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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 19, 2021

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1100)

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR CLOVERDALE—LANGLEY CITY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

On Friday, April 16, at the last sitting of this House, we had debate on Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code, conversion therapy. During the question-and-answer period following my speech opening the morning's debate, contrary to Standing Order 18, the member for Cloverdale—Langley City used language that was offensive to me and, in my understanding, to many other members of the House. While she did reach out to me on Friday evening to offer an apology for “any misunderstanding”, I am of the belief that such an apology should be made not just to me, but to all members of the House and to members of the LGBTQ2S community in Canada and around the world who have expressed their hurt and their anger at her inference.

In quoting Matthew 23:27, the member inferred that either I or all members of the LGBTQ2S community are unclean. As an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada, I am well aware that at its best this passage has been used to deride someone as a hypocrite. However, this passage, along with the whole of that particular chapter, has been used for centuries to bolster anti-Semitism and, very specifically, anti-Jewish sentiments. The misuse of this passage has led to misunderstanding, even hatred of Jews, by Christians, as pointed out by the famed theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book, *Faith and Fratricide*. It is, however, the first time that I have heard it used to cast negative aspersions on members of my community. The biblical concept of unclean has long been disavowed by Jews and Christians alike, and there is certainly no place for it in this House, especially in the debate on important amendments to the Criminal Code, which will further recognize an attempt to heal the hurt perpetrated against lesbians, bisexual, gay, transgendered, queer and two-spirited people. We are not unclean.

I would ask that you, as the Speaker, request that the member apologize and withdraw those remarks, and that you also remind all

members to be mindful of their words, which may be heard by other members and by many Canadians as being offensive.

• (1105)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for his point of order. I take it under advisement. I will return to the House with a ruling on that.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ) moved that Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (illness, injury or quarantine), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this is it. We made it. It is finally time to debate a very compassionate, common-sense bill that seeks to extend special employment insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. I am very honoured to sponsor this bill on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

It is finally time to put forward a practical, viable solution to a very real and documented problem. It is finally time for parliamentarians to once again tangibly demonstrate their support for the idea that sick workers deserve better and deserve more.

I would like to remind members that the Bloc Québécois's February 2020 motion to extend EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks received the support of all opposition members. I would therefore like to thank the 169 members who supported the proposal and remind them that sick workers still need their support. I hope that, together, we will be able to convince the 149 Liberal members who voted against the motion to support it this time around. As the Speaker pointed out, the Liberal government's support is essential to my bill. I need this government's help because my bill needs a royal recommendation in order to be passed.

It is finally an opportunity to honour and remember Émilie Sansfaçon and bring her political struggle, which courageously began when she was fighting for her own life, to a successful conclusion. It is an opportunity to finally implement something that more than 618,000 people have been calling for, namely extending EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. I want to thank the incredible Marie-Hélène Dubé for her perseverance and tenacity in rallying support for this effort.

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I invite parliamentarians to think back to January 4, 2021, which feels like just yesterday. Think about it this way: If one of your loved ones had a serious illness, like cancer, and their treatment had begun on January 4, that individual would no longer have any income today, because their benefits would have run out. They would have used up their 15 weeks of special benefits. This is unacceptable and, I dare say, embarrassing for a wealthy society like ours.

My bill would make some very simple amendments to the Employment Insurance Act. It would replace all references to the maximum of 15 weeks of special EI sickness benefits with a maximum of 50 weeks.

I want to make it clear that these benefits are for people who lost their jobs against their will. Eligible workers who are sick can collect 55% of their average salary to a maximum of \$573 per week.

We can all agree that nobody decides to be sick. Nobody plans to be away from work for a long period of time because of illness. Nobody wants a cancer diagnosis or anything like that. These things are totally involuntary and unpredictable. The workers who need this safety net are the most precarious workers, those who are not lucky enough to have good jobs with private insurance or good coverage under collective agreements.

In 2017, 400,000 people needed this crucial support. It was their only option. These are people from all across Quebec and Canada, of all ages and backgrounds. In many cases, they do not have the privilege of holding well-paid jobs. When they get sick, they typically do not have the financial leeway to fully focus on getting better.

Back home in Salaberry-Suroît, a rural riding, when people get sick they usually have to go to Montreal for treatment. They have to budget for travel, parking and all sorts of medical expenses. Often, spouses also have to take time off work during the treatment periods to support their partner, which adds to the families' financial stress.

These workers deserve better. EI sickness benefits have the added advantage of preserving the employment relationship between the worker and the employer. In other words, when the person recovers and feels better, they can return to their position.

• (1110)

We can all agree that this job security is far from a luxury, especially after fighting for one's life.

My bill is also a posthumous tribute to Émilie Sansfaçon. At 31, this young mother lost her battle with cancer, leaving behind her grieving spouse and her two children. She died before she could see the outcome of her political fight to improve EI sickness benefits by extending them from 15 to 20 weeks, despite a meeting in 2019 with the current Liberal Prime Minister, who gave her hope. However, nothing has changed since then.

The Bloc Québécois leader and member for Beloeil—Chambly noted in the House that Ms. Sansfaçon is the face of the inequity, injustice and discrimination that the seriously ill face in the employment insurance program, but Émilie is also the face of hope, a fighting spirit and perseverance. By passing Bill C-265, the Émilie

Sansfaçon act, we will finish the fight for all the Émilies in Quebec and Canada.

I am pleased to remind all my colleagues that in 2019 the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a study confirming that we collectively have the means to adequately support sick workers. It is a sensible and compassionate proposal. It is both realistic and achievable to increase EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks with a premium increase of six cents per \$100 of insurable earnings.

The idea that 50 weeks are necessary in the event of illness was recognized to some extent during the pandemic, as temporary adjustments to EI provided for 50 weeks of benefits in case of need. Nevertheless, it is incoherent that there are still only 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits.

My colleagues will agree that it is peculiar and incoherent that we have the means to support caregivers for a longer period than the person they are caring for. In fact, the caregiver is entitled to 28 weeks, which is excellent, but the person being cared for is only entitled to 15 weeks. Where is the logic in that?

One thing is clear: We cannot afford to let workers mortgage their homes to cover medical expenses, as was the case for long-time advocate Marie-Hélène Dubé. Ms. Dubé was even forced to delay surgery for her third bout of cancer because she had not worked enough hours to be eligible for another 15 weeks of sickness benefits.

We cannot afford to delay remission and leave workers living in financial insecurity throughout treatments. We cannot afford to choose precariousness over compassion.

Today we are debating a progressive bill that I think should galvanize all progressive members in the House.

I never thought I would find myself quoting a former Liberal member, but my Liberal colleagues might be more receptive to the words of one of their own. On November 22, 2011, the former member for Bourassa said, "In a non-partisan way, I am asking all my colleagues to make that gesture of solidarity and support my bill." This makes good sense. I want to echo this statement and call on all of us to support vulnerable workers.

In the past 10 years or so, parliamentarians have had the opportunity to debate similar bills introduced by the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. The Liberal Party even made the same proposal during the 41st Parliament.

If the Liberals decided to change their position and hammer home the message that workers do not need the 50 weeks that we are proposing and that 15 weeks or 26 weeks are sufficient for all workers, then they need to explain why. For a government that tells anyone who will listen that it governs based on science, this position is untenable and lacks ambition. Statistics from the government's own department contradict its position and confirm that they are abandoning the most vulnerable workers.

The Quebec Cancer Foundation supports extending benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. I would like to get it on the record that the Canadian Cancer Society is also in favour of extending these benefits and sees 26 weeks as the minimum increase and 50 weeks as the more desirable option.

• (1115)

It is time, hon. colleagues, to join that consensus and support Bill C-265.

I would like to close with a heartfelt plea. Today is budget day. The Liberal government could be generous to the most vulnerable members of our society, to sick workers who need more from the government than financial insecurity, stress and abandonment.

When parliamentarians, citizens and the media read the budget announcements, I hope they will all think about Émilie Sansfaçon and the hundreds of thousands of people like her, and I suggest they look at the situation in the following way.

If the government makes no mention of this issue and continues to provide only a measly 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits, then it is breaking its promise and insulting sick workers.

If the government increases these benefits to 26 weeks, then it is simply providing false comfort hiding the terrible reality that the Liberals are letting down approximately 68% of workers who need those benefits.

If the Liberal government decides to extend these benefits by only slightly more than that, then it has missed an opportunity. The Liberals will not have increased these benefits enough in the eyes of the over 618,000 people who signed the petition started by Marie-Hélène Dubé, which calls for extending EI sickness benefits to 50 weeks.

If the Liberal government is suitably generous and decides to extend benefits to 50 weeks right away, I would be the first to congratulate it and withdraw my bill, Bill C-265, which would then be obsolete.

In other words, let there be no doubt that I will continue to demand what is fair and realistic, because we in the Bloc Québécois have not forgotten Émilie Sansfaçon; because we in the Bloc Québécois stand with vulnerable workers; and because we in the Bloc Québécois choose compassion, solidarity and kindness.

I know the House is capable of doing so, as well. I call on all my colleagues to support this bill.

Let us pass Bill C-265 for the most vulnerable workers.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague

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from Salaberry—Suroît for her excellent speech and her excellent bill.

As she indicated when she was introducing her bill, we have decided to support this legislation and we will continue to support it. I have a very simple question for her.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer believes that anyone eligible could take full advantage of the entire benefit period. The reality is that this is not always what happens.

Can my colleague comment on the fact that, if the bill were to pass and 50 weeks of benefits became available, that does not necessarily mean that most people would take the full 50 weeks?

• (1120)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question and the opportunity to clarify.

My bill provides for up to 50 weeks of benefits, but we know that, on average, people need 41 weeks. That is an average, which means that some people who are sick need less than 50 weeks but quite a bit more than 26 weeks. That is well documented and proven. In 41% of cases, workers need more than 26 weeks. They actually need a minimum of 41 weeks.

Just because the bill provides for 50 weeks, people might think that every worker fighting illness will use all 50 weeks. That is not at all the case. We are talking about an average.

In costing this proposal, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that, as a society, we have the means to provide these workers with significant protection so they can focus on fighting their illness instead of stressing about how they are going to support their families and pay for rent, groceries and medical bills.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the speech and the initiative by my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît.

She is right. For about a decade, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP have been proposing measures to take care of the most vulnerable workers when they fall sick, because we know that the current 15 weeks are not enough and that the proposed 26 weeks provide false comfort.

I would like her to keep going. The average recovery period is often 36, 37 or 41 weeks, as she said. We must also consider the doctor's advice. It is not the worker who chooses to take more or fewer weeks, it is their doctor who determines how much time they should take to recover before they are fit to return to work.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is quite right. As I stated in my speech, nobody decides to be sick. None of us can predict when we will get sick, and often we cannot predict when we will get better, either.

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Today, highly effective treatments are available that may affect a person's ability to return to work, but it is the doctor who makes these decisions. The sick worker cannot decide to return to work if their doctor believes that they do not have everything they need to handle their workload. The worker must take the time to fully recover.

A person with an unforeseen illness should only return to work with their doctor's permission. This bill is about supporting a worker fighting for their life who does not have everything they need, such as a collective agreement or private insurance. Even if they want to return to work, they must first accomplish just one thing, and that is to heal. That is why my colleagues must support Bill C-265.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her thoughtful and passionate speech about a bill that will correct a grave injustice.

I would like her to tell us about the choices available to workers. In her earlier remarks, she said that the limited sickness benefit period could force a person who is still recovering to go back to work. A person who has not fully recovered may fall ill again more quickly, and that is another cost to society.

I would like my colleague to comment on that aspect, and I would also like to know if she has had discussions with the Liberals. Does she know on what grounds they would reject this proposal when there is money in the EI fund, which is supposed to be managed independently?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent question.

Quite frankly, I do not understand why the Liberals refuse to propose or give royal recommendation to this bill. We have known for 10 years now that 15 weeks of benefits are not enough. We knew that long before the 15 weeks were granted.

The Liberals are hiding behind their proposal to increase benefits to 26 weeks, which has been announced by the minister several times in the House, but what is her rationale for proposing 26 weeks?

Legislation like the Employment Insurance Act is not amended very often. It is an old piece of legislation that needs to be updated, but just because we change it today and increase the number of weeks to 26 does not mean we could change it again next year. These kinds of changes do not happen often. The Liberals need to reverse their position and agree to this change to increase the number of weeks of sickness benefits to 50. That is what vulnerable workers need.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in this important debate. Before anything, I want to share my condolences to the friends and family of Émilie Sansfaçon. I would also like to recognize the work and advocacy of the member for Salaberry—Suroît.

We never want Canadians to face unnecessary hardship. We are doing whatever we can to put in place the necessary measures to support them when they are going through a difficult time. When eligible Canadians are unable to work, the employment insurance program is there for them. Sickness benefits within the EI program are designed as a short-term income replacement measure, for temporary work absences due to illness, injury or quarantine.

The benefits provide up to 15 weeks of temporary income support at an amount equal to 55% of the average weekly insurable earnings, up to a maximum weekly amount. In 2021, this maximum weekly amount is \$595. Right now, too many Canadians exhaust their 15 weeks of benefits before they are able to return to work. That is why our government is committed to extending EI sickness benefits to help Canadians pay their bills while they recover.

EI sickness benefits are one of the many supports available to Canadians with longer-term illness and disability. These supports include the Canada pension plan disability benefit, as well as benefits offered through private and employer insurance, and supports provided by provinces and territories.

Access to EI benefits is normally based on the number of insurable hours that individuals have worked in the year prior to their application or since their last claim. This is known as the "qualifying period." When we recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic was preventing many Canadians from accumulating the number of insurable hours that are normally required, we took action to address the problem.

We made adjustments so that workers with at least 120 hours of work as of September 27, 2020 could receive a one-time insurable hours credit of 300 insurable hours for claims for regular benefits related to job loss, and 480 insurable hours for claims for special benefits, such as sickness, maternity and parental, compassionate care or family caregiving.

The hours credit is retroactive to March 15, 2020 for claimants who were looking to transition early from the CERB to EI but could not establish their EI claim due to insufficient hours. For those claimants, the qualifying period may also be extended. The hours credit is available for new EI claims for one year, in recognition that labour market conditions remain uncertain and will take time to stabilize.

We knew that even with these temporary changes to the EI program, many workers would still not be eligible. That is why our government introduced the suite of recovery benefits. These benefits include the Canada recovery benefit to support workers, including self-employed workers, who are, themselves, ineligible for EI; the Canada recovery caregiving benefit to support workers who have been unable to work because they need to provide care or support for a child, family member or dependant as a result of COVID-19; and, of course, the Canada recovery sickness benefit.

Along with the CERB and other measures our government introduced, the Canada recovery sickness benefit has become a critical part of our government's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was created through the safe restart agreement as a temporary income support program for workers who need to stay home because they are unable to work at least 50% of their scheduled work week due to being sick or needing to self-isolate due to COVID-19, or having underlying conditions or undergoing treatments or having contracted other sicknesses that make them more susceptible to COVID-19.

Our government also amended the Canada Labour Code to ensure that workers can have access to job-protected leave and can avail themselves of the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit.

• (1130)

This past February, we proposed amendments to the Employment Insurance Act, which received royal assent on March 17, to increase the maximum number of weeks available for EI regular benefits for claims established between September 27, 2020, and September 25, 2021. We also made changes that would facilitate access to EI special benefits for self-employed workers until September 25, 2021, when all the temporary EI measures end.

Complementary to these amendments, we have made regulatory changes to increase the number of weeks of benefits available for the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit. Again, we did what needed to be done to continue supporting Canadians.

Before I conclude, I would like to say a word about the future of EI. Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how the EI program has not kept up with the way Canadians work, nor emerging trends in labour markets. That much is clear. It was not built to respond to a major crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

That is why, when the pandemic hit, we recognized very quickly that the current system was not able to cover enough Canadians in the workforce who had been impacted with job loss. It was also not able to keep up with the volume of applications that needed to be processed quickly and efficiently to help Canadians pay their bills and put food on the table.

We have a unique opportunity right now to bring the employment insurance program into the modern era to make it more inclusive. Flowing from last fall's Speech from the Throne and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion's mandate letter, we are committed to bringing forward a plan for a modernized and inclusive EI system.

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We have been working very hard over the past year to introduce a number of benefits to help Canadians get through the pandemic. These benefits have played a pivotal role in buffering the worst economic impacts to Canadians. As I said, we never want to see Canadians suffer. That is why we are doing whatever we can to support them as they are going through this difficult time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-265, introduced by the member for Salaberry—Suroît.

The bill focuses on EI sickness benefits, which have been capped at 15 weeks since the 1970s, whereas EI regular benefits can last up to 26, or even 50, weeks.

This is not a new issue. I heard about it from Marie-Hélène Dubé, a Rivière-du-Loup resident who contacted me about it. I hear about this issue quite regularly from my constituents. Marie-Hélène Dubé is an acquaintance of mine. Over the years, I have spoken with her several times about the topic we are debating today.

Nearly four years ago, in 2018, I presented a resolution at my party's general council, held in Saint-Hyacinthe, to extend EI benefits in the case of serious illness. This resolution was adopted the members of my party. Last month, I also got this resolution passed by all party members at the Conservative convention, which was held virtually earlier this year.

All parties in the House want to address this issue. The Liberals are sadly the only ones dragging their feet.

I remind members that the Liberal government has been in power since October 2019. It had a majority for the first four years and has remained in power for another year and a half with the help of other opposition parties. So far, the Liberal government has not done anything to extend EI sickness benefits, and I do not see why.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer released a study two years ago in April 2019, estimating the cost of extending sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50. According to this study, it would cost between \$1.1 billion and \$1.3 billion a year. That may seem like a lot, but it is important to know that the EI program is first and foremost supposed to be independent and self-sustaining. It is funded through premiums paid by workers and employers, which are adjusted periodically based on the claim rate.

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In 2019, the contribution rate for workers was \$1.62 per \$100 of insurable earnings to a maximum of \$56,300 a year. The employer pays 140% of that amount, or \$2.27 per \$100 of insurable earnings. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that extending sickness benefits would cost 6¢ more per \$100 earned by a worker. For someone who earns \$35,000 a year, that is an increase of \$21 a year or \$1.75 a month. For someone who has reached or exceeded the maximum insurable earnings of \$56,300, the proposed change would cost \$33.78 a year or \$2.81 a month. If we asked people whether they were prepared to pay between \$1.75 and \$2.81 a month for peace of mind and access to EI sickness benefits if they were to get cancer or need heart surgery, for example, it is very clear that the answer would be yes.

Balance protection insurance for credit cards and credit disability insurance on car loans both cost far more than 0.06%. They usually cost around 1% of the monthly balance. That amount is 20 times higher than the small increase we are talking about here to extend EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50.

We might well wonder if that is why the Liberals are reluctant to offer EI sickness benefits for longer than 15 weeks. Have insurance companies lobbied the government because they do not want this safety net to make their financial products less attractive?

Let us remember the incestuous relationship between the Liberal government and major financial institutions, which was an issue when the Liberals introduced Bill C-27 in the previous Parliament. That bill proposed legislative amendments to pension standards that would have benefited Morneau Shepell, the family-owned investment company previously run by Bill Morneau, the former finance minister.

As a Conservative, I am very wary of any new tax or government directive that could make it harder for Canada's small and medium-sized businesses to compete. As the owner of a business with about 30 employees, I am all the more wary considering the especially difficult year all SMEs have had. I am here to help them get through the pandemic that we will have to continue grappling with for the next few months, or maybe even more than a year. However, I do not think that contributing an extra \$29 or \$47 per year per employee will bankrupt my business.

• (1135)

My employees are important to me, and I would love for them to have this lifeline to count on in case they ever have to face such a difficult struggle.

On this subject, I would not accuse the government of over-spending. Why, then, are we still here, six and a half years after the Liberals took office? They still have not addressed this issue. The Liberals had a chance to include parts of Bill C-265 in their own Bill C-24, but they decided against it. To top it all off, we learned last week that the government has decided to refuse royal recommendation for Bill C-265, so its odds of being passed by the next election are slim.

Is this what the Liberals call co-operation with the opposition parties? It sounds more like “my way or the highway”. It appears as though they want to call an election right away, so that the Prime Minister can run as a great saviour and promise, for a third time, to

increase the number of weeks of EI benefits for serious illnesses, when he had every opportunity to get it done sooner.

A few weeks ago, I asked the government whether it was going to extend EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks, as set out in the motion the House of Commons passed in February 2020. The government responded that it would first extend this benefit period to 30 weeks.

That is great, but when? Will it be in the budget? We shall see this afternoon. Can the government tell us the difference in cost between 30 and 50 weeks? I remind the House that the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that extending these benefits from 15 to 50 weeks would cost 6¢ for every \$100. This figure is not for 30 weeks, but perhaps the government and the Department of Finance did their own assessment.

What is the difference in cost between 15 and 30 weeks? What would be the difference in cost between 30 and 50 weeks? Is the government seriously obstructing Bill C-265 to save 2¢ or 3¢? The Liberal member who will be speaking next has a few minutes to ask me questions. I would like him to start by answering mine.

Beyond the figures I just cited, Marie-Hélène Dubé and Émilie Sansfaçon were extremely resilient, and in the case of Ms. Sansfaçon, to the very end. Ms. Dubé went through three cancer diagnoses in the last 10 years. Earlier I heard my Liberal colleague note that the government has made changes related to COVID-19. I am glad that it did that, with our support, but here we are talking about a recurring thing and not something sporadic in connection with a pandemic. As mentioned by my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît, these are legislative amendments that do not happen often. The Employment Insurance Act has not changed since the 1970s and is no longer adequate. As my Liberal colleague aptly put it earlier, we must absolutely overhaul this legislation to adapt to today's realities.

I could go on for several more minutes, but the reality is that many businesses are struggling to find employees. That is the case in my riding right now. Unfortunately, when some get sick they not only have the burden of their illness weighing on them, but they also bear the financial burden, which becomes an additional stressor and is very hard to bear for anyone going through these difficult times.

Some will say that the Conservatives refused to make these changes in the past. It is true, but the way things are changing we must take care of one another. As my colleague mentioned earlier, people who can take care of those who are sick are entitled to more benefits than the sick people themselves. That makes no sense. We must adapt these new realities to today's life. Clearly, the pandemic added another layer, and the reality is that these types of events primarily affect women.

I believe that we must absolutely support my colleague's bill, and I invite the Liberals to also support it.

• (1140)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise today to discuss this very important matter for thousands of people in Quebec and Canada. We have a duty and a collective responsibility to foster social progress and programs that truly meet people's needs.

I would like to thank my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît for introducing this bill. It is similar to motions that have been moved in the past by the Bloc Québécois and to bills introduced by the NDP over the past ten years. I would like to thank my colleague because this issue is important to us at the NDP, as a progressive labour party.

People and employees find themselves in extremely difficult and painful situations because they are either ill, seriously injured or have cancer. They are fighting for their lives, sometimes under extreme financial pressure. If they do not have private insurance, a collective agreement or a labour contract that provides for recovery leave, they hit the employment insurance wall and its 15 weeks of sickness benefits, which is totally inadequate.

We consider this issue so important that we want action. We want the people in our society who have no other recourse, help or support to have up to 50 weeks of sickness benefits. We do not want to let these people fall through the cracks. Émilie Sansfaçon's story and her plea for help touched us all, and we must remember that. There were also all those people rallying behind Marie-Hélène Dubé, who collected more than 618,000 signatures on her petition. Having met Ms. Dubé several times in recent years, I know that she is still on the case.

I therefore think that all of us, as members of parliament, should at least be able to agree on the matter. Our party wants this issue to be successfully resolved so badly that it does not care which party proposes the solution, as long as it leads to the right outcome. To be frank, I must admit that I do not understand how the Bloc Québécois managed to fall short on this file.

Last March, at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona tabled an amendment to government Bill C-24 that would have extended employment insurance benefits from 15 to 50 weeks.

I do not understand why the Bloc member for Thérèse-De Blainville voted against this amendment, agreeing with the committee chair's opinion that the amendment was inadmissible because it required a royal recommendation. The opposition parties held the majority on the committee and could have challenged the chair's

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interpretation. If the three opposition parties, including the Bloc Québécois, had voted in favour of the amendment proposed by my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, the committee would have brought to the House a bill offering Canadians 50 weeks of EI sickness benefits. Since the amendment was part of a government bill, it would not have required a royal recommendation.

I am disappointed that the Bloc Québécois voted against the NDP's amendment because it wanted to table its own bill on the same issue a month later. In April, it was decided that Bill C-265 also required a royal recommendation. If the Liberals, unwilling to act in solidarity to help vulnerable and sick workers, refuse the bill, we will be up against a wall. We will once again be left in the lurch, and all of our efforts will have been in vain.

I understand that my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît is pleading with the Liberals to join the rest of us in supporting sick workers in order to resolve the EI issue once and for all. However, we missed a really good opportunity in committee. I think that the Bloc Québécois fell short because of a misinterpretation. I wanted to say that, because I find it extremely unfortunate for the people who are suffering and who have been waiting years for changes to the employment insurance program.

As I was saying earlier, this is not a question of offering everyone 50 weeks of benefits in the case of injury or serious illness, such as cancer. It is a question of offering them the possibility of receiving up to 50 weeks of benefits. If the doctor believes that the person is unable to work and must take more time off to heal before returning to work in good health, as my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé pointed out, we should allow the worker and the doctor to make the best decision possible and provide for more than the current 15 weeks of benefits.

• (1145)

The minister says that they will provide 26 weeks for purposes of consistency. Caregivers are entitled to 26 weeks, while sick people only get 15 weeks. That makes absolutely no sense. Perhaps the government wants to extend the benefits to 26 weeks to avoid being called out on that inconsistency, but that makes no sense because, once again, it is only a half-measure.

As my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît pointed out, the average remission or recovery time for many serious illnesses is 41 weeks. It can be 36 or 37 weeks in some cases, and 45 or 46 weeks in others. All that means is that 26 weeks is not enough.

Private Members' Business

Stopping at 26 weeks is unrealistic, given what science and medicine are telling us. That is why we will not agree to 26 weeks.

When the Liberals were in the opposition, they voted for 50 weeks. That was a few years ago, and they may not remember, but we do. I think that we can all agree today or in a future vote to support the most vulnerable workers so as to give them hope and the option of taking the time they need to heal properly.

Marie-Hélène Dubé said she was shocked at the government's chronic inaction on this issue despite all of its promises, and at its lack of respect for sick Canadians who, after having paid into the EI program their entire life, receive 15 weeks of benefits when they fall ill even though it takes on average almost 50 weeks to heal.

Shawn Chirrey of the Canadian Cancer Society gave a very specific example: The average treatment and recovery time for breast cancer is 25 to 36 weeks, compared with 37 weeks for colon cancer.

We know, then, that 15 weeks is not enough for cancer patients. We can also see, by the average treatment and recovery times for colon and breast cancer, that 26 weeks is still not enough. The science is clear.

I would ask that everyone make an effort to adopt this common sense measure that, as my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party have pointed out, is eminently affordable. Remember that it costs 6¢ extra per \$100 in salary, according to a study by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. There are really no better reasons than human compassion, the scientific approach and affordability to justify this contribution on the part of workers and businesses.

I believe that the the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities should have accepted the amendment to Bill C-24. It would have been a much easier and more efficient way of giving Canadians 50 weeks.

We have another opportunity here with Bill C-265. However, this time we need help from the government, and the Liberals will have to get on board. Otherwise, I do not know how they will be able to explain it to sick Canadians who want to have the time they need to recover and need financial support. I hope we will be able to agree on a permanent, comprehensive reform of this important social program.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that our social security net is full of holes, that there are major problems with access to employment insurance. For years, under the Conservatives and the Liberals, the majority of workers who contributed to EI did not have access to benefits. Only about 38% of workers who lost their jobs were eligible to receive EI benefits.

The current crisis prompted the government to put certain measures in place. However, the four programs are temporary and will expire this summer or fall. We need to make permanent the changes that were made to improve access to EI. That is absolutely crucial, particularly for self-employed workers, freelancers, contract workers, people working in the arts and culture industry and translators, who have not had access to EI cheques or benefits for years.

The NDP made CERB available for self-employed workers and freelancers. However, we need a real employment insurance reform so that no one slips through the cracks and we are able to take care of everyone who needs it.

● (1150)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the important Bill C-265, the *Émilie Sansfaçon* act. This is a great opportunity to achieve the goal of permanently extending EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50.

Today is the first hour of debate on this bill at second reading. However, like my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît, I feel like compelled to say that our bill may be for nothing if there is a surprise in the budget that is coming in a few hours.

Yesterday I was watching a public affairs program on TV and saw the President of the Treasury Board say that the goal of the next budget is to go farther and aim higher. The government has a golden opportunity to do just that by supporting our bill.

The bill we are debating has three goals. First, it seeks to correct an unjustifiable inequity and shocking injustice that has gone on for 50 years and must not continue one more day. Second, it seeks to recognize and support people with serious illnesses such as cancer and serious chronic and episodic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis. Lastly, it seeks to help people get better and to support them for as long as their doctor says is medically necessary.

This bill, which would extend the special EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 and permanently fix the Employment Insurance Act, is not the first such bill to be tabled in the House, as my colleagues have pointed out. In the past 10 years, seven bills have been introduced, but none of them got anywhere, and none of them were endorsed by Parliament, despite a broad consensus that still exists today. Why have successive governments failed to act all these years?

This must not become another missed opportunity. We must seize this opportunity and act. As I mentioned in the House last week, this is not a request, but a heartfelt plea. We want to make this amendment to the act to ensure that workers have a social safety net.

Private Members' Business

A study initiated by the Bloc Québécois is under way at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It involves a comprehensive reform of the EI system. The aim is to strengthen the system and to fix the gaps and flaws that the pandemic has highlighted.

One of those flaws is the fact that special sickness benefits last 15 weeks. That is so outdated. Many groups submitted briefs and many witnesses appeared to speak in support of this initiative, with good reason. They include major Canadian and Quebec unions and the Mouvement Action-Chômage de Montréal. Even here in the House, the NDP, the Conservatives and the opposition parties all support this change, as do 88% of Canadians. I myself surveyed 2,000 residents of my riding, and 85% of them were in favour. What more will it take?

As mentioned, the PBO says it would cost \$1.1 billion if everyone took the 50 weeks, but we know that will not be the case. This is therefore feasible and possible.

• (1155)

What would not be feasible, however, would be to do nothing. Not supporting them adequately during their care would leave thousands of sick people at risk of losing their jobs and being more distressed by their financial insecurity than by their health. That was what happened to Émilie Sansfaçon, who sadly died too young from cancer. She shared her heart-wrenching story with us, explaining how her financial situation was causing her more anguish than her own health needs were. This was her struggle, the same struggle thousands of people face. There are people like Émilie Sansfaçon everywhere. We need to continue this fight and, above all, fix the problem. We can no longer neglect these workers, because this is a social, moral and human issue.

We already know that our EI system is far from being a gold mine, even for people who have paid into it their entire lives. If we look at sickness benefits under the regular EI system, individuals have to work 600 hours to be eligible. Even if they are eligible, however, workers are entitled to just 55% of their earnings for a maximum of 15 weeks, which will not be counted in the calculation of insurable hours to qualify for other benefits.

Canada is one of the worst G7 countries in terms of providing a social safety net for workers, just behind the United States. The U.S. provides 12 weeks, Canada 15, France 156, Germany 78, Japan 72 and Italy 52. I have three words to describe the current situation: shameful, embarrassing and stingy. The time has come to be among the best.

The government promised to extend the benefit period to 26 weeks, but it never did. However, that would not be enough. It is not about negotiating or trading a short 15-week period for a half-measure because that would not solve the problem. Instead it is about treating sick workers fairly by providing them with 50 weeks, the same maximum number of weeks that workers are entitled to when they lose their job. We can no longer discriminate against sick workers. We have no choice but to help them because the 50-week period is economically sustainable and socially imperative. All we need is the political will and a vision where our social pro-

grams and our social safety net for workers do not leave anyone behind or allow anyone to slip through the cracks.

Do we want to be seen as a society that abandons the most vulnerable, or as a fairer and more equitable society, one that provides support and comfort and is compassionate and humanitarian towards workers and the sick? It is with the latter image in mind that I ask for the unanimous support of the House for this bill to extend EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks. Not only is it a question of fairness, but it will allow people to take care of themselves with dignity.

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent rising on a point of order?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am certain that you will find unanimous consent for the motion that, notwithstanding any standing or special order or usual practice, at 3:59 p.m. today or when no member rises to speak, whichever comes first, Bill C-11, an act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts, be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties and I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practices of the House, at 3:59 p.m. today, or when no member rises to speak, whichever comes earlier, Bill C-11, an act to enact the consumer privacy protection act and the personal information and data protection tribunal act and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts, be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

• (1205)

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

*Government Orders***POINTS OF ORDER**

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR CLOVERDALE—LANGLEY CITY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to a point of order raised by the member for Don Valley West, who is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with regard to a question placed by the member for Cloverdale—Langley City in the debate on Friday on Bill C-6, conversion therapy.

This is not the first time I have had to respond to these kinds of statements in the House of Commons, unfortunately. What the member for Cloverdale—Langley City did was to hide behind biblical quotations to cast dispersions on gay members of the House of Commons. This is a very serious matter for me. I believe it is, in fact, a question of privilege. It makes it difficult for members of Parliament to do their jobs when they are subject to these kinds of accusations. It also makes it very difficult to encourage other Canadians to run for public office when these kinds of slurs are allowed in the House of Commons.

As I said, this is not the first time I have had to deal with this, unfortunately. On September 29, 2011, the previous member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, Russ Hiebert, made a statement in S.O. 31s where he implied that because of my position on certain legislation, I was a friend of pedophiles. At that time, I stood in the House and objected to that statement, first, because as an adult survivor of child abuse, I took very strong offence to that kind of statement; and second, because once again it made it difficult for me to do my job as an MP when subjected to those kinds of accusations. The same excuse was used by the previous member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale in 2011, which is being used again, “Oh, I didn't really mean that. Someone has misunderstood because I didn't say word for word what I clearly implied in my statement.”

This does affect me as a serving member of the House. This affects all members of my community across the country when these statements are allowed to stand without apology or removal. I would ask the Speaker take this into very serious consideration and take appropriate action to ensure that this does not happen again in the House of Commons. That can only happen when a member is sanctioned for doing so.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for his additional comments on the matter. As he may have heard, the Speaker has taken this matter under advisement and has indicated that he will get back to the House in due course.

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[English]

DIGITAL CHARTER IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from March 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute honour for me to rise in the House to speak on behalf of the residents of my riding of Davenport. I am speaking in support of Bill C-11, an act to enact the consumer privacy protection act and the personal information and data protection tribunal act and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts. It is also known as the digital charter implementation act.

From the earliest days of my first run for office, the residents of Davenport have approached me to tell me how concerned they are about the security of their personal information. They are literally running after me in the streets to say that this is an issue of great importance to them. I can assure members that it is not just Davenport residents who are concerned. The Privacy Commissioner published a survey in 2019 that found that 92% of all Canadians were concerned about their privacy, with 37% of Canadians being extremely concerned. This means that nine out of 10 Canadians are worried about their privacy.

I know that the third wave of this pandemic is the most pressing issue for all of us right now, and rightly so, but it has not made our privacy concerns go away. Indeed, this pandemic has had the opposite effect, given that most, if not all, our lives have moved online, from work to worship to shopping to social gatherings. This is a front and centre issue.

Davenport residents are not comfortable entrusting all their data into the black hole of the Internet, managed mainly by big multinational tech giants. These companies have been operating with outdated regulations and limited transparency. As Canadians right now, we have no choice. We are all used to downloading apps or signing up for things online that come with long privacy policies and consents requests. I do not know about everyone else, but most of us do not have time to read all the online terms and conditions that are often in legalese and not easy to understand. That is why I am happy that Bill C-11 would require plain-language consent requests.

We are also too used to being peppered with targeted ads and content based on the websites we visit, with no consent or even knowledge about algorithms that track our actions. It is impossible to keep track of how our personal data and how our online actions are being used or abused, whether it is to misinform others or even more nefarious purposes like identity theft.

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That is will I am glad that Bill C-11 is before the House. It marks a huge leap forward in our privacy laws. Canada must do all it can to protect the data of all our residents, and Canadians should know exactly how their data is used with maximum transparency. We should have the right to manage what data is kept online and what is deleted.

Canada must also keep up with the rapid growth of the digital economy, as hundreds of companies and organizations are now handling our personal data. Other countries have already acted on this. The E.U. passed the General Data Protection Regulations in 2018. Its rules require that other countries meet its standards to do business, to exchange data across borders. This means that if we want Canadian businesses to continue to have an edge in European markets, we have to modernize our privacy rules. It is imperative that we move now, as aggressively as possible, and for all these reasons, we must pass the digital charter implementation act.

What would the bill actually do? First, the bill introduces the new consumer privacy protection act that updates the old PIPEDA act, which was first passed in 2001. Second, the bill introduces the personal information and data protection tribunal act to create an oversight and enforcement body for the new privacy rules. Third, it would retain the measures of part 2 of PIPEDA under the new electronic documents act. The measures in the bill are built upon three key goals: consumer control, responsible innovation and strong enforcement and oversight.

Let me just touch very briefly on how the measures in the bill would meet each of these goals.

First, how do we give consumers more control? Bill C-11 would modernize consent rules and would require companies to ask for consent in plain language, which is great. The bill would also give Canadians the right to data mobility. That means they could direct one organization to share certain data with another for a specific reason. For example, they could direct their banks to share financial information with another bank.

- (1210)

Next, it would give Canadians the right to withdraw their consent for the use of their data. It would allow people to direct a company to delete whatever personal information it has about them, including on social media platforms, which would give control of personal data back to Canadians. The bill also clarifies that even information that has been de-identified is still personal information. Even if a company removes people's names from its data, this bill would ensure that the data still belongs to those people. It has to be protected, and companies need their consent to use it.

Finally, the bill requires transparency for use of algorithms and AI. It would give every Canadian the right to request an explanation of how and why an automated system made a choice or prediction about the individual. I am hoping that at some point, we are allowed to relay what companies can and cannot do with that information.

The second goal is enabling responsible innovation. We want our country to stay globally competitive, support innovation and unlock the potential of data to create incredible value and improve our lives, but we need to support that innovation in a way that guaran-

tees the right to privacy. The bill would simplify consent rules so that companies are not burdened by seeking consent for every use of information, even when consumers reasonably expect it. This is good for business and also helps Canadians make meaningful choices. Rather than being bombarded by consent requests full of legal jargon, consumers will see plain language requests when it really matters.

Bill C-11 would also allow Canadians the choice to contribute their data for the common good. It would allow businesses to share de-identified data with certain public institutions to power social benefits like public health and infrastructure. Lastly, the bill would allow businesses to submit their codes of practice to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner to ensure they comply with the law. This kind of transparency and streamlined regulation is both good for businesses and good for Canadians.

The third goal is strong enforcement and oversight. With any new regulations, we absolutely need stronger enforcement and oversight. Indeed, I know that is something the Office of the Privacy Commissioner has long requested. What would this bill do? It would give the commissioner that power, including forcing an organization to comply with privacy laws and ordering a company to stop collecting data for personal information. It would also create the personal information and data protection tribunal, and the Privacy Commissioner could also ask the tribunal to impose fines. We would have the stiffest penalties in the G7. For small transactions, the fine would be 3% of global revenue or \$10 million, whichever is greater, and for more serious violations, the penalty is up to 5% of global revenue or \$25 million, whichever is greater.

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I mentioned earlier that Davenport residents have been raising this as a concern to me for five years now. I have received a number of letters, so I want to pay tribute to all those who have written to me through the years to indicate that this continues to be an issue. I know they will be very happy to hear that we are moving forward on this legislation.

This bill is the first of many steps our federal government will take to protect Canadians' privacy and harness our country's potential in the digital age. Our current privacy laws were passed in 2001, and in 20 years the pace of change has left those laws badly out of date. We will need to keep doing more to stay on top of rapid changes, looking at both the threats and the opportunities. Davenport residents and, indeed, all Canadians demand that we continue to do all we can to keep our privacy and data security laws updated in a way that protects them, while still enabling data to be used for innovation and economic growth.

In 2019, we set out a vision for the Internet in the digital charter. That vision is of an Internet that serves the public good and guarantees certain rights, like the right to control and consent, the right to transparency and portability, the use of data for the common good and the need for strong enforcement and accountability.

I am proud that our government has introduced this bill to implement the digital charter and guarantee these rights to Canadians. We have seen big new challenges, and we have stepped up with real solutions. I ask all of my colleagues for the speedy passage of this bill.

• (1215)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad that we are trying to update the legislation to reflect our digital reality.

The member commented on the Privacy Commissioner and the additional powers that would be given. We have seen quite a number of privacy data breaches from the federal government, especially from the Canada Revenue Agency. Would the Privacy Commissioner have the ability under this legislation to fine the government or order the government to stop collecting private information because it is not adequately protected?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that it does not matter whether it is the federal government or any level of government; we are all really concerned about any type of these breaches. The honest answer to her question is that I actually do not know if the Office of the Privacy Commissioner is able to. I will ask about it.

My sense is that it is what we are trying to do, so I would hope it would also incorporate the federal government and the different levels of government. I do not know the answer. I hope it would be the case, but I know it does have the power to order businesses to do that. I will look into it and get back to the hon. member.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her speech.

What our Conservative colleague said is true. This bill does not seem to apply to the government.

I have another question. There is another flaw with respect to the identification of individuals. There is nothing in the bill to force banks, for example, to institute a strict policy for the identification of individuals, nor is there any kind of fine system that would compel them to do so.

Is the government open to a series of amendments on this issue?

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons I am eager to move forward with this legislation is that it is good to have these types of discussions in committee. If there are improvements to be had and ways we could even strengthen what is already an excellent bill, there is always an opportunity to do so at committee.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we know, big corporate data privacy breaches are becoming more common every year, and Canadians are concerned about how the big tech giants like Facebook are collecting and using information. Privacy is now a household issue that really affects everyone.

My concerns are around the private rights of action, which would allow individuals and groups of consumers to seek compensation in court. This has been effectively used in the United States to remedy violations. However, it is unnecessarily so burdensome in Bill C-11 that it effectively makes it unusable. For example, if the Privacy Commissioner does not investigate and rule on a complaint, an individual has no right of action. If the Privacy Commissioner does investigate and rule on a complaint but the tribunal does not uphold it, the individual has no right of action. Additionally, if a two-year timeline is exceeded for whatever reason, individuals lose their right of action, basically making it a right only in theory but not in practice.

Does my colleague agree that the bill needs to be amended to fix this?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, believe me, I am very concerned about data and ensuring that Canadians have complete control over the data they are sharing: who uses their personal data and for what purposes. A fundamental objective of this bill is to give control and consent, to ensure transparency, portability and interoperability, and to have strong enforcement and real accountability. If there are some additional measures the hon. member thinks should be considered, I would suggest that it be brought up in committee.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would put to the hon. member this quote from Jim Balsillie, from an article in the National Post in March: “The algorithms that push this content are addictive by design and exploit negative emotions—or, as Facebook insiders say, ‘Our algorithms exploit the human brain’s attraction to divisiveness.’”

This bill would not address that problem. Is the government open to amendments in committee to deal with this aspect of the dark web?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, the point the member brought up is something I personally worry about as well. It really bothers me that my actions online are fed into some sort of an algorithm or AI system and translated in specific ways I have no control over. I would like to believe, and do believe, that all these types of amendments would be very open to consideration within committee.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to Bill C-11 and data privacy.

Many in Parliament know of the previous work that has been done by the access to information, privacy and ethics committee. We dealt with this in 2018 around Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. We came together in London for the first meeting of the International Grand Committee, which represented nine nations and close to half a billion people. We have all seen how data manipulation can be misused by big tech, and our efforts in the International Grand Committee were really to set the stage for what we can do together to push back on some of big tech's practices and hopefully reform those practices. As chair of that committee, I was especially pleased with the efforts of all the parties in the room. In their speeches, the member for Beaches—East York, the member for Timmins—James Bay, my own colleague from Thornhill and many others took this on, as we care about all Canadians' data and privacy.

It is laudable that Bill C-11 attempts to combat some of the concerns that we have and crack down on some of those practices that have been concerning for many years. It deals with things like algorithm accountability, which has been mentioned by some colleagues today, personal access to data, de-identification of information, and certification programs for big tech so that there is a certain set of standards to be followed. Some of these moves have already been taken up by some in big tech who are doing this on their own to some extent. Stiffer penalties are recognized in Bill C-11, as well as private right of action.

However, there are many other things I am concerned about that are simply not in the bill, or there are huge exemptions that a freight train could run through, which would neutralize the bill in many respects.

First, privacy as a human right is the number one thing that I do not see in the bill. Many have said, from our efforts, that privacy as a human right needs to be foundational to any legislation. Conservatives recently passed a policy that deals with this exact principle:

The CPC believes digital data privacy is a fundamental right that urgently requires strengthened legislation, protections, and enforcement. Canadians must have the right to access and control collection, use, monitoring, retention, and disclosure

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of their personal data. International violations should receive enforcement assistance from the Canadian Government.

Clearly, this is a concern of many. We have heard from countless witnesses and experts. Jim Balsillie, who has been mentioned already this morning, warned us of what can happen if we do not take this seriously.

I will talk about the exemptions in the bill that concern me, and my copy of the bill is very well highlighted for some of the errors that are in it.

There is “Exceptions to Requirement for Consent.” A meaningful consent is another principle that we really need to address in the bill, and it has been mentioned already. If children have an app they like to play games on, all that has to be done to basically hand over their data is just a little check box in order to play the game, and we call that “meaningful consent”. Bill C-11 says that it attempts to fix that, but I will go over the exemptions.

“Exceptions to Requirement for Consent” states:

An organization may collect or use an individual’s personal information without their knowledge or consent if the collection or use is made for a business activity described in subsection (2)

This is the list of activities in subsection (2) that are exempt from meaningful consent:

- (a) an activity that is necessary to provide or deliver a product or service that the individual has requested from the organization;
- (b) an activity that is carried out in the exercise of due diligence to prevent or reduce the organization’s commercial risk;
- (c) an activity that is necessary for the organization’s information, system or network security;
- (d) an activity that is necessary for the safety of a product or service that the organization provides or delivers;
- (e) an activity in the course of which obtaining the individual’s consent would be impracticable because the organization does not have a direct relationship with the individual; and

This is the big one:

- (f) any other prescribed activity.

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• (1225)

I appreciate the Liberal members stating that this bill is an effort to get us to a better place around data privacy in Canada, but exemptions like that in the legislation need to be addressed. That is why our party talked about getting Bill C-11 to the industry committee to have a fulsome discussion of its good parts and of what needs to be fixed and strengthened. Sadly, the current government has decided to send it to the ethics committee instead of where it should go. Some of the audience today might understand why. Because of the government's many ethical lapses and failures, it would like to use up all of the time it possibly can with other legislation, such as Bill C-11. Only ethics violations should really be discussed at the ethics committee. It is unfortunate that this is going to be pushed to the ethics committee. My hope for legitimate changes to the legislation may be muted by a rush to get through it, and it may not be given due diligence, as many Canadians are expecting it should.

I want to thank the Canadians who have come to me over the years to talk about their concerns around the way our data is collected. Many years ago I coined the phrase that our online data is essentially our digital DNA. It is who we are online, and we need to do all we can to protect the information and data of Canadians. In this new era of social media being in the public square, we need to do our due diligence as legislators to make sure that it is protected as much as possible. Unfortunately, although the effort is laudable, this legislation simply falls short. That is why, from our perspective, we want to see it go to committee and hopefully changes can be made there.

There is an old saying: "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." I do not think we can call this legislation good quite yet.

I wanted to thank some of the guests we had before us. There has been some discussion that not enough has been heard regarding privacy and digital issues online, but we had countless experts from Canada and heard from experts around the world. We heard from Shoshana Zuboff and many witnesses at our International Grand Committee who really set the blueprint for what can be done with digital and data privacy. We have a way to make it better.

Our Privacy Commissioner made many suggestions. We see some of those in this legislation regarding increased fines and stiffer penalties for big tech if they misuse people's data or have lapses with that. However, the legislation still falls short. My hope is that it gets to committee so the committee can get a really good eye on it and have the chance to propose some fixes to those exemptions and other holes in the legislation.

I look forward to any questions.

• (1230)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies and I may be known around this place to rarely agree with each other, but I want to salute him for his leadership on this work. We are 100% aligned in that we need to do much more to, in his words, deal with the appropriation without consent of our digital DNA. I agree with him: It is unfortunate this is going to the ethics committee instead of industry, but it is one of those files that has feet in both committees.

What does he think would be the most important amendment to make to this legislation, or should we scrap it and start over as some critics are suggesting?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her comments and kind words.

The most important thing would be to recognize privacy as a fundamental right or a property right. It needs to be recognized with that significance. The rest comes from that being at the top of the pyramid, because if that fundamental ideal is not there many other reasons can be made not to legislate appropriately. However, if that is the foundation we have a great place to go with the recognition of how serious data is. It really is our digital DNA. We need to protect it as such, and apply rules to big tech and other companies so they use it appropriately.

• (1235)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, regarding Bill C-11, the Privacy Commissioner has stated that he is concerned with the government's new definitions of commercial activity and consent rules. The current bill actually has much less protection of privacy than the previous definition.

I wonder whether the member could comment on that. Does he share those concerns? Should the government be making amendments in this regard?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I do share those concerns. In my work as the former ethics chair, I have gotten to know our Privacy Commissioner professionally, and I really heard the case for having stringent protocols around data. Again, this bill is supposed to deal with those concerns, and I listed the exceptions, even for the requirement to consent. Members can use the analogies they want, but a truck could drive through it. When there are huge exceptions for uses of data this bill should tighten them up, not open them more widely and broadly. I think this is what needs to be addressed in committee, and my hope is that it will be at ethics.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies for bringing to the attention of the House some of the errancy of Bill C-11. In particular he noted that this bill should be heading to the industry committee, and it has found its way back here because the Liberals are trying to prevent the ethics committee from doing its work on other very important issues, such as scandals. I acknowledge that.

The member also talked about some exceptions in the bill that would make it less effective than it should be, and I am wondering this: Are there any exceptions in particular that he finds particularly grievous?

Government Orders

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, there are many provisions that might be legitimate, given that, between a bank and a person who deals with that bank, there are agreed-upon arrangements. However, there is an exception in place, where it says the organization may collect or use an individual's personal information without their knowledge or consent, if the collection or use is made for business activity described in subsection 2, and that description is for "any other prescribed activity."

That essentially means the door is wide open for however that corporation wants to use that person's data. "Any other prescribed activity" means that if it decides it wants to use the data for x, y or z, that is up to the corporation. It does not appear to be up to the individual. Things like this need to be tightened up in the extreme. We also need to allow consumers, who want to have their data used, to give corporations their data for a good reason. It must have high fences, so that a corporation cannot use it for anything else and cannot sell it. The biggest concern I have, with all our understanding of data, is of people being manipulated by their data, and our kids being manipulated by their data. People's ever-increasing time spent on smart devices is concerning to everybody in Canada, and we need to make sure that corporations are only using data they are allowed to, in ways they are allowed to.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be here today and to contribute to this debate on Bill C-11. I have been here for four years. It is hard to believe, as I just had my anniversary on April 3, that I have been serving the good people of Calgary Midnapore for four years, which I am so fortunate to do. At this point in my political career, if I do not believe that the messengers themselves are sincere, I have a hard time believing the message. It is really hard for me to think about and understand a policy if I do not have a lot of good faith in the individual or entity from which it is coming.

There stems one of the two struggles that I have with this bill: I do not genuinely believe in the sincerity of the current government to protect Canadians. I have seen this from many perspectives, both past and present. My second concern is a sort of generalization, but it still remains that I see the government doing things in a half-hearted effort. This is along the same lines as my first point about insincerity.

When I refer to my past experience with this, I am drawing upon my time as the shadow minister for democratic institutions. Bill C-11 is relevant to that because, during my time as shadow minister, the Digital Charter was announced. If not legislation, this was certainly an important policy announcement that was supposed to carry a lot of weight. At the time, we were debating Bill C-76, which would have major implications for future elections. The digital conversation, along with foreign interference and foreign influence, had a lot to contribute to the discussion around Bill C-76.

When the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry made his announcement at that time, along with the minister of democratic institutions, it felt very flat. It felt as though it was one of those commercials for children on a Saturday morning or, since the current government likes to insult Conservative institutions so much, perhaps a video from PragerU. It really did not come across with a lot of sincerity or a lot of teeth. It just seemed to do what the government likes to do, which is a lot of virtue signalling.

This bill also reminds me of the tribunal composition. It always concerns me a little when the government creates a body that has any type of implication in the direction of Canadians' lives or industry. I am thinking of the Leaders' Debates Commission, which I believe significantly impacted the debates framework in the last election. I recall the question from the member of Parliament for Provencher to the previous speaker. If we look back now, the debates commission included one of the Kielburger brothers. It is very interesting that we find this here today.

One thing I am concerned about within the framework of the Bill C-11 legislation is that the current government members always find a way to take care of their friends. We have seen this with SNC-Lavalin, which we are still dealing with the implications of here today as we go through the pandemic; with Mr. Baylis, the former member of Parliament; and, as has been alluded to before, the WE Charity scandal, which the previous speaker indicated. Unfortunately, this legislation is being sent to ethics rather than industry in an effort to delay that. Even in the context of Bill C-11 and what this is supposed to do, I worry about government members taking care of their friends.

I mentioned that the second part of my concern was that the current government does everything half-heartedly. I believe that includes this legislation, without question.

• (1240)

We look at the possibility of information being shared with other parties. The bill would allow an organization to transfer an individual's personal information to a service provider without their knowledge or consent. Regarding the right to have the collecting party delete collected information on request, it somewhat deals with that, but when I have tried to unsubscribe, in some situations it has definitely been unsuccessful.

We also see in the bill the right to opt out of the sale of personal information where an organization may transfer an individual's personal information to a service provider, again, without their consent or knowledge. This is a theme that I am seeing in the government addressing things half-heartedly and Bill C-11 definitely falls within this.

Government Orders

Also, we have seen this half-hearted response with the pandemic from the very beginning in terms of the government's eliminating the warning system prior to the pandemic's arrival; the return of personal protective equipment, which showed such a lack of foresight for the necessity of its use not months later; and the slow closing of borders that we saw at the very beginning, and in my position as shadow minister for transport I have seen incredible, draconian measures that were inserted at a result of poor response earlier on. It is the same with any situation when the longer we allow something to fester, the greater the response it requires later on. Unfortunately, Canadians are paying the price of the inaction. There is also the rapid testing and of course vaccines, which is a complete failure of the government and of the Prime Minister .

I want to say to any Canadian who is listening to this speech, if they are upset because their business is closed, their children are at home and not at school, they have not seen their family in 18 months, there is a third wave, it is the fault of the Prime Minister for so poorly preparing for the later stages of this pandemic. This is another half-hearted response that I have referred to.

We have also seen this unfortunately within the defence committee. The government was willing to turn its back on women all across the country in not believing the stories and yet it is willing to investigate the unfortunate situation of the member for Pontiac, who is an incredible individual might I say. My husband and I had the good fortune of travelling to Israel with him and I will stand in solidarity with him.

In kindergarten, I was painting a picture and when I was done, I had taken off my smock and was standing there in my slip when my good friend, Kim Crocker, who I later had the pleasure of serving with in student council with in high school said to me, "You're standing there in your slip" as all the fine women of Calgary Midnapore did wear at that time. My point is the Liberals have turned their backs on women at the defence committee as well.

If there is something good to be said about this piece of legislation, in my capacity as shadow minister for transport, many right-to-repair organizations and the small repair shops across rural and suburban Canada have said that Canadians have the right to own their data.

Colleagues within the Conservative Party will argue that this is a property right and a human right. As we advance in the digital age, I believe more and more that this is a human right, that our history of data will one day be almost synonymous with our DNA.

I will leave it there. I do not believe in the government's sincerity of protecting Canadians. I believe that so much that the Liberals do is a half-hearted effort. For both of these reasons, I stand here today in regard to Bill C-11 with a lot of questions about the legislation, but the belief that I am not certain whether this legislation goes far enough.

• (1245)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we get to questions and comments, I see the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City is indicating a point of order.

The hon. member.

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR CLOVERDALE—LANGLEY CITY

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today in response to the point of order made by the member for Don Valley West.

As I said to the member on Friday, the Bible verse I quoted was in reference to hypocrisy, which has been a common interpretation of that passage as the member for Don Valley West himself acknowledged this morning. Last week, I called to apologize to the member for the misunderstanding. I would like to extend that apology to all members of the House and anyone in the LGBTQ community who took offence. The quote I used was certainly not intended in the way it is being portrayed, and I am glad to have the chance to clarify.

I unreservedly apologize.

• (1250)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City for her additional comments on the matter.

* * *

DIGITAL CHARTER IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member for Calgary Midnapore started her speech, she pretty much started and ended it the same way, which was by saying "I do not...believe...[the government's sincerity] to protect Canadians."

I find that quote so incredibly troubling. It is one thing to come into this House to debate policy and to challenge each other to make better laws and better policies, but to suggest that somebody lacks sincerity to do good is just taking it to a whole new level.

If the member does not think that the government is sincere in its desire to protect Canadians, could she then share with us what she thinks the government is trying to do, apparently maliciously, to Canadians?

I think what the member means is that she is not happy with the legislation, but I do not think she means that the government and this side of the House lack the sincerity to try. Could the member clarify that?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, who we are all so familiar with at this point.

He is right. No, actually I do question the government's sincerity. More importantly for Canadians, as we head into the end of the spring session and into the summer, I question its competence. I actually think that is just as important, if not more so. There are always the two questions, is it evil, is it incompetent? Evil is a strong word, so I will not touch on that. However, incompetence, for certain, over and over again here.

To the member for Kingston and the Islands, he is correct. I would actually say it is perhaps more incompetence than insincerity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to expand on two points.

Bill C-11 leaves out an important aspect regarding online identity protection to prevent fraud, such as identity theft. In addition, the government is not addressing its own problems, since the bill does not apply to the federal government, even though the government's online identity checks are clearly inadequate.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I did see that in the digital charter as well as in Bill C-11, but it is not enough, and that is not the only thing we saw that was inadequate. I think that is the case with all bills. Attitude is also a factor. In my speech, I gave a lot of examples where we can see that this was not enough.

In my opinion, it started two or three years ago with the digital charter. Bill C-11 is a good start, but it is not enough.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with her, we absolutely need to protect people's data. I had the same sorts of concerns with the current government. I had the same concerns with the former Conservative government, as well, because it also failed to act and now people's private information is getting out in droves.

Could the member respond to that?

• (1255)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of serving on the HUMA committee with my colleague from Winnipeg Centre. I hope that she is doing well. Unfortunately, we have never had a federal New Democratic Party government, so I would not be able to comment on its performance, had it ever occurred in Canadian history.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to join the debate on this important issue, the data charter implementation act. I will be diving into what is a large bill and addresses a large spectrum of some of the issues we face in the world in which we live that have been exacerbated by COVID in so much of what we do, such as in this place, the evidence of which is that I am participating in this debate from Battle River—Crowfoot in Alberta. The fact is that digital has been transformed over the last number of months with COVID before us and I will be getting into different aspects of the bill, some of the things I think are laudable and some of the concerns that I have.

Government Orders

The previous member for Calgary Midnapore did a great job on her speech. I would note that we saw in the background that there is snow on the ground. That is certainly one of the interesting things about our country. It is often joked that if we wait a few minutes, the weather will change. That has certainly been the case in East Central Alberta. I would like to take a moment of my time to talk about the wildfires that started and were part of what has really consumed a significant amount of time over the last number of days.

It has been very dry in Battle River—Crowfoot since the snow melted and although there has been some moisture that has lessened the likelihood of those fires, I want to take a moment to thank all of the firefighters, volunteers and volunteer professionals. It is often a misconception that volunteer firefighters are somehow inferior to their full-time counterparts in the city. There have been a number of grass fires over the last week or so in my riding, but one particularly large one received a tremendous response. Four or five fire departments from different small communities reached out, worked together, along with hundreds of community volunteers, and put out this particular fire.

I would note how important it is that we take fire safety seriously at a time when moisture is needed. There was a little of it over weekend and I received more than just a few comments. Rarely are people thankful for snow in April, but those who saw the threat of fire were thankful for the moisture that came this past weekend. As a reminder to all those watching, they should be careful when they are in rural areas and there is such a threat of fire, as there is today, and thank all those who put their lives on the line to protect folks in this area and across Canada.

I will go on to the substance of what we are debating here today. There are two major parts to Bill C-11. Part 1 would enact the consumer privacy protection act and various aspects involved with the protection of personal privacy. At a time when everything we do is online, it is a significant topic of conversation that needs to be discussed. Part 2 would enact the personal information and data protection tribunal act, which would establish a tribunal to hear appeals related to personal information and privacy.

Government Orders

As the world has become more digital, so much of our lives is detailed online and so much of the information we see goes through a filter. I hear from constituents who talk to me about the things they see on Facebook or other social media platforms, even the advertisements they see when they google something or the fact that we even refer to searching for a term on the Internet as “googling” speaks to the extent to which our information is online. We certainly see the need for stronger protections to ensure that Canadians' data, their information and, ultimately, their rights are protected. Certainly, we have had a lot of conversation around privacy as a human right and, further, what the property rights are in terms of data that is online. We see Bill C-11 as an attempt to address that.

• (1300)

I have listened with great interest to some of the Liberal speeches on this matter, and a lot of the points brought up are certainly laudable in their goals. However, the proof will be in the implementation. There is certainly a lack of clarity. There are also no concrete measures outlined here to ensure that the goals and ideas talked about in the preamble, as well as the words spoken by the minister and various Liberal members, are actually translated into actionable items that do what is in the best interest of Canadians. This is of particular concern on an issue like this.

We have seen unprecedented scandal and mismanagement. We have seen a level of access to the highest offices in this land for those who can afford to pay and those who happen to have the Prime Minister and his staff on speed dial. A bill like this, where billions of dollars and corporate interests are at stake, should force every Canadian to pause to think about, when we say this will be implemented and it will be informed by regulation, what the process is between a bill's implementation and ensuring that it is effectively implemented through regulation. What sort of lobbying will take place? Who will benefit? I think these are valid questions that need to be asked.

We have seen that Canadians have very little trust in the Liberals when it comes to ensuring that their best interests are served when the Liberals are getting phone calls from their well-connected friends and the businesses that they associate with.

As this bill will likely go to committee, these are the sorts of questions that have to be asked to ensure that, when it comes to the data and privacy of Canadians, when it comes to being online, and when it comes to some of the transparency mechanisms, every aspect is clearly parsed out, so Canadians can trust that the regulations are not simply being sold to the highest bidder, those who have the most expensive lobbyists, or lawyers who happen to be able to get face time with those in the Prime Minister's Office.

Some will suggest that this is cynical, or that it is simply not true. We could go through a long list of the failures of Liberal scandal and mismanagement over the last five years. None is more obvious on that front than this reality. Using definitive language and a word like “reality” can often get politicians into trouble, but I say the reality is that there is a clear call to ban Huawei from Canada's 5G network, yet the Liberals, the government, have refused to act on that simple demand.

It leaves one to draw conclusions about who is able to influence the government's decision-making process. Conservatives have and

will continue to stand up for the rights of Canadians and that includes the right for Canadians to have privacy online.

There are some laudable goals in this bill. I would suggest that all Parliamentarians here believe we need to address the issues that are brought up in this legislation. We have to ensure that we do that. The Liberals will, without a doubt, as they already have done today, blame the opposition for delay tactics, blocking committees and various other things.

The reality is that we have seen time and time again the Liberals bring something forward such as a bill. They will then demand it be passed, even though the very reason for some of those delays are entirely of their own making. However, they later learn that they made mistakes that could have been identified through things such as full democratic discourse and comprehensive committee research.

• (1305)

Earlier today, the Liberals blocked a motion that would have sent this to the industry committee. There is a reason this deserves full consideration, and certainly Conservatives are doing our part to ensure we have a fulsome debate, so Canadians can get the answers they need on this important subject.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are thousands and even millions of applications.

Some of these applications use games to draw people in, in the form of a quiz, for example. They then retrieve the information from the user's contact list. When the user gives their consent by clicking on the button, most often without carefully reading the rules, their contact list is sent to an organization or business.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the flaws in the legislation when it comes to such applications.

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, the question emphasizes how complex the series of issues surrounding digital privacy is. It could be an application a child installs on a phone. When we click on that “agree” button, rarely do people read the sometimes thousands of pages of terms and conditions we agree to. Sometimes it is enlightening to even just take a moment and see what one is agreeing to.

Although there have been steps taken by the private sector to address some of those things, for example, app stores having verified apps versus unverified apps and what not, this touches on the whole host of challenges associated with ensuring digital privacy and that Canadians ultimately have a right to ensure their data is protected.

Government Orders

Further to that, digital information often does not necessarily have clear borders. This is not only a Canadian issue. It is a world-wide issue, especially as servers often exist in different jurisdictions. There are many challenges that exist around that, which is why this debate today is so important.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will not be surprised to hear I am disappointed in some of the remarks he made during his intervention.

Toward the end, he expressed displeasure with the fact that the House did not pass the unanimous consent motion brought forward and that we stopped it. We also put one forward, which was identical, for this bill to go to the committee it was assigned to. I know there are some discrepancies and different opinions as to where the bill should go, but even the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said this bill has feet in both committees.

More importantly, the member talked about what has been going on in this House. There are so many pieces of legislation I would like to see us discuss here, such as conversion therapy. However, it took us, because of Conservative stall tactics, about seven months to pass the fall economic statement. Does the member really believe it is the Liberals who have been slowing down the legislative process in the House?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, there it is again. I find it unsurprising but incredibly troubling the sort of rhetoric that comes from that side of the House, especially when the simple answer to the question is that there was a delay of 35 days. That is the legacy of this Prime Minister, who is covering up his WE Charity scandal, and it is 35 days of delay because of prorogation.

The government is in charge of the legislative agenda of this House. It is incumbent upon every member of Parliament to stand up for their constituents and ensure their voices are heard. I hear the hon. member across the way speak so flippantly about this somehow being a Conservative problem, and he could not be more wrong. He and all members of the government should look in the mirror and acknowledge this is a Liberal problem.

Further, there have been bills related to COVID relief programs that have had to come back to this House three separate times. When it comes to debate, had there been fulsome democratic discourse in the beginning, they would not have had to come back three times to fix Liberal mistakes. I will take no lessons from the members opposite, who are somehow blaming Conservatives for a delay, when the reality is they are in government. It is their mistakes causing these problems, and there was a 35-day delay because of the Prime Minister's prorogation and the covering up of the WE Charity scandal.

• (1310)

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always honoured to participate in parliamentary debates, especially when there is an important and pressing topic such as what we have in front of us today.

Stronger legal protection for both consumer protection and data privacy needs to be improved, and this is impossible to deny. It might be tempting to say that Bill C-11 is timely, but instead, we

should be clear with ourselves that it is well past the time for us to address these issues.

The kind of improvements Canadians need are long overdue, and the government has been slow to act. For years the Liberals have done a lot of talking about it, but it always seems to take them a while to get around to doing anything. They have been talking about a digital charter for years.

This bill was introduced back in November. Five months later, we have had very little time to debate it so far in second reading. I hope they are looking at various ways to possibly amend this bill to get it right. As the official opposition, we want to actually get things done for Canadians.

As the world becomes more digital and interconnected, it is extremely important to make sure people are fully protected in every possible way. In this process, filled as it is with the promise and potential of amazing developments with technology, there are also risks. Each new form of connection can also provide openings to be used against people. Besides the usual bad actors who are always looking for any new occasion to commit crimes, there are more subtle trends that, if we are not careful to check them, could work against everyday people's best interests, such as through invasive levels of data collection. To put it simply, people are not products. We have to make sure they are never treated as such.

As Canadians, we must always ensure that our society upholds fundamental rights and truths. Every person, whether they are acting as a customer or a private citizen, should have the ability to manage their affairs as they see fit and decide for themselves who will have access to their property. They should not find themselves in a position in which they are living at the mercy of powerful interests, whether it is the private or public sector.

We should expect to see stronger protections for privacy and for personal information. There is some clear language in this bill concerning corporations and institutions. However, more importantly, what about when people are interacting with the government? Much more importantly, what about when the government decides to interact with the people, whether they want it to or not? We do not have to go too far back in the past to remember when Statistics Canada wanted to look through Canadians' bank accounts and financial information. This makes me wonder how this kind of thing will be handled going forward under this legislation.

Of course, there is a lot more that could be said about the many ethical scandals directly coming out of the government over the last five years. Is it any wonder that people would be second-guessing the government's commitment to handling their information? Let us go back, though, to what is already in the bill for private entities.

More than words, we need better and stronger protection in action. Is that what we can expect? A few weeks ago, the Privacy Commissioner spoke on Bill C-11. He said:

The government has set out important objectives for the bill, including increasing consumers' control over their data, enabling responsible innovation, and establishing quick and effective remedies, including the ability to impose significant financial penalties. I support these objectives. Unfortunately, my analysis of the bill's provisions leads me to conclude that they would not be achieved.

Government Orders

With further definitions and allowances made under this bill, he goes on further to say, “this would result in less consumer control than under the current law.” He also points out, “some of the new consent exceptions are too broad or ill defined to foster responsible innovation.” In particular, he says “one new exception is based solely on the impracticality of obtaining consent. Such an approach would render the principle of consent meaningless.”

Again, what will get this done for Canadians? I want to support this bill because of what it should be doing, but these types of points, as expressed by the commissioner, need to be thoroughly addressed at committee. Canadians deserve greater clarity from this process.

Aside from the government's own activities and operations, along with those of its various agencies, we have to question how much of a priority it is to protect Canadians from external threats to their privacy and security. How the government has handled Huawei might be the best example.

While the Liberals talk a big game when it comes to Canadians' privacy, their inaction on one of the most important and recent privacy concerns with Huawei shows that they do not actually take serious action. I ask member to remember last fall, when opposition parties passed a motion calling on the government to decide whether Huawei would be allowed to participate in Canada's 5G infrastructure.

The government has not only ignored Parliament on this issue. It has also ignored Canada's most important strategic allies. The rest of the Five Eyes alliance have taken decisive action to either ban or significantly curtail the role of Huawei in their telecommunications infrastructure, yet the Liberal government has not listened to their warnings. The United States, in particular, has played a vital role in pushing back against Chinese incursions into democratic nations' security and their citizens' privacy.

- (1315)

Based on its security intelligence, it has warned Canada that including Huawei's technology in our 5G networks would compromise our national security and the integrity of the Five Eyes partnership, yet the Prime Minister has done nothing. The Liberal government must finally have the courage to stand up to China and ban Huawei from participating in our 5G network.

While the government may pretend banning Huawei's participation would limit Canada's access to 5G, the reality is that there are safer options.

Last June, for instance, Bell Canada announced a partnership with Ericsson to help develop its 5G network across the country. Ericsson, of course, is based out of Sweden, with which we have excellent diplomatic relations. Both Sweden and Canada are dedicated to advocating for human rights around the world. Telus also partnered with Ericsson in addition to Nokia and Samsung.

Comparatively, Huawei has a proven track record of breaking the law and stealing information. In fact, Huawei was indicted by the American Department of Justice. To quote from its statement at the time, it charged Huawei for “stealing U.S. technology, conspiracy,

wire fraud, bank fraud, racketeering, and helping Iran to evade sanctions, amongst other charges.”

The Communist Party of China is the greatest threat to western nations, to national security and to the integrity of our institutions. If the government does not prevent Huawei from playing a role in our 5G networks, it will be giving the CCP a leg up in its quest to establish itself as the world's next superpower. Canadians are nervous about the role China is playing in their lives and the CCP's access to their personal information, and they should be. We know Huawei has close ties to the governing regime. Its founder is even a member of the CCP. This is the same oppressive government that, according to the allegations of its own citizens and residents, has harassed them while living here or has threatened their families in China.

When 5G finally takes off across the country, millions of Canadians' personal information will be transmitted through telecommunication infrastructure. We cannot in any way allow the Chinese government to get its hands on that critical information.

I have something else to say about the failure of the government to provide for rural Canada and for the needs of my constituents. The first principle of the digital charter is universal access. The government has failed to deliver on this need for rural and remote areas. Universal broadband funding has seen delay after delay.

I could speak on and on about various ongoing issues.

With rural broadband, as it is listed in the charter, the universal access side to it is extremely important. At this time of year, many people back home are looking to get into seeding, to get the crops in for the year. We are starting to see more and more how broadband and cell coverage is such an important factor in the practices of farmers, even for ranchers. It is vital infrastructure.

We say that we will vastly protect people's private information, yet we do not even have the infrastructure in place for people to connect to the Internet. If they do, when it is very slow and not responsive to them, it makes it even that much harder for them to be aware of what they are checking a box for or reading through. It makes it that much harder to properly download the information or to figure out what information will be taken from them. That, in and of itself, takes time and it takes a lot of effort. Therefore, when we have a serious conversation on protecting the needs and information of our citizens and we do not even have adequate infrastructure in place, we have to ensure we address some of those concerns first and foremost. This legislation will not accomplish any of that.

Getting to the principle of the bill, it is great we are having a discussion on this. We need to definitely address some of the fundamental concerns that the bill tried to raise. I look forward to continued debate on this. I also look forward to when the bill gets to committee, so we can see some amendments to it and we can start to take a serious approach to the needs of our constituents and of Canadians.

Government Orders

• (1320)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government brought forward the digital charter back in 2019. We recognized that Canadians were increasingly reliant on digital technologies to connect with each other, to buy goods and services or to access information. The new consumer privacy protection act would give Canadians more control and greater transparency over how companies would handle their personal information.

Would the member not agree that having a timely passage of the legislation is, in fact, in all our best interests, in particular the interests of Canadians?

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, yes, it is important to ensure we have this debate and, yes, the timely passage of the bill would be great. However, the issue is that it has been five months, and this only the third day it has been up for debate.

Only one party is in charge of the legislative calendar, and that is the Liberal government. If it wants to see a timely passage of the bill, I would hope that we would have more opportunities to debate it and that there would not be four-month gaps between the times that are set aside for debate on such an important bill as this one.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I have seen again and again, and this concerns me, is that we often see the government trading off privacy rights and not looking at the other priorities. Could the member talk about how we can ensure that privacy rights are respected and that they can work with other priorities? It does not have to be one or the other.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, we definitely want to see a process that makes it very transparent and up front. We are starting to see a little more effort. For example, when we go to a website, we will see an acknowledgement that it uses cookies and we have the opportunity to go through it. We have a little more control over what kind of information the website may or may not be taking from us. However, we need to see that more transparent approach, particularly when the government is interacting with us. We need to see the kind of information it will use, gleaning and taking for its benefit. There needs to be more conversation and focus on that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has brought up a lot of great points, especially around the issue of Huawei.

The House passed a motion requiring action from the government on Huawei, yet we have seen nothing. At the same time, it is bringing in Bill C-11, which has some laudable points in it, but does not address one of the biggest elephants in the room, which is Huawei. The government has refused to ban it from our country. Huawei is well known for stealing information and sharing it with the Chinese communist government.

I wonder if my colleague could tell me why he thinks the government is so reticent to ban Huawei, as the House has demanded.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, we continue to see a pattern over and over, where the government delays and decides to not take a principled approach or principled stand on these issues. The issue

with Huawei goes much further than just simply whether it is the right company for 5G or not.

Number two in the 10 principles of the charter is safety and security, and we are talking about the safety and security of our citizens in Canada and abroad. We have been seeing a regime in place that is looking to use facial recognition software to persecute its own people. Our government needs to take a very serious, strong and principled approach when dealing with Huawei, respect the will of Parliament to ban Huawei from 5G and take a strong stance and make it known that Canada we will defend our citizens.

• (1325)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to joining the debate on Bill C-11.

“One who wants to know is better than one who already knows” is a Yiddish proverb, and members know I have a great love of them.

However, I want to go through the legislation before us, because a lot of constituents have written to me with major concerns. It is not that they dislike the legislation per se. They agree, as many members have said, with the principles and content, but the bill falls far short of their expectations.

As the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands has said, it is an issue of control, who controls the information. My personal belief is that property rights are a human right, and our digital presence, our cookies, the way we look is their digital private property and it should really be treated that way. We have a come to time where we should extend our conception of what is a property right to our digital presence.

I remember knocking on doors in Mahogany in my riding. A gentleman who worked for a large IT company was very concerned about deepfakes, the ability for people to create some really lifelike images, voices and mannerisms of other individuals and the possibility for it to be used for a nefarious purpose, to mislead, misdirect and also to get money out of people. Imagine what type of use people could get out of deepfakes. I think of the past few years where we have seen a lot of companies make immense strides in providing a digital picture of people who never existed, but they look so lifelike that it is so difficult to tell if they are actually deepfakes. They trick our eyes and brains to think they exist.

On the issue of control, I have had constituents bring up issues of Clearview AI harvesting through facial recognition technology, the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandals. Closer to home in Calgary, is Cadillac Fairview and what constituents have termed “secret mall surveillance”. There was a panel put up in different parts of the mall, one of the biggest malls in Calgary, that were collecting information off the images of people going in. I cannot remember what the purpose was, but it was stopped once many people started to raise issues with what the information was being collected for.

Government Orders

It is an issue of control. There are principles in this digital charter, and I do not want to go over them too much. However, I want to raise issues specific to things like the right to opt out of the sale of personal information. That is a really big one. The GDPR does this already as does the European Union.

Sometimes when people go online, depending on the country source for the product or service purchase, after having clicked through terms and agreements, because many people do not read those, it will ask whether they are opting out of the sale of their personal information. That is missing in this legislation, and it really should have been in there.

Many constituents, like Chris MacLean in my riding, raised this as an issue, saying that they would like to have more control to consent to where their information would go. I could imagine certain situations where people are fine with their personal information being sold, perhaps some of what they give a particular company is not much and they feel it could have some type of purpose or there could be some controls put in place. However, this legislation does not have that.

Then there are the consent exemptions. I want to focus a little more on this one. This issue has been of major concern to people in my riding. As I mentioned, Chris had issues with it, Kevin Silvester, Shelley Bennett and Randall Hicks had issues with it. There is a lot of them. The issue is “for a public interest purpose” is how the government has defined it, that is socially beneficial purposes, clause 39 is one of them.

It kind of lists off government institutions, public libraries, post-secondary educational institutions, any organization that is mandated under federal-provincial law or by contract with a government institution. What if it contracted out a large government youth program, like the WE charity, and then it ran it. What kind of personal information would be collected? I know it has been embroiled in its own scandals of late. The ethics committee met this morning and discussed it even further.

It continues on to point four. This is subparagraph 39(1)(b)(iv) under the disclosures made to any other prescribed entity. Then there is paragraph 39(1)(c), the disclosures made for socially beneficial purpose. That is such a broad definition. Who gets to decide what is a socially beneficial purpose? I could drive two Hummers through that definition, working for a contracted out organization, perhaps collecting information, processing a program, a service on behalf of the federal government. I have major issues with the way that is structured, because it allows so many exemptions to be provided in interactions.

● (1330)

When we read about these organizations, it is a lot compared with any other prescribed entity. There are no limits on this prescription. There are no limits on what the federal government could prescribe as an outside entity and then our information would be shared with them. That is a consistent concern that my constituents have. They mostly focus on the business angle of it, but we know that the federal government oftentimes has a lot of contracting out of services, including IT services and procurement services. For the construction of ships, for example, the government does not own shipyards; it contracts that service out and asks someone else to do

it for the government. When they do that, is there not a possibility, because it is for a socially beneficial purpose, that the federal government could decide just to share information quite broadly? I have an issue with it because I do not think it does a great service for Canadians.

There is another issue I have with one of the definitions provided. It is the definition being used in the law for how personal information is defined. It says, “an identifiable individual”. The example that I gave, that many of my constituents give as well, is an example from Calgary when, years ago, Cadillac Fairview, which owns the Chinook Centre in Calgary on the Macleod Trail, was using facial recognition and surveillance information. Maybe they were just tracking the flow of pedestrian traffic through the mall, perhaps to plan where the doors should be; I do not know this, but if the benchmark being used in the definition is “an identifiable individual”, how much effort is a company going to put in to identify someone? That is what makes it identifiable. When I read through the legislation, I have a hard time grasping how far this could go. Is there an expectation that the companies will not keep this information at all because they did not make it identifiable, so it is okay? Is it because the image is too grainy? Is it because their name is so common that it could be just about anybody? It is an imprecise definition that could have really been beefed up from the beginning instead of taking it to committee in such an incomplete format.

Those are the issues I found, just reading through the legislation and after so many of my constituents wrote to me. They still have major issues. What they want to see is a significant number of amendments brought forward to fix the legislation. There are a few ways to do that. The government could just draft a new piece of legislation and table it again and have it go forward. There are a lot of good things in the bill, like many members have said, that make it salvageable.

At the committee stage, that is where they get into it. I do really believe this should go to the industry committee. It may want to bounce the bill around to the different committees. I used to sit on the Standing Committee on Finance in the previous Parliament, and the government would apportion the omnibus budget bill to different committees and look at the parts in order to have the expertise. So much of this is about corporations and businesses that it should really go to the industry committee. Again, it is the industry minister who has tabled the law.

Government Orders

On the issue of identifiable information, the definition should include such information as people's email address, obvious personal information like location information, gender, biometric data, web cookies, political opinions and any pseudonyms they might use so the company or the organization that is collecting it can combine it all together. It does not have to be a private organization; it could be a public one, it could be a charity doing this; who knows? That could have been a much better definition than simply leaving it very open-ended as "an identifiable individual".

Another matter that a lot of my constituents have raised is the playing field between a Canadian company based here where Canadian law can easily reach it with the fines that would be levied; and then international companies, perhaps based in Latin America, in parts of Africa, in Australia and other countries that have different privacy laws and how we would be able to find them and also collect the fines on them. That whole mechanism and the fact of a tribunal of three to six people and only requiring one expert is another issue.

I have tried to lay out as many issues as I have heard from my constituents in my riding. I mentioned that some of them had very specific concerns.

Much of the legislation is on the right path, but there are so many shortcomings. Like the previous member said, the issues here are data privacy and control, regarding who controls the information and where it can go and that the legislation is still unclear in certain parts, regarding who can deal with it; and exemptions and exceptions being given. Those two different concepts need to be fleshed out more in the legislation. It should be done at committee. It should be done at the industry committee first. If it needs to go to the ethics committee afterwards, so be it; but the industry committee should deal with it first, immediately.

• (1335)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things at issue, in terms of protecting Canadians from a digital perspective, is that we are seeing a lot more identity theft. We are getting a plethora of scams, where people have obtained our personal information or email addresses and whatnot and come after us. Could the member comment on what this bill would do to address those concerns?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, as far as I can tell, not much new in this legislation specifically deals with those types of issues. We have all seen the phishing scams, even on Parliament Hill, where people pretend to be banks, financial institutions or credit unions. It looks so real and the interaction is so real that people feel it was actually sent by the named institution. There is a lot more that could be done and witnesses could be brought forward at committee who could deal with it, but the industry committee is the right committee to deal with this bill.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the hon. member highlighted the discussion around privacy rights. Privacy is a fundamental human right and this bill would fail to protect privacy rights. In terms of protecting children, it goes in the opposite direction. It has loosened the regulations when other countries are strengthening the rules around protecting children. It continues with a broken model of consent that pits indi-

viduals against corporations and political parties, which is a power imbalance.

I would ask the hon. member whether he thinks political parties should be included in this legislation and bound by the privacy rules.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I will speak about the first part of his observation on privacy rights. Privacy rights should be property rights. That is where we should go and expand it, and that is the way it should be understood. I talked about, for example, deepfakes and the concerns I heard at people's doors, specifically in Mahogany. I had a constituent who spent a lot of time explaining it to me. It has panned out in public media about the misdirection and ability of people to be misinformed on something that looks so absolutely real. It tricks one's eyes and ears into believing the person is actually saying what is being said.

The member talked about algorithms. Many of us have children. I have three kids and they just love YouTube, but sometimes I wonder where the algorithm leads them based on the choices they are making as they are clicking. More than once I have had to stop them because the algorithm has gone completely out of control and showed them things that no child who is 10 years old should ever be able to see.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see Bill C-11 as legislation that offers world-leading privacy and data protection. It also has some of the strongest fines among the G7 privacy laws. This is legislation that Canadians would support and it even seems that members on all sides support the legislation.

The government does not have a process like opposition days where things are voted on automatically. We are very dependent on opposition parties recognizing the importance of legislation and allowing it to get to the committee stage. I wonder if my friend could provide his thoughts on whether he believes the bill should move forward. We have had many days of debate, for example—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Government Orders

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the member is the parliamentary secretary to the House leader. He is participating in setting the agenda. It has been months since this legislation came to Parliament to be debated. He should perhaps look at his own schedule to determine how many more days the government could do this. I read directly from concerns of my constituents, and I invite all members to do that. That is exactly what I did. I printed off the emails because I wanted to discuss their specific concerns. That is what each of us should be doing and that is what matters the most.

This is not world-leading legislation. The GDPR in the European Union is world-leading. This is not that.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-11 imposes obligations with regard to the collection, retention and disclosure of personal information, which is good. However, it does not require businesses to verify that the person they are dealing with is who they claim to be before authorizing a financial transaction.

In the interest of regulating banking practices and reducing fraud, should we not be requiring financial institutions to institute robust identity checks to prevent fraudsters from stealing someone's identity and using their personal information? Should banks not be required to include the number of fraud cases due to identity theft in their annual statements? Should they not be required to contact anyone whose identity may have been used fraudulently?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île for his comments.

I agree with the first part of his question and his idea. I think people need to provide valid and informed consent. Many of my constituents have the same concern about private businesses sharing their personal information.

I agree with the first part, but as far as the second part is concerned, I would like to hear more debate on the matter before taking a position.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate on Bill C-11. It is important to start with the conversation that has been had around where this legislation is going to be debated. The legislation belongs to the industry minister, so we would expect the industry committee would deal with it. In spite of an offer from the opposition by way of unanimous consent to have this sent to the industry committee, the government will instead send it to the ethics committee.

What else the ethics committee has been dealing with and will be dealing with this spring are germane to the rationale for the destination of this bill. Up to this point, the ethics committee has looked at the pandemic spending, particularly the issues around the failed Canada student service grant and the half billion dollars destined for the WE organization. That study has faced some significant obstruction: first, by way of Parliament being prorogued in the midst of a pandemic; and, second, upon returning from prorogation, the committee was filibustered for the equivalent of 20 meetings, more

than 40 hours. When the agreement on having witnesses appear was finally reached in December, many months followed where the witnesses would not appear. Finally, summonses were issued.

The potential damage to the government and the Prime Minister the testimony that the committee is looking for is great. Not only did the Prime Minister prorogue and the Liberal members filibuster for the equivalent of more than 20 meetings, but when an order of this House was issued for witnesses to appear, which passed with majority support, the Liberal members said they did not like the decision, they did not support that Canada's Parliament had spoken that it was within its powers to exercise an order for people to appear at committee and instead wanted others to go, so they told those individuals to defy an order of Canada's Parliament. Who told them that? Ministers of the Crown told individuals to dodge, to duck an order—

● (1345)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The debate we are having today is on Bill C-11, the digital charter implementation act. Although I thought at the beginning that the member was going to briefly reference the ethics committee, he is now completely talking about an unrelated matter. I guess he trying to justify why this is going to a certain committee, but that is certainly not the content of the bill, which is what we are supposed to be discussing now. Perhaps you could—

An hon. member: Debate.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: How is this debate? I am bringing a point of order that the member is not talking about this. That is the only thing I have been talking about.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps you could encourage the member to stay on topic and discuss Bill C-11 specifically.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. In the past, members have sought your intervention to guide members to speak relevantly. I have laid out very clearly the connection between the point I am making and the legislation before us. I am very aware of the rules of relevance and I am sure you will find the member opposite is very aware that those rules are very loosely enforced in this place. While I appreciate the member's guidance to the Speaker, I wonder if perhaps he does not view it as debate because he does not agree with the content of what I am saying.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the interventions by hon. members. Indeed, relevance is a legitimate point of order when it is raised, and I compliment each of the hon. members for their knowledge of the Standing Orders in this respect.

I have heard from each member. I will listen carefully to the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes in respect to his comments on the matter. Yes, there is certainly latitude given to members, for example to make comparisons with respect to the topic before the House. I recognize he is just a little over three minutes into his speech, and I am sure that he will continue to keep his comments relevant to the matter before the House, that being Bill C-11.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the concern the government has with the content of the testimony of those individuals who were ordered to appear is so great that ministers of the Crown ordered individuals not to appear at committee, in contravention of an order of this House. We have seen the lengths to which the government is prepared to go to avoid talking about issues that are embarrassing to it and that are damaging to it.

We now have Bill C-11. We have legislation where, for many months, the opposition has been calling on the government to take a major step to protect Canadians' privacy, and it could achieve that by banning Huawei. We heard very troubling reports today about a country where we learned that via Huawei, communist China was able to listen in to a NATO partners' phone calls happening in that country and listen to the phone calls of a prime minister. This certainly is vindication for everyone who has called for Huawei to be banned. That is a concrete step that the government could take, with the support of this House, to protect the privacy of Canadians, but that has not happened.

We are six years into the mandate of the Liberals. They got a new mandate two years ago. Now they have this legislation. The industry minister has put it forward, but they do not want it to go to the industry committee. They want it to come to the ethics committee.

Why did they wait until this spring before they wanted it to arrive at the committee? Interestingly, last summer, the Ethics Commissioner said that he was investigating the Prime Minister for the Canada student service grant debacle, after the Prime Minister had said he failed to recuse himself from discussions related to the awarding of that contract. Members of the Prime Minister's family had received half a million dollars from the WE organization, and then the Prime Minister voted to give that same organization a half-billion-dollar grant, which would have included more than \$40 million in benefit or revenue for the WE organization.

After the Ethics Commissioner said that he was going to conduct that investigation, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's office put out a tweet. The tweet highlighted the timeline that it usually takes for a report to come back on a potential violation of the Conflict of Interest Act. The first two reports issued by the Ethics Commissioner with respect to the Prime Minister were "The Trudeau Report" and "Trudeau II Report". There will be a third report bearing the same name, which is due this spring. So—

• (1350)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on a point of order.

Government Orders

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member did not intend to use the Prime Minister's proper name in referring to those reports. It is a small point of order, but I hope that he will avoid using the Prime Minister's proper name in this place.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her intervention on this issue. This has come up before. In this particular case, the infraction that the member refers to, in fact, is the title of the report. It so happens to include the family name of the Right Hon. Prime Minister in this case.

Certainly, we recommend that members not invoke the names of other hon. members, but I do recognize that on other occasions, the name of this report has been used without there being any disorder or issues of that nature. I will rule that this is acceptable in this case, but I do encourage hon. members not to repeat unnecessarily the names of such reports.

I see the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to interrupt the member again when he starts speaking, so I thought this would be the best time to do it. On the same point of order I raised earlier, since you made your ruling, he mentioned the title of Bill C-11, talked about Huawei for about 15 seconds, and then immediately went back to the Ethics Commissioner report.

Now we are rising on a point of order to talk about a report that is completely unrelated to Bill C-11. I know the member indicated that one can supposedly loosely relate, but that is not the case. It is only the case sometimes with special bills like budget bills.

I would encourage you, Mr. Speaker, to encourage the member to stay on topic and not stray away again, because you already ruled on this once.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

I see the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. Is this on the same point of order, the one the member for Kingston and the Islands just spoke to?

Ms. Elizabeth May: No, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to apologize to the hon. member. I had not realized that distinction around the proper name of the report, so I wanted to apologize for my earlier point of order.

I am not addressing the one from the member for Kingston and the Islands.

The Deputy Speaker: It is very kind of the hon. member; I appreciate her so doing.

Back to the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, I have been, as I indicated I would, listening carefully to the hon. member. In fact, his argument, as I have been following it, has to do with the delay of the scheduling of this particular bill before the House. I suppose that is a legitimate point of debate in the House.

Government Orders

I see we still have about three minutes left, and I am sure he is going to link those ideas together and conclude with his arguments being relevant to Bill C-11. We will let the hon. member finish.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, while I am thrilled that members are listening so intently, I do think it is a bit telling that they cannot even get through a 10-minute speech without their tactics. It is disappointing, to say the least.

However, I left off speaking about the report that bears the Prime Minister's name. Now, the member opposite heckled when I said that, saying that if the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is raising the point, one knows one is really out of order. Well, we see that is not the case. While the member opposite has to speak for his team today, what I can say is that the official opposition recognizes that the tactics being used by the government by attempting to send Bill C-11 to the ethics committee are part of a coordinated cover-up.

Liberals do not want to deal with the privacy of Canadians. They have had six years to do it. They do not want to deal with the privacy of Canadians. They refuse to take simple steps like banning Huawei, like Five Eyes partners. They do not want to take the necessary steps. They do not want to send this to a committee that is going to deal with this uninterrupted.

When the report bearing the Prime Minister's name comes to committee, we are going to put Bill C-11 to the side and we are going to address that report from the Ethics Commissioner. If the government really wants this legislation to be dealt with in an earnest way, then it is going to send it to a committee, as suggested by the opposition, that ought to be dealing with it, because the industry committee deals with the industry minister, and the ethics committee deals with the Ethics Commissioner.

When we have a bill that the government members profess is designed to protect the privacy of Canadians and is so important to them, we would expect that they place it at a committee where it can be given its due consideration and not time it with their hope that it will be able to displace the work of an officer of Parliament. The committee is surely going to deal with that matter; it is of great public interest.

While I look forward to members asking questions that are germane to Bill C-11, and of course we are not going to hear any questions that stray away from the meat of this bill, it is incredibly important that people recognize that as the defence committee has filibustered, as the ethics committee has filibustered, as PROC has filibustered and as Parliament was prorogued, this bill is being used in an attempt to avoid embarrassment for the government, for the Prime Minister. When a report from the Ethics Commissioner lands at the ethics committee, it will be dealt with and Bill C-11 will be put to the side, and Liberals will say that the opposition does not care about the privacy of Canadians.

We do now, we did before and we will then, but the government has a choice to make, and today it can decide to send that bill to the industry committee and it will receive due consideration. I would be happy to give our full attention to Bill C-11 and its merits, debate those and make amendments at the industry committee, but if

government members are looking to disrupt the work of the ethics committee, they are going to be unsuccessful in doing that.

• (1355)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I did say that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands was always right, but what I find even more honourable about her is how she apologized when she was wrong. I have a ton of respect for that member, and I will always listen attentively to what she has to say.

The reason I kept raising the point of order is that the preceding two speakers to this member kept going on and on about how the government is not responsible: The government sets the agenda; it has all been the government, and the government can do what it wants. However, in reality, we have seen that the opposition and this member came forward and maybe for 30 seconds out of the 10 minutes actually spoke about Bill C-11. His agenda, and we all know this from being in the House, is totally on another matter.

I get jaded, perhaps, when I see members from the opposition coming in here and saying, "It is the government. Why has the government not done anything? We would never play these games." Then, literally right after they are done speaking, this member comes in here and plays this game. That is where my concern is born from.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the agenda of the member opposite seems to be obfuscation. While I was interrupted multiple times because the member did not want to hear the case, hear the facts that the scheduling of the bill, the placement of the bill, is being used to hopefully disrupt a committee, he used the time to make a comment about the schedule of the House.

Obviously, these are legitimate points of debate that I have made this morning. However, when the government wants to obfuscate and obstruct, it should fully expect that the opposition is going to hold it to account for that. We make no apologies for it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am actually going to focus on the bill itself.

Of course, for Canadians, privacy rights are an important part of life in the digital age, and there are many platforms and many ways in which people's privacy could be breached. Facebook and Google often use Canadians' personal information in ways that have nothing to do with the service, under the guise of helping a small business, for example. We have also seen a variety of platforms where people can hide behind anonymity to post various comments.

I am wondering whether or not, in addressing these issues of privacy, platforms such as Google and Facebook should be allowed to share personal information under the guise of supporting a small business. Does the member agree with that? What other action should the government take to stop and hold to account these various platforms so that people cannot hide behind anonymity?

• (1400)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is important, of course, that we protect the privacy rights of individuals. One's data or presence online has incredible value to private business, and we need to be cognizant of that. Of course, a regulation to make sure that the biggest tech giants are respectful of that and that they are protecting individuals' information is key.

We have also heard in testimony from organizations like Twitter that sometimes anonymity is necessary as part of public discourse, so a balance needs to be struck there. We will have to take a look at that when it is studied at committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There will be a minute and a half remaining in the time for questions and comments. I am sure the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes will be fascinated to come back and receive those questions when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

We will now go to Statements by Members, and first is the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

J.A. DOUGLAS MCCURDY SYDNEY AIRPORT

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after months of negotiations, I am thrilled to share with the House that regional routes at the J.A. Douglas McCurdy Sydney Airport in my riding will be restored this spring. This is great news for Cape Breton—Canso. The Sydney airport is a critical piece of infrastructure that keeps my constituents connected to larger travel centres, supports businesses and economic development, and has welcomed thousands of newcomers to Cape Breton and northeastern Nova Scotia.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of airport CEO Mike MacKinnon, the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, the Cape Breton Partnership, the Cape Breton Regional Chamber of Commerce and, of course, my constituents in Cape Breton—Canso and those in Sydney—Victoria for their tireless efforts and advocacy.

On behalf of my constituents, I want to extend warm Cape Breton—Canso thanks to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Transport for their work to keep those of us in the Atlantic region safe and connected.

VACCINE HUNTERS CANADA

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Vaccine Hunters Canada is a community group that has come together to help eligible Canadians who wish to be vaccinated sooner to find available vaccines in our fight against COVID-19. To quote the group, it would like all Canadians “to reach out to...friends, family, co-workers, members of your community, neighbours”, especially those most at risk, and assist them in getting their vaccines sooner.

Statements by Members

I was so happy to see that this weekend the group promoted the drive-through immunization clinic at Evraz Place, right here in Regina. Every member in the House should visit @VaxHuntersCan to see the good work that is being done in each of their communities by these outstanding young Canadians.

Throughout the past 13 months, Canadians across our country have stepped up to help one another during these difficult times. Through these efforts, Canadians will get their freedoms back sooner and return to living their normal lives sooner rather than later.

COMMENTS BY MEMBER FOR NUNAVUT

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to comments made on Twitter over the weekend by the member for Nunavut. In response to an indigenous politics tweet, she said, “Jones is not an Inuk”. I stand before the House today to point out for the member for Nunavut that her domination attitude is the most prevailing one I have heard in some time. Her comments are laterally vicious and threatening to myself as an Inuk woman and the Inuit who are members of the NunatuKavut Community Council.

As a descendant of Inuk and white parents, I was raised with a deep connection to the land, and I continue to practice traditional ways of our people. Unfortunately, I have never seen such disrespect from another parliamentarian in my 25 years of political office.

I ask the member to respect all indigenous people in Canada, to apologize for her statement and to stop committing racial erosion against her own culture. It is attitudes like hers that have set Inuit back decades in modern society. I expect an apology and a withdrawal of her statement on Twitter.

[Translation]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, “Volunteering, So Chic” is the theme of National Volunteer Week, which is taking place from April 18 to 24.

Sports and cultural events, services provided by community organizations, recreation activities and community engagement activities would not be possible without our countless volunteers.

Their ability to adapt to all manner of new realities and to create great social innovations is inspiring. I must say that the last year has been trying, but we have been able to count on their caring presence. I thank them for being so happy to give to others, for their commitment and for preparing the volunteers of the future. We know that volunteering benefits others, but it also benefits those who give of their time.

Statements by Members

These cherished volunteers are essential for the vitality and solidarity of our communities. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to express our sincere and heartfelt thanks.

Happy National Volunteer Week.

* * *

● (1405)

BENOÎT FONTAINE

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our poultry producers are facing a number of challenges, but I am proud to highlight the work of a man who has been advocating tirelessly for the sector, Benoît Fontaine.

Mr. Fontaine is a resident of Stanbridge Station in my community, Brome—Missisquoi, and he was recently re-elected for a sixth term as chair of the Chicken Farmers of Canada.

The former high school teacher and principal has focused on running his family business since 2012. He has built quite an empire with 11 poultry farms in Quebec. For years now, he has been working hard to advocate internationally for the interests of Canada's 2,800 poultry producers. His work is not always easy, but his passion and expertise make him the best possible spokesperson for our poultry sector.

I would like to congratulate Benoît Fontaine on his re-election. I look forward to continuing to work with him on these important issues.

* * *

[English]

NORTH OKANAGAN—SHUSWAP

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my constituents of the North Okanagan—Shuswap are good people, willing to support their country, but they are growing weary because the government has failed to protect Canadians.

Businesses are closing, workers are out of jobs, families are hurting and loved ones continue to be lost. Now Canada is lagging far behind our peers in vaccine delivery. The government has also failed to address the mental health and opioid crises that continue to claim lives. Canadians deserve better.

I want to thank all the constituents of the North Okanagan—Shuswap who have contacted me to share concerns and ideas for a plan to recovery. Connecting with constituents is always my priority and while we have had to change how we connect, I continue to prioritize constituent input. Together we can build on a plan to secure our health, secure our jobs and secure our future.

* * *

2020 SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a year ago this week, Nova Scotians experienced extreme tragedy, violence and heartache. I will not use this time to remember a violent gunman or use his name. Instead, I remember those who were taken from us, like Cole Harbour RCMP police Constable Heidi Stevenson, a beloved member of our community, mom, wife and friend to so many.

ble Heidi Stevenson, a beloved member of our community, mom, wife and friend to so many.

In the face of this extreme heartache, we did not let those acts of violence tear our province apart. Although the wounds of this tragedy run deep in our communities, I will always remember the compassion, resilience and love that Nova Scotians showed for one another through song, words and signs of support in windows, hearts on the side of highways. We are Nova Scotia strong.

Even when Nova Scotians experienced their worst days, they did what they could to help each other through it. We will always remember the lives that were lost and we will always remember that we are resilient. We are Nova Scotia strong.

* * *

RAMADAN

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish *Ramadan Mubarak* to all Muslims in Canada and around the world celebrating the holy month of Ramadan. Here in Mississauga, through this pandemic, we have seen many mosques, Muslim organizations and groups that have stepped up to help our neighbours in need.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone of them. I especially thank those who work on the front lines of combatting COVID-19 as essential workers and medical professionals, all while fasting.

In this challenging time, I know that this Ramadan will be different. This is really an extraordinary time for our Muslim Canadians. Mosque programs and prayers will be virtual and iftars will not be able to happen with friends and family in the same way like past years, as we must practice physical distancing and keep our communities and neighbours safe. I know this is difficult, but I also know that we will get through this together.

I want to take this opportunity to celebrate Canada's Muslim communities and important contributions that Muslim Canadians make each and every day. Again, *Ramadan Mubarak*.

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● (1410)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week our leader announced a plan to tackle climate change. I was pleased to see many of the ideas I have been advocating for present in the plan, things like working with major industrial emitters to implement technology to actually reduce emissions, reducing emissions in transportation and buildings, increasing the amount of carbon captured through carbon sequestration and solutions that are forest and agriculture-based.

We want to replace higher carbon footprint fuels in the world with our Canadian environmentally responsible alternatives like nuclear, natural gas and green energy. We want to eliminate the Liberal punishing carbon tax and give money back to Canadians, so they can participate in helping our country reduce its carbon footprint.

Unlike the Liberals, who have yet to plant one of their two million trees and have once again not achieved their climate targets, the Conservatives have a plan that has been verified to meet our Paris 2030 targets by a well-respected environmental firm.

The Conservatives have a real plan for the environment.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, volunteerism and civic and community engagement are at the heart of our Canadian values and define my community, Alfred-Pellan.

Volunteers were already making a big difference, but the pandemic has put an even brighter spotlight on the minor miracles they have performed for our local organizations. The kindness, compassion and generosity that our volunteers have shown in seniors' homes, with meals on wheels, at youth centres, or amongst neighbours and friends have made the situation less painful for my community.

During National Volunteer Week, I would like to thank these kind men and women whose individual efforts are making our Laval community stronger by binding us together.

I thank them for working miracles every day and for giving back to the community. I thank them for their volunteerism.

* * *

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S ACT

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Right Honourable Julie Payette was appointed Governor General on July 13, 2017. She resigned on January 21, 2021. She did not complete the usual five-year term, serving only three years and six months. Although she held her position for a very short time, since resigning, Ms. Payette will automatically receive an annual pension of \$150,000 and a hospitality budget of \$206,000 for the rest of her life.

The circumstances under which she left office are deeply disturbing. Eighty per cent of Canadians support ending her financial benefits. Ms. Payette resigned and should not be eligible for a lifetime pension, just as workers who resign are not eligible for employment insurance.

I urge all Canadians to sign petition e-3314, which calls on the government to immediately amend the Governor General's Act so that only governors general who have held office for a minimum of five years are eligible for a pension and financial benefits.

Statements by Members

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are weary and anxious to turn the corner on COVID-19. The future of Canada is at stake, and we know this. Now is not the time to deliver a federal budget that reimagines our economy.

Canadians who are struggling cannot afford to have the Prime Minister gamble their financial security on an ideological plan that picks winners and losers, a plan that neglects job, sectors and entire regions of our great country. Canadians need a plan that will secure their future. We need action to help the hardest-hit sectors so families have the security and dignity that come with a stable job.

The Conservatives have put forward a recovery plan that would support those who have struggled the most. It is a plan that would improve our country's resilience, restore our economy and put us on steady ground.

It is time that the Liberal government forgo risky ideological experiments and prioritize securing a strong, healthy and prosperous future for all Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ARMENIA

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, "The government has decided to destroy all Armenians living in Turkey. Their existence must come to an end, however tragic the means may be; and no regard must be paid to either age or sex, or to conscientious scruples." That is a quote from a telegram sent by Talaat Pasha, the minister of the interior of the Ottoman empire on September 15, 1915.

The massacre of 1.5 million Armenians followed in what became the first genocide of the 20th century. The genocide order was followed everywhere. In Ankara alone, 500,000 people died. In some regions, caravans of families were driven into the desert, where very few survived. Let us be frank. Events in recent months have served as a reminder of this collective trauma. Once again, Armenians were attacked and bombed. A total of 3,500 Armenians were killed in the conflict that shook Artsakh, Armenians who were targeted for who they are, where they live. It is impossible not to see a very worrisome historic parallel.

That is why, more than ever, we have a duty to remember, show compassion and stand in solidarity.

Oral Questions

● (1415)

SAGUENAY—LAC-ST-JEAN FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Association forestière Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean will soon be celebrating its 80th anniversary.

Since 1942, the association has been helping to cultivate an appreciation of forests among young people and the general public and is thereby contributing to the growth and development of this major economic sector while advocating for environmental conservation.

The Association forestière Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean plays a major role in educating the region's population, sharing information, and raising people's awareness of the importance of forests and of sustainably developing them. Forests are carbon sinks, which makes them one of our greatest assets in the fight against the climate crisis. As such, the association will no doubt be playing an even greater role in the years to come.

On behalf of the people of Jonquière and the Bloc Québécois, I wish the Association forestière Saguenay—Lac-St-Jean all the best in its ongoing efforts to demonstrate the importance of one of our greatest assets: forests.

* * *

[English]

2020 SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take the floor today in the beautiful province of Nova Scotia to recognize the one-year anniversary of one of the darkest chapters in its history: the death of 22 people in Portapique.

One year ago, Nova Scotia RCMP struggled for 13 hours to try to stop Canada's deadliest rampage. The deaths of innocent victims were senseless, unnecessary and totally heinous.

Ever since this tragic event occurred, Nova Scotians across the province came together to mourn and to support the victims' families. They continue to stand in solidarity with them one year later to help folks understand how something so awful can happen in one of our beautiful and sleepy communities.

Yesterday, it was heartwarming to see so many COVID-friendly gatherings, church services and a provincial moment of silence at 3 p.m. to honour the memory of the victims. No matter what we face, Nova Scotians unite and rise in the times of grief and sorrow.

I ask all my colleagues in the House of Commons to work together to help the victims' families and loved ones to get answers they need and deserve to help them heal. This kind of atrocity should never happen again.

* * *

2020 SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a year ago today, Nova Scotians began to realize the gravity of the horrific events of the Nova Scotia shooting, which began in Portapique and impacted communities across the province, including the communities I represent in Kings—Hants.

There were 22 innocent lives lost, including an expectant mother, in a senseless and cowardly act of violence that words simply cannot properly describe. Today I think of the families and friends who lost loved ones and collectively, as Nova Scotians and indeed as Canadians, we stand with them. I want to thank all the first responders who answered the call, including Constable Heidi Stevenson, who made the ultimate sacrifice in the interests of protecting others, and Chad Morrison, a neighbour of mine who was injured in the line of duty.

I am fiercely proud to be a Nova Scotian and, as Nova Scotians do, we collectively came together to mourn, grieve and show kindness and love for one another during a difficult time. The compassion and collective spirit we have witnessed is powerful and it, rather than the violence and evil we experienced, will be what continues to define us in the days ahead.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are in a race against COVID-19 variants that we are sadly losing.

When vaccines get to Canada matters as much as how many arrive. This week's Pfizer shipment, according to experts, will be completely used up in two days. The Prime Minister's February shortages created this April's third wave.

How much longer is the third wave going to be because the government has failed to get enough vaccines on time?

● (1420)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to emphasize that in addition to the deliveries that we have already secured for Canada, we signed an agreement with Pfizer, a very stable partner, to have eight million more doses coming into this country by the end of June. We will be receiving between 48 million and 50 million doses, cumulatively, before that time.

Our deliveries and our negotiations mean that in the month of May, for example, we will have 2 million doses per week coming into the country and 12 million over five weeks in June.

We are third in the G20, and I thank the hon. member for the question.

HEALTH

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is too little too late.

The Prime Minister had been warned about a third wave since February, but it is April and only 2% of Canadians are fully vaccinated. I repeat: only 2%. Less than a quarter have had even one dose. Every decision the government has made, according to its own experts, has been to compensate for a lack of supply. This third wave is a direct result of the Prime Minister's inaction.

Why are Canadians getting a vaccine plan now for June, instead of April or earlier?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have been there for provinces and territories, and indeed for all Canadians as we battle COVID-19 together.

Eight dollars out of every \$10 spent on responding to COVID has been federal funding. We have been there with billions of dollars in transfers to provinces and territories, acquisition of personal protective equipment and rapid tests, acquisition of vaccines and, indeed, helping provinces and territories with surges of cases.

We will continue to be there for as long as it takes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ontario is in crisis because of vaccine shortages.

In Kitchener-Waterloo, public health announced last weekend that vaccination clinics were closing because of vaccine shortages. For example, the vaccination clinics at the Boardwalk in Kitchener and Pinebush Road in Cambridge will go from seven to three days a week.

When will the government get serious and deliver the vaccines the provincial government desperately needs to stave off the third wave of this pandemic?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that vaccines are an important tool to fight COVID-19, but we have to continue to apply public health measures and listen to the scientists and experts who are leading the way.

We will be there for Ontarians during this third wave, as we were during the first and second waves. As the member opposite knows, I spoke with Minister Christine Elliott on the weekend. We will be supporting Ontarians no matter where they live in the province.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, where is the urgency from the government?

Ontario is in crisis. A third wave is upon us, all because the government has failed to deliver vaccines. We have 4,400 new cases a day, double the rate of the U.S. There were 19 COVID deaths in the last 24 hours alone, higher than the rate in the U.S.

The U.S. and U.K. are avoiding the third wave. Over 40% of Americans have been vaccinated and over 50% of Britons have been vaccinated, but only 26% of Ontarians.

When is the government going to deliver the desperately needed vaccines to the province of Ontario?

Oral Questions

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important that the member opposite not confuse Canadians with, I think, somewhat false allegations.

We know that, even in jurisdictions where there have been very high rates of vaccination, public health measures must continue until we are certain that we can crush that curve.

That is exactly what we are doing: vaccinating Canadians and making sure that they have the tools they need to get through this wave and any other experiences of surges in any province or territory. We will be there for Ontarians. We will be there for all Canadians for as long as it takes with whatever they need.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking truth to power: a power the current government is not using to deliver vaccines. Referring to the government's handling of the pandemic, *The Globe and Mail* said last weekend, "the best policy for Canadians is this: When it comes to COVID-19 you're on your own. Pretend you don't have governments protecting you because in many ways you don't." The government punted much of the responsibility for the pandemic to the provinces. One of the few things it had to do was deliver vaccines. This is something it has utterly failed to do.

When is it going to focus on the task at hand and deliver these vaccines?

• (1425)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite has been reassured time and again, the federal government has stopped at nothing to support Canadians, regardless of which jurisdiction they live in. Whether it was delivering PPE, supporting people with the CERB and the wage subsidy, or purchasing vaccines and other therapeutics, we have been there for Canadians and we will continue to be there. Of every \$10 spent responding to the pandemic, \$8 has come from the federal government. We have supported provinces and territories every step of the way and we will not stop.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, the government will finally table the first budget in two years. We are expecting this past year's deficit to be close to \$400 billion. The federal government is justifying its spending to help people and businesses during the pandemic. Unfortunately, the Liberal government also used this as an opportunity to pad the coffers of the Liberal Party by happily dipping into wage subsidies for businesses, a fine example that was followed by the Conservatives and the NDP.

Given that the Liberal Party received \$15 million in donations this year, will it take this opportunity to return taxpayers' money that it misappropriated?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of the pandemic we made a decision that we were going to be there for households and businesses. When it came to workers, we did not discriminate against them on the basis of who their employer was. With the Canada emergency wage subsidy, we have now ensured that more than five million Canadians have remained on their employers' payroll, which allows them not only to maintain their salary but to access important benefits.

Going back to March 2020, knowing what I know now, I would do the same thing again to make sure that Canadians were supported through this pandemic.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he is not even embarrassed to say that. It is not funny.

It was not just the other parties that took advantage of the wage subsidy to line their pockets. We learned that the Canada Revenue Agency received 1,200 complaints about companies that fraudulently received the wage subsidy.

Do you know how many companies were sanctioned? Not one. There were no prosecutions or prison sentences. None at all. I have to say that the Liberals are not setting an example. That is like putting Colonel Sanders in charge of the henhouse.

When will the government demand that those who stole money from taxpayers pay it back?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government took quick and decisive action to provide assistance to Canadian workers and employers.

The Canada Revenue Agency launched post-payment audits of Canada emergency wage benefit recipients.

I remind my colleague in the opposition that he voted against post-payment audits of wage subsidy recipients. My colleague cannot change his vote, but I hope he will admit that audits of large-scale programs might be useful after all.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic third wave is raging and Ontario's health care system is in serious crisis. People are doing their best to stop the spread of COVID-19 by staying home and following public health guidelines, but they need more help. If the federal government declared a public welfare emergency we could increase hospital capacity, get more vaccines to vulnerable people and provide paid sick leave to all workers to reduce infections.

The federal government should do everything it can to save Canadians' lives. Will the Liberal government use its powers under the Emergencies Act to save lives in Ontario?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way we have worked with the provinces and territories collaboratively to save lives and stop the spread. That is the philosophy of the government and it is what Canadians want to see: the provinces and territories working with the federal government, stopping at nothing to save the lives of their loved ones and to ensure they have the financial and economic supports to protect themselves and their communities. We will continue that hard work with the provinces, territories and Canadians so we can get through this together.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hospitals across Ontario are in crisis and London is no exception, setting a new record for COVID-19 patients in its ICUs. The Ontario Conservative government has dropped the ball and the federal government owes it to Ontarians and all Canadians to do everything it can to help protect lives during this third wave. New Democrats have asked the Prime Minister to use the Emergencies Act to get more people vaccinated and to provide sick leave and pay to workers.

Yes or no: Will the Prime Minister commit to using the Emergencies Act to protect the lives of Ontarians from this devastating third wave?

● (1430)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has stopped at nothing to work with provinces and territories and to provide supports to provinces and territories, whether they are economical supports, health and human resources, equipment or vaccines.

We are going to continue that hard work together because that is how we are going to protect lives and stop the spread, by working together and making sure that, no matter what jurisdiction a Canadian lives in, that person has the support of all levels of government.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Johns Hopkins estimates that to achieve herd immunity for COVID-19 at least 70% of a population needs immunity, and 70% of Ontario's population is 9.8 million people. Ontario has the capacity to vaccinate 100,000 people per day. At this rate, the province could have already vaccinated 10 million people, enough to reach herd immunity. The federal Liberals did not send anywhere close to this number of vaccines.

Will the minister admit they could have mitigated the third wave if the Liberals had sent more vaccines to Ontario in January and February?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, around the world, governments are working to immunize their populations to save lives and stop the spread of COVID. Canada is no different. In fact, we are the third highest country in the G20 for the administration of vaccines. We will stop at nothing to protect Canadian lives. We will work with provinces and territories to make sure they have vaccines, and not only that, but that they have the support to administer those vaccines in the fastest possible way.

I spoke with Minister Elliott on the weekend. We agreed that working together is the best approach to save lives and to stop the spread.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike what the minister says, Canada is different. Unlike in the U.S. and the U.K., on January 15 federal Liberals announced major problems with vaccine delivery, and acute shortage persisted until February 18. That meant that from January 15 to February 18, only 320,000 people in Ontario were vaccinated. However, with enough vaccines, 100,000 people per day, or 2.8 million, could have been vaccinated in Ontario. People in Ontario were expecting to be vaccinated this spring, not to have a deadly new wave of COVID.

Why did Canada not have more vaccines in January and February?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will remind the hon. member that it was she who indicated that Canada would not have vaccines until 2030. We secured 3.5 million more vaccines in the first quarter than originally targeted, and we are getting those vaccines to provinces as soon as possible.

I will remind the hon. member that we have delivered 12.7 million doses to the provinces and just over 10 million doses have been administered. Our vaccine procurements are strong and made stronger by the eight million more doses that will come from Pfizer over the next two months. We are third in the G20 for doses administered, and we will continue moving at this rapid pace to ensure that all Canadians have access to a vaccine.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will remind the minister that the original contract she signed with Pfizer and AstraZeneca only had vaccines arriving in late February and March respectively. Political pressure from the opposition made a difference. Shortages in January and February cost approximately 2.8 million Ontarians their chance to get a COVID vaccine during these months. That is the equivalent of the entire core population of the city of Toronto. This means that

Toronto is still like a tinderbox of unvaccinated people, and it exacerbated the third wave.

Why did Canada not have more vaccines in January and February when we needed them to prevent the third wave?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the inquiry, and I will reiterate that we are third in the G20. We have surpassed all of our targets that were originally set, and we are on track to have between 48 million and 50 million doses in the country by the end of June. Again, we have delivered over 12 million doses to the provinces and 10 million have been administered.

As a federal government, we have also provided supplies, PPE and rapid test kits because we know that to address the pandemic, we need to take a multipronged approach. That is what the public health experts are telling us, and that is exactly what we are following. We will continue to deliver—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Brazilian public health officials announced the discovery of much more transmissible, vaccine-resistant variants. This new state of affairs has brought Brazil's health care system to the verge of collapse.

What was the Liberal government's reaction to this news?

The Liberals decided to put an end to additional screening for travellers entering Canada from Brazil. The Prime Minister is prolonging this health crisis by refusing to take action to secure our borders. Why?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we have some of the strongest measures in the world to screen for COVID-19 at our borders, regardless of the country of origin. It is important that all travellers are screened for COVID-19 and that all positive cases are sequenced for the variants. That is exactly what we are doing.

All travellers are required to submit a predeparture test, test on arrival, quarantine in a government-approved hotel and then quarantine for an additional 14 days until such time that they are cleared of having COVID. We will stop at nothing to protect Canadians at our borders.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is clearly not working. The measures that have been put in place since the beginning of the pandemic are not working and recent measures are not working either. We must not forget that there were no variants in Canada until just a few weeks ago.

The major problem in Canada right now is the variants that are coming in from places around the world, like Brazil. We had special measures in place for flights arriving from Brazil, and the government decided to stop applying them.

The Prime Minister is playing with fire. Can someone explain to me why the government stopped applying the special measures for flights arriving from Brazil?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that we have some of the strongest measures at the border in the entire world, including, by the way, a ban on foreign nationals entering Canada, predeparture testing required before boarding a plane, post-arrival testing and a stay in a government-authorized quarantine hotel until the return of a negative COVID test.

All positive tests are quarantined, and all positive cases are quarantined. All travellers must submit a test at day 10. That is how we stop COVID at our borders. We will continue to protect Canadians from importation.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister can go ahead and say that she is repeating herself, but I am telling her again that this has been a mess from the beginning.

Since the beginning, we have been asking for more measures, measures that are better administered. That never happened, and now, we have variants in Canada.

Another problem is the AstraZeneca vaccine. We paid twice as much as the U.S. and four times more than Europe and it is not even arriving on time.

Can the minister explain why the AstraZeneca vaccine is taking so long to get here when we paid four times more for it than Europe did?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, our vaccine contracts are confidential. We are not going to risk breaching them while every country is in a race for vaccines.

This is a great week. We just secured eight million more doses from Pfizer, with the first four million doses set to arrive in May. Pfizer continues to be the workhorse of our vaccine program, as deliveries of their vaccine will total two million per week in May.

I am surprised that the member opposite would suggest this when it is quite clear, and I am certain we all agree, that Canada's vaccine supply chain must remain stable.

*[Translation]***AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Switch Health's screw-up with day-10 tests remains unresolved.

Despite a slight increase in staffing levels, the company is still not keeping up with demand and is still unable to provide our producers with services in French. That is unacceptable.

These are practical people. They have suggested solutions, such as hiring a medical testing company themselves to get proper service.

Will the government listen to them or suggest other solutions?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure my colleague and all producers that we are working very closely with the industry and with our Government of Quebec colleagues to find fast, effective solutions.

We are acutely aware of concerns about the day-10 tests, and we will have additional resources to address the situation very soon.

I also want to point out that, overall, the arrival of foreign workers is going very well, and we are expecting a good season.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a farmer from Saint-Thomas, Mr. Rondeau, lost 35,000 pounds of asparagus last year because of federal mismanagement issues related to seasonal work. He was really hoping to make up for it this year. Unfortunately, the testing boondoggle left him without his first group of workers for 18 days, when the asparagus season lasts for only about 60 days.

Mr. Rondeau is not alone. Several other members have received calls from concerned farmers. They need the government to wake up. This is urgent.

What will the government do and when?

● (1440)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I can assure the member that we are very aware of the problems associated with the day-10 test. We understand the urgency and importance of essential foreign farm workers, and we are doing everything we can.

A number of discussions are under way, and we are close to finding a solution and implementing it. A few more days of patience are needed. Overall, the arrival of foreign workers is going well, and we are doing this to ensure the safety of Canadians, the safety of workers and obviously food safety.

TAXATION

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to make life simpler for Quebecers, the Government of Quebec has announced that it is extending by a month the deadline for filing tax returns. Last year, the federal government did the same thing, but this year it is hesitating.

Quebeckers will have a reprieve from filing their provincial tax return with Quebec, but not their federal tax return. It is nice to get a bit of help, but if the help is lopsided then we are no further ahead.

Will the federal government follow Quebec's lead and give taxpayers and accountants another break during these extremely trying times?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that this tax season is stressful for Canadians. We will continue to be there for them every step of the way.

In February, we announced that recipients of the emergency and recovery benefits would be eligible for interest relief if they filed their 2020 tax returns. The Canada Revenue Agency has also put in place robust taxpayer relief provisions that grant them relief from penalties or interest incurred for reasons beyond their control.

These measures ensure that Canadians who need help during tax season will get it.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the finance minister will finally table a budget.

She recently had an epiphany about new social programs in a reimagined economy, and letting future generations pay for it, but the Prime Minister recently sent a letter directing his minister to “avoid creating new permanent spending.” That is his standard, not mine, but we know how easily the Prime Minister makes and breaks promises.

Will the minister's budget contain new permanent spending, yes or no?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member uses the language of epiphany as an attempt to paint me, and by extension the minister and our government, as some kind of radicals. I will reassure him there is nothing radical about investing in measures that will protect the environment and create jobs at the same time.

There is nothing radical about supporting women in the economy, so my daughter has the same opportunities for success I enjoy. There is nothing radical about supporting low-income workers and middle-class families, so they have a decent shot at a quality of life that we too often take for granted.

Oral Questions

I can reassure the hon. member the measures included in the upcoming budget will be focused on fighting COVID-19, supporting Canadians through its end, and setting a course for a recovery that is sustainable and inclusive.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take that as a yes. It is another broken promise.

Canadians expect their government to support them in their time of need, and we have supported those efforts, but the Prime Minister has incurred the largest deficit and achieved the worst outcomes in the G7. He has also incurred the largest debt in Canada's history, so he recently instructed his finance minister to “review [Canada's] debt management strategy”.

Can she now tell us whether her budget contains a serious plan to manage the massive debt that future generations will be left to pay, yes or no?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's argument rests upon the premise that our pandemic response has somehow been too expensive. If he thinks our measures have been too expensive, I would like to introduce him to my neighbour, who told me that she was able to feed her kids and pay her rent because she collected CERB when she lost her job.

I would like to introduce him to a small business owner in my downtown community who was able to keep the doors open because he gained access to CEBA. I would like to introduce him to my classmate who works at the Michelin plant in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, who had a job last year because their employer benefited from the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

When it came time to support Canadians, our government had their backs, and Canadians ought to know that. We will continue to do whatever it takes to see them through this emergency.

● (1445)

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see there is no debt management strategy.

The Prime Minister also told his minister to present “a new fiscal anchor”.

The Liberals have tried to manage this pandemic and its massive financial consequences without a clear set of rules. We have spent more per capita but achieved less than any other major developed country. Meanwhile, future generations of Canadians fear they will be left to pick up the tab.

I ask the minister this: Will her budget include a meaningful fiscal anchor, or does her Prime Minister still believe that budgets balance themselves?

Oral Questions

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's world view is patently ridiculous when he outlines it in that question. The reality is, he sees the cost of our response but not the value and the measures we have advanced to support Canadian households and businesses. He ignores the fact that inaction in the face of this once-in-a-century public health and economic emergency would have had a cost that was far greater than supporting Canadian households and businesses.

I would direct the member not to my own words but to the recent report of the IMF, which indicated that if our government had not taken such quick and decisive action at the outset of this pandemic, our debt would remain the same size but there would be economic scarring that we would pay for—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

* * *

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 60 years of education at Laurentian University is being trashed. Professors who built unique programs are being kicked out of the door without even access to their severance, students are being told not to come back even though they are halfway through their studies and the midwifery program has been gutted even though it has had its own funding.

The member for Sudbury is saying, “Hey, don't look to the Liberal government for any help”.

Here is the thing. We had an emergency debate, and the Liberals made all kinds of positive talk about Sudbury. Where is the plan to show up and work with the province to save this important francophone, anglophone and indigenous institution? Where is the backbone to help Laurentian and the people of Sudbury?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

It goes without saying that we are extremely concerned about what is happening at Laurentian University. We are concerned and we are obviously thinking of the professors who have lost their jobs and the students who have been negatively affected.

That is why we are in talks with the Government of Ontario, which had jurisdiction over education, to find solutions. We will be there to help the francophone community and, of course, the people of Sudbury and northern Ontario have access to post-secondary education in French. We will be there as allies.

* * *

[*English*]

ETHICS

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the member for Winnipeg North sponsored a charter-violat-

ing petition for Mr. Tataryn, former president of the Manitoba Liberal Party and retired police officer, who is attempting to limit any criticism of police by making changes to the Criminal Code. The member claimed to support the petition in spirit, but according to parliamentary records, the member also supported the petition in dollars. Financial records reveal that he had hired Tataryn as a subject matter expert.

Why is this government willing to violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to help its Liberal buddies?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that our government will always stand up for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we are working very hard with our law enforcement agencies and through their leadership with law enforcement agencies right across the country.

We had, just this weekend, in Ontario an extraordinary example of where the police were offered authorities to violate the charter and, unanimously, they stood up to that and said no. I want to acknowledge that leadership and assure the member that we remain committed to upholding all of the rights and freedoms that are available to all Canadians throughout the country.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past year has been extremely challenging for everyone here in Canada and for people around the world. While many Canadians have been working remotely, essential workers have been physically working on the front lines across the country to keep us safe and to make sure that we have food on our tables. Many of these frontline workers are immigrants whose status is temporary.

Can the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship please inform this House of what our government has done to recognize the invaluable contributions that newcomers bring to Canada and our economy?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has shone a bright light on the extraordinary contributions of newcomers who are working on the front lines of our hospitals, long-term care homes and farms. That is why I was proud to announce a fast, innovative and inclusive pathway to permanent residence for up to 90,000 essential workers and international students who are already in Canada and giving back.

This is another positive example of how, when given the opportunity, hard-working and skilled newcomers can accelerate our economic recovery and drive a pathway to prosperity for all Canadians.

• (1450)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 12 months have passed since the innocent victims lost their lives in the worst killing rampage in this country. The scars of the victims' loved ones are still very difficult to heal. One of the reasons is that the investigation has been slow since day one, revealing little information and keeping the victims' families in the dark. We know that the final report is due November 2022, but details continue to trickle out to the media.

When will the minister put the victims' families first and respect their right to information as guaranteed by the Canadian victims bill of rights?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the tragic anniversary reminds us and deepens all of our resolve to ensure that we get the answers that the families need and that we take the actions necessary to ensure this does not happen again. We listened to the families and the people of Nova Scotia, who made it very clear that they wanted a full, independent and comprehensive public inquiry into this. We listened to them, and we have appointed that public inquiry and that work is ongoing.

In addition, there has been a very extensive criminal investigation conducted by the police of the jurisdiction, the RCMP, in this case, and that work is ongoing.

We understand the traumatic grief being experienced by that community and by those families, and we will do—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been an entire year.

The Portapique massacre started with domestic violence. The murderer's partner was assaulted and hid in sub-zero temperatures for hours after escaping her abuser. Twenty-two people and an unborn child were killed.

Despite calls by victims' families and Conservatives for a full public inquiry, the Liberals turned to their old avoid-and-delay tactics. It was not announced for three months and only began taking applications for participants last month. Why has the public safety minister avoided and delayed seeking justice for victims of the Portapique massacre?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the hours and days immediately following this terrible tragedy, we worked with the Province of Nova Scotia in developing a plan to initiate an immediate comprehensive review of all of the circumstances; we reached out to a former chief justice of the Province of Nova Scotia to conduct that review. We then heard very clearly from the families and the communities of Nova Scotia and all of our members of Parliament representing Nova Scotia that a public inquiry was required. We listened to and respected their wishes and we have appointed that public inquiry.

Oral Questions

We will do what is necessary to provide answers to the families. We understand that a full and independent inquiry is what they want, and that is what we worked to deliver to them.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one million Canadians still do not have access to their Canada Revenue Agency accounts.

The Conservatives are calling on the Liberals to extend the deadline for tax returns until June 30, so this issue can be fixed. It is a simple, clear request that makes perfect sense.

Will the Prime Minister agree to extend the deadline for federal tax returns until June 30, yes or no?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that tax season is particularly stressful for Canadians this year. We will continue to be there for them at every step of the process.

I encourage all Canadians to file their taxes on time, to prevent any delays in the benefits and credits they are entitled to. Canadians can easily file their taxes online or on paper, and some can even do so over the phone.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I get the impression that the minister did not understand the question at all.

There are one million files that Canadians cannot access. Quebeckers are already living in a ridiculous situation. It is the only province in Canada where individuals have to file two tax returns because the Liberals have refused the unanimous request of the Quebec National Assembly to resolve this situation.

This is a simple request to help people during the pandemic.

Why is the government refusing to make life easier for Quebeckers during this difficult time by extending the deadline for federal tax returns until June 30, as the province has already done?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we announced in February that people who receive emergency and recovery benefits would be eligible for interest relief if they filed their 2020 tax returns.

We have also put in place robust taxpayer relief provisions that grant them relief from penalties or interest incurred for reasons beyond their control. These measures ensure that Canadians who need help during tax season will get it.

Oral Questions

• (1455)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, the House adopted the Bloc motion to extend employment insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. Also roughly a year ago, the Prime Minister met with Marie-Hélène Dubé and Émilie Sansfaçon, who fought until the very end for this idea. My thoughts are with them today.

On Thursday, in response to a question from my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville about the issue of 50 weeks, the Minister of Employment said that everything was on the table.

Will the government extend the benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks or not?

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her advocacy and hard work on this issue.

Canadians expect and deserve an EI system that is flexible and responsive to their needs. That is why we have spent the last five years modernizing EI and making improvements for Canadians. EI sickness benefits are an important support for Canadians who need to leave work because of illness or injury. Right now, too many claimants use up their EI benefits before they can return to work, and that is why we are committed to extending EI benefits to help Canadians pay the bills while they recover.

There is more work to do, and we will keep working so that EI is there for Canadians when they need it most.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not really surprised that the government is using today's budget as a convenient excuse to avoid the question. However, we can do something tangible without passing the budget. I introduced Bill C-265, which would extend employment insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks.

Mr. Speaker, you found that Bill C-265 required a royal recommendation to pass third reading.

My question is simple. Will the government vote in favour of the bill and will it provide the royal recommendation?

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know many Canadians exhaust their EI sickness benefits, and that is why our government has made a commitment to extend EI sickness benefits. We understand the importance of paid sick leave, providing Canadians the support they need to get the treatment they need, and that is why we made paid sick leave a priority during the pandemic. Extending EI sickness benefits is part of our government's commitment to modernize EI.

Our commitment is to Canadians and to be there for them during difficult times, whatever it takes and however long it takes. Extending EI sickness benefits is a central part of that commitment.

* * *

• (1500)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the poor planning and isolated decision-making of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has caused tremendous confusion and uncertainty from coast to coast. On the east coast, the minister has not given a satisfactory answer to the lobster fishing crisis; she has only introduced an interim measure. On the west coast the minister has created further uncertainty and instability for our prawn harvesters as well as our fish farmers, with no plans in place to help them or the communities most affected by her decisions.

When will the minister stop harming Canadian fishing communities with her unclear decisions, lack of consultation and uncertainty?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is extremely disappointing to see the member opposite politicizing a Supreme Court-affirmed right for first nations communities. We have been working with first nations, as well as with industry, to communicate our plan for this year, which is to make sure we have as many harvesters on the water as possible in a safe and efficient manner in order to sustain the fishery as we work toward long-term agreements.

The only person who seems to be confused by my decision is the member opposite.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last December the fisheries minister announced her Discovery Islands decision. She did not base the decision on science, she did not base the decision on advice from her department and she did not base the decision on transparent and balanced consultations.

The Discovery Islands decision is part of the minister's larger pattern of announcing surprise decisions that put British Columbians out of work, whether they be involved in aquaculture, public fisheries or prawn or crab harvest.

What does the minister base her decisions on?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision with the intention to phase out fish farms by June of 2022 in the Discovery Islands was not an easy one to make, but it was based on the outcomes we had after a number of discussions and consultations with the seven first nations in the Discovery Islands.

We have seen the court's decision on the transferring of fish. That injunction in no way changes my decision to phase out farms in the Discovery Islands by June of 2022.

We will continue to work with the first nations, industry and the province on the best path forward.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Ontario, the third wave is already hammering small businesses that were already on their last legs. ICUs and hospitals are filling up with COVID patients who have not received their vaccines. Kids in Ontario are not in school. They cannot play soccer or baseball, all while seeing businesses and families south of the border getting back to normal in a vaccinated United States. This third wave is entirely due to the failure of the government to deliver vaccines.

Will the government urgently deliver adequate vaccines to Ontario so families can fight off the third wave?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way we have been there for provinces and territories, indeed, Canadians to protect them from COVID-19 and to protect their financial security. We are going to continue to do that by working with all provinces and territories across the country.

The distribution of vaccines is an agreement that has been worked out collaboratively among premiers. We will continue to make sure that vaccines are delivered in a timely way, so they can continue their important work of vaccinating their populations.

* * *

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that COVID-19 has had a major impact on small businesses, especially indigenous businesses.

Indigenous economic development is an essential aspect of reconciliation. Last week, the government made a major investment in the indigenous growth fund.

Would the minister tell the House how this concrete commitment to economic reconciliation will benefit indigenous entrepreneurs across the country?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle for her question.

We are committed to supporting the success of indigenous entrepreneurs. Our \$50-million investment in the indigenous growth fund will help close the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous businesses, create more economic equity and further advance the important work of reconciliation.

Oral Questions

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government repeatedly says that it has delivered. The only thing I can say that it has actually delivered are COVID-19 new variants that are wrecking havoc across the country. Let me be clear that these new variants are only here because of the government's catastrophic failure to secure our border.

Will the government finally admit this failure, apologize to Canadians who have lost family members during this COVID-variant third wave?

• (1505)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is indeed a global pandemic. It is unfortunate that we see every country around the world battling COVID and trying to protect their citizens. That is exactly what we have done.

We have added layers of protection at the border including, most recently, as the member opposite would know, the requirement to test before departure; to test upon arrival; to stay in a government-approved hotel; to receive their negative tests before moving on to their personal quarantine; to sequence all positive tests; and, indeed, to ensure that people submit to a 10-day test before leaving quarantine.

We will continue to protect Canadians from the importation of COVID-19.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadian soldiers were deployed to Latvia without their COVID vaccinations. Within two weeks of joining their Canadian soldier colleagues in Latvia, we learned that the pandemic peaked in Latvia. Now we learn that soldiers have been deployed to another COVID hot spot in Ukraine.

Why does the Prime Minister not realize that his vaccine shortages are not just serious in Ontario, but dangerous for our women and men serving overseas?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of our Canadian Armed Forces members serving abroad and inside Canada is our top priority. Our surgeon general and the acting chief of the defence staff have been working with our health officials on prioritizing where the vaccines should go. We do have a very good plan in place to make sure that our members get vaccinated. In fact, I just had a briefing this morning and more should be happening very quickly.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

The Speaker: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé on a point of order.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, the interpretation is not working.

[English]

The Speaker: Can they hear me now? Perfect.

I will let the minister start from the beginning so that everyone can hear the answer.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of our members in the Canadian Armed Forces is our top priority, whether it is serving abroad—

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît is also rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, the interpreter is telling us that the minister's equipment does not seem to be working properly.

The Speaker: I am sorry, my own equipment is not working. Could the member repeat what she just said?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that the interpreter is telling us that she cannot do her job because the minister's equipment does not seem to be working properly.

[English]

The Speaker: There seems to be a problem with the equipment on the minister's side. Sometimes the headset is on, but it is not the active microphone. Maybe it is on the camera. I would ask the minister to have a look.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, both microphones are working. We have already been working with IT officials in trying to get a better system in place. My team is working on this, but right now, everything is hooked up and I checked it just before question period started.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I feel like I am having a conversation with the English-to-French interpreter. She is telling us that the sound is poor. Could someone speak with the interpreters, because we are hearing the conversation through our headsets?

The Speaker: There seems to be a problem with the minister's system. I would ask the House to be patient as we wait for the problem to be fixed and for the minister to repeat his answer.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

● (1510)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, we cannot accept an answer from a minister for which there is no interpretation. I suggest that you ask the parliamentary secretary to answer, as he may have the proper equipment.

The Speaker: It is up to the party to decide who will answer. I cannot ask someone else to answer.

[English]

Let us try one more time and if it does not work, then maybe we will request an answer in writing.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry for the problem. My team has been working on solving this, because the translation is very important to me as well.

The health and safety of our Canadian Armed Forces members is important and it is our top priority. The chief of the defence staff and the surgeon general have been working tirelessly, making sure the priority is done. Vaccination is currently ongoing, more doses have been provided. I can assure everyone that we are working at top speed to make sure our members are looked after, but this is all done with proper medical advice.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal vaccine rollout has been floundering for months. We keep paying the price for vaccine delivery delays. In my riding of Sarnia—Lambton, we have had to cancel vaccine clinics repeatedly. Case numbers and ICU hospitalizations are out of control.

Do the Liberals have any plan to actually get us out of this pandemic?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have reiterated in the House today, we are exceeding our targets. We received 3.5 million more vaccines into the country in Q1, and we will be at 48 million to 50 million vaccines prior to the end of Q2.

I will remind hon. members that we bring the vaccines into the country and the provinces are responsible for their distribution. We have brought 12.7 million vaccines into the country and 10 million or so of those vaccines have been distributed.

We will continue to bring vaccines in by the millions, as the agreement with Pfizer we announced last week suggests, and we will work with our provinces and territories to make sure all Canadians who wish to have access to a vaccine have that access.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, people across my home province of Nova Scotia came together to remember the lives of those who were taken from us far too soon. Despite all the hurt and pain, we remain Nova Scotia strong. As we continue to grieve together, we are thankful for the support we have received from Canadians. Their kindness and generosity will not be forgotten.

Today, we remember those 22 lives and the many others who continue to live with this pain. Could the Minister of Public Safety please speak to this further?

Government Orders

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sydney—Victoria as well as acknowledge all my Nova Scotia colleagues for their strong advocacy, compassion and leadership in this terrible time of tragedy.

Today, we mark the tragic anniversary of the mass shooting that took the lives of 22 of our fellow Canadians. The families, friends and communities that lost loved ones in this terrible tragedy remain in our hearts and prayers. I also want to take the opportunity to assure them that the memory of their tragic loss will serve to deepen our collective resolve to get the answers the families require through the independent public inquiry and to ensure we take every step necessary to ensure this never happens again.

* * *

MARINE TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 11, the tugboat *Ingenika* sank near Kitimat, claiming the lives of Troy Pearson and Charlie Cragg. This tragic incident has brought to light the lack of regulations for tugboats below 15 tonnes. Workers have shared stories of poor maintenance, inadequate training and tugs operating in unsafe conditions.

We must use the lessons from this tragedy to improve safety for all tugboat crews working on our coasts. Will the minister commit to immediate action so that every worker who goes to sea comes home safely to their family?

• (1515)

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to the families of those that have suffered in that accident. My department and I, along with my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, are working together on addressing the situation.

I look forward to my colleague's input as to how we can move forward.

* * *

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, travel agents in my constituency express their worry that they would have to return thousands of dollars in commission if airlines were required to pay out refunds to travellers for tickets unused or cancelled because of the pandemic. Could the minister please explain how the recent agreement with Air Canada will impact travel agents?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, we announced an agreement with Air Canada that refunds passengers, protects jobs, restores routes and protects travel agents. We are in the middle of discussions with other airlines to offer the same benefits. I look forward to hearing the outcome of these discussions soon, but air travellers are an integral part of these discussions.

[*Translation*]

VICTIMS OF NOVA SCOTIA TRAGEDY

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand that there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence.

[*English*]

I now invite the House to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the tragic event that happened a year ago in Nova Scotia.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT

The House resumed from April 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: It being 3:18 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-15.

[*Translation*]

Call in the members.

• (1530)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 93*)

YEAS

Members

Alhabra	Amos
Anand	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baker
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bergeron	Bérubé
Bessette	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blois	Boudrias
Boulerice	Bratina
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings	Carr
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Champagne
Champoux	Charbonneau
Chen	Collins
Cormier	Dabrusin

Government Orders

Damoff	Davies	Thériault	Therrien
DeBellefeuille	Desbiens	Trudeau	Trudel
Desilets	Dhaliwal	Turnbull	Van Bynen
Dhillon	Dong	van Koeverden	Vandal
Drouin	Dubourg	Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Duclos	Duguid	Vignola	Virani
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duval	Weiler	Wilkinson
Dzerowicz	Easter	Wilson-Raybould	Yip
Ehsassi	El-Khoury	Young	Zahid
Ellis	Erskine-Smith	Zann	Zuberi— 214
Fergus	Fillmore		
Finnigan	Fisher		
Fonseca	Fortier		
Fortin	Fragiskatos		
Fraser	Fry		
Garneau	Garrison	Aboutaif	Aitchison
Gaudreau	Gazan	Albas	Alleslev
Gerretsen	Gill	Allison	Arnold
Gould	Green	Baldinelli	Barlow
Guilbeault	Hajdu	Barrett	Benzen
Hardie	Harris	Bergen	Bezan
Holland	Housefather	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Hughes	Hussen	Bragdon	Brassard
Hutchings	Iacono	Calkins	Carrie
Ien	Jaczek	Chiu	Chong
Johns	Joly	Cooper	Cumming
Jones	Jordan	Dalton	Dancho
Jowhari	Julian	Davidson	Deltell
Kelloway	Khalid	d'Entremont	Diotte
Khera	Koutrakis	Dowdall	Dreeshen
Kusmierczyk	Kwan	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Epp
Lalonde	Lambropoulos	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Lametti	Lamoureux	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Gallant
Larouche	Lattanzio	Généreux	Genius
Lauzon	LeBlanc	Gladu	Godin
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre	Gourde	Gray
Lemire	Lightbound	Hallan	Harder
Long	Longfield	Hoback	Jansen
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)	Jeneroux	Kent
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Kitchen	Kmiec
Maloney	Manly	Kram	Kurek
Marcil	Martinez Ferrada	Kusie	Lake
Masse	Mathysen	Lawrence	Lehoux
May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Lewis (Essex)	Liepert
McCrimmon	McDonald	Lloyd	Lobb
McGuinty	McKay	Lukiwski	MacKenzie
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	Maguire	Martel
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	McPherson	Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
Mendès	Mendicino	McColeman	McLean
Michaud	Miller	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Melillo
Monsef	Morrissey	Moore	Morantz
Murray	Ng	Morrison	Motz
Normandin	O'Connell	Nater	O'Toole
Oliphant	O'Regan	Patzner	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Perron	Poilievre	Rayes
Petitpas Taylor	Plamondon	Redekopp	Reid
Powlowski	Qaqqaq	Rempel Garner	Richards
Qualtrough	Ratansi	Rood	Ruff
Regan	Robillard	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Saroya
Rodriguez	Rogers	Scheer	Schmale
Romanado	Sahota (Brampton North)	Seeback	Shields
Saini	Sajjan	Shin	Shiple
Saks	Samson	Sloan	Soroka
Sangha	Sarai	Stanton	Steinley
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia	Stubbs	Sweet
Schiefke	Schulte	Tochor	Uppal
Serré	Sgro	Van Popta	Vecchio
Shanahan	Sheehan	Vidal	Vierns
Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Vis	Wagantall
Simard	Simms	Warkentin	Waugh
Singh	Sorbara	Webber	Williamson
Spengemann	Ste-Marie	Wong	Yurdiga
Tabbara	Tassi	Zimmer— 115	

NAYS**Members**

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[*English*]

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order and ask the member for Nunavut to apologize for her comments made on Twitter over the weekend.

In response to an indigenous politics post, she said that I am not an Inuk. This member has no right to question my culture or indigenous identity. It is a violation of my honesty and integrity as a parliamentarian. I ask the member to respect all indigenous people in Canada, to apologize for her statement and stop committing racial erosion against our culture. It is attitudes like this that have set Inuit back decades in modern society. I ask that she stand and apologize for her comment and withdraw it on Twitter.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her comments and her input. Unfortunately, the Speaker does not have jurisdiction over what goes on outside of the chamber. I am going to have to leave it at that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I want to be very clear from your ruling. I did see that exchange on Twitter and the question was about whether the Liberals had been meeting with mining companies and telling the truth. I am very concerned that this attack on the member for Nunavut has been made in the House when we know that Twitter is a separate issue.

Is the Speaker saying that it is not his jurisdiction to intervene in Twitter spats with members online?

• (1535)

The Speaker: I am afraid if the Speaker had to make rulings on everything that was said on social media, we would not have time for much else. No. The member for Timmins—James Bay is correct that what goes on in the chamber gets ruled on by the Speaker, and not what goes on in social media.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

The Speaker: We are getting into debate here. I do not want to move into debate, so we will move on unless another point of order or a question of privilege is being claimed. If not, then we will go on.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of

Routine Proceedings

committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 15th report later this day.

* * *

COMPANIES' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-288, An Act to amend the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing my private member's bill, which would amend the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, CCAA, by simply adding publicly funded post-secondary institutions to the companies excluded from CCAA protection. It is seconded by my colleague, the MP for Nickel Belt.

[*Translation*]

As members of the House know, Laurentian University filed for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act on February 1.

[*English*]

As a result, it has been a long and difficult two months for the Laurentian University community, for Sudbury and for Northern Ontario.

[*Translation*]

As a Sudburian, I was shocked by the scope and depth of the cuts announced last Monday. I spoke to students, professors and staff about the cuts and about the devastating effects they will have on the entire community.

[*English*]

The fact that the Laurentian University administration felt that it had to cut more than 188 professors and staff and dozens upon dozens of academic programs, and that it had to throw thousands of students into chaos right in the middle of their exam period by using the CCAA process to salvage Laurentian University, demonstrates the need to amend the CCAA. This restructuring process was not created for such an institution or, obviously, such an outcome.

[*Translation*]

Until now, it was reasonable to assume that the provincial governments responsible for these institutions would ensure that their finances did not get out of control, but unfortunately, here we are. What is happening at Laurentian University should never be allowed to happen at any other university or college in Canada.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

In my opinion, it is clear that the CCAA process was never intended to be used by publicly funded institutions in this way. With this bill, I want to guarantee that no other publicly funded post-secondary institutions in Canada, nor their students, professors or communities, suffer in the way that our Laurentian University community is suffering right now, and that provincial governments finally ensure the oversight and proper funding of our publicly funded post-secondary institutions.

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

* * *

● (1540)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Finance, presented on Tuesday, February 16, 2021, be concurred in.

The Prime Minister is spending Canada's tomorrow on his today. Here we are, with another record-breaking deficit. In fact, in the last two years alone, the government will have added roughly half a trillion dollars to Canada's national debt. With the fiscal program laid out, we will see the Prime Minister having added more debt than all of the previous prime ministers going back to Confederation combined.

The Prime Minister might take delight in the present-day experience of all of his spending. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift, and that is why they call it a present. He might not worry about what is to come. He might say the mystery of tomorrow will find out its answers when we get there.

How can we predict what all of this debt will mean tomorrow? The only way to see into the future is to look to the past.

Let us look at the example of the most prescient, prophetic political leader of all time: Winston Churchill. In the early 1930s, he predicted World War II while most were blind to German aggression. In 1946, while most still believed that they could maintain the wartime pact with Stalin well into the post-war period, he arrived at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri and gave his famous "Iron Curtain speech", predicting the Cold War that would define the following half century.

Not only that, but in Maclean's magazine in 1931, he wrote some very prescient language about technology, with which we can all relate today. He said:

Wireless telephones and television, upon their present path of development, would enable their owner to connect up to any room similarly installed and hear and take part in the conversation as well as if he put his head in through the window. The congregation of men in cities would become superfluous.... There would be no

more object in living in the same city with one's neighbor than there is today in living with him in the same house. The cities and the countryside would become indistinguishable.

Now, as we are all entering the Zoom world, where people are living in the countryside and doing work that was formerly done congregated together, we can see the incredible prophecies of Winston Churchill, who predicted everything that we would call today the iPad, the smart phone, the Zoom and the Skype.

How did he make these kinds of predictions 90 years before they would happen? The answer is, as he put it when he advised young people at one commencement ceremony, study history, history, history. He wrote 52 volumes of Nobel Prize-winning literature, almost all of it on history. He said there was a methodology for seeing the future. Here is what he wrote it would be:

There are two processes which we adopt consciously or unconsciously when we try to prophesy. We can seek a period in the past whose conditions resemble as closely as possible those of our day, and presume that the sequel to that period will, save for some minor alterations, be repeated. Secondly, we can survey the general course of development in our immediate past, and endeavour to prolong it into the...future.

In other words, look back in order to see forward. We can do the very same thing about economics. Thankfully, Dr. Rogoff and Dr. Reinhart from Harvard University have condensed 800 years of financial and debt history into five leading indicators for a forthcoming debt crisis. Do they apply to Canada? I will quickly go through them.

One is declining output. Last year, our GDP dropped \$120 billion, check.

Two is large and sustained current account deficits. That means we buy more from the world than we sell to the world. We have had that for the last five years as well, amounting to \$300 billion of current account deficits, check.

Third is asset price inflation. Anybody who has tried to buy a house lately knows we have that. House prices are up somewhere around 25% in the same year when the income with which our economy buys those houses has dropped. In fact, Toronto and Vancouver are two of the most expensive housing markets on planet earth, two of the 10 most expensive, to be precise, so yes, we have asset price inflation, check.

● (1545)

The next thing we have is rising household leverage. We have \$1.75 of debt for every dollar of take-home pay, which is the highest ratio in the G7, and a near record in Canadian history, check.

Routine Proceedings

Finally, there is a rise in overall debt across the economy, which I think we can all agree is true. Last year, the deficit was equal to 17% of GDP, which is the largest single deficit we have ever had outside of the Second World War. In fact, as a share of GDP, it is twice the size it was in World War I, three times the size it was in the Great Depression and four times the size it was in the great global recession.

The only time it was ever bigger was in the middle of the Second World War, when we were fighting imperial Japan, the Nazis and the Mussolini's fascists. Other than that period, we have experienced record levels of debt increase in this short period of time.

Therefore, we have the fifth and final leading indicator based on historical experience of a forthcoming debt crisis, according to these two distinguished economists who have done exhaustive research, case by case over eight centuries. All five of those rules are checked in this case.

Some will say that this time is different. This time we will be able to break all of the rules of public finance and have nothing go wrong because we have Skype. We have new technology, and we have Twitter. We can do all the things that were mathematically impossible throughout all of history. This time it is different.

It turns out that Reinhart and Rogoff named their book *This Time Is Different* because, every single time there is a debt crisis, in the years leading up to it, politicians say that this time is different. Let me quote them:

The essence of this-time-is-different syndrome is simple. It is rooted in the firmly held belief that financial crises are things that happen to other people in other countries at other times; crises do not happen to us here and now. We are doing things better, we are smarter, we have learned from our past mistakes. The old rules of valuation no longer apply. Unfortunately, a highly leveraged economy can unwittingly be sitting with its back at the edge of a financial cliff for many years before chance and circumstance provokes a crisis of confidence that pushes it off.

We ask ourselves if we are, again, sitting with our backs at the edge of that cliff. As I said at the outset, we need to look back in order to see forward. Have we been here before? It turns out that we have, but they were totally different circumstances. For example, back then, the prime minister's name was Trudeau, and he was running a deficit of 11% of GDP. Right now, we have a Prime Minister by the same name, and he is running a deficit from last year of 17% of GDP. That is totally different.

Back then, Pierre Elliott Trudeau sent the Bank of Canada on a money-printing spree to pay for all of his spending, and the money supply, M2, grew by 15%, but now it is totally different. Money supply has only gone up 13% under completely different circumstances. Why do we keep going back to the past like that? Next, back then, federal government spending had gone over the 20% mark. Now it is almost 30%. It is completely different.

The government, as a share of the economy, is a third bigger now than it was back then. With all the same ingredients put in the pot, we expect to come away with a different stew. The reality is that history repeats itself. When we do the same things over and over and expect a different result, we are carrying out the very definition of insanity.

• (1550)

What happened as a result of the debt crisis of Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the early 1980s when he ran deficits of over 10% of GDP, increased the money supply in just one year by 15% and had a federal government alone that consumed more than a fifth of the economy? Well, we had something called “stagflation”, the stagflation crisis of the early 1980s.

What was the human cost of that crisis? There were 650,000 more people in poverty by 1984 than were in poverty in 1980, a 25% increase in poverty in just four years. Inflation hit a nearly half-century high of 12% and unemployment hit an all-time high also of 12%. There was an all-time high in interest rates with the bank overnight lending rate hitting 18%. Can the Speaker imagine interest rates of 18%? He is far too young to remember all the way back to that time.

When we combine inflation and unemployment, as economists do, they add one to the other to create something called the “misery index”, which is the amount by which consumer prices are rising and the percentage of the people who are without jobs. It reached 24%, again an all-time high. There is something very tragic about a high misery index.

When people's costs go up and their salaries go down, their desperation rises and often they end their own misery. In the year 1983, under Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the policies we see replicated now, the suicide rate hit 14.8 per 100,000, the single highest suicide rate in Canadian history before or since. When things get miserable enough, people have a tendency, tragically, to end their misery.

We know from economic data around the world that financial crises can be lethal. For one, according to Rogoff and Reinhart, they see a drop in housing prices of one-third, which means people's homes are worth less than their mortgages, meaning they cannot possibly ever pay off their mortgages and must default with enormous losses that cascade across the economy. Because they have no net equity, they cannot find a place to live.

Unemployment rises by seven percentage points in the average financial crisis. According to the University of Calgary, in Canada, for every one percentage point increase in the unemployment rate, we get a two percentage point increase in the suicide rate. In financial crises that happened across Asia, for example, in 1997, there were 10,000 excess suicides that occurred.

In the great global recession, the great recession of the 2008-09 period, there were also another 10,000 additional economic suicides reported by the British Journal of Psychiatry. There is an abundance of scholarly evidence that financial crises destroy not only people's livelihoods, bank accounts and their net worth, but also force many to do the most desperate of deeds, and that is exactly what we need to avoid.

The Budget

History also gives us reason for hope, and let me look back at another part of our history. As I said at the outset, only once in history has the deficit in Canada been bigger than it was last year, and that was in the middle of the Second World War. Our men and women returned from the battlefield having this enormous debt, and what did they do? They immediately worked to pay it off.

By 1947, the federal government was running the single biggest budget surplus as a share of GDP in Canadian history: 5% of GDP. That would be the equivalent of a surplus of over \$100 billion today were it matched relative to our economy now. As well, from the end of the war to 1973, our economy grew from \$12 billion to \$128 billion. That is economic growth of 1,000%, literally a 1,000% in the size of our nominal economy.

• (1555)

Our ancestors returned from the battlefields and went to the farm fields and factories and unleashed a torrent of production at the same time as they exercised good, responsible management. They had fought for our freedom, and then they returned to fight for our finances, and they basically vaporized the debt.

It is true that in this period there was a phenomenal growth in the industrial power of our economic system. New machinery was invented that allowed our factories, our mines, our warehouses and our transportation systems to crank out far more goods and services for our people than ever before, but, happily, the same is now occurring with technology. We are experiencing another industrial technological revolution that can empower the same kind of productive enhancements, but it will take change and it will take an effort to secure our future.

We need to unleash the free enterprise system, restore industry and frugality at the same time, so that our incomes can outpace our debts, so that we can replace a credit card economy with a pay-cheque economy, so that our people can be confident in their ability to pay down their mortgages and our governments to pay down their debts, so that our programs upon which our most vulnerable rely will always have a solid financial footing, and so that our hard-working public servants can continue to draw the salaries that they deserve. This is what it means to secure our future.

Unfortunately, we have a government that is focused exclusively on the myopia of the here and now, taking incredible risks as we sit on the edge of this debt cliff. It does not have to be this way, because, just as our history tells us of the folly of the past, it tells us about the hope for the future. We, in this party, will build upon that hope and stand on the shoulders of our ancestors who gave us this mighty and great country and let us keep Canada strong and free.

• (1600)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. This is the end of the time, as we are moving into the budget, which should start momentarily. When we do return, the hon. member will have 10 minutes of questions and comments coming to him when we resume debate.

• (1605)

[Translation]

It being 4:05 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion. Debate is therefore deferred to a future sitting.

[English]

The House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 2 concerning the budget presentation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved:

That this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

She said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I would like to table, in both official languages, the budget documents for 2021, including the notices of ways and means motions.

[Translation]

The details of the measures are included in these documents.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I am requesting that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions.

[English]

I would like to begin by taking a moment to mourn the tragedy in Nova Scotia a year ago yesterday. We grieve with the families and friends of the 22 people who were killed, and all Nova Scotians.

This is also a day when people across Canada are fighting the most virulent wave of the virus we have experienced so far. Health care workers in many provinces are struggling to keep ICUs from overflowing and millions of Canadians are facing stringent new restrictions.

We are all tired, frustrated and even afraid, but we will get through this. We will do it together.

[Translation]

This budget is about finishing the fight against COVID. It is about healing the economic wounds left by the COVID recession. And it is about creating more jobs and prosperity for Canadians in the days—and decades—to come.

It is about meeting the urgent needs of today and about building for the long term. It is a budget focused on middle-class Canadians and on pulling more Canadians up into the middle class. It is a plan that embraces this moment of global transformation to a green, clean economy.

[English]

This budget addresses three fundamental challenges.

The Budget

First, we need to conquer COVID. That means buying vaccines and supporting provincial and territorial health care systems. It means enforcing our quarantine rules at the border and within the country. It means providing Canadians and Canadian businesses with the support they need to get through these tough third wave lockdowns and to come roaring back when the economy fully re-opens.

Second, we must punch our way out of the COVID recession. That means ensuring lost jobs are recovered as swiftly as possible and hard-hit businesses rebound quickly. It means providing support where COVID has struck the hardest to women, to young people, to low-wage workers and to small and medium-sized businesses, especially in tourism and hospitality.

The final challenge is to build a more resilient Canada: better, more fair, more prosperous and more innovative. That means investing in Canada's green transition and the green jobs that go with it, in Canada's digital transformation and Canadian innovation, and in building infrastructure for a dynamic growing country. It means providing Canadians with social infrastructure from early learning and child care to student grants and income top-ups, so that the middle class can flourish and more Canadians can join it.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Our elders have been this virus's principal victims. The pandemic has preyed on them mercilessly, ending thousands of lives and forcing all seniors into fearful isolation. We have failed so many of those living in long-term care facilities. To them, and to their families, let me say this: I am so sorry. We owe you so much better than this.

That is why we propose a \$3-billion investment to help ensure that provinces and territories provide a high standard of care in their long-term care facilities.

And we are delivering today on our promise to increase old age security for Canadians 75 and older.

[*English*]

Our government has been urgently procuring vaccines since last spring and providing them at no cost to Canadians. Nearly 10 million Canadians have received at least one dose of vaccine. By the end of September, Canada will have received 100 million doses, enough to fully vaccinate every adult Canadian.

We need to be ready for new variants of COVID, and we must have the booster shots that will allow us to keep them in check. That is why we are rebuilding our national biomanufacturing capacity so that we can make these vaccines here in Canada. Canada has brilliant scientists and entrepreneurs. We will support them with an investment of \$2.2 billion in biomanufacturing and life sciences.

[*Translation*]

When COVID first hit, it pushed our country into its deepest recession since the Great Depression. But this is an economic shock of a very particular kind. We are not suffering because of endogenous flaws or imbalances within our economy. Rather, the COVID recession is driven by an entirely external event—like the economic

devastation of a flood, blizzard, wildfire or other natural disaster. That is why an essential part of Canada's fight against COVID has been unprecedented federal support for Canadians and Canadian businesses.

We knew Canadians needed a lifeline to get through the COVID storm. And our approach has worked. Canada's GDP grew by almost 10% in the fourth quarter of last year. We will continue to do whatever it takes. Our government is prepared to extend support measures, as long as the fight against this virus requires.

As Canada pivots to recovery, our economic plan will, too.

[*English*]

We promised last year to spend up to \$100 billion over three years to get Canada back to work and to ensure the lives and prospects of Canadians were not permanently stunted by this pandemic recession. This budget keeps that promise. All together, we will create nearly 500,000 new training and work experience opportunities for Canadians. We will fulfill our throne speech commitment to create one million jobs by the end of this year.

Some people will say that our sense of urgency is misplaced. Some will say that we are spending too much. I ask them this. Did they lose their jobs during a COVID lockdown? Were they reluctantly let go by their small business employers that were like a family to them but simply could not afford their salary any longer? Are they worried that they will be laid off in this third wave? Are they mothers who were forced to quit the dream job they fought to get because there was no way to keep working while caring for their young children? Did they graduate last spring and are still struggling to find work? Is their family business, launched perhaps by their parents, which they hope to pass on to their children, now struggling under a sudden burden of debt and fending off bankruptcy through sheer grit and determination every day?

If COVID has taught us anything, it is that we are all in this together. Our country cannot prosper if we leave hundreds of thousands of Canadians behind.

The world has learned the lesson of 2009, the cost of allowing economic hardship to fester. In some countries, democracy itself has been threatened by that mistake. We will not let that happen in Canada.

The Budget

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

About 300,000 Canadians who had a job before the pandemic are still out of work. More Canadians may lose their jobs in this month's lockdowns. To support Canadian workers as we fight the third wave, and to provide an economic bridge to a fully recovered economy, we will build on the enhancements we have made during the pandemic.

We will maintain flexible access to EI benefits for another year, until the fall of 2022. The Canada recovery benefit, which we created to support Canadians not covered by EI, will remain in place through September 25 and extend an additional 12 weeks of benefits to Canadians. As our economy fully reopens over the summer, the benefit amount will go to \$300 a week, after July 17.

Low-wage workers in Canada work harder than anyone else in this country, for less pay. In the past year they have faced both significant infection risks and layoffs. And many live below the poverty line, even though they work full-time. We cannot ignore their contribution and their hardship—and we will not. We propose to expand the Canada workers benefit, to invest \$8.9 billion over six years in additional support for low-wage workers—extending income top-ups to about a million more Canadians and lifting nearly 100,000 people out of poverty. And this budget will introduce a \$15-an-hour federal minimum wage.

COVID has exposed the dangerous inadequacy of sickness benefits in Canada. We will do our part and fulfill our campaign commitment by extending the EI sickness benefit from 15 to 26 weeks.

● (1620)

[*English*]

We know the pandemic has exacerbated systemic barriers faced by racialized Canadians, so budget 2021 provides additional funding for the Black entrepreneurship program as well as an investment in a Black-led philanthropic endowment fund to help fight anti-Black racism and improve social and economic outcomes in Black communities.

One of the most striking aspects of the pandemic has been the historic sacrifice young Canadians have made to protect their parents and grandparents. Our youth have paid a high price to keep the rest of us safe. We cannot, and will not, allow young Canadians to become a lost generation. They need our support to launch their adult lives and careers in post-COVID Canada, and they will get it. We will invest \$5.7 billion over five years in Canada's youth; we will make college and university more accessible and affordable; we will create job openings in skilled trades and high-tech industries; and we will double the Canada student grant for two more years while extending the waiver of interest on federal student loans through March 2030. More than 350,000 low-income student borrowers will also have access to more generous repayment assistance.

COVID has brutally exposed something women have long known. Without child care, parents, usually mothers, cannot work. The closing of our schools and day cares drove women's participation in the labour force down to its lowest level in more than two

decades. Early learning and child care has long been a feminist issue. COVID has shown us that it is an urgent economic issue too.

I was two years old when the Royal Commission on the Status of Women urged Canada to establish a universal system of early learning and child care. My mother was one of Canada's redoubtable second wave of feminists who fought and, outside Quebec, failed to make that recommendation a reality. A generation after that, Paul Martin and Ken Dryden tried again.

This half-century of struggle is a testament to the difficulty and complexity of the task, but this time we are going to do it. This budget is the map and the trailhead. There is agreement across the political spectrum that early learning and child care is the national economic policy we need now. This is social infrastructure that will drive jobs and growth. This is feminist economic policy. This is smart economic policy. That is why this budget commits up to \$30 billion over five years, reaching \$9.2 billion every year permanently, to build a high quality, affordable and accessible early learning and child care system across Canada.

This is not an effort that will deliver instant gratification. We are building something that, of necessity, must be constructed collaboratively and for the long term, but I have confidence in us. I have confidence that we are a country that believes in investing in our future, in our children and in our young parents.

Here is our goal: five years from now, parents across the country should have access to high quality early learning and child care for an average of \$10 a day. I make this promise to Canadians today, speaking as their finance minister and as a working mother. We will get it done.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

In making this historic commitment, I want to thank the visionary leaders of Quebec, particularly Quebec's feminists, who have shown the rest of Canada the way forward. This plan will, of course, also provide additional resources to Quebec, which might well use them to further support an early learning and child care system that is already the envy of the rest of Canada and, indeed, much of the world.

*The Budget**[English]*

Small businesses are the vital heart of our economy and they have been the hardest hit by the lockdowns. Healing the wounds of COVID requires a rescue plan for them.

Budget 2021 proposes to extend the wage subsidy, rent subsidy and lockdown support for businesses and other employers until September 25, 2021, for an estimated total of \$12.1 billion in additional support. To help the hardest-hit businesses pivot back to growth, we propose a new Canada recovery hiring program, which will run from June to November and will provide \$595 million to make it easier for businesses to hire back laid-off workers or to bring on new ones.

However, our government will do much more than execute a rescue. With this budget, we will make unprecedented investments in Canada's small businesses, helping them to invest in new technologies and innovation. We will invest up to \$4 billion to help up to 160,000 small and medium-sized businesses buy and adopt the new technologies they need to grow.

The Canada digital adoption program will provide businesses with the advice and help they need to get the most out of these new technologies by training 28,000 young Canadians, a Canadian technology corps, and sending them out to work with our small and medium-sized businesses. This groundbreaking program will help Canadian small businesses go digital and become more competitive and efficient.

[Translation]

Increased funding for the venture capital catalyst initiative will help provide financing to innovative Canadian businesses, so they can grow.

We will also encourage businesses to invest in themselves. We will allow immediate expensing of up to \$1.5 million of eligible investments by Canadian-controlled private corporations in each of the next three years. These larger deductions will support 325,000 businesses in making critical investments and will represent \$2.2 billion in total savings to them over the next five years.

Building for the future means investing in innovation and entrepreneurs, so we propose to invest in the next phase of the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy and to launch similar strategies in genomics and quantum science, areas where Canada is a global leader.

[English]

In 2021, job growth means green growth. This budget sets out a plan to help achieve GHG emissions reductions of 36% from 2005 levels by 2030 and puts us on a path to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. It puts in place the funding to achieve our 25% land and marine conservation targets by 2025.

- (1630)

[Translation]

By making targeted investments in transformational technologies, we can ensure that Canada benefits from the next wave of global investment and growth.

The resource and manufacturing sectors that are Canada's traditional economic pillars—energy, mining, agriculture, forestry, steel, aluminum, autos, aerospace—will be the foundation of our new, resilient and sustainable economy. Canada will become more productive and competitive by supplying the green exports the world wants and needs.

That is why we propose a historic investment of a further \$5 billion over seven years, starting in 2021-22, in the net zero accelerator. With this added support, on top of the \$3 billion we committed in December, the net zero accelerator will help even more companies invest to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, while growing their businesses.

[English]

We will propel a green transition through new tax measures, including for zero-emissions technology, carbon capture and storage, and green hydrogen. We are at a pivotal moment in the green transformation. We can lead or we can be left behind. Our government knows that the only choice for Canada is to be in the vanguard.

Our growing population is one of our great economic strengths and a growing country needs to build. We need to build housing. We need to build public transit. We need to build broadband. We need to build infrastructure. We will. We will invest \$2.5 billion, and reallocate \$1.3 billion in existing funding, to help build, repair and support 35,000 housing units. We will support the conversion to housing of the empty office space that has appeared in our downtown areas by reallocating \$300 million from the rental construction financing initiative.

Houses should not be passive investment vehicles for offshore money. They should be homes for Canadian families. Therefore, on January 1, 2022, our government will introduce Canada's first national tax on vacant property owned by non-resident non-Canadians.

[Translation]

Strong, sustained growth also depends on modern transit. That is why, in February, we announced \$14.9 billion over eight years to build new public transit, electrify existing transit systems, and help to connect rural, remote and indigenous communities.

Therefore we are committing an additional \$1 billion over six years for the universal broadband fund, to accelerate access to high-speed internet in rural and remote communities.

*The Budget**[English]*

We intend to draw even more talented, highly skilled people to Canada, including international students. Investments in this budget will support an immigration system that is easier to navigate, more efficient and more efficient in welcoming the dynamic new Canadians who add to Canada's strength.

Our government has made progress in righting the historic wrongs in Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples, but we still have a lot of work ahead. It is important to note that indigenous peoples have led the way in battling COVID. Their success is a credit to indigenous leadership and self-governance.

We will invest more than \$18 billion to further narrow gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, to support healthy, safe and prosperous indigenous communities and to advance reconciliation with first nations, Inuit and the Métis nation. We will invest more than \$6 billion for infrastructure in indigenous communities and \$2.2 billion to help end the national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

This has been a year when we have learned that each of us truly is our brother's and our sister's keeper. Solidarity is getting us through this pandemic, and solidarity depends on each of us bearing our fair share of the collective burden. That is why, now more than ever, fairness in our tax system is essential.

- (1635)

[Translation]

To ensure our system is fair, this budget will invest in the fight against tax evasion, shine a light on beneficial ownership arrangements, and ensure that multinational corporations pay their fair share of tax in Canada.

Our government is committed to working with our partners at the OECD to find multilateral solutions to the dangerous race to the bottom in corporate taxation. That includes work to conclude a deal on taxing large digital services companies.

We are optimistic that such a deal can be reached this summer. Meanwhile, this budget reaffirms our government's commitment to impose such a tax unilaterally, until an acceptable multilateral approach comes into effect.

It is also fair to ask those who have prospered in this bleak year to do a little more to help those who still need help. That is why we are introducing a luxury tax on new cars and private aircraft worth more than \$100,000 and pleasure boats worth more than \$250,000.

[English]

This budget lives up to our promise to do whatever it takes to support Canadians in the fight against COVID, and it makes significant investments in our future. All of this costs a lot of money, so it is entirely appropriate to ask, "Can we afford it?" We can, and here is why.

First is because this is a budget that invests in growth. The best way to pay our debts is to grow our economy. The investments this budget makes in early learning and child care, in small businesses, in students, in innovation, in public transit, in housing, in broadband and in the green transition are all investments in jobs and

growth. We are building Canada's social infrastructure and our physical infrastructure. We are building our human capital and our physical capital. Canada is a young, vast country with a tremendous capacity for growth. This budget would fuel that. These are investments in our future and they will yield great dividends. In fact, in today's low-interest rate environment, not only can we afford these investments, it would be shortsighted of us not to make them.

Second is because our decision last year to support Canadians is already paying off. Decisive action prevented economic scarring in our businesses and our households, allowing the Canadian economy to begin strongly rebounding from the COVID recession even before we finished our fight against the virus.

Third is because our government has a plan and we keep our promises. We said in the fall economic statement that we would invest up to \$100 billion over three years to support Canada's economic recovery, and that is what we are outlining here today. We predicted a deficit for 2020-2021 of \$381.6 billion. We have spent less than we provisioned for. Our deficit for 2020-2021 is \$354.2 billion, below our forecast.

Finally, and crucially, we can afford this ambitious budget because the investments we propose today are responsible and sustainable.

- (1640)

We understand there are limits to our capacity to borrow and that the world will not write Canada any blank cheques. We do not expect any. This budget shows a declining debt-to-GDP ratio and a declining deficit, with the debt-to-GDP ratio falling to 49.2% by 2025-26 and the deficit falling to 1.1% of GDP.

These are important markers. They show that the extraordinary spending we have undertaken to support Canadians through this crisis and to stimulate a rapid recovery in jobs is temporary and finite. They also show that our proposed long-term investments will permanently boost Canada's economic capacity.

[Translation]

In 2015, this federal government was elected on a promise to help middle-class Canadians and people working hard to join the middle class. We promised to invest in workers and their prosperity, in long-term growth for all of us. And we did. Today, we meet a new challenge, the greatest our country has faced in a generation, with a renewed promise.

*The Budget**[English]*

Opportunity is coming. Growth is coming. Jobs are coming. After a long, grim year, Canadians are ready to recover and rebuild. We will finish the fight against COVID. We will all get back to work, and we will come roaring back.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be the first to formally congratulate my colleague on becoming the first female finance minister to table a federal budget in this House. I will add that it is a remarkable accomplishment. It is long overdue, and I believe it defines a new role model for Canadian women across our country to aspire to. I send my congratulations to the minister.

I note the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the minister, dated January 15, called for her to present a "new fiscal anchor" to guide her work. The budget fails to do that. Instead, it contains vague references to a declining debt-to-GDP ratio starting two years from now. It turns out that was the Liberal government's old fiscal anchor, so there is nothing new about this one. In fact, her anchor does not even include measurable targets that would give Canadians the comfort of knowing their government understands the importance of proper debt management. All we have are references to the trajectory of the debt-to-GDP anchor.

My question is this: Why did the minister not deliver a new fiscal anchor the way the Prime Minister had directed her to do?

• (1645)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I will start by thanking the member opposite for those generous congratulations.

I think it would be appropriate for me today to think about Kim Campbell, the first woman prime minister of Canada, who was, of course, a Conservative woman prime minister. One thing we should agree on in this House is that all of us believe it is important to advance the cause of women in Canada.

When it comes to a fiscal anchor, I very much agree with the member opposite that it is important for our spending to be reasonable, sustainable and prudent. That is why it was important for us in this budget to hit some key fiscal markers.

First of all, we were clear in the fall economic statement that we would spend up to \$100 billion in stimulus over three years. We have kept that promise. Perhaps more crucially, we have been clear in this budget, both in our commitment and also in our demonstrated actions that, following the extraordinary spending of this year, Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio will decline, and we show in our fiscal tables a clear declining trajectory ending in 2025-26 at a 49.2% debt-to-GDP ratio.

Further, as we point out in the budget document, we commit to unwinding the COVID-related deficits, and our budget and our fiscal projections show precisely that. In 2025-26, we come to a deficit of just 1.1%.

I would say to hon. members and my colleague opposite that those are our anchors: a declining debt-to-GDP ratio and unwinding the COVID-related deficits.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to sincerely congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on her first budget. It is certainly an historic moment for her and for the economy. I sincerely congratulate her on the volume of work that has been done. Her speech laid out a host of unprecedented measures. Many are very interesting, and we will certainly have time to come back and review them.

I want to note that this is the first time that I am seeing a tangible commitment to fight tax avoidance and tax evasion. It is just an expression of intent at this stage, but it is truly a step in the right direction, and I congratulate the minister on that.

In my opinion, there are two key things missing from this budget. First, there is the health funding that Quebec and the provinces asked for. We are in the middle of a health crisis, and from the Bloc Québécois' point of view, if there was ever a time to deal with that issue, it is now.

Second, since the primary victims of the pandemic are seniors, we have long been calling for an improvement to the old age security pension starting at age 65, so as not to create two categories of seniors. This improvement is nowhere to be found in her speech.

Why did the Minister of Finance not include these two measures in the budget, especially since the difference between the deficit announced last fall and the one announced today is the exact same dollar amount as these two measures? Am I to assume this is a political decision?

• (1650)

The Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. minister, I want to remind members that I have a long list of people who want to ask questions, so I would ask them to keep the questions and answers to a reasonable length.

The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his questions. I would also like to thank him for all the very interesting discussions we had when preparing the budget. I really appreciated it.

First, I am very pleased that the member noted that we focused on fighting tax evasion. It is a priority for our government, especially during a pandemic, since social solidarity is very important. To achieve social solidarity, everyone must pay their fair share, and we are really going to focus on that. I will be very pleased to work on this objective with all members.

The Budget

Second, given that the member is from Quebec, I will take this opportunity to point out to all members that the budget and the commitments we have made truly show the importance of Quebec's political leadership. Quebec made the decision to create a child care system more than 20 years ago. It was difficult and very costly. When I discussed this with Éric Girard, he told me to be careful because it is very expensive.

Quebec has proven another very important thing, namely that a child care system will make the economic recovery excellent and extraordinary. I think that it is important for me, as an anglophone from Toronto, to thank Quebec, especially the feminists from Quebec who worked very hard to build that system.

I will now address the other two questions.

In terms of health, we announced last month that we would be giving the provinces \$5 billion to fight the third wave of COVID-19. As everyone knows, it is costing a lot of money, but the federal government is there to help the provinces.

As far as seniors are concerned, we have enhanced the old age security program for those 75 and older. We also allocated \$3 billion for long-term care. This is a major contribution.

In closing, when it comes to the deficit and the fact that it is lower than what we projected, I hope that everyone will agree with me that this is a good thing and that it illustrates our government's prudent approach.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the historic speech that the Minister of Finance just made. I congratulate her on that.

[*English*]

It has been a long wait for a budget, as members know. Canadians have been hit hard by the pandemic, and front-line workers, who are looking for measures and a functioning paid sick leave program, are going to come away profoundly disappointed by this budget. However, billionaires will be happy because they continue to get a free ride. At a time of overwhelming inequality and unprecedented increases in wealth for Canada's billionaires, the Liberal government has refused to put into place a wealth tax or end pandemic profiteering on the backs of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

All it has given us is a vague promise to collect the \$25 billion we lose every year to tax havens.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The question is very simple. Why do the government, the finance minister and the Prime Minister refuse to put into place measures so that the ultrawealthy in this country pay their fair share?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, we are talking a lot about women, and since this is a question from the NDP and since I did mention my mother in my speech, I want to point out for the member opposite that she ran for the NDP in Edmonton—Strathcona, now an NDP seat. Therefore, we have more in common than he might think.

On Canadian workers, our expansion of the Canada workers benefit is historic. No one should work full time in Canada and live in poverty, but millions of people do. This investment would lift 100,000 Canadians out of poverty and would expand by one million people the Canadians we support. That is great for Canadian workers. I think that is something my mother, were she still alive, would support too.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are unprecedented times and today we have the biggest spending budget in Canadian history, but this budget comes far too late. It is the federal government's first budget in well over two years. For that long, Canadians have been without a comprehensive plan for the economy to guide us through what has now become the stormiest time of our lifetime. I believe that Canadians will feel let down by this budget.

They are expecting a comprehensive plan to safely reopen our economy; to get Canadians vaccinated and back to work again; to help struggling small business owners back up on their feet; to manage the massive, looming financial consequences of this pandemic, including a clear fiscal anchor that I mentioned earlier; and, of course, most important, to provide future generations of Canadians with the hope and confidence that the Canadian dream is still alive and well. My fear is that Canadians will be profoundly disappointed.

To be sure, there appeared to be a number of positive measures in this budget, especially those that continue to support Canadians in their time of need as they struggle to make it through to the end of the pandemic. We will carefully review and analyze them to see whether they are sufficient to help our country through this difficult time and to secure our long-term future. So far, I am not encouraged, but we will have more to say in the days ahead.

Until then and until tomorrow, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 4:58 p.m.)

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