by the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board.

● (1420)

When asked about the problem with that, the response from the spokesperson of the board was that many of these companies are reputable. Among the Myanmar military-related stocks owned by CPPIB, there are, according to CPPIB's global head of public affairs and communications, "highly-reputable multinational companies providing their clients with exceptional products and services." The profits of those companies, which are directly owned by the military of Myanmar, go back to the Myanmar military for its operations in supporting its activities, which is something the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board should not be investing in. Canadians would not want their pension security to be reliant on this. It is a good reason that the bill needs to be passed, and there are many more.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I first want to thank and recognize my NDP colleagues, the members for Hamilton Mountain, Hamilton Centre and St. John's East, for their contributions to the debate on this bill and for their support.

With great financial power comes great responsibility. The Canada pension plan fund, valued at half a trillion dollars, has the kind of financial firepower that can literally move markets with its investments. Where and how this money is invested can have great consequences around the world and here at home. We live in an increasingly globalized world where multinational corporations valued at billions of dollars have an incredible amount of power at their disposal.

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Many of these corporations have extracted obscene amounts of wealth from countries with corrupt or despotic governments that do not have the same labour or human rights protections we take for granted here in Canada. The working class in those countries is exploited for low wages and often suffer from poor working conditions. Their populations do not enjoy the protection of the law and are often victims of state security forces. When it comes to fighting for their environmental rights, the right to live in a safe, clean and healthy environment, they are often brutally shoved aside so as not to interrupt profit.

The corporations that continue to exploit these inequalities and degrade and pollute our world in the name of profit must be held to account. Corporate social responsibility must be enforced by law and through the ethical investment of our pension funds.

In my introductory speech on this bill, I laid out clear examples of how our CPP funds have been invested in companies with problematic track records. This included references to the MiningWatch index, the Food and Beverage Benchmark Findings Report, the Public Eye awards of shame and research from the magazine Corporate Knights. The information was cross-referenced by the Library of Parliament and verified.

There have been numerous reports in newspapers detailing the problematic investments made by the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board. The fact of the matter is that despite the board's policy on responsible investing, our Canada pension plan funds have been exposed to companies that block climate policy and climate resolutions, cause severe environmental damage, and use forced or child labour with severe human rights violations as a result.

There are clear examples around the world where countries are legislating corporate social responsibility. Germany has taken a step toward forcing companies to take responsibility for any labour or environmental abuses in their supply global chains. A new law allows for hefty fines if those companies' contractors abroad are found to breach human rights or environmental rules.

Sweden's national pension funds must include environmental and ethical standards in its investment policies and report annually to the government on how it would adhere to those practices. Moreover, Norway's pension plan is governed by regulations that provide a legal framework emphasizing international human rights and environmental standards.

Canada's current lack of ambition in legislating in this area is truly shameful. Since I introduced this bill, wild and untrue allegations

have been made by some of our media and Conservatives, so let me be very clear about two things. Nothing in my bill would allow any political interference or direction of the investment decisions of the CPPIB, and nothing in this bill would change that board's mandate, which is to maximize investment returns without undue risk of loss.

When it comes to debate on this bill, the Conservatives have made it very clear in their speeches that despite clear evidence of problematic investments that could violate human labour or environmental rights, they are fine with profit over people. This, unfortunately, is not surprising for a party that too often remains wilfully blind to bad corporate behaviour.

The Liberals, it seems, while bringing their customary platitudes about noble intentions, will also vote against the bill. I remain hopeful that some of them will see the light and vote with the NDP to send this bill to committee for further study.

Allow me to conclude by saying that even if this bill does not pass, this issue is not going away. There will be increased scrutiny of our investments going forward. I again urge my colleagues to support Bill C-231 so that our pension investments will not contribute to human misery around the world.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 2:30 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired. If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

• (1430)

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I respectfully request a recorded division on Bill C-231, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act (investments).

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 24, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 22, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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

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