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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, April 23, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)
[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from February 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Lakeland has three minutes left for questions and comments.

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

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my colleague from Lakeland could tell the House about the negative impacts this legislation would have on people who have decided to become law-abiding firearms owners, and if she would like to contrast that against the lack of a positive outcome for those folks as a result of the legislation.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I guess this is a central question around Bill C-21. What is mind-boggling to me, the Conservatives and law-abiding Canadian firearms owners, collectors, sport shooters, hunters and the people who have firearms in their family collection of heirlooms is that these are the most law-abiding, responsible, vetted, law-abiding firearms citizens. With Bill C-21, the Liberals and its proponents are trying to make the argument that it is about public safety and reducing crimes.

In a situation like Toronto, where shootings have increased since 2014 by 161%, those residents have a right to say that their government ought to be taking action to keep them safe. However, those shootings are being caused by criminals and gang members who do not worry about laws—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to allow for one quick question.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

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.): Madam Speaker, much like we saw the Conservatives do a lot of back-flipping on the price on pollution, ultimately they understood what Canadians expected. I wonder if the member would acknowledge that the public wants to see this issue move forward. Will the Conservatives do some back-flipping on this issue and ultimately recognize the safety of Canadians?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I literally just said that residents in cities like Toronto and other places, where gangs are shooting up their streets, deserve action from the government to keep them safe. However, this is what the Liberals are doing. They are repealing minimum penalties for unauthorized possession of a prohibited firearm, a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition, possession of a weapon obtained by crime, weapons trafficking, possession for the purpose of trafficking, reckless discharge, discharge with intent to wound or endanger and robbery with a firearm.

Bill C-21 would also allow relaxed penalties for sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking in persons for material benefit, abduction of persons under age 14, motor vehicle theft and arson for fraudulent purposes.

What is mind-boggling to every Canadian who agrees that government should be protecting his or her safety and security is that Bill C-21 would do nothing about that except target law-abiding firearms owners—

• (1005)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, I have to go to the next speaker.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I begin my speech, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to share my time with the member for Oakville North—Burlington.

Government Orders

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member requires unanimous consent to share his time. Does he have that unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I will not talk about this in my speech, but I want to comment briefly on what the Conservative Party member just said. One of the important things we are doing with Bill C-21 is increasing maximum penalties for certain offences, such as trafficking and smuggling. We should all keep that in mind as we study the bill.

That said, I appreciate this opportunity to add my voice to the debate on Bill C-21 at second reading. I believe this is one of the strongest legislative packages ever introduced in this country to combat gun violence. It proposes a wide range of measures to help keep people safe and deliver on the firearm policy commitments we made to Canadians during the last campaign.

These measures are urgently needed, because gun violence remains a tragic reality that too often affects our cities and regions. We only have to look at the Polytechnique tragedy, or what happened four years ago at the Quebec City mosque, in my riding, when a killer entered the mosque and murdered six people, leaving many kids fatherless, and injured several others. We must also remember the massacre that happened more recently in Nova Scotia.

No one should have their life cut short so tragically and senselessly in our country. No one should have to live with the pain of losing a loved one to gun violence. That is why our government made it a top priority to protect Canadians from gun violence, including by regulating their use and strengthening Canada's gun laws.

Last May, we took a significant step forward in protecting Canadians by prohibiting more than 1,500 models of assault-style firearms and their variants, which have too often been used in tragic incidents here in Canada and in the rest of North America. The vast majority of firearm owners are responsible and law-abiding citizens, but these powerful and dangerous firearms that we banned on May 1, 2020, were not designed for legitimate activities such as hunting or sport shooting. Rather, they were designed for use on the battlefield and have no place in our cities, on our streets or in our lives.

Bill C-21 goes even further in protecting Canadians. To finish what we started last May when we banned more than 1,500 models of assault-style firearms and their variants, Bill C-21 proposes to amend the Firearms Act to provide a non-permissive storage option to the owners of firearms prohibited on May 1, 2020. That means an owner could choose to keep their firearms but would not be permitted to use them, sell them, give them to someone else or bequeath them. That is far more restrictive than the grandfathering rules that accompanied previous firearm prohibitions in Canada.

According to these rules, grandfathered owners can buy from and sell to other owners who hold the same grandfathering privileges. Some grandfathered firearms may also be authorized for use at a shooting range. None of that would be allowed with respect to the assault-style firearms prohibited last May. They would have to be stored away safely and kept there under lock and key.

This approach would essentially freeze the market for these firearms, while treating existing owners fairly. Over time, the number of prohibited firearms in Canada would decrease substantially, and they would eventually be eliminated. To accelerate that process, and unlike what was done with past prohibitions, the government also intends to introduce a buyback program as soon as possible. Owners who wish to surrender their firearms for compensation as part of that forthcoming program could certainly do so.

It is impossible to know how many people would take the government up on that offer, but it is highly likely that many owners would take compensation in exchange for their firearms. Those who want to retain their firearms as part of a collection or for sentimental value can do so, but as I was saying, they would not be permitted to bequeath them, transfer them or use them.

Failure to comply with those regulations would also result in criminal prosecution. Any prohibited firearm remaining in someone's possession would, and this is very important, also need to be registered, including those that were previously classified as non-restricted. Regulators and law enforcement would know exactly who the owners are, and where their assault-style firearms are located.

Moreover, owners who choose to retain possession of these firearms would be required to comply with additional requirements. That includes successfully completing the Canadian restricted firearms safety course and upgrading to a restricted possession and acquisition licence, with all the associated fees that would entail.

● (1010)

The requirements I just mentioned, and the permanent inability to lawfully use or transfer these firearms, for any reason, would essentially make those firearms useless. Logically speaking, all of those things would be major incentives to participate in an eventual buyback program.

Removing these powerful prohibited firearms from society is one of the many goals of this legislation. However, it is also important to immediately remove any firearms from potentially dangerous situations, including situations involving domestic and intimate partner violence, an issue that has been compounded by the pandemic. Sadly, there have been too many such incidents in Quebec over the past year. Beyond domestic violence, there are also other situations where a person may be suicidal or has openly advocated hatred or violence against someone.

To respond to these situations, Bill C-21 proposes the creation of red-flag and yellow-flag provisions. These provisions would make it easier for anyone who feels threatened by the presence of a firearm in their home or by an individual who owns a firearm to take action to protect themselves and others.

More specifically, the red-flag regime would allow anyone, not just police, to apply to the courts for an immediate removal of an individual's firearm if they pose a danger.

Similarly, the yellow-flag regime would allow anyone to ask a chief firearms officer to suspend and examine an individual's licence if there are reasonable suspicions that the person is no longer eligible to hold a licence.

I will remind members that these measures build on the amendments made to the Firearms Act in 2019, which establish that a firearms licence applicant's lifetime history of intimate partner violence and online threats are mandatory grounds for consideration in the determination of licence eligibility.

Gun violence continues to be a major problem in our communities. It is important to remember that all firearm tragedies, from the public ones we commemorate to the private ones that occur in the home, create untold sadness and are often preventable. All Canadians deserve to live in a place where they can be safe and secure, and that is the objective of Bill C-21.

As the Prime Minister said, "we need more than thoughts and prayers. We need concrete action." That is exactly what Bill C-21 proposes: concrete action to stem the tide of gun violence in Canada.

I am very proud to support this bill at second reading, and I hope that my colleagues will do the same so that it can be sent to committee and we can hear what various groups have to say about Bill C-21. For decades now, various civil society groups have been calling for a ban on military-style assault weapons like the one we implemented on May 1, 2020, which will be strengthened by Bill C-21. These weapons were designed for the military and are not appropriate for civilian use. We have seen them used in too many incidents, too many tragedies and too many killings. They were designed for military use and manufactured to be efficient killing machines. They are not used for hunting or sport shooting and have no place in our society because they are too dangerous.

I am proud to be part of a government that, after decades of dithering, finally decided to move forward with prohibiting 1,500 different models of firearms, including the AR-15 and Vz58. This ban essentially froze the market completely as of May 1, 2020, by prohibiting the import, export, use and sale of such weapons.

I would remind the House that the young man who burst into the Quebec City mosque was armed with a Vz58. Thank goodness his gun jammed, but he never should have been in possession of such a weapon in the first place. This is why a ban like the one we proposed on May 1, which is strengthened in Bill C-21, is so important, as are the increased maximum penalties for many trafficking and smuggling offences, and the red-flag and yellow-flag provisions.

Government Orders

I am getting a bit off topic from Bill C-21, but I would also point out the investments we have made to expand our border capacity and dedicate more resources to the community-based organizations working to prevent violence upstream. This is in addition to the resources that have been invested in the RCMP and our law enforcement agencies across the country with programs such as Ontario's guns, gangs and violence reduction strategy.

● (1015)

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not understand why my colleague believes the bill would do anything. We know that 95% of gun crime in Canada is with illegal guns. The Liberals voted against a private member's bill from the member for Markham—Unionville that would have eliminated illegal guns coming into the country. They now have introduced Bill C-22, which would remove penalties for crimes committed with guns. It is clear that criminals do not obey the law.

Why does the member think that criminals will obey this law?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton. Today is a big day for her because she just became a grandmother. My congratulations, and I am happy to see her virtually.

To answer her question, it is clear that no single measure will eliminate gun violence in Canada. We have to tackle it on all fronts. It is obviously important to take military-style assault rifles out of circulation, but Bill C-21 includes other measures too.

For example, the bill increases maximum penalties for offences related to firearms trafficking and smuggling. It enhances information sharing among agencies such as the RCMP and local law enforcement services. We are also investing in giving the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP more tools to fight the diversion, illegal importation and smuggling of firearms.

These measures are all important in this fight. We are acutely aware that no single measure will resolve the situation, so Bill C-21 contributes to all aspects of the fight.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

My question has more to do with handguns. Initially the idea was to delegate this responsibility to the municipalities. Eventually the provinces got involved, since the federal government had stepped back.

Government Orders

In this case, would a single, standard policy be more effective at controlling firearms than some sort of patchwork approach where the rules vary from one place to another or one province to another?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, that was in fact one of the commitments we made at the request of municipalities across the country. They would like more authority to limit, regulate and ban firearms in their jurisdiction, and that is precisely what Bill C-21 is proposing.

We are certainly listening, and we will always be prepared to work with the provinces, the municipalities and the opposition parties that want to strengthen gun control in Canada, instead of diluting it as the Conservatives keep proposing.

What the Conservative Party is proposing would be a major step backward for gun control. We are always looking for different ways to strengthen gun control. We will work with the municipalities, the provinces and the opposition parties to do that.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know the member wants to remove these dangerous firearms from society, but many are questioning how effective that would be if people could keep their guns for 30, 40 or 50 years, or wait until the Conservatives get in power. They are already on record saying they would reverse this ban.

How effective, or how long-term, would this ban actually be without some other measures?

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We took an informed approach based on New Zealand's experience. It is estimated that its mandatory buyback program recovered just one-third of these weapons.

Our approach is definitely different. Those who wish to surrender their weapons will be eligible to receive fair compensation from the government. Those who do not will have to register their firearms and will not be able to use, sell or bequeath them. In short, the guns will be useless and unusable. The requirement to register these firearms so we know where they are is of fundamental importance.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member for Kingston and the Islands on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The English translation was coming through as French and I did not hear the response from the parliamentary secretary. I really wanted to hear that. I do not know if it can be fixed. Can he repeat his answer to that?

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The interpretation seems to be working now.

Could the parliamentary secretary quickly repeat his answer?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, I am eager for my colleague from Kingston and the Islands to learn French, and I am here if he needs help.

I was saying that our approach is based on other countries' experiences. For instance, New Zealand has had limited success, if we compare the estimated number of firearms in circulation with the number of firearms surrendered to the government.

With our approach, those who wish to surrender their weapons will receive fair compensation from the government, and those who wish to keep their weapons may do so, but they will have to register those firearms so we know where they are located. They will not be able to use, sell or bequeath them. It is non-permissive permission, if you will.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join in this important debate, and I am proud to be part of a government that takes action on gun control to keep Canadians safe. In the last Parliament I was able to work on Bill C-71. I am proud of that work, and I am proud to continue that work with Bill C-21.

This legislation would introduce some of the strongest gun control measures ever seen in Canada. It would complete the prohibition of assault-style firearms, it would lay the foundation for a buyback program, and it would take needed action in a number of areas critical to improving public safety, including limiting or prohibiting access to firearms for those who pose a risk to themselves or others, fighting gun smuggling and trafficking by strengthening measures at the border, increasing maximum penalties for certain firearms offences under the Criminal Code, combatting the unlawful use of firearms in diversion to the illicit market, and strengthening the rules for those firearms that are indistinguishable from legitimate ones.

Bill C-21 is good news for the public safety of our communities, our institutions and our most vulnerable citizens. It would also add new tools that could be used toward reducing needless deaths from family violence and suicide. I would like to recognize the work of those who have repeatedly stressed that the focus of action on firearms needs to be on those who die by suicide and are victims of femicide and domestic violence. The Canadian Women's Foundation notes that the presence of firearms in Canadian households is the single greatest risk factor for the lethality of intimate partner violence. In conversation with the Lethbridge YWCA, the group told me every single woman who came to their shelter had been threatened by a partner with a firearm. Over the past five years, nearly 2,500 women had been victimized by partners with a firearm.

My work with local organizations in my riding and across the country has helped to shine a light on the dangers of gun violence. Many women are afraid to report the threats of gun violence they face, or the illegal guns their partners own, and while shelters such as Halton Women's Place provide supports for women while they are at the shelter, women are at their most vulnerable for gun violence once they leave.

Bill C-21 would be the first step in removing guns from the hands of abusive partners, but we must remain committed to engaging and encouraging women to report illegal guns and abusive partners and ensuring they have the support needed. Too often, survivors are without support in the justice system, and this must change.

Our government proposes to invest \$85 million to help ensure access to free legal advice and legal representation for survivors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, no matter where they live. This investment is good news, but we must also continue to work with women's organizations that help survivors of domestic abuse and gun violence find safety from abusive partners. Intimate partner violence accounts for 28% of all police-reported violent crime in Canada, and that number has risen during the pandemic.

Of 945 intimate-partner homicides that occurred between 2008 and 2018, eight in 10 involved female victims. One woman or girl is killed in Canada every other day on average, according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. We have it in our power to help reduce these senseless deaths and this tragic violence. Bill C-21 is not a panacea: It is a tool that we must use, in conjunction with investments like a national gender-based violence strategy, to reduce this hateful violence.

There were 580 individuals, overwhelmingly male, overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly rural, who died by firearm suicide. Dr. Alan Drummond and Dr. Eric Letovsky of the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians have been vocal in saying that we must do more. Over 75% of firearm deaths are deaths by suicide. Introducing a mandatory reporting mechanism for doctors to call the police to remove guns from at-risk patients immediately is a recommendation I heard from them, and is worth exploring if it is in federal jurisdiction.

The bill contains key new measures that could limit or prohibit access to firearms for those who pose a threat to themselves or others. Bill C-71 took important steps in that direction with lifetime background checks that take into account intimate partner violence and online behaviour. These provisions must be implemented as soon as possible, but they are still insufficient methods for preventing a dangerous situation from becoming deadly. If someone suspects an individual with access to firearms might pose a danger to themselves or others, authorities only have limited power to intervene. With Bill C-21, we would introduce red- and yellow-flag laws.

- (1025)

A red-flag regime under the Criminal Code would empower both law enforcement and all Canadians, including those organizations that support survivors of abuse, to take action. If someone is aware of a potentially dangerous situation, they would be able to apply to a court to order an immediate temporary weapons prohibition order.

Government Orders

There would also be judicial discretion to order the immediate seizure of firearms.

This means that any member of the public, including a family member or caregiver, could take action if there were reasonable grounds to believe that an individual should not have access to firearms. These include online behaviour. A person would also be able to apply to a court for a temporary access limitation order to prevent someone who was subject to a weapons prohibition order from accessing firearms possessed by another individual. The weapons prohibition order could require the individual to surrender to law enforcement the firearms in their possession. It could also be accompanied by a search and seizure order.

In the United States, 19 states and the District of Columbia have enacted extreme risk laws, and these have been effective. A recent study in California details 21 cases in which this law was used in efforts to prevent mass shootings.

Recently, I hosted a round table on Bill C-21 with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and stakeholders in my community. We heard from representatives of Sheridan College, a local post-secondary institution, who voiced their concerns about how areas of congregate settings such as colleges are vulnerable to mass shootings and gun violence. Bill C-21 is a good step towards protecting our students on campus. Those at the round table expressed some concerns about the need to do more. They talked about the need for judicial education on domestic violence and coercive control if these red-flag laws are to be effective.

I have heard from a number of individuals and organizations that have either lost someone to gun violence or support survivors. They say that these red-flag laws need to be strengthened. I am committed to learning from them, and I am grateful for their future contribution once we start to study this proposed legislation at committee. We will invite advocates with lived experience, and they will bravely tell us about the worst day of their lives and why we need to take stronger action. It is incumbent upon everyone at that committee table to listen with an open heart and hear about what we, as parliamentarians, can do to make sure other families are not faced with the same devastating news that they have lost a loved one due to preventable firearms violence.

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These red-flag provisions are one tool that aligns with Canada's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. It builds on current federal initiatives, coordinates existing programs and lays the foundation for greater action on this critical issue. The strategy is organized across three pillars: prevention of violence, support for survivors and their families, and promoting responsive legal and justice systems.

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive, deadly and deeply rooted human rights violations. The bill before us is paramount to the creation of strong and safe communities for everyone, and we have seen support for these measures.

Jan Reimer, a former Edmonton mayor and now executive director of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, said that the legislation proposed is:

...a step in the right direction.... We see women being threatened with a gun. It's one of the major, if not the major, causes of death for women in domestic violence relationships. Better control doesn't take anybody's rights away, but it does protect women's rights to safety.

Bill C-21 is one more tool we can use to prevent gun violence across our country. I look forward to testimony at the public safety committee from advocates who push us to create and strengthen legislation that protects our communities from gun violence. I am proud to support our efforts to keep Canadians safe.

• (1030)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Madam Speaker, I found a lot of what the member opposite said quite interesting.

As a therapist in my previous life, I can say we wanted to get to the roots of situations with people and their actions. I heard a lot about the statistics on male suicide in rural Canada and that type of thing. I represent a rural riding in western Canada. This government has done nothing but attack the livelihoods of the men and women who work in the energy sector.

I guess my questions are: Why does the government pick and choose what it actually wants to do and not look at the real reasons for mental illness? Why does this government not actually care about the mental health of Canadians? Its attacks on the energy sector are only perpetuating the problem in western Canada.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, we are here to debate Bill C-21, which is important legislation to protect Canadians. Having had similar conversations, I would encourage the hon. member to speak to people like Dr. Alan Drummond, who can talk about the issues with, as I said, largely rural, white males who are dying by suicide.

It concerns me greatly when the Conservative Party of Canada only talks about guns and gangs, which is an important issue that we are dealing with, and ignores the issue of death by suicide.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his speech.

I would like to hear his thoughts on the fact that, contrary to what was originally promised, the buyback program will not be mandatory. I understand that the firearm owners will be subject to restric-

tions that will ultimately make the firearms useless, as my colleagues mentioned.

Instead of making everyone unhappy, why not push to make the buyback program mandatory as originally promised? Why choose half-measures?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the hon. member agrees with our government about the need to ban assault-style firearms. I believe that the minister of public safety has reviewed what happened in New Zealand and looked for a solution that would be most effective in Canada. I look forward to hearing testimony at committee to see if there are any ways to strengthen the legislation.

I am pleased to know that the hon. member is in support of the ban on assault-style weapons.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask specifically about the Canada-U.S. border and the smuggling of guns. There was a cutback a number of years ago. We pulled away from doing investigative and undercover activity with the United States to be proactive on gun smuggling and drug smuggling at the border. Those calls to reinstate that have not been fulfilled. I have been asking for a Canada-U.S. border task force to help deal with COVID and a series of different things that we have had. We had that structure in the past.

Would the member commit here today to at least examining that? Part of our problem at the border is that we have no ongoing strategy that involves third parties that is open, accountable, and public, which could actually work on some of these things that have been cut and other ones that are proposed to bring in more safety.

• (1035)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his advocacy on this important issue. He is absolutely correct. Funding was cut under the Conservative government to the Canada Border Services Agency and we have restored much of that. There was \$500 million in the last Parliament and we continue to make investments at the border. Does that mean that we do not need to do more? Absolutely not; we do.

We are looking at a new Canadian task force with the United States. I would be happy to have a conversation with the hon. member to work together on ensuring that we are taking the most appropriate and best action on this issue.

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Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to join in the debate in this virtual sitting of the House of Commons on Bill C-21, which is obscurely named an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments on firearms.

I first want to say that what New Democrats want is for Canadians to be safer and feel safer. What we do not want is a polarization and a politicization of an issue that should be about public safety. Unfortunately, it deteriorates fairly rapidly into a debate about something else. We understand there are differences of opinion as to how best to make Canadians safer, but we do not want a clash of cultures. This is not a debate about cultures; this is a debate that ought to be focused on public safety.

I sat through two Parliaments before the previous one and heard issues debated regarding gun safety and the long-gun registry and it was not very helpful, frankly, in terms of gun safety and people's safety. We are in a situation now where the banning of assault rifles is one of the two most important measures. This is not about gun culture, hunting, law-abiding citizens or anything like that. We know there are efforts to talk about law-abiding citizens and I agree that most of us are law-abiding citizens, but the reality is that guns are a serious problem in our society. There have been mass shootings and I can go over some of them.

In December of 1989, we are all familiar with the horrendous events at École Polytechnique, where 14 were killed and 14 injured. In August of 1992, there was a massacre at Concordia University and in 1996, in Vernon, B.C. there were nine killed. In January 2017, we know about the Quebec City mosque shooting in Sainte-Foy, with six dead and five injured. Last April, there was the horrendous event in Nova Scotia, where 22 were killed and three injured. We know that these things happen and that they are likely to happen again. If something can be done to reduce the danger of this happening, then we should do it.

The two most important measures that deal with gun violence are the ban on military assault-style weapons and assault weapons with those kinds of capabilities and the empowering of municipalities to restrict or ban handguns within their boundaries. Both measures are ones that New Democrats have long supported and, in the case of the municipal handgun ban, were even the first to advocate. These measures would provide some support and defence against the possibilities that someone, in the case of assault rifles, who may have an obsession, grievance, hatred or some form of mental imbalance or anger associated with that, could cause mass deaths in a very short period of time, causing significant and horrendous death and loss of life of innocent people. As was pointed out, these guns have no use in our civil society. These are military weapons designed to be effective killers of people and New Democrats support the ban of these weapons.

We also want this legislation to receive the largest support possible in the House of Commons and largest level of acceptance by the general public. We know there is significant public support for a ban on assault rifles. A May 2020 poll said that 82% of people support a ban on the possession of assault-style weapons by civilians, 87% of women and 88% of Canadians aged 55-plus support a ban on military assault-style weapons and 87% of Canadians agree that the federal government should increase funding to suppress the

smuggling of assault-style guns into Canada. Of course, this is another measure that we have been advocating for for at least a decade, that smuggling enforcement has to be improved considerably.

● (1040)

We heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety say that measures have been taken, but they are very late in coming and they are not even installed properly yet. In fact, going back to 2014, over 1,000 Canada Border Service Agency agents were removed from service and have not been replaced by the government since it has been in power, since 2015. That is something that is seriously deficient in the response that has taken place.

We will have committee hearings. There are serious concerns that have been raised by groups that have been advocating for victims of mass shootings. They have come forward and said that they do not believe that the Liberals are very serious if they are not prepared to put measures in place that take the long-term effect of removing these weapons seriously.

The so-called "grandfather clause" that allows people to keep weapons for potentially 20 to 60 years, despite the fact that they are prohibited weapons, is something that causes people to be concerned about how serious the government is in actually changing things, particularly when we already have a commitment from the Conservative Party to reverse that ban and therefore the lobbyists are encouraging people not to participate in a voluntary buyback program.

The minister's parliamentary secretary and the previous speaker suggested that a study of the New Zealand situation proved that only 40% of guns were actually returned in a voluntary buyback program. I do not believe that is an effective and proper analysis of the facts. The only figure that is based on is a figure put forth, unverified, by the gun lobby suggesting that there were 170,000 assault-style rifles in place. The other evidence shows that as a result of the buyback program, there has been no change in the price on the black market for assault-style weapons and there is no indication that this has not, in fact, been effective in reducing and eliminating further actions of that nature in New Zealand.

In fact, a ban in Australia was very important in effecting change for what happened in 1996, the Port Arthur massacre, that killed 35 people and injured 23. A national firearms ban was put in place and placed tight controls around automatic and semi-automatic weapons. Since then, there has only been one mass shooting since 1996, defined as more than five killed. However, between 1978 and 1996, there were 13 mass shootings in Australia, proving that the ban would be effective.

Government Orders

This is another failure of the government. There are other aspects of this bill, and I think the previous speaker touched on the red flag laws. We need to hear about the effectiveness of them. It looks to me that they can be effective in improving the possibility of getting guns out of the hands of people who may be an immediate danger to themselves or others. That is a very positive thing, but we do need to hear evidence on that because there are some of contrary views as to whether they are proper and able to do an effective job in that.

We have also a need for consultation from these groups. We need to also hear from another group that has a great deal of interest in this legislation and I am speaking here of the airsoft industry. It has come forward after being effectively put out of business by this legislation without any notice, without any consultation and without any alternatives. The failure to consult with other groups in the preparation of this legislation was also evident in this area because there are possibilities of using regulation as a different method of control in the airsoft industry.

For those who do not know, it is akin to the paintball industry. It is called airsoft because it is essentially an air gun that is used in recreational activity. Many of them are replicas of other styles of guns. We have legislation and regulation within the movie industry to allow it to use replica guns in film work with licences and regulations.

● (1045)

There is no reason to believe that regulations could not be developed in consultation with the airsoft industry to allow that industry to continue in a regulated fashion. That is something that may or may not be able to be done with committee hearings. It may be something that ought to be put off for further consultation.

This legislation was brought in after the order in council, very quickly after the Portapique massacre in Nova Scotia last year. We do not think that sufficient consultation was made, with all of the things that are contained in this legislation. We do need to have a closer look at much of what is in this legislation. There is a lot of detail here.

I would like to hear that the government is prepared to be serious about considering other ways of ensuring that if we are going to have a ban on assault rifles, it is going to be an effective one that would be permanent in nature. It has been suggested, for example, that instead of having a compulsory buyback, if people wish to keep these assault-style rifles because they are collectors and want to have a display and show them to their friends, etc., there are methods of rendering them inoperable. It has been suggested that might be an alternative to the grandfathering clause, which would be quite easily overturned, rendering ineffective the measures that the government has taken.

It is not something that I think ought to be left lingering. We do not control the future, obviously, but to have a measure that provides legislation that lingers for decades but is not effective for that period of time is something we need to avoid.

The bottom line here is that we have legislation that meets the need to ban assault rifles, to make it more difficult to use, to be put into place. We hear as part of the discussion, and we have already

heard it here this morning, talk about law-abiding citizens. The law-abiding citizens are people who do not break the law. There are many people who are law-abiding citizens until they are not law-abiding citizens anymore.

The research on gun violence shows that, for example, in the 16 deadliest mass shootings in Europe, and this is five-year-old evidence, between 1987 and 2015, 86% of the victims were shot by a licensed shooter. In at least 29 American mass gun killings since 2007, 139 people were killed by licensed firearm owners. To look back to Canada, of the firearms seized from Canadians who were violent, had threatened violence or were subject to a prohibition order, 43% were registered to licensed gun owners. In New Zealand, another example from far away, half the perpetrators in both non-fatal firearms-related domestic disputes and in gun homicides have been licensed gun owners.

It is not a panacea to say that we are dealing with law-abiding gun owners and there is no problem, because law-abiding gun owners are being affected by this. In fact, the individual who drove from Manitoba to Rideau Hall last July with a cache of guns had these guns legally. He said he was coming to arrest the Prime Minister, in part because of the gun legislation being brought forward.

We are not talking about one category or another here. We are talking about protecting the public and making the public safer. We are talking about assault-style rifles. One of the prohibited weapons from last year's order in council was held by this individual from Manitoba.

● (1050)

We have to get away from this whole issue of talking about attacking one group of people versus another. The emphasis has to be on public safety. The emphasis has to be on finding a way to ensure that we have the broadest public support possible for the legislation, by focusing specifically on the assault-style rifles and trying to do something about handguns, which are predominantly a city problem, by giving the authority to the municipalities to have some control over that. It may not be perfect, but it is better than what is there now, which is nothing that is actually controlling this.

Yes, there has to be more enforcement. Yes, there has to be a crackdown by the police on activities in cities. We have already heard from some municipalities, like Vancouver and Surrey, that are interested in this. Toronto has spoken favourably about it. These are areas where handguns are a particular problem and a danger to public safety. If this will help, then we should provide the mechanism so that it can be put in place.

Having said all that, I will be interested in comments or questions from my colleagues. I think this legislation is in the right direction, but it needs to be looked at very carefully. We need to make sure that it is actually going to be effective and that it is not going to be an overreach in an area like the airsoft industry, for example, which might be able to be more properly regulated.

Government Orders

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from the east coast for his good words, and I share his analysis that we need to work through a consensus-based approach in Parliament to do what we can to make Canadians not only feel safe, but in fact be safe.

I have listened to the Conservatives, many from rural parts of the country. They talked about the need for sentencing, as if because we have made murder illegal it somehow has been stopped, simply because we have made it a criminal act. I have also heard them attack mandatory minimum sentences and talk about the increase in gun violence that has occurred underneath a regime of mandatory minimum sentences that have done nothing to stem the growth of gun violence.

I work with mothers in my riding who have lost their children to gun violence. What they are saying is that if we want to stop it, we need to invest in jobs and housing and attack systemic racism in the justice system, especially in the sentencing provisions but also within prison and the way police arrest.

I am just curious, because the member mentioned the border and because we have had several significant arrests recently in Toronto precisely because of the investments we made at the border, whether he would work with us through committee to strengthen border provisions to stop all handguns coming across the border and whether he would—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will let the hon. member answer, because there is a huge list of MPs who wish to participate.

The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, measures at the border are necessary, absolutely. Surprisingly enough, it is the first time we have heard of new equipment being introduced that will actually detect guns. One would think this would have been in place many years ago, but that is not the case. Obviously, border measures have to be strengthened.

As far as the mandatory minimum sentences go, many of them have already been found to be unconstitutional. I know they are brought forward for symbolic reasons, but they are not held to be effective and, in fact, in many cases are found immediately to be unconstitutional. Therefore, it is a futile effort. They do not work. They have been proven not to work and they have not, in many cases—

• (1055)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech and some of the Liberals' speeches before, and I find it interesting that this debate is around their having a lot of consultation with those who agree with them and then bringing forward this legislation that somehow deals with what is certainly a problem.

My question for the member for St. John's East is quite a practical one. Could he assist in this conversation to simply define what

an assault-style firearm is? Certainly there is a lot of ambiguity around that. The government has been unable to or has chosen not to define what that is, exactly, which has led to a significant amount of confusion about what is actually being discussed here when we talk about so-called assault-style firearms.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, it is a good question if one is looking for a specific, exact, legally applied definition. However, it is there in the list of types of weapons that are being specifically banned. If there needs to be an improvement in the specific definition, that is something that could be handled at committee. I would welcome any suggestions for opening up the areas of ambiguity so that we could look at them and perhaps amend them to ensure that the definition is accurate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, in which he spoke primarily about assault weapons.

Towards the end, he touched on the issue of restricting handguns and said that some major cities have expressed an interest. I would like to hear more about that, because in Quebec, for example, the mayor of Montreal is not interested. Then again, the Quebec National Assembly is saying that Quebec and the provinces could eventually be given the authority to manage handguns. Furthermore, as some groups have suggested, one solution could be to ban the importation and production of handguns.

What does my colleague think of these solutions? I would like to hear more from him on the issue of handguns.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I personally would be supportive of that. As to the Government of Quebec wanting to pass regulations in relation to handguns within its jurisdiction, I would be happy to see that as well. That is something that is certainly permissible.

The method being used in the legislation, we would have to talk about it, but it may well be workable. It attaches the bylaws to the firearms certificate, and that is what makes it enforceable under federal regulations. It is a possibility of doing both of those things, and I would welcome any moves by the Province of Quebec to assist in that within its jurisdiction to go beyond municipalities.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Is the hon. member for North Island—Powell River on? We'll come back to her.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington.

Statements by Members

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I have a few issues with the comments I have heard. I want to focus on the issue of assault rifles. I want to point out that the reason why the member is saying “assault-style” is that it really is just a style. There is no functional difference. There is no magazine capacity difference between these guns. They simply look different. They are not more dangerous. They are not more capable of harming somebody. To use this terminology, which is unfair to legal gun owners and is entirely arbitrary, does damage to this debate.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I think the idea is fairly well understood. I believe there is no real room for doubt about the nature of these weapons, which are capable of rapid fire in a very short period of time, and they are designed to do that very thing. That is the nub of the matter.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, we have to go to Statements by Members. The hon. member for St. John's East will have three minutes left for questions and comments.

I know there was a technical issue with the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, so as soon as the debate continues after question period, I would certainly look at recognizing the hon. member for North Island—Powell River should she choose to come back on after that.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Madam Speaker, lockdowns with no end in sight are being endorsed by federal leaders and are destroying our communities. The impact on the lives of Canadians is severe. Ordinary people are being investigated by police for organizing peaceful protests against the lockdowns.

Last week, I heard from a young business owner in my riding. She told me that if things did not change soon, she would likely have to declare bankruptcy. The Liberal budget will be of no help to her.

Others have confided to me that their children have had to be medicated to reduce suicidal thoughts. Tragically, the budget fails to address the surging youth mental health tsunami we are witnessing.

Canadians look to their leaders for help, but instead their concerns appear to be falling on deaf ears. We can look south of the border to see that many U.S. states have reopened and are better from an economic, social and mental health perspective.

It is time to recognize that quarantining the healthy helps no one. We need to end these draconian lockdowns once and for all.

ARMENIA

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, April 24 is Armenian genocide remembrance day, a time to remember and reflect on the horrible crime that led to the deaths of over one million ethnic Armenians during World War I.

During the month of April, we remember all genocides: the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the Cambodian genocide and far too many others. Governments and people around the world must recognize genocides for the permanent marks of hate they leave on our history.

Tomorrow, I invite all Canadians to join in remembering with our large Armenian Canadian community through online ceremonies. Genocide must never be ignored or denied.

As we honour those lost in the Armenian genocide, remember and proclaim, “Never again”.

* * *

[Translation]

EXPLORE PROGRAM

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, in 1971, the Government of Canada launched Explore, a second-language summer program for young students across the country that seeks to promote our official languages.

Since then, over 250,000 young people, including myself when I attended Glendon College in Toronto a few years ago, have taken advantage of this program to improve their second language and their understanding of Canada's cultural and linguistic reality.

This year, 2021, marks the 50th anniversary of the Explore program, which is something worth celebrating.

It is time to extend heartfelt congratulations to all those who contributed to the success of this program over the years by implementing, managing and facilitating it in order to give these thousands of youth the experience of a lifetime.

Let us continue to support the Explore program, which strengthens our linguistic and cultural diversity and represents a pillar of our national identity.

* * *

[English]

KENNY WILLIAMS

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today, I pay tribute to the life of Kenny Williams, who recently passed away at the age of 69 after a long, dignified struggle with ALS.

Kenny was a son, husband, father, grandfather and friend to everyone who knew him. However, most people knew Kenny from his 30-years of service to the hockey community on the southern shore and throughout the province.

Kenny was a founding member of the committee that worked to get the Southern Shore Arena built in 1986, and worked as the stadium manager for over 30 years. He served on boards for minor, junior, senior and women's hockey.

Statements by Members

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Generally, we do not have points of order, but does the hon. member have a tie and a jacket on? I cannot see that. Maybe I will come back to him.

I will now go to the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

* * *

• (1105)

SENIORS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government finally announced in its budget the help for seniors on old age security that it promised in the election. The problem is that it only applies to some seniors.

The proposal is a one-time payment of \$500 in August of 2021 and an increase of 10% to the OAS going forward. The catch is that it is only for those aged 75 or older. There is no real justification for leaving out seniors under age 75.

The Liberals say, “many seniors have faced economic challenges as they took on extra costs to stay safe”, and “After a lifetime of hard work, they deserve a secure and dignified retirement.”

Could somebody tell me why this does not apply to seniors ages 65 to 74? The government has created an apprenticeship program of “junior seniors” and “senior seniors”. This is ridiculous. The government must cancel this two-tier system and give the increase to all seniors of age 65 and older.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA SUMMER JOBS

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, summer is a vibrant time in my community, Alfred-Pellan. Laval's young people certainly look forward to it eagerly, and so do our community organizations and businesses. Why? Because summer means the Canada summer jobs program, a vital program that makes a difference in my community.

This year, Canada summer jobs will invest close to \$7 million in Laval, creating 1,618 quality summer jobs for Laval's youth. In Alfred-Pellan, 331 young people will get opportunities for real-life, rewarding work experience and on-the-job training with our local community organizations and businesses.

I encourage young people in Laval to apply for these jobs, which will make a difference for their future and support our local organizations and businesses.

Good luck, have a good summer, and thank you.

* * *

[English]

KENNY WILLIAMS

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the life of Kenny Williams, who recently

passed away at the age of 69 after a long dignified struggle with ALS.

Kenny was a son, husband, father, grandfather and a friend to everyone who knew him. However, most people knew him from his 30-years of service to the hockey community on the southern shore and throughout the province.

Kenny was a founding member of the committee that worked to get the Southern Shore Arena built in 1986 and worked as the stadium manager for over 30 years. He served on boards for minor, junior, senior and women's hockey.

In 2005, he received the Gold Stick Pin for his years of service on the board of directors with HockeyNL. He was inducted into the Newfoundland & Labrador Hockey Hall of Fame in 2015. He became a life member of HockeyNL and received the Hockey Canada Order of Merit in 2017.

Kenny was passionate about hockey and about giving back to his community. I want to honour his legacy and thank him for a life service to his community and indeed our province.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am blessed to live in beautiful Port Moody—Coquitlam, Anmore and Belcarra, where we have mountains, dense rainforests and salmon streams.

Local first nations, stream-keepers, Burke Mountain Naturalists, Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable, hatcheries and other community groups work hard to protect our environment, but with climate change, B.C.'s diverse biosphere is at risk.

A year ago, I asked the minister if Canada had a COVID-19 wildfire evacuation plan for communities. Lately, I have been monitoring local infrastructure, because sewage overflows from torrential rainfalls contaminate creeks inhabited by endangered species.

Climate change calls for stronger infrastructure and emergency plans. That is why I am pleased our party's secure the environment plan includes investing in technology to improve early detection of wildfires and better predict their behaviour. It also includes investing in the building of infrastructure that is extreme weather resilient and will help communities prepare for emergencies.

Statements by Members

• (1110)

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, women entrepreneurs are crucial to Canada's economic success, and supporting their innovation is key to ensuring a strong, inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last month, our government provided \$235,500 in top-up funding for Haltech Regional Innovation Centre in Burlington, which to support women entrepreneurs across Halton in navigating this crisis and to continue to grow their businesses. This funding is in addition to the Women entrepreneurship strategy funding previously provided to Haltech, for a total of \$543,300.

Haltech provides important support to help a diverse group of women entrepreneurs to start-up, scale-up and reach global markets. Activities include training sessions through cohort-based programming and mentorship opportunities.

I am proud of the hard-working women supported by Haltech, led by Shann McGrail. These women entrepreneurs play an important role in stabilizing and growing our local and national economy.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last election we made a promise to seniors over 75. Budget 2021 proposes to introduce legislation that will increase regular OAS payments for pensioners 75 and over by 10%—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): One moment, please. I did try to advise the hon. member that there was an issue with his mike. I see that the boom is down. Could he maybe plug it back in, and we will start over.

I would ask all members who are virtual not to turn their mikes at all, no matter what. It shows a lack of respect for the House. Unless members are being called on to speak, they are not to turn their mikes on.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, last election we made a promise to seniors over 75. Budget 2021 proposes to introduce legislation that will increase regular OAS payments for pensioners 75 and over by 10% in July 2022, and it will increase every year that follows. This August, a one-time \$500 payment will be made to seniors 75 and older; 3.3 million seniors will benefit by the promise we made.

This budget also supports seniors by providing \$3 billion over five years to ensure national long-term care standards. This is over and above previous commitments.

For example, we saw one-time payments to seniors over 65 last summer. Prior to the pandemic, shortly after our first election, we increased dramatically the guaranteed income supplement, which literally took hundreds of seniors in Winnipeg North out of poverty.

We care about our seniors.

ARMENIA

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 106th anniversary of the Armenian genocide perpetuated by the Ottoman Turkish empire, where one and a half million Armenian men, women and children lost their lives.

One hundred and six years have passed since the horrific crime of 1915, yet Turkey continues to this day to deny its heinous crime. Turkey's continued denial of its history has fuelled its current regime to continue on a path intent on completing the Armenian genocide, which it was not able to finish in 1915.

Today, Turkey continues to use its massive wealth and military arms to put the security of Armenia and Artsakh under constant danger. We stay committed to all Armenians in Canada and around the world and their cause, and say "Never again".

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COVID COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, throughout this pandemic, my constituents have consistently gone out of their way to help their friends, their neighbours and those who have been isolated by COVID.

We recently celebrated these COVID community champions at an event in my riding. The stories we heard were amazing: about church board members and nurses stepping up for parishioners; about gardeners tackling anti-Black racism and gardeners beautifying neighbourhoods; there were advocates for the elderly and advocates for tenants; journalists for newcomers; musical entertainers for seniors; people fighting the pandemic on the front lines; and those fighting for the rights of persons with disabilities.

Hearty congratulations to Mary Oko, Angel Beyde, Dmytro Ilchuk, Anne-Marie Mohler, Brian Traquair, Julia Stewart, Gezahegn Demissie, Stella Joseph, Deborah Gold, Cathy Brown, and the entire team of volunteers at Roncyworks and those fighting food insecurity at Feed It Forward. They are all COVID community champions. I can say with absolute sincerity that on awards night, they inspired me to work hard to be a better neighbour.

• (1115)

OPIOIDS

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, a pandemic that has taken more lives than COVID is ravaging British Columbia. I speak of the opioid crisis. More than 1,700 people have died from opioids. In Maple Ridge alone, 500 have overdosed.

Keeping people alive is critical, but helping them get a new life is so much better. That is what recovery is all about.

Despite a lack of federal leadership, there are still some excellent supports in my riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge. InnerVisions has two facilities. Hannah House for women and Miller House for men have combined 80 beds. Hope for Freedom is seeing great results at its lodge. The Salvation Army has an excellent Genesis recovery program.

I want to recognize the staff and hard work being done at the Maple Ridge Treatment Centre. The One Way Club and Celebrate Recovery also help those struggling with addictions.

These organizations are mainly non-profits that need our support as they provide life-changing support for so many.

* * *

TOURISM BUSINESSES IN FUNDY ROYAL

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, my riding of Fundy Royal is full of great tourism operators. Some have opened their businesses over the past few years, while many others have been in operation for decades. They are struggling, under the current COVID restrictions, to remain afloat and get through to reopening. Many have received limited support so far and are skeptical that they will get any support from the federal government to get them through to this summer. I hear from far too many businesses that are frustrated by the inaction of the federal government and are worried about what the coming months may hold for them.

The Conservatives have called for the federal government to ensure our economy's future by securing stimulus measures that are targeted to sectors that are struggling, like tourism. Canadians deserve a plan to get the economy growing again so that we can ensure a prosperous future.

* * *

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, in northwest B.C. the railroad tracks run through so many of our communities. Day and night, trains over a kilometre long rumble through residential areas carrying dangerous goods such as diesel, propane and methanol. If proposed terminal projects go ahead, the volume of dangerous goods will increase even further.

While these trains are integral to our economy, the increase has communities concerned. They see derailments occurring and worry about the risk of a major incident, like the one in Lac-Mégantic. They wonder about response times and evacuation plans. Most of all, they wonder if federal regulations are doing enough to ensure that a major incident never occurs in the first place. Recent reports

Statements by Members

from the environment commissioner and the Auditor General have shown their concerns are legitimate.

People who live in northwest B.C., including those who work on the trains, deserve a federal government that is doing everything in its power to protect communities, workers and our environment. We will not be silent until that basic responsibility is fulfilled.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SICKNESS BENEFITS

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to pay tribute to my sister Nancy, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in November 2019.

She received the diagnosis after having a mammogram and a biopsy. She was devastated. She was starting a new life with her spouse, she had a good job and everything was turned upside down. She had six months of chemotherapy and then, in May 2020, she had a partial mastectomy and 23 radiation treatments. Nancy had to stop working to take care of her health.

The 15 weeks of EI benefits she is entitled to are absurdly insufficient to help women who, like her, face the greatest challenge of their lives, beating cancer. The 50 weeks of EI sickness benefits we are asking for would really help these women and spare them unnecessary stress. They currently have to focus on fighting their illness and trying to survive, without having the peace of mind they deserve.

I am proud of my sister for her courage and strength. With all my love, I wish her good health.

* * *

• (1120)

[English]

INCOME TAX DEADLINE

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to follow up on the upcoming tax deadline and my continued concern that millions of Canadians are vulnerable to losing the benefits being renewed this July because they have not been able to get their taxes done.

Oral Questions

The government says it cannot do it, but let us take a look at last year. We were in a pandemic, we were under lockdown and people were asked to stay at home. The government said it would move the tax deadline to September and make sure there is a smooth transition of benefits. Let us fast-forward to this year. We are in a pandemic, we are in lockdowns because we do not have enough vaccines and we are being asked to stay at home. However, the government says it is not going to move the deadline.

The reason this matters is that there are thousands of people who cannot complete their taxes at home. They do not have computers, so they are not capable of doing that. I see that. Thousands of constituents were in my office this past year and they had to cancel this month because they were asked to stay at home and not get their taxes completed.

We need to help vulnerable people and we need to make sure there is a smooth transition. The government should be compassionate and reasonable, and extend the deadline two months to help millions of Canadians out.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on April 22, 1970, the very first Earth Day took place, bringing millions of people together as a way to create awareness surrounding the real and critical issues of climate change and global warming. Over 50 years later, we continue to educate and mobilize our efforts to help bring positive environmental change.

The federal government is taking the necessary steps to help bring meaningful change and reverse the effects of climate change. Here in Brampton and the Region of Peel, our federal government has invested in 43 new electric vehicle charging stations and most recently announced the single-largest federal investment in the history of my riding of Brampton East to help create Brampton's largest transit maintenance facility. This facility will be equipped to transition to a fully electric fleet and help Canada reach its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.

We can all make a difference in protecting our beautiful earth when we unite together. Let us all do our part to protect our earth for this generation and many generations to come.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, last night Major Kellie Brennan gave powerful testimony. She told the committee that she was intimidated by General Vance into giving false testimony. She said he bragged about controlling the military justice system and that he was untouchable and had the Minister of National Defence under his control. This is shocking and deeply disturbing but appears to be true.

Will the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence admit that they were complicit in covering up allegations of sexual misconduct and, in doing so, have failed women in the military?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, limiting all forms of misconduct and abuse of power and creating a safe work environment for everyone on the defence team have always been a top priority of our government. We know that any organization, including the Canadian Armed Forces, must work hard to eliminate the toxic masculinity that creates an unacceptable culture.

All avenues to a safer future for women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces are going to be considered. More work needs to be done and more will be done.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is not believable. Make no mistake. There are more questions to come for the minister.

Canada has been losing the fight against COVID-19 variants for months. Yesterday, the Prime Minister finally noticed, and he took some advice from the Conservative leader. However, once again, it is too late for many Canadians.

A Brazilian variant outbreak ravaged British Columbia and the Indian variant has been found in three provinces. How much longer will the third wave be in Canada because the Prime Minister was once again slow to act?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when it comes to protecting Canadians, we have stepped up every single step of the way. We have taken measures to protect Canadians and put in place some of the strictest border measures around the world, and yesterday was no exception. This shows that we are committed to continuing to act, to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes. We are going to get through this third wave together because Canadians are committed to doing so.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, a month ago, when the Prime Minister was asked if border measures worked, his answer was simple. He said no, they actually do not work, and then he doubled down on that. In fact, since January 2020, including yesterday, when we asked the Prime Minister if he would start to control flights coming to Canada, we got no for an answer. Yesterday, late in the day, the Prime Minister finally got a small ounce of what is common sense to most and suspended flights from India and Pakistan.

How many Canadians are going to be affected by COVID-19 because the Prime Minister was dreadfully late once again in making the right decision?

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

On this side of the House, our government will always operate on scientific data, public health advice and the changing COVID-19 situation around the world.

We have indeed temporarily suspended travel from India and Pakistan as we monitor the situation in the region. Passengers must also receive a negative test at their last point of departure before they can fly to Canada. We continue to strongly advise against non-essential travel. The safety of Canadians will always be our priority.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, it took every effort to get the Prime Minister to close the border last night to countries with severe outbreaks of variants.

It is unbelievable that it takes the government such a long time to make decisions. When it comes to public health, it is crucial not to take any risks. The Prime Minister has been exposing the public to serious risks from day one of his term. He is slow on vaccines, slow to close the borders and slow with rapid testing. Does he realize that he caused this third wave?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The measures that we have in place are the strictest in the world. While the number of cases of the coronavirus is rising around the world, we are taking the necessary steps to protect Canadians from COVID-19 and its variants. Yesterday, we temporarily suspended all commercial and private passenger flights from India and Pakistan for 30 days. We will continue to advise against all non-essential travel because the safety of Canadians will always be our top priority.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is difficult to understand why the Prime Minister was once again slow to act given the experience he gained in managing our borders during the first wave. He is not learning from his mistakes.

It took pressure from the Conservatives, the provinces and the media for him to finally decide to close the borders and protect Canadians. The situation is deteriorating in other countries. Can the Prime Minister assure us that he will no longer jeopardize the health of Canadians by dragging his feet?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Ever since the pandemic hit, we have been advising against all non-essential travel. We adopted a multi-pronged approach to protecting Canadians' health and safety. We will continue to base our measures on the wise counsel of our public health officials. We will not hesitate to adjust our measures as needed.

Oral Questions

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the government decided to create a Canada-wide child care program like the one we have in Quebec.

The problem is that the Prime Minister seems to be telling Quebec what to do with its share of the funding. His budget proposes to negotiate an agreement with Quebec that would allow for further improvements to its system.

Quebec has been operating its early learning centres for almost 25 years now. It does not need advice from the federal government. Will the government transfer the funds to Quebec unconditionally?

[*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.): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that for the first time in our nation's history, we are moving forward with a national plan to ensure that every family in Canada has affordable access to early learning and child care opportunities. We know from Quebec's leadership that this is going to not only improve the learning outcomes for young children in our communities, but allow more women to take part in the economy.

As we go forward, we are going to engage in a collaborative way with the provinces to ensure that this money is used in its most productive way so that more women can take part in the Canadian economy, as they have been able to in Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I did not get an answer to my question.

As I said, Quebec has been operating its early learning centres for almost 25 years now. We invented the model. There are no federal day care centres right now. They does not exist. Based on what experience does the federal government think it can tell Quebec how to manage its share of child care funding?

The Prime Minister was needlessly vague when he was asked about this. I am simply looking for clarification, so as to avoid a pointless quarrel. Will the government commit to transferring Quebec's share of funding unconditionally?

• (1130)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois just missed out on a great opportunity to applaud the budget. This budget addresses Quebec's expectations, including things like aerospace, high-frequency rail in the Quebec City-Toronto corridor, culture and seniors.

As for the child care system, we are taking inspiration from Quebec because Quebec is a pioneer. It has a model that works extremely well, one that we want to export. This is a great way to showcase Quebec's expertise across Canada. This is all very positive, and the Bloc should be pleased.

*Oral Questions***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals are trying to convince us that they have become the champions of the French language when, in fact, they are not.

They are sticking with the same kind of reasoning used with the abysmal Netflix agreement. In their budget, the Liberals did not allocate any money specifically for the production of French-language audiovisual content. This sector was already on life support. Artists and artisans are worried. The pandemic has only placed them in an even more precarious situation.

Will the minister pledge to allocate funds for French-language audiovisual productions, a sector essential to the vitality of the French language, yes or no?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and advocacy for the arts and culture.

However, I would like to remind him that, in our budget, we kept one of our election promises, which was to increase Telefilm Canada funding by \$50 million. A good part of this funding will go to French productions, which Telefilm Canada has already planned. Therefore, there will be more money for French-language audiovisual productions.

* * *

*[English]***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, a “for indigenous, by indigenous” urban, rural and northern housing strategy has been in the minister’s mandate letter since 2019, yet in budget after the budget the Liberals fail to deliver. The minister’s lame excuse is that they are studying it.

The chair of CHRA’s indigenous housing caucus said that the absence of such a strategy in budget 2021 is a disgrace. The president and CEO of the CAEH, who is also the co-chair of the government’s national housing council, called it the most glaring disappointment.

Will the Prime Minister immediately amend the budget to include an urban, rural and northern “for indigenous, by indigenous” housing strategy?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is critical to understand that there is a report coming out of Parliament right now that stresses the need to co-develop a strategy around urban, rural and northern indigenous housing. We are waiting for that report and will be acting on that report.

In the meantime, I would direct the member to the rapid housing initiative, which she scoffed at. It promised to deliver 3,000 units of housing. We have now more than doubled that fund, and the program has delivered close to 40% of the units to indigenous housing programs.

Our government is serious about an urban, rural and northern indigenous program. She will see the results of the budget. She will

see the results of this program. However, in the meantime, we have upped our game and are investing more than any—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

* * *

*[Translation]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday the British Parliament followed this Parliament’s example and adopted a motion recognizing the genocide of the Uighur Muslims.

The Uighurs are being forced to pick cotton and produce tomatoes. The measures the government put in place in January to ban these imports are ineffective. Other countries are using more effective measures.

Will the government bring in effective measures to ban these imports from China?

[English]

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member reminds us that the whole world is watching China, and our message to China remains clear: We are watching as well. More than ever, democratic countries must stand together to promote values of democracy and human rights, as must parliamentarians and parliaments around the world.

We welcome the decision by the U.K. Parliament. We understand it, and it is in a very similar situation to our parliamentary decision. We will continue to let China know that we are watching every human rights situation that is important to all Canadians.

● (1135)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, countries around the world are waking up to the threats from China. The Canadian Parliament, the U.K. Parliament, the Dutch Parliament and the Biden administration have all recognized the Uighur genocide.

Yesterday, Australia cancelled two Chinese infrastructure agreements, both part of China’s belt and road initiative. When will the government do the same and withdraw from another belt and road initiative? When will it indicate it wants to play no part in exporting China’s authoritarian model and withdraw from the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we have said repeatedly in the House, the relationship with China remains complex and multi-faceted. We will stand up for Canadian human rights and values around the world, including with regard to China. Every action that we take with China will be in the best interests of Canada and Canadians. We again remind the House that we are watching China on every aspect.

*Oral Questions***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, “A budget that needs 700 pages of [red] ink says a lot about government motivations. After doubling our federal debt in only six years, and spending close to a trillion dollars, not moving the needle on long-term growth would be the worst possible legacy of this budget.” Who said that? It was Robert Asselin, former top adviser to the Prime Minister and Bill Morneau.

If even Liberal advisers are starting to freak out about the forthcoming debt crisis, should Canadians not be concerned as well?

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.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member seems to think that our pandemic response has been too expensive. I will remind him that one of the most important things we can do to contribute to a growth-oriented recovery is preserve the jobs that we have now.

If he thinks our measures are too expensive, I would like to introduce him to a small business owner in my community who was able to keep the doors open because they had access to the emergency business account. I would like to introduce him to classmates of mine from high school who have a job at a local manufacturing facility and were kept on the payroll because of the wage subsidy.

Our message to Canadian households and businesses is that we will be there for them no matter what it takes for as long as it takes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to introduce the member to the 300,000 people who do not have jobs and the tens of thousands of small businesses that cannot operate because his government failed to close the border and keep the virus out, and failed to speed up and bring vaccines in. As one businessman said the other day, this government has first-world inputs, but third-world outcomes.

Why does the government think it can only judge success by how expensive it can be rather than by the results that Canadians experience?

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.): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the thousands of small business owners who have done the right thing to protect the public's health by closing their doors when it was necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Indeed, that strong public health response is what will enable us to rebound successfully.

I will remind the hon. member that in the months of February and March, the Canadian economy added 259,000 and 303,000 jobs, respectively. As we continue to deal with the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, I expect businesses will continue to do the responsible thing. However, we will be there for them to ensure that they can contribute to the recovery when it is safe to do so.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, last night Major Kellie Brennan gave powerful testimony before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

She told the committee that General Vance tried to intimidate her into providing false testimony. She said he bragged about having the military justice system under his control. He even boasted he had the Minister of National Defence under his control.

Why did the government ignore the allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance for three years? Was the government also under his control?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that could not be further from the truth. We have absolutely no tolerance for any form of misconduct. I want to acknowledge the courage of those who have come forward.

We have always taken any allegations that were brought to our attention very seriously, and we have taken immediate action. We will ensure that a full, thorough investigation is conducted.

We know there needs to be a total culture change in the Canadian Armed Forces. That is why in budget 2021 we have committed \$236 million to eliminate any form of sexual misconduct.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is all well and good to talk about millions of dollars, but I would remind the minister that leadership is just as important. My next question is about health care.

Experts are saying that we need to vaccinate at least 70% of the population against COVID-19 to reach herd immunity. Quebec's vaccination efforts are orderly, and the province is able to vaccinate more than 100,000 people a day. The same is true for Ontario and, at this pace, the province could have already vaccinated 10 million people, which is enough to reach herd immunity.

Will the Minister of Health admit that Canada could have already reached herd immunity if the Liberal government had provided enough vaccines on time?

• (1140)

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is important to know that Canada is actually in the top three in the G20 regarding the administration of vaccines. It is also important to know that Canadians have worked hard to stop the spread of COVID. However, there is still more work to be done, which means we have to continue to follow public health measures to ensure that Canadians are kept safe.

Oral Questions

In my home province of Ontario, we are seeing the spread of the variants, and I want to thank health care workers for the incredible work they do. We need to support them and ensure that Canada can get a hold on this crisis.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, in 2008, Stephen Harper's climate plan, entitled "Turning the Corner", proposed three things: one, to get out of coal; two, to invest in carbon capture technologies; and three, to implement the fuel standard.

In the budget the Liberals presented this week, they proposed the following: one, to get out of coal; two, to invest in carbon capture and storage technologies; and three, to improve the fuel standard.

Ottawa is yet again trying to turn oil into a green energy. I am all for recycling, but at some point do they not draw the line at Harper's environmental policies?

[English]

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have a credible and tested climate plan that is already delivering results. We have made historic investments of more than \$100 billion to build a cleaner, healthier economy with more good jobs for Canadians. This includes \$17.6 million for climate and the environment in budget 2021, \$15 billion through the strengthened climate plan, \$15 billion for dedicated transit and \$60 billion for the pan-Canadian framework.

We will continue to fight for climate change, invest in a cleaner future and create a stronger economy.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am asking the question because Canada's strategy seems to be the same as the one Stephen Harper's government introduced 13 years ago, which did not work.

By trying to transform oil into clean energy, Canada failed to meet the Kyoto targets in 2012 and the Copenhagen targets in 2015. In 2020, it failed to meet the targets it set under the Paris Agreement.

How can the Liberals guarantee that they are going to achieve a different result with the same oil strategy?

[English]

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when our government took office five years ago, Canada's emissions were going the wrong way: emissions were on track to be 12% higher by 2030 than in 2005. We flattened the curve on pollution. We have negotiated Canada's first climate plan; a plan that is delivering the biggest projected cut ever to Canada's emissions. We are seeing the results.

The target we have set is both ambitious and realistic, beyond our current grasp but not out of reach, and it keeps us on a credible path to net zero by 2050.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, COVID-19 has left our frontline workers stretched to the limit. Retired nurses from across Canada have come out of retirement to lend a hand, but because they are currently receiving pensions, portions of their old age security benefits will be clawed back as they breach the threshold. Their skills and knowledge are invaluable during this pandemic, but they are being forced to choose between receiving benefits and providing care.

Could the minister ensure that retired nurses are not punished financially as they serve in Canada's hour of need?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are eternally grateful for our health care workers in this country during this difficult time, and we have committed to supporting health care workers as they help fight the third wave.

We will do everything it takes to support them during this time, and we are eternally grateful. We are committed to making sure that these health care workers get the support they need.

* * *

● (1145)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, the finance minister recently suggested that interest rates are so low that we cannot afford not to borrow, but we all know that interest rates change. New homebuyers are stress-tested to ensure that they are able to afford a 2% or more interest rate increase. The Liberals have said that this is for their own good.

Can the minister explain what our national debt-servicing costs will cost Canadians when interest rates rise?

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.): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member of the threat that was raised by the former Governor of the Bank of Canada, Stephen Poloz, when he appeared before the finance committee. He indicated that the risk of deflation and the downward pressure on the economy is far greater, and that the right thing to do in the moment is to ensure that the federal government provides the kind of support that is necessary to keep Canadian households and businesses afloat through this pandemic.

By making investments to help families keep food on the table and businesses keep workers on the payroll, we have preserved the economy and protected it against economic scarring so that the economy can come roaring back when it is safe to do so.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the tax-filing deadline is right around the corner, and many Canadians and their accountants are stressed.

The Liberals' delays in securing the vaccines allowed for this third wave to strike hard. So many Canadians have seen their jobs disappear or businesses close. Covering the basics like rent, paying the mortgage or groceries is difficult. They need relief from the extra stress of a looming tax bill.

Last year, the minister did the right thing. Will she please do the right thing again this year?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government understands that 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.

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[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, Monday's budget included a remarkable admission that veterans are unable to access programs because disability benefits are not being confirmed.

An Afghan veteran in my riding has undergone multiple surgeries after being injured in an IED blast. For the past six years, he has been denied the critical injury benefit. Two years ago, the veter-

Oral Questions

ans minister visited my riding and met his family. Instead of deciding, the minister suggested that they appeal, again.

However, the minister sets policy, and so we ask again: Are multiple, invasive surgeries complex treatments?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this budget that we brought forward is a budget that supports veterans and their families. We have invested \$140 million to immediately cover mental health treatment costs while applications are being processed; and an additional \$15 million for the well-being fund, for organizations that are supporting veterans. We have also invested \$45 million to reduce veterans homelessness. Our government has invested and will continue to invest to improve the lives of veterans and their families.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, my home province of Ontario is deep into a devastating third wave. In Windsor-Essex, many people work as essential workers. They need to cross over into the United States and there have been calls to get them vaccinated urgently in the United States. As we have seen, a deal has been arranged between Manitoba and North Dakota. We need to ensure our essential workers are protected so they can perform their vital roles for all of us.

Will the Prime Minister use the strength of the Canadian consul general offices and trade offices to help set up vaccines for essential travellers and workers going into the United States?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are grateful, and explore more community partnerships to help ensure even more Canadians are vaccinated. We are absolutely committed to working with provinces and territories to ensure that essential workers are vaccinated and prioritized. We will continue to advocate for that.

We also are open and willing to work with additional partners who can help us because we know vaccines are an important part of stopping the spread and we thank our essential workers for their hard work.

Oral Questions

• (1150)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, later today, the government's Infrastructure Bank is holding its annual public meeting; only it is not a meeting at all. It is, wait for it, a series of pre-recorded promotional videos. This bank has \$35 billion of public money, and yet cannot deliver even the most basic level of accountability. No local government in Canada could get away with calling a pre-recorded video a public meeting. Is the minister worried that an actual meeting might raise questions about why the bank has not completed a single project in four years?

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, smart investments that create good jobs require thoughtful planning and, when done right, they can be nation building. We need to ensure that every public dollar spent on infrastructure is creating jobs, attracting investment, fighting climate change, promoting social equity and building the economy of the future.

Efficiency Canada and other national organizations welcome the CIB's work and its recent growth plan, retrofitting our entire economy and creating more than 100,000 jobs every single year.

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[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, ever since the start of the pandemic, our government has been listening to small businesses and providing the support they need.

Would the parliamentary secretary tell us how budget 2021, which focuses on a strong, inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery, will help Canada's small businesses not only survive, but thrive?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Miramichi—Grand Lake for his question and his hard work on behalf of small businesses.

Our government will continue to support small businesses by extending the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency rent subsidy.

We also introduced the new Canada recovery hiring program.

In addition, we are investing in tomorrow's SMEs in fields such as aerospace, clean tech and AI.

We are investing in the SMEs of today and tomorrow.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris-Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, rural Canadians are being put at a greater risk of getting COVID because of the government's inability to get vaccines in a

timely manner. Recently, the drive-through vaccination centre in Weyburn, Saskatchewan had to close because there were simply not enough injections available to keep it running. In many cases, rural Canadians are now having to drive 200-plus kilometres into locked-down communities to get a vaccine, risking higher exposure.

Does the minister realize her failure to get vaccines to the provinces is disproportionately affecting the health of rural Canadians?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we, of course, want to thank all of the provinces for their collaboration and for their mobilization. My home province of Quebec is now over 30% vaccinated, and I know Saskatchewan is approaching that number for at least one dose into the arms of our citizens. We have lots of vaccines coming in: two million Pfizer doses per week throughout the month of May and two and a half million a week coming in during the month of June. We will have up to 50 million vaccine doses circulating in Canada by the end of June. I know the member joins with me in hoping that everyone signs up for a vaccine, does it soon, and that we can get this over with quickly.

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister has told Canadians they will need a booster shot every year to counter the new and deadly variants of COVID-19, but right now the vast majority of Canadians have yet to receive any vaccine at all and those who have are waiting months for their second dose. The Liberal government has failed to procure vaccines and has failed to increase our domestic production capacity.

Can we expect the Liberals to fail in rolling out these booster shots, too?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, look for some news on booster shots coming later today.

I will say to the hon. member that, again, close to 30% of all Canadians have received a vaccine. Over 13 million vaccine doses have already been distributed in Canada. We will have up to 50 million doses by the end of June. We will have more than enough vaccines to cover all Canadians and I join with the hon. member in encouraging Canadians to sign up as soon as their turn comes to get a vaccine.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, vaccine supplies in Kelowna—Lake Country are drying up. Lakeside Medicine Centre, a local pharmacy in Kelowna, told local media that it could only guess when the next supply of vaccines would arrive and it has heard nothing as to whether any more are on the way soon. In B.C., we are facing a third wave of COVID-19 and stronger lockdown measures due to the Prime Minister's failure to get vaccines to Canada faster and earlier.

How can the Liberals be so out of touch with my constituents, who are once again getting laid off, are closing their businesses and cannot see their families?

• (1155)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, all of the provinces are devising innovative distribution and all kinds of channels to get vaccines to citizens more rapidly. One thing is for sure: the vaccine supply continues and is, indeed, going to increase over the coming weeks, with over two million a week of the Pfizer vaccine alone during May and two and a half million a week during June. That will bring us up to 50 million doses of vaccines available for British Columbians and all Canadians through the end of June. I know we are all eager for Canadians to get vaccinated.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, as other countries are coming out of this pandemic, small communities in my riding, such as Breton, are just beginning to receive their first doses because of the Liberals' failure on procurement. Many of these communities have expressed concerns with delay and uncertainty of the timeline getting their first and second doses. In March, witnesses at the health committee confirmed the off-label interval was a decision exclusively based on procurement schedules.

When will we get enough vaccines so we can stop rationing and use the manufacturers' recommended interval?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know that the member will join me in hoping that the citizens of his riding in Yellowhead and, indeed, all Canadians have access very soon to their first dose and the evidence is their first dose will be coming very quickly. The 50 million vaccine doses that we are expecting by the end of June are, of course, more than enough to cover the first dose and, indeed, will make a significant dent in the second dose for all Canadians. We know that Canada is third in the G20 in getting that first dose to its citizens.

We all look forward to the end of this pandemic and I know the hon. member joins me in encouraging his citizens to get vaccinated when it is their turn.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is proud to support sugar shacks.

Through the Ma cabane à la maison initiative, maple products were sent to about 40 embassies to promote Quebec's businesses. It

never occurred to us that we should also have promoted sugar shacks to the Government of Canada. The budget did not allocate a single cent for sugar shacks. No one in Ottawa seems to realize that sugar shacks have lost out on two entire seasons because of the pandemic.

When will sugar shacks get targeted assistance?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, this is a first.

Sugar shacks are the perfect example of a food service business that is only open in the spring, and their season cannot be postponed. Sugar shacks lost 100% of their revenue last year during the first wave and 100% this year during the third wave, yet there is no federal assistance program tailored to their needs. Clearly no one is aware of this.

This type of business only exists in Quebec. Perhaps this is why the people in Ottawa are not familiar with sugar shacks. It is not right that after the pandemic ruined two spring seasons, the federal government has still not realized that it needs to help sugar shacks, because everyone around the world considers them to be part of Quebec's heritage.

When will the government do something?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, given the circumstances, I would like to answer both questions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I think it was the same question, but I invite the minister to reply.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question.

Many of us in the House of Commons have participated in the Ma cabane à la maison initiative. I myself participated in Ahuntsic-Cartierville, and our Quebec lieutenant took part, as well. It is a great initiative.

I want to reassure my colleague. Not only do we support sugar shack owners, but we have been there to help them through the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. We will continue to help them.

If the member has specific cases to raise, she can reach out to my office. We will be able to help them, because of course we must protect our maple syrup industry and help our business owners in the regions of Quebec.

Oral Questions

• (1200)
[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, the woke Liberal government ran and hid from voting when it came to standing up for those being persecuted for their religious beliefs, proving that human rights mean nothing to them. It is the same government that shut down the Office of Religious Freedom, after all. There has been no plan for persecuted minority groups such as the Sikh and Hindu refugees in Afghanistan or the Muslim Uighurs in Communist China.

Why is the Prime Minister all talk and no action on standing up for religious freedoms at home and abroad?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this government has actually extended the Office of Religious Freedom and integrated it in a much broader way within our international human rights obligations. We repeatedly have meetings with people from around the world. We are exercising leadership in the international contact group on these issues, both at an individual level and at a corporate level, to make sure that we as Canadians have a voice regarding international human rights on every subject that has been raised by the member.

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TOURISM INDUSTRY

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, this past weekend Richmond lost another small business. After nearly 50 years of faithful service to the community, Hanson Travel was forced to permanently close its doors due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, Mr. Lau is not alone. I have heard time and again from struggling businesses in Richmond that the government needs to take steps to help support Canadians in the air travel industry, including travel agents.

When will the government finally take real action to support our tourism industry?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, obviously we know that tourism operators and travel agencies have gone through difficult times. That being said, we have been there for them since the beginning and there is also good news for them in the budget. I hope my colleague will share the good news about the \$1 billion to support the tourism sector, making sure businesses have access to the wage subsidy and rent relief programs until September, as well as a lot of support through the regional development agency. There will be a new one in British Columbia, so that is also good news for tourism operators in her home province.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I go to the next speaker, I would like to remind the member for Carleton and the member for Kingston that they should not be going back and forth debating in the House while questions and comments are being answered. The individuals who are listening virtually can hear what is going on as well, and it disrupts the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Provencher.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, Churchill Wild is a world-class adventure tourism company specializing in polar bear watching. It is based in my riding of Provencher. Like many in the tourism sector, this business is struggling thanks to border closures and travel restrictions. Every day that these measures persist makes it harder for it to keep its doors open.

The Liberal budget claims to have a plan for the safe reopening of our borders, but there is no plan. There are no timelines and no data-driven schedule for the safe reopening of these borders.

When will the Prime Minister deliver a real plan to help the Canadian tourism sector recover?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague, because obviously we have a plan to support the tourism sector. We have been there since the beginning of the pandemic for them. We are here for them now. We will continue to make sure that we are there for them in the future.

That is why we have invested \$1 billion, a historic investment. I hope my colleague will share that with his constituents, because obviously we need to make sure they have access to money to survive the pandemic, but also make sure that they can invest in their business and create great destinations in the future.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has shone a light on systemic issues affecting long-term care facilities across the country.

We have seen the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on those living and working in long-term care. We must do more to protect our most vulnerable. National standards of care for our seniors in Canada will ensure that regardless of where they live, all seniors will be treated with dignity.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health please tell the House how the government is taking action on this important issue?

• (1205)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt for this important question. On a personal note, her strong advocacy has had a real impact on this policy, and I thank her for that.

She is absolutely right that we need to protect those living and working in long-term care. Our seniors built this country. They deserve safe and quality care, and to be treated with dignity.

That is why, in budget 2021, we provided \$3 billion to create national standards for long-term care. We are going to work with provinces and territories to create these national standards. We need to make permanent changes to ensure this never occurs again.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government says it has enforced some of the strictest border measures in the world. This could not be further from the truth.

The so-called quarantine hotels have little to no security. Four hundred and four passengers simply walked out of the airport with nothing more to worry about than a fine. Who knows how many more were just never caught?

The government allowed dozens of flights to arrive from Delhi with COVID-positive passengers, all while India now faces the threat of a double variant.

When will the government get serious about keeping Canadians safe?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have been serious since day one. In fact, our measures at the border are some of the strongest.

No matter the country of origin, travellers must submit to a test prior to boarding and when they land. There is also a mandatory quarantine, and then additional testing after, when they continue their 14-day quarantine. As a result, these measures are working.

I would also like to point out that the health critic for the Conservatives actually supports releasing strong measures at the border. Does this member agree with her?

* * *

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, what is unfortunate about this Liberal government is that it has once again abandoned Quebec and the fight to protect the French language. There was nothing in this week's budget about providing tools to protect and promote French in Quebec.

The Minister of Official Languages was present for November's emergency debate on the decline of French in Quebec. Action must be taken quickly. We cannot wait for consultations on her white paper. We must act now.

Why is this Liberal government once again abandoning the French language and Quebecers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday, his colleague asked me what investments were in the budget for the official languages. He obviously had not read the budget, and I am wondering whether my colleague has read it either.

Oral Questions

Funding is provided in the budget for the French language and also for Quebec.

With funding also allocated for French second-language programs in Quebec, which are for English-speaking Quebecers, we will be able to strengthen the French fact in Quebec overall. That is also the goal of the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Several funding initiatives are proposed in the budget. I hope that my colleague will join us in celebrating this.

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[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, our veterans and members of the Canadian Armed Forces have put their lives on the line for Canada. Those who have experienced sexual trauma while in the military should not have to fight their government for compensation.

The CAF-DND sexual misconduct class action settlement is scheduled to close on November 25. For too many, the claim process is so painful that the deadline will limit the number of victims able to come forward.

When will the minister extend the deadline for the class action and allow victims to come forward with claims on their own time?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we understand it is important to invest in veterans, and our government has done that. It is why, after a decade of slashing and cutting the budget by the previous government, we spent \$11 billion in new benefits and services. We have reopened the offices the Conservatives closed and we have rehired a thousand veterans who were fired by the last government. This government has supported veterans and their families, and we will continue to do so as we move forward.

* * *

● (1210)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. There continues to be some confusion on the government's strategy to keep our communities safe and to improve public safety from gun and gang violence. Policies designed in Ottawa must produce results on the ground at the local level.

What measures is the minister taking with and for the province of Prince Edward Island to improve the safety of our citizens from gun and gang violence?

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my distinguished and esteemed colleague for the question.

Many communities, both urban and rural, have seen a rise in gun crime over the past few years. In response, our government has introduced robust and stricter laws to ensure better gun control, but we have also continued to make investments. We are continuing to invest in fighting this violence and going after those who commit it.

We recently announced that Prince Edward Island will be getting more than \$1.5 million through the guns and gang violence action fund. This is a tangible measure that will make communities safer.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, one in five Canadians lives in energy poverty, paying more than 6% of their income on home heating. They cannot afford the upfront costs of a home retrofit rebate program or take on more debt in the form of retrofit loans, yet that is what the government is offering. The Liberals could have created a no-cost, turnkey, low-income program just like the 2004 Jack Layton plan or the U.S. weatherization assistance program.

Why will the Liberals not use the billions of dollars that subsidize the oil and gas industry to help low-income Canadians?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are taking action to fight climate change and grow the economy, and budget 2021 is a critical step forward.

Budget 2021 represents \$17.6 billion that will help with a cleaner and more sustainable future. That includes \$4 billion for the protection of our lands and oceans, over \$600 million to protect and restore Pacific salmon and \$5 billion to support the net zero accelerator to help decarbonize heavy industry. We have an ambitious plan for climate change that will help all Canadians, including those in the hon. member's constituency.

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INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Ind.): Madam Speaker, in spite of being fully capable, our government failed Canadians on domestic vaccine production in a timely manner. Canada is in the middle of a serious pandemic, but the government keeps on bragging with announcements of millions and millions of dollars with no end result.

How is the government going to justify its slackness to Canadians?

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government has invested significantly from day one in biomanufacturing, recognizing that our country did not have the capacity to produce its own vaccines. We have made investment after

investment all across the country. These have been hundreds of millions of dollars and now, through budget 2021, there is over \$2.2 billion so Canadians are protected not just now but in the future. We know Canadians need these vaccines and are going to need boosters in the future. Our government is prepared and we are making the necessary investments.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 20 petitions.

* * *

● (1215)

[Translation]

PETITIONS**EMPLOYMENT EQUITY**

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the past few months have revealed the individual and collective difficulties that members of Canada's Black communities face. That is why I am presenting petition e-3147, which calls for Canadians of African descent to stop being marginalized in the workplace.

This petition is in line with efforts to fight systemic racism and racial discrimination. The federal government must implement meaningful reforms to ensure that visible minorities in Canada can thrive. Being Black means having a salary that is 26% lower on average and having a much higher unemployment rate. That is why we want to end all forms of workplace and employment discrimination.

The NDP supports the demands of the Black community in their fight to be considered a separate designated group in the Employment Equity Act.

[English]

TRAVEL ADVISERS

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to present two certified petitions from constituents.

In light of COVID travel restrictions, there are over 12,000 travel advisers in Canada who continue to work without pay. The 25 petitioners on the first petition call upon the House of Commons to provide sector-specific funding for independent travel advisers and to extend qualifications of the RRRF in urban areas to include sole proprietors.

The 25 petitioners on the second petition call on the House of Commons to ensure that financial assistance to airlines and travel companies is conditional on the protection of travel advisers' commissions and that clawed-back commissions be repaid to travel advisers in a timely manner.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to present two petitions initiated and signed by constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

The first petition outlines a long series of human rights abuses sanctioned and perpetrated by officials of the Chinese Communist Party. The petitioners urge the Government of Canada to deploy all legal sanctions against these perpetrators under the Magnitsky act, including freezing assets and barring entry into Canada.

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, the second petition highlights that proactive holistic health practices play an important role in building immune system strength and help to keep people healthy. The petitioners are concerned that there is not enough focus on proactive health and wellness care. The petitioners request that the Government of Canada increase the focus on education and empowering Canadians on holistic approaches to optimize and maintain their natural immunity and well-being. They call upon the government to include proactive health and wellness care practices in the Canada Health Act and enhance access to these services.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first is in regard to Bill C-6, which is before the House being debated now. These individuals indicate that the definition needs to be fixed. It should state only to ban coercive, degrading practices that are designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. They indicate that as it is now, it expressly allows counselling and medical and surgical efforts to change a child's gender but prohibits support for a child seeking to detransition to his or her birth gender, and it could restrict the choices of LGBTQ2 Canadians concerning sexuality and gender by prohibiting access to any professional or spiritual support that is freely chosen by them to limit sex behaviour and detransition.

Routine Proceedings

SEX SELECTION

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, my second petition is in regard to Bill C-233, the sex-selective abortion act, calling on the Parliament of Canada to pass an amendment to the Criminal Code prohibiting sex-selective abortion, on the basis that the majority of Canadians believe that it should be illegal to have an abortion if the family does not want the child to be a certain sex: i.e., 16% of Canadians would not agree with this bill. Canada has no legal restrictions, so it is antithetical to our commitment to equality between men and women not to do so.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am presenting four petitions in the House this afternoon.

The first petition is a new petition for me. It highlights the passage in the last Parliament with unanimous support of the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, or the Magnitsky act. It also highlights the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China and, in the context of that, organ harvesting as well.

It notes the detention of a Canadian citizen, Ms. Sun Qian, and it calls on the Government of Canada to deploy all legal sanctions to hold those accountable for these violations of human rights, including against this Canadian citizen. In particular, it calls for the use of the Magnitsky act against those involved in the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

• (1220)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is related to the first, in that it responds to the particular issue of organ harvesting and trafficking. The second petition is in support of Bill S-204, a bill that has just been referred back to the Senate for third reading. The bill would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ that was taken without the consent of the person whose organ it is. It would also create a mechanism by which people could be deemed inadmissible to Canada if they are involved in forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

Various versions of this bill have been put forward by Liberal and Conservative members over a decade, and petitioners are hoping that we are finally able to get it done and passed in the current Parliament.

Routine Proceedings

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition highlights the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. It highlights credible reports of war crimes, such as indiscriminate shelling of civilian towns and villages, extrajudicial killings, at least one large-scale massacre, looting and sexual violence. Petitioners are calling for greater engagement by the Government of Canada in terms of seeking justice, humanitarian support, humanitarian access and appropriate investigations. Petitioners also call on the government to promote short-, medium- and long-term election monitoring in Ethiopia.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth and final petition is with respect to Bill C-6.

Petitioners are supportive of efforts to ban conversion therapy. Petitioners are highlighting problems with the definition of conversion therapy used in this bill. In particular, petitioners note that the bill refers to any effort to reduce sexual behaviour. There may be many cases where people of any sexual orientation would seek counselling or support in the context of a desire to reduce sexual behaviour. Petitioners argue that this should be a choice for an individual, but obviously have no tolerance for violent and degrading practices that would constitute conversion therapy. Petitioners want the government to ban conversion therapy and use a proper definition in the process.

I commend all four of these petitions to the consideration of my colleagues.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to present in the House today a petition from many of my constituents and from constituents from beyond the borders of Saanich—Gulf Islands. They call on the House to consider and respect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They draw attention, in particular, to violations of UNDRIP in the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline. They specifically speak to the concerns of the Wet'suwet'en nation and ask the House assembled to support UNDRIP and respect the hereditary rights of the Wet'suwet'en nation.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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.): Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 473 and 478.

[Text]

Question No. 473—**Mr. Kyle Seeback:**

With regard to royal recommendations provided to the House of Commons in conformity with section 54 of the Constitution Act, 1867: (a) during each of the 42nd and 43rd Parliaments, how many government bills required royal recommendations; (b) of the royal recommendations in (a), how many, broken down by each session of the 42nd and 43rd Parliaments, were provided (i) at the time notice was given of the introduction of the corresponding bill, (ii) following the notice of introduction of the corresponding bill; (c) for each bill in (b)(ii), (i) which bill was it, (ii)

what was the date when notice of the bill's introduction was given, (iii) what was the date when the bill was introduced, (iv) what was the date when the notice of the royal recommendation was given, (v) who signed the royal recommendation, (vi) what accounts for the delay between the two dates in response to (c)(ii) and (c)(iv); and (d) is the statement, at page 148 of the Guide to Making Federal Acts and Regulations (second edition), "When a royal recommendation is required for a bill, it is communicated to the House of Commons before the bill is introduced and is included on the Order Paper", still the policy of the government?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office's systems do not compile the information requested. Information pertaining to royal recommendations appended to bills, and the timing of notice of introduction of bills and of royal recommendations, can be found in House of Commons publications, including the Status of House Business available online at www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/house/status-business; and the Notice Paper at www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/house/latest/order-notice.

With respect to when a royal recommendation is required for a bill, Standing Order 79 of the House of Commons provides that a royal recommendation must be produced before the bill receives a final vote at third reading.

Question No. 478—**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:**

With regard to the government's response to e-petition e-2760 stating that, "the Gender-Based Analysis Plus [GBA+] framework was used in the development of Bill C-6 to assess its expected impact on diverse groups of women, men, and gender diverse people": (a) what parameters of the GBA+ were used; (b) who was responsible for administering the GBA+; (c) who was consulted in conducting the GBA+; (d) what were the conclusions of the GBA+; (e) why has that GBA+ not been made public; (f) will that GBA+ be made public; and (g) how did that GBA+ specifically impact the drafting of Bill C-6?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to part (a), all parameters of the GBA+ framework were considered in the development of Criminal Code amendments in relation to conversion therapy. Those parameters for which there is available data, and that are more directly relevant to the issue of conversion therapy, were noted in the results of the application of the GBA+ framework: gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, age, race and income.

With regard to part (b), Department of Justice officials who are responsible for policy development and drafting relevant cabinet documents on conversion therapy prepare the GBA+ assessment with support from the Department of Justice GBA+ unit. The Minister of Justice is responsible for the final contents of the memorandum to cabinet, which includes the results of the application of the GBA+ analytical tool.

More generally, the deputy minister is responsible for providing overall leadership to support GBA+ in the Department of Justice. The senior assistant deputy minister, policy sector, is responsible for the GBA+ unit, provides leadership in the promotion, implementation and monitoring of GBA+ in the department, and advises senior management of their roles and responsibilities.

With regard to part (c), officials from the LGBTQ2 secretariat and the Department of Justice GBA+ unit were consulted in applying the GBA+ analytical tool.

With regard to part (d), the department's analysis identified the proportion of the population that identifies as homosexual, bisexual and transgender; the presence of higher rates of diagnosed mental disorders among LGBTQ2 Canadians than non-LGBTQ2 Canadians; and, that LGBTQ2 Canadians are disproportionately impacted by various types of victimization. The department drew from data of the Sex Now Survey and the 2019 TransPulse national study to note the proportion of respondents who reported having been exposed to conversion therapy. The GBA+ analysis also noted the association of conversion therapy with negative psychosocial health outcomes; the susceptibility of youth to conversion therapy's harms; and that transgender, indigenous and racial minority men and those earning lower incomes were more likely than cisgender, white and higher income men to have experienced conversion therapy. In the case of indigenous respondents, this may be a function of the lasting effects of colonization. In the case of transgender respondents, this may be a result of the double stigma experienced by those who are simultaneously part of sexual orientation and gender minorities.

With regard to part (e), since 2008, it has been mandatory to include GBA+ considerations in memoranda to cabinet. As such, the GBA+ assessment in this case was included in the memorandum to cabinet that presented options for the government's approach to Criminal Code amendments related to conversion therapy. The memorandum to cabinet is a Secret document subject to the Confidence of the Queen's Privy Council.

With regard to part (f), the GBA+ assessment is prepared for cabinet deliberations and is protected by cabinet confidence.

With regard to part (g), the information considered in the application of the GBA+ framework pointed to youth's greater vulnerability to the harms of conversion therapy, supporting Bill C-6's proposed comprehensive prohibition on causing a person under 18 to undergo conversion therapy, whether in Canada or abroad. The information considered also notes that some adults seek out conversion therapy, sometimes because of a conflict between their deeply held religious beliefs and their sexual orientation, and that in some cases, adults who voluntarily choose conversion therapy suffer harms as a result. This evidence supports Bill C-6's approach of permitting consenting adults to choose conversion therapy when it is offered free of charge, while still prohibiting profiting from, advertising or promoting conversion therapy, to reduce the presence of public messaging that is discriminatory and harmful towards LGBTQ2 communities.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

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.): Madam Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 472, 474, 475, 476 and

Routine Proceedings

477 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 472—**Mr. Kyle Seeback:**

With regard to repairs to the government's CC-150 Polaris aircraft that was damaged in a towing incident in October 2019: (a) what were the total costs of the repairs; (b) what is the itemized breakdown of (a); (c) on what date did the aircraft return to service; and (d) what is the expected remaining lifespan of the aircraft?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 474—**Ms. Rachel Blaney:**

With regard to Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) training at Veteran Affairs Canada (VAC), broken down by staff position, office location and year since 2010: (a) how many employees have taken the online GBA+ course offered by the Department for Women and Gender Equality; (b) how many employees have taken the GBA+ premium course offered by the Canadian School of Public Service; (c) how many staff have taken the half-day enhanced senior leadership training; (d) who is leading or delivering the training sessions; (e) how many training sessions have been offered; (f) has the enhanced senior leadership training been established as a requirement for onboarding of new senior leadership members; (g) has VAC developed or adapted tailored GBA+ tools; (h) how much was spent for training; (i) how much was spent on contractors and subcontractors; (j) of the contractors and subcontractors in (i), what is the initial and final value of each contract; (k) of the contractors and subcontractors in (i), what is the description of each service contract; and (l) have any applications for training been denied, and, if so, how many and why?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 475—**Mr. Jamie Schmale:**

With regard to the Development Finance Institute Canada (FinDev) and M-KOPA holdings, since May 1, 2017: (a) what is the total in dollar terms FinDev has invested in M-KOPA; (b) did any cabinet member approve the M-KOPA investments, and, if so, who and on what date; (c) how many M-KOPA shares were purchased, on what date, and at what unit price; (d) what percentage of all shares does FinDev own; (e) what is the predicted rate of return on FinDev's investment in M-KOPA in (i) two years, (ii) five years, (iii) ten years; (f) how many new jobs in Kenya are attributed to the FinDev investment; (g) what is the name and full-time job title of FinDev's observer at the M-KOPA board; (h) has FinDev or its board observer determined if M-KOPA employees, salespeople or agents are paid in compliance with Kenya's minimum wage; (i) has FinDev or its board observer approved executive pay to chief executive officer Jesse Moore of a minimum US\$250,000 per annum plus bonus and stock options; (j) has FinDev or its board observer determined if M-KOPA practices usury or charges customers criminal interest rates as defined by Canada's Criminal Code; (k) did FinDev or its board observer include an "Environmental and Social and Governance" clause in its agreement with M-KOPA; and (l) has FinDev or its board observer invoked any Environmental, Social and Governance breach in seeking a return of its original investment?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 476—**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:**

With regard to contracts signed by the government with the Bluesky Strategy Group or its principals, since December 1, 2019: for each contract, what are the details, including the (i) value, (ii) description of the service provided, (iii) date and duration, (iv) internal tracking or file number, (v) whether it was sole sourced?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders*Question No. 477—**Mr. Larry Maguire:**

With regard to Canada's former ambassador to the United States, David McNaughton: what are the names and titles of the officials or employees of the United States government that the ambassador met with between January 1, 2018, and October 31, 2019, broken down by (i) name and position, (ii) date and time of meeting, (iii) location of meeting, (iv) the agenda topics of each meeting?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for St. John's East had three minutes remaining for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member serves on the safety and security committee and, on February 22, there was an interesting motion that was passed by the committee and reported back to the House. In particular, as it related to the National Firearms Association and the comments it had made regarding some of the committee members, which were quite derogatory remarks at times, there was a motion to condemn these comments.

The member had to step out and another member of the NDP voted for him, but I am curious if he wants to comment on some of the tactics that have been used by the National Firearms Association and the comments it has been making. Perhaps he can inform this House how he would have voted had he not had to step out.

• (1225)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is surely an interesting question, but I will have to take it under advisement, because I was not present for that discussion. In fact, I am not fully apprised of the matters that were being discussed.

As sometimes ministers say, I will take the question on notice and get back to the member later.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I heard my colleague talking about a red flag regime that would help get guns out of the hands of people who pose a risk.

Would it not be simpler to completely ban the possession of weapons?

In some cases, would the use of this red flag regime not simply trigger someone who is a danger to themselves or others?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I am not sure that the hon. member and I are talking about the same thing.

The proposed red-flag legislation indicates an opportunity for a court to have guns or any firearm removed from a particular individual because of the individual's circumstances, which is something the police have access to now, but it would include a friend, neighbour or associate being able to make a similar application.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise to speak on behalf of my constituents in Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and on behalf of the Bloc Québécois as the public safety critic.

Gun control is not a simple subject. People cannot seem to agree on it. It evokes strong emotional reactions from some people and brings up extremely bad memories for others. It is a sensitive subject that deserves proper consideration. Although gun control does not please everyone and there are different ways of going about it, we have a social responsibility to control firearms in order to keep people safe. That is our duty as elected officials.

I have to say that we have been waiting for this gun bill. We have been waiting for it because the Liberals clearly and unequivocally promised to improve gun control during the 2019 election campaign. It was a firm commitment that gave many people a glimmer of hope.

My thoughts go out to the survivors of the shootings our country has seen in the past few years. My thoughts are with the lives lost to handguns or military-style assault weapons. My thoughts are with the loved ones and families of these victims. We are fighting for them, but also to ensure that tragedies such as the ones at the Quebec City mosque, Polytechnique and in Nova Scotia never happen again. There are others, but I will leave it at that. In fact, over the years, there have been far too many lives lost to firearms that have no place in our streets, our homes or in the hands of violent and unstable people.

We were expecting this bill, but we were certainly not expecting it to be so flawed. It seems the Liberal Party did not consult anyone in drafting this bill, because nobody is happy. Not the gun lobby, not friends and family of victims of mass shootings and not law-abiding gun owners who feel their rights are being violated.

Unfortunately, this bill is nowhere near good enough. It just passes the buck to others, such as municipalities across Quebec and Canada. This bill does not fix a thing. The most it does is make a few improvements to existing laws. It has a number of flaws that I will get into, but before I go there, I want to say that the Bloc Québécois agrees with the principle of the bill even though it is so deeply flawed for the reasons I mentioned.

I want to reiterate the importance of legislating gun control. Voting against the principle of this bill would mean tossing it in the trash without even giving it a chance to be improved and amended. The Bloc Québécois is willing to work and collaborate with the Liberal Party to make the bill more restrictive on some points and more logical on others. Despite our differences of opinion on how to get there, I think it is important that we come together and work together to ensure a safe environment for all Quebecers and Canadians.

I truly believe in collaborative work. Perhaps it is my naivete, as I am still in my early days in politics, but I believe in it and I hope to never stop believing in it. I hope I never become a cynic, because the ultimate goal—I hope and believe—is the same for all parliamentarians in the House: to keep our people safe. We debate with one another through our ideologies, our politics and our turf wars, but what we ultimately want is for our constituents to be safe. However, as long as weapons that were designed specifically for the battlefield are in the hands of civilians on our streets and in our homes, no one is safe, unfortunately.

I want to thank the members of Poly Remembers. I communicate regularly with them, and I want to thank them for their long struggle. I want to speak on their behalf and say that they are so exhausted by this 30-year struggle. They feel betrayed by the Prime Minister of Canada, who obviously did not keep his word. On many occasions, the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada looked the victims and their families in the eye and promised to prohibit military-style assault rifles.

Unfortunately, that is not what he is doing with this bill. Unfortunately, assault rifles are not banned, contrary to what the Liberal Party is saying. Only some popular models are banned. Most of these models will no longer be in circulation, but the current owners of these weapons will be able to keep them at home. The bill will not prevent someone who already owns one of these newly banned weapons from committing a crime. It is a half measure which, in my opinion, comes after another half-measure announced last May, prohibiting about 1,500 models of military-style assault rifles, while hundreds of models are still in circulation.

● (1230)

I should point out that there is no official definition of “assault weapon” in the Criminal Code, which makes banning them more complicated.

For examples, should all semi-automatic long guns be considered assault rifles, or only semi-automatic long guns with detachable magazines? This is a valid question and it should be clarified.

The government may have created its list based on the weapons used in mass murders in recent years, hoping to grab some headlines. However, based on the reaction from various groups advocating for controls on assault weapons, the government's announcement was clearly not a success.

When the government issued the ban last May, it committed to creating a buyback program. We figured that a federal government buyback program for military-style assault weapons would be mandatory for legal owners. We expected something similar to what was done in New Zealand.

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In response to the Christchurch massacre in 2019, the government of New Zealand, a country of 4.8 million people, launched a buyback program that apparently brought in more than 61,000 firearms and more than 188,000 parts. Before the initiative, police had estimated that there were between 55,000 and 240,000 of the newly prohibited firearms in the country.

These newly banned weapons belonged to some 32,000 gun owners who received a total of \$100 million New Zealand, or approximately \$87 million Canadian, in compensation for complying with the legislation, so we see that the program was relatively successful. It is certainly better than a voluntary buyback program.

What guarantee is there that the owners will sell their weapons back to the government in good faith? The people who acquired these types of weapons completely illegally are certainly not the kind of people who are going to raise their hands and politely hand their guns over to the government in exchange for a few hundred dollars.

That is what I do not understand about the government's measure. By not making the buyback program mandatory, the government has made it completely voluntary.

Philip Alpers is an associate professor at the Sydney School of Public Health in Australia and a gun control expert who has studied buyback initiatives. In a recent Canadian Press article, he said that optional programs, as opposed to compulsory ones, have a greater chance of missing the mark of making communities safer. In fact, many studies show that a voluntary buyback is the most likely to fail.

He talked about how arms buyback programs in Australia and New Zealand, for example, not only prohibited certain firearms but also included stiff penalties for those who did not turn in their weapons. The fact that these programs included penalties for those who did not turn in their weapons made all the difference in those two countries. Right now, as written, Bill C-21 would allow owners to keep their weapons under certain conditions, including safe storage. This clearly shows how important it is to make the buyback program mandatory.

During a press conference, the Minister of Public Safety said that the Canadian government did not know how many military-style weapons were in circulation in Canada, which is why it did not make buyback mandatory. That makes absolutely no sense because, if he is not sure those people will turn in their weapons, then what makes him think they would even register them?

PolySeSouvient called for a mandatory program last May when the new order in council was announced because, it held, “each weapon that remains in private hands constitutes a risk”. It is important to note that most of the mass shootings in Canada were committed by legal gun owners. That is important to keep in mind when deciding whether to make a buyback program mandatory or not.

Government Orders

Last March, exhausted by the struggle it had been waging for so many years, the group PolySeSouvient said that if the Prime Minister did not significantly amend his bill, he would no longer be welcome at the Polytechnique memorial ceremonies. PolySeSouvient sees the bill as a “smokescreen” that would place an additional burden on individuals, in other words, legislation that unfairly targets responsible gun owners but not criminals. I could not agree with them more.

Introducing Bill C-21 was nevertheless a great way to bring the ban full circle and move forward with a legislative ban on military-style assault weapons, as promised by the Liberal Party during the 2019 election campaign.

I will not mince my words. Not only does this show how untrustworthy the Liberals are on this issue, it proves that they are not taking it seriously. First, the Liberals are not keeping their word. Second, they continue to pretend that a voluntary buyback program will actually curb the gun problem in this country. We must not kid ourselves.

The fact that weapons do not need to be rendered inoperable for storage when people choose to keep them in their homes is also enormously problematic. At the very least, weapons should have to be disassembled before being stored, which would make their immediate use much more difficult.

Even if regulations prevent people from using their newly banned weapon, if they have it within reach when a conflict occurs, nothing would prevent them from causing irreparable harm.

• (1235)

That is not the only thing in this bill that does not make sense.

Members will recall the 2019 election campaign, during which the leader of the Liberal Party would tell anyone who would listen that he was the candidate who would bring in stricter gun control measures in Canada, unlike his Conservative opponent, who would eliminate these measures. That was an election promise, made to distinguish his party from the other major party.

Once the Liberal Party came to power, it started looking into how it could keep its promise and satisfy one side without losing too much support from the other. The Liberals then had a genius idea. Since they had committed to introducing gun control measures, they could simply delegate that task to municipalities. If that plan worked, all the better, because the Liberals would have kept their promise. If the plan did not work, it would be the municipalities' problem, not the Liberals'.

In Bill C-21, the federal government is asking some 5,600 Canadian municipalities to implement their own handgun storage measures in their jurisdictions, whether it be storage at home or within municipal borders. The ban could go so far as to prohibit the transportation of weapons within the municipality. This means that the 5,600 or so Canadian municipalities could decide to implement completely different measures.

There are about 1,400 municipalities in Quebec. In my riding of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia alone, there are 56 municipalities and two indigenous territories. You will travel 15 kilometres if you start at Sainte-Angèle-de-Mérici in the interior and

travel to Sainte-Flavie, which is on the river, going through the village of Saint-Joseph-de-Lepage and downtown Mont-Joli, which is one of the four largest cities in my riding. In those 15 kilometres, there could be four different handgun regulations.

It would seem that the government floated this idea without thinking it through. Also, I have to say that municipal budgets are quite tight. The government is ready to throw this whole thing in their court without telling them when, how or why. It would leave to others the task of passing thousands of totally disparate and inconsistent regulations. That would be a real fiasco.

The Liberal government is completely shirking its responsibilities. It is clear that it has no intention of banning handguns.

Right away, the City of Montreal criticized the fact that the government was missing a golden opportunity to enact legislation that would establish clear, consistent, effective rules for the country as a whole. Montreal mayor Valérie Plante reiterated her demand and called on the federal government to help implement better gun control measures just days after a 15-year-old girl was killed in a shooting in Saint-Léonard. That was Montreal's fifth homicide of the year. She was an innocent bystander who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, according to media reports. The City of Toronto had more than 462 shootings in 2020. The problem of illegal weapons changing hands and often ending up in the hands of young people is now back on the agenda. This is a scourge, especially in Canada's big cities.

Bill C-21 does not resolve that problem. The government is promising to combat gun smuggling and trafficking, but it is not necessarily putting more resources at the border. Obviously, we know that guns do not magically find their way into the hands of young people. Nearly 250 prohibited weapons were seized in Dundee in March, and a 24-year-old man was arrested. He owns a house that straddles the U.S. border in an area that is historically known for smuggling because of its geographic location. Heaven knows what other young people could have ended up with those weapons. This shows just how real smuggling and trafficking are, and not just in the big cities. It is also happening in our regions, like in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield.

To come back to handguns, we see that, once again, the government did not consult anyone before introducing the bill, certainly not the cities. The Union des municipalités du Québec, or UMQ, also spoke out against some provisions of the bill, including the fact that the government is attempting to transfer responsibility for handgun control to the cities when that does not fall under their jurisdiction. The cities obviously do not want to take on that responsibility. The UMQ joined its voice to that of the Fédération québécoise des municipalités, which has also spoken out against this tactic. Others quickly joined them, including the mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, and the mayor of Gatineau, Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, who said they were disappointed with Ottawa's plans. That says a lot.

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Then the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously approved a motion calling for this power to be delegated to Quebec City rather than to the municipalities. The idea of implementing a single regulation that would apply to Quebec as a whole, rather than thousands of different ones, has been relatively well received. That would obviously suit the federal government, which would get to offload its responsibility either way, so that seems to be the ideal situation.

There is a problem though. The Government of Quebec appears to have agreed to the motion too hastily and may not be too keen to re-engage in this kind of debate after the intense negotiations over the gun registry a few years back.

• (1240)

Furthermore, the Quebec government, like that of any other province, can already pass legislation or regulate handguns within its borders if it wanted to. The federal government would not necessarily have to delegate that power. It should be noted that this is not on the Quebec government's political agenda either.

As a member of the Bloc Québécois, I would normally be in favour of delegating more powers to Quebec. This time, however, this really bugs me. I get the impression that the federal government wants to cut and run. The government was the one that committed to controlling handguns, so it should be the one taking action, instead of punting responsibility to whoever will take it. It should just keep its promises.

I want to come back to the problem of illegal guns. Most of the handguns used by gangs and criminal groups are illegal, whether they have been stolen from citizens or not. We need to make these weapons harder to access here, while also stopping imports of illegal firearms at the U.S. border.

Leaving it up to municipalities or provinces to ban guns within their borders does not solve the problem. Ottawa would have to ban handguns nationwide to have any effect. However, Ottawa does not have the political courage and prefers to delegate.

I just want to clarify that since the beginning of my speech, I have been talking about handguns and military-style assault weapons. Twelve-gauge and 10-gauge hunting rifles are not covered by last May's ban or this bill. Hunters can continue to hunt without fear. Killing an animal for food is not the same as using a weapon that is capable of firing off dozens of bullets within seconds and that is explicitly designed to kill a lot of people in a short amount of time.

We are also talking about guns that can easily be modified to make them even deadlier. Those are the guns we want banned, and I completely agree with the government on that score.

However, the bill sidesteps the problem. The point is to ban assault weapons, not for the purpose of preventing sport shooters from using them at shooting ranges, but for the purpose of preventing people from being killed. Unfortunately, we see that this bill only prevents sport shooters from safely using their guns and does not prevent massacres.

I also want to touch on another problem created by this bill. We were shocked to see that the government was trying to restrict

paintball and airsoft activities through a provision that considered certain replica guns used in these activities as prohibited weapons.

Once again, the government made things up as it went along and did not consult stakeholders, which is what I heard from the Fédération Sportive d'Airsoft du Québec. Gun shop owners were not consulted either. They often sell their products to police forces, but overnight, they found themselves saddled with hundreds of newly prohibited weapons, with no instructions from the government on what to do with them. The bill was introduced quite some time after last May's ban. It has been a few months since the bill was introduced, and gun shop owners still do not know what to do with the hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of stock gathering dust on their shelves.

Coming back to replica assault-style weapons, there is some basis for the government's desire to ban them. Police officers could resort to lethal force if they are called to a scene where they believe a real weapon is being used, which means there is also the risk of collateral damage to innocent people. We owe our police forces our unwavering support.

The government could have looked at what is being done elsewhere. For instance, in the United States, air guns must have an orange tip on the barrel, which helps identify them as imitation firearms. Requiring clear markings on replica guns would be an adequate compromise, and at committee, we will definitely ask the government to look at this possibility rather than abruptly banning an activity enjoyed by hundreds of Quebecers. I agree that the government must provide greater oversight over the sale of paintball and airsoft guns, but it could do that while respecting those who practise these activities safely.

After consultations with Quebecers from across the province, gun control advocacy groups, gun rights groups, gun shop owners, hunters, sport shooters, paintball and airsoft enthusiasts, and firing range owners, it is clear that this bill is definitely flawed.

To reiterate what I said at the beginning of my speech, even though we would like to throw this bill in the trash and start over, time is running out and we should at least give it a chance. That is what we will do in committee. However, I want to be transparent. If significant changes are not made to the bill, or the bill is not changed at all, and the buyback program for military-style assault weapons is not made mandatory, we will simply vote against the bill.

I would like to remind members that the Liberal Party promised many times to ban assault weapons and restrict handguns. It is not keeping either of those promises with this bill as it now stands. The Bloc Québécois is prepared to work with the government to keep our fellow citizens safe.

• (1245)

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her work at the public safety committee. It is a pleasure to work with her there.

Government Orders

The hon. member was talking about the airsoft industry. I want to make it clear that the legislation would not put it out of business. What it will do is exactly what she has said. It will change the weapon so that it has orange on it or is transparent, ensuring that it does not look like a real weapon. Chiefs of police have been calling for this for years. The Winnipeg police said that 215 crimes last year were committed with these weapons, which are indistinguishable.

Does the hon. member have any comment on the call from the police for us to make sure these weapons are in fact banned?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. It is also a pleasure for me to work with her at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I was pleased to hear what she said. I believe this lack of information is causing confusion. Groups were not consulted and are unaware of the details of the bill. They are concerned about what might happen.

The fact that the government is prepared to change the law to make toy guns safer by painting the end of the barrel will certainly make a lot of people happy. As she said, police chiefs know what they are talking about and they have to be consulted first. I totally agree with her.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals' so-called municipal handgun ban has been widely criticized by law enforcement. For instance, former OPP commissioner Chris Lewis characterized it as "ridiculous". The hon. member accurately noted that it would create a confusing patchwork from municipality to municipality.

Does the hon. member agree that the effect of this measure would be to target law-abiding firearms owners, while doing next to nothing to enhance public safety?

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

It would be a complete mess if nearly 5,600 municipalities had different rules.

As I said, it was not the municipalities who promised to control handguns, it was the federal government. The Liberal Party made this promise during its election campaign before being elected. Once in power, it delegated this responsibility and washed its hands of it. In fact, it did not keep its word.

I want the government to keep its word. The government is the one that promised to control handguns, it is the one that should bring in one rule for the entire country.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her nuanced, intelligent and well-informed speech.

The NDP supports the Liberal government's plan to ban and remove from circulation military-style assault weapons, the sole purpose of which is to kill a lot of human beings. We will all be much safer once these machine guns and submachine guns no longer exist.

What does my colleague think of the half-baked voluntary buyback program that the Liberal government is proposing?

I find it really hard to understand the government's argument that it will ban the use of these weapons. People will not be able to use these weapons, up until the day that they do use them, at a school, a mosque or a church.

What does this mean for our safety in the medium and long term?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his kind words.

That is the crux of the problem. People do not use something until they do. I mentioned this problem in my speech.

There is a big difference between having an assembled weapon and a disassembled weapon at home. The person would not be able to immediately use the weapon in a dispute or in reaction to something. They would have to assemble the weapon that is stored safely in order to prevent them from doing something that cannot be undone.

The very fact that the buyback program is voluntary is a problem. The Bloc Québécois wants this program to be mandatory and wants the government to buy back weapons from gun owners at cost.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. My previous colleague put it very well when he said that she gave a very nuanced speech on a very sensitive issue.

As the critic for the status of women, I have had the opportunity to consider the firearms issue. I would like to continue in the same vein and hear what my colleague has to say about the fact that the buyback program will be voluntary rather than mandatory. The government often gives the example of New Zealand to say that mandatory buyback programs do not work.

In her speech, my colleague spoke about Mr. Alpers from Australia. Experts like him are saying that voluntary buyback programs are far more likely to fail. Other analysts are saying that it is spreading misinformation to say that the program in New Zealand did not work. However, the government often uses this argument to tell us that mandatory buyback programs do not work.

Can my colleague tell us a little more about that?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that very good question.

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What is misinformation is to say that what New Zealand and Australia did is not working. Those countries have recovered hundreds of thousands of weapons. If participation is voluntary, we can assume that some people will turn in their weapons while others may not. It is entirely possible that no weapons will be turned in.

I think the people behind this misinformation campaign are acting in bad faith in general when it comes to gun control. They say the program does not work, but it clearly worked in New Zealand. Canada should follow suit.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know the member is on the public safety committee. She was present during the February 22 meeting when a motion was brought forward regarding comments that were made by the National Firearms Association after the bill was introduced. Some of those comments were extremely disparaging and, quite frankly, attacked members of Parliament, including members of the committee, and indeed members of the community who had been advocates.

I am wondering if the member could comment on how she voted on that motion. What does she see as potential issues with the narrative that is coming out and with people talking like that regarding legislation and the committee, and committee members specifically?

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I was indeed at the February 22 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security during which members heard some alarming statements about the safety of people who attempt to control guns, including committee members.

My Liberal Party colleague asked us to condemn those statements. I voted in favour of the motion because I, too, think such statements deserve to be condemned. As I said, we have a responsibility to society to control firearms, and nobody should be saying that kind of thing to us because of it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

I am not sure, but I think the effectiveness of the mandatory program in New Zealand is a contentious issue, and the program has received a lot of criticism. I wonder if my colleague could share the source of the information she used to support her position.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her relevant question.

I looked at the figures and statistics provided by the New Zealand government on the number of weapons recovered by authorities. I have already mentioned the work of Professor Philip Alpers of the University of Sydney, in Australia, an expert in the field, who has studied the differences between voluntary and mandatory buyback programs to demonstrate how well they have worked.

As I said earlier, collecting hundreds of thousands of weapons rather than none at all is in itself indicative of the program's success.

[*English*]

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with my colleague from Provencher.

At about this time last year, the Liberal government announced at the start of the COVID health crisis, when Parliament was shuttered, that by using its vast regulatory powers it was banning the use, sale and importation of more than 1,500 makes and models of legally purchased firearms. This was done without Parliament's authority and without a vote or even a debate among MPs. It was, in my opinion, undemocratic, and in the eyes of many it was an illegitimate order.

Law-abiding firearm owners follow it, as they must and always do, but many feel their democratic rights have been stripped away. The Liberals turned hundreds and maybe thousands of my constituents, and many tens of thousands of responsible law-abiding firearm owners across Canada, into criminals overnight with the signing of this regulatory order.

Today we debate Bill C-21, which builds on the government's regulatory order and will continue to target and harass Canadian hunters, farmers and recreational firearm users. What Bill C-21 will not do is improve public safety. Worse, the federal government is using Bill C-21 to resurrect the failed Liberal long-gun registry.

The Minister of Public Safety will deny it. He will get angry too, along with many Liberal MPs—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members to turn their microphones off, please. It is very disturbing to those who are trying to give their speeches in the House.

The hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest.

• (1300)

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, the Minister of Public Safety will deny it. He will get angry too, along with many Liberal MPs. They will do that instead of replying to the substance of their policy, their own legislation.

Listen to the minister's response this week when answering my Conservative colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe during question period. He said:

There is no gun registry in the country. It is one of the reasons in the legislation we have brought forward that we will require people who are in possession of these now prohibited weapons to register them properly, so we can have a precise calculation of where these guns are.

By the minister's own description of the legislation, the Liberals intend to resurrect a long-gun registry.

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That is not all. The bill misses its mark elsewhere and will waste resources in other ways as well.

Bill C-21 hopes to set up a voluntary purchase program, what Liberals call a “buyback” of the firearms the government made illegal last year. What is Ottawa proposing to purchase? It is lawfully obtained firearms as well as heirlooms and tools. Many are worth thousands of dollars because of their rarity, age and calibre.

The Minister of Public Safety recently said that the government did not know how many firearms would fall under its confiscation program, yet he also claimed elsewhere that in the range of 200,000 firearms, at an average cost of \$1,300 per firearm, would be covered. At the low end of estimates, this will cost taxpayers somewhere in the range of \$250 million, but other experts have said that the Liberals' voluntary confiscation program could cost the treasury billions of dollars.

As many members know, under the current Liberal government, our country's national debt surpasses the debt of every other government before it since Confederation. To the Liberals, a few more billion dollars wasted is not something to worry about. That is because they believe the budget will balance itself.

For some reason, the Liberals believe that creating more red tape for law-abiding firearms owners in confiscating their property will somehow stop gang and gun violence in Toronto. They are so confident this is a proven solution that they have even introduced another terribly flawed piece of legislation, Bill C-22, which doles out softer sentences for criminals who commit offences with a firearm. The Liberals are soft on crime. They are more concerned about standing up for the so-called rights of criminals than defending our communities.

We on this side of the House believe that victims of crime should have the first claim on our compassion. We also believe laws should achieve results, which Bill C-21 would not do. Indeed, Bill C-22 would even make communities less safe.

Unlike the Liberals, the Conservatives know our justice system must put more emphasis on responding to victims than catering to criminals.

The crimes the Liberals hope to prevent are committed by criminals who will never follow the laws and regulations of legal firearm ownership in Canada. Despite the Liberal order in council firearm ban last May, there were 462 Toronto shootings in 2020, an increase over 2018. After the Liberals brought in their firearms ban last year, the precursor to Bill C-21, the rate of shootings in Toronto did not go down but up. Why? Because law-abiding gun owners are not the source of gun crime in Toronto.

As a Conservative MP in 2012, I was proud to vote to abolish the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry. It cost taxpayers almost \$2 billion, yet it did not protect the public from gun crime. Instead, it needlessly targeted law-abiding Canadians and tied up police resources.

The Conservatives went further than simply abolishing it. We also enacted tougher legislation on the illegal use of firearms, something I know we tried to pass in this Parliament as well, but was voted down by opposition parties.

As well, the Conservatives also made changes when they were in government and the data collected on firearm owners from the long-gun registry was destroyed so that a future federal government could not resurrect it after promising not to do so. One could say that the Conservative government passed measures 10 years ago to stop Liberal tricks. I say tricks, because in the last election, we saw Liberals across the country, especially in rural ridings, promise that a re-elected Liberal government would not bring back the long-gun registry. However, the Minister of Public Safety's answer in question period shows otherwise; that Bill C-21 would create a new registry.

As the member of Parliament for New Brunswick Southwest, I represent thousands of law-abiding firearms owners. Each was schooled on how to use firearms responsibly, how to care for them and how to store long guns. Each was approved by the RCMP to purchase, own and use his or her firearms legally.

• (1305)

These law-abiding citizens already follow some of the world's strictest laws pertaining to firearm ownership. They are moms and fathers, grandparents, sisters, brothers and, in some cases, kids. They are friends and they are neighbours. They pay their taxes and follow the rules. They enjoy spending their leisure time at a range or hunting deer, birds and moose in the woods.

These law-abiding firearm owners strive to follow all the rules and regulations on firearm ownership as outlined by the RCMP. Safety for them is not an afterthought but the chief objective whenever they use a firearm. I have seen this first-hand, as I have gone shooting with them on many occasions.

People should not take my word for it. They should go to the range themselves and watch. For every person, it is safety first. It is always about safety first. Why? Because they are responsible Canadians.

As well, many of them are legally allowed to possess restricted firearms. Under the Firearms Act, the RCMP scans their names through the Canadian Police Information Centre every single day. I did not misspeak. Every single day, checks are made.

Unfortunately, to the Liberals, these men and women are threats. They are practically criminals in their eyes. The act of them legally purchasing a firearm is seen as dangerous. The Minister of Public Safety has taken it upon himself to overreach into provincial authority and attempt to confiscate legally purchased property at taxpayer expense.

Bill C-21 as well as Bill C-22 are flawed bills that are poorly thought out and make our communities unsafe.

After the tragic killings in Nova Scotia last year, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety shared a briefing with parliamentarians. Those who joined the government's technical call on the Liberal order in council firearm ban last year will recall the exchange. When asked, "Would anything announced today in this prohibition have changed what occurred in Nova Scotia and how he accessed those illegal firearms?", the parliamentary secretary for Public Safety replied, "*C'est pas l'objectif*". That is not the bill's objective.

Other than using a national tragedy to vilify and harass law-abiding firearm owners, what would Bill C-21 achieve?

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I take issue with a couple of things in my hon. colleague's remarks. At the onset of his speech, he talked about this being an undemocratic exercise of the government's discretion. Then he just talked about using a national tragedy as a rationale for bringing this policy forward.

I have no problem debating the member on the merits of the bill. What I take issue with is he knows an order in council is the legitimate way to prohibit weapons under the Criminal Code. He also knows this was in the Liberal Party platform.

Will he at least admit that this was the legitimate way for our government to go about prohibiting firearms, that it was also in our platform and that it was not as a result of the tragedy that happened in Nova Scotia?

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, just because something is technically legal does not mean it should be acted upon. It was part of the Liberal platform, but the forum to bring forward these changes is Parliament. However, the Prime Minister brought these forward at a time of the health crisis, when Parliament was closed and there was no room for debate. It was a technically legal manoeuvre, but it was not the right way to go about this, because it shut out MPs who represent voters across the country and who had no say at that time.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would first like to tell you that I am a granddaughter and a cousin in a family of hunters and fishers. In my view, Bill C-21 is not an attack on responsible gun owners and hunters. My colleague also mentioned this in her speech.

The bill deals with two different issues; one is firearms trafficking, and the other is possession of firearms by criminal groups. It is possible to reduce crimes committed with illegal weapons and to counter the proliferation of legal weapons at the same time.

Government Orders

With respect to criminal groups, I would like to hear more from my colleague about the importance of ensuring better control of firearms trafficking at the border.

This is something several groups have called for to ensure that we are protected against criminal organizations.

• (1310)

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Bill C-21 affects thousands of hunters, fishers and people living in rural areas by making them out to be criminals. This is bad legislation.

With regard to the border, when firearms are not registered, the penalties should be more severe. We, Conservatives, introduced a bill on that, but it was blocked by the government and some opposition MPs. Furthermore, Bill C-21 would weaken penalties for the illegal aspects.

[English]

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member touched on a theme, and I want to ask him a question on it.

The focus of the legislation, I know for my rural constituents, seems to be targeting exactly the wrong people. I note that right after this bill was brought in, the government brought in Bill C-22, which would lessen the sentencing for robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, using a firearm in the commission of an offence and possession of a weapon obtained by the commission of an offence. The government is lowering the sentences for those offences committed by actual criminals, while Bill C-21 seems to be targeting the wrong people entirely, the non-criminals.

Could the hon. member please comment on that?

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, that is my point. These two bills have to be looked at in conjunction.

On the one hand, Bill C-21 targets law-abiding Canadians by turning them into criminals, penalizing them. On the other hand, Bill C-22 lessens the criminal sanctions on the illegal use of firearms.

It makes no sense, and a Conservative government would do the exact opposite.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege for me to speak to Bill C-21, and I want to thank my colleague, the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, for sharing his time with me today.

Keeping our communities safe is one of the primary responsibilities of government. Whenever we find ourselves lying in bed or walking in a park, or are at work or in a classroom, every Canadian should be able to live without the fear of violence. To that end, Canada has some of the strictest laws in the world when it comes to firearms.

Government Orders

Indeed, Canadian firearms owners are among the strongest advocates for firearm safety and common-sense firearms laws. To me, that makes sense, but when left-leaning governments want to be seen as cracking down on gun violence and gang activity, law-abiding firearms owners take the brunt of their focus and become the target.

The problem with that approach, of course, is that registered firearms owners are not typically the ones committing any acts of violence. This means that a credible approach to tackling gun violence needs to focus on the criminals and gangs who have no regard for Canada's firearms laws and who use illegal guns in the commission of violence. Any other focus is simply virtue signalling and window dressing.

The reality is that the vast majority of gun crimes are committed with illegally obtained firearms. At least 80% of the guns used in Canadian gun crimes are illegally smuggled in from the United States. This is not particularly shocking, given that Canada and the United States have the world's longest undefended border. We are also aware that it is considerably easier to purchase firearms in the U.S. This is a reality that we must recognize in any Canadian legislative response.

Bill C-21 does not take these facts into account, which is why I was pleased to support my colleague, the member for Markham—Unionville, who put forward Bill C-238 to amend the Criminal Code to increase penalties for those alleged to be in possession of a firearm unlawfully imported into Canada and to increase the mandatory minimum penalty for the possession of such weapons.

During his speech on his bill, the member shared that he met with community leaders and law enforcement and asked them what steps the federal government ought to take to make the community safer. This was his response:

The thing I heard over and over at these meetings was that organized crime was behind the shootings, and the streets are flooded with guns smuggled from across the border. Mostly they are handguns because they are easy to smuggle, hide and carry. That should not be shocking news to anyone. Our farmers, hunters and sports shooters are not fuelling a crime wave. The shootings are gang-related, with innocent people getting caught in the crossfire.

Bill C-238 was a common-sense bill that would have taken real action to address the serious issue that we are talking about today. However, the Liberals voted against it. They actually helped to defeat it. It was a bill that would have imposed tougher sentences for criminal smuggling and on those who were found in possession of illegal firearms. If the Liberals had wanted to show that they were serious about gun violence, they should have supported Bill C-238.

Then we have Bill C-22 on the heels of Bill C-21. It was introduced by the Liberals only one day after Bill C-21. In Bill C-21, the Liberals claim to be cracking down on gun violence, and in Bill C-22, the Liberals are proposing to repeal minimum penalties for firearms-related crimes such as unauthorized possession of a prohibited firearm or weapon that had been trafficked, discharge with the intent to wound or endanger, and robbery with a firearm. These are all part of what Bill C-22 is proposing to reduce the minimum sentences for.

How disconnected does one have to be to introduce, one day, a bill that would supposedly crack down on gun violence, and the next introduce a bill that would reduce penalties for gun crime?

I speak regularly with local firearms owners. These individuals know and understand the value of well-crafted firearms legislation.

● (1315)

They understand their responsibilities as firearms owners and they respect the rules that are in place, but they do not understand why the Liberal government continues to target them knowing full well that the problem does not lie with them, but with criminals and gangs.

It is not just firearms owners who do not understand this. Law enforcement voices have also raised concerns. The National Police Federation said, “Costly and current legislation, such as the Order in Council prohibiting various firearms and the proposed buyback program by the federal government targeted at legal firearm owners, does not address these current and emerging themes or urgent threats to public safety.”

The head of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said, “The firearms laws in Canada are actually very good right now. They're very strict.” He added:

There are lots of law-abiding citizens out there who do possess guns for very legitimate purposes. When you look at the steps you have to go through to possess a firearm in Canada, it's actually quite rigorous. Once you do get a license, the actual purchasing, the transportation, the storage...all of that has very strict laws in Canada.

In my province of Manitoba, Winnipeg Police Service inspector Max Waddell said that while a ban on all guns might seem, and I emphasize the word “seem”, like a common-sense approach, banning guns wouldn't necessarily stop gun violence:

I'll draw a parallel. Illicit drugs are also banned. Yet we see dramatic increases and challenges around methamphetamine... [because] it's that supply and demand force that causes individuals to obtain these firearms whether it's to protect their drug trade, prevent harm, to use it for extortion. Whatever the criminal element is needing these guns for.

Further, Winnipeg Police Service spokesman Constable Rob Carver did not mince words at all. He said Bill C-21 “won't make any difference whatsoever.”

Despite the unequivocal evidence that gun violence is perpetrated by criminals using illegal guns, perhaps the most bizarre part of Bill C-21 is that it goes after airsoft guns.

In rural Manitoba, chances are that people have used airsoft guns personally or at least have family and friends who have done so, shooting cans from across the yard or strapping on a pair of goggles for a friendly match. As it stands, Bill C-21 will ban all airsoft guns outright, most BB guns and some paintball models in Canada as well. This bill would destroy a pastime enjoyed by over 64,000 players across Canada and risk an industry worth \$100 million to the Canadian economy. Half the businesses in Canada tailored to these harmless hobbies expect to close for good, causing some 1,500 Canadians to lose their jobs in the process. This is silly and does absolutely nothing to address real gun violence in Canada.

Earlier this year, 36,600 Canadians signed a petition to stop Bill C-21's attempt to shut down airsoft and paintball. Among other calls, they simply asked the government to recognize that airsoft and paintball do not represent any public risk, and that banning them would not improve public safety. Signatories hailed from every province and territory, with Ontario and Quebec making strong showings alongside western provinces.

Canadians are rightly frustrated with this. Why is the Liberal government's plan to take legal firearms off the ranges and ban toys? We need a bill that addresses gun smuggling. We need a bill that goes after gangs. We need a bill that prevents criminals from getting access to illegal guns, and Bill C-21 is not it. Bill C-21 is a smokescreen. The bill would have no impact on the illicit use of illegal firearms in crime. Criminals do not register their guns. They obtain their guns illegally. Gangs do not register their illegally obtained guns.

The Liberals propose to give municipalities the power to create local firearms bylaws. Why would we expect that this bill would have any impact on public safety?

• (1320)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, in my short time in politics, I have been to more funerals for young people lost to gun violence in my riding than I have for members of my own family. The Conservatives have reversed course on income trusts, they have reversed course on same-sex marriage, they have reversed course even on the price on pollution. You cannot do it for the love of Yonathan, or Q or Mikey or Reese, for 22 in Nova Scotia, for six in Quebec City, for 14 in Montreal, but for the love of God, can you do it for their families?

I broke with party ranks and supported your private member's bill. For the love of my city, for the love of the families, could you please reverse course and save these families more grief? Why can't you change your minds? Leave the gun lobby behind.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address all questions and comments through the Chair and not to the individual members.

The hon. member for Provencher.

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his passion for safety for children, youth and the citizens in his riding, and indeed right across Canada.

Government Orders

I too want to extend my sympathies to those who have lost loved ones, and I share regrets for folks who have lost their lives due to gun violence.

I appreciate that this member stood with Conservatives to support C-238, because it was a common-sense measure that actually attacked gang violence and gun violence in a meaningful way. Bill C-21 does not do that. If it did, we would be taking a hard look at it. We would be supportive of this bill, but as Bill C-21 stands, it will do absolutely nothing to address the violence he is talking about.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to come back to the problem in Montreal that my colleague asked a question about earlier. The mayor of Montreal has asked the government to tackle the handgun issue, and the Quebec National Assembly has unanimously called for the government to consider this problem and address it.

Quebec is concerned about this issue and has been having this debate since the tragedy at École Polytechnique. This event left a mark on all of Quebec.

When she spoke about Bill C-21 earlier, my colleague explained that the bill could be sent to committee and improved. If we do not sit down together, we will not be able to propose improvements.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the fact that amendments could be proposed in committee, about the fact that we could at least rework this incomplete bill that no one seems happy with, and about the fact that it is important to sit down and work together, so we can help reduce crime in urban areas.

• (1325)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, that is a good question. Why not study it at committee? The answer actually is quite simple. The Liberals have indicated that they are not open to amendments, first of all, so it is almost pointless to bring it to committee. It is a bad bill. It is not going to reduce gun violence or criminal activity.

The fact of the matter is that firearms used in perpetration of crimes are typically purchased illegally. They are used by criminals. Changing the laws and attacking law-abiding farmers, sports shooters and firearms owners will not address the problems that this member has raised.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree that illegal guns coming across the border are very concerning, but I know that when the Conservative government was in power it cut over 1,000 jobs in the CBSA that directly dealt with this. Now we see the Liberal government not getting anywhere close to replacing those.

Does the member feel that we need to see those jobs increase, so that we see a decrease in illegal guns coming into Canada?

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, that was a great question. Do we support having an increased focus on addressing crime and illegal guns that are being smuggled in from the United States? We know that is primarily where they are being smuggled in from. When I look at the incident that happened in Nova Scotia, the records indicate that those guns were smuggled in from the United States. That was done illegally and they were possessed illegally.

We would be very supportive of focusing increased efforts to reduce that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before resuming debate, I want to remind the hon. member that there are only three minutes for the debate. He will be able to continue later on.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-21, even if just for a couple of minutes today, and I will continue the next time it is before the House.

I am very pleased that this legislation has come forward, and I say this as somebody who has a lot of hunters in his family. My mother comes from a family of seven children, and all three of her brothers are hunters. One owns a hunting lodge property that he hunts on near Westport, Ontario. My father-in-law comes from a hunting and fishing lodge, where he, his father and grandfather, three generations, trained hunters. They brought people from throughout North America to Plevna, Ontario, where they hunted and fished.

I was very pleased to see, and to have heard from my family members, that the bill does not concern them. Because of some of the fearmongering from various organizations and political parties, a lot of concern was raised by them. However, once I was able to sit down with them and explain exactly what the situation was, they did not have an issue with it. Quite frankly, they do not believe in guns that are designed to inflict the maximum possible human damage, and they are not interested in using them when they are hunting at a hunting and fishing lodge or when they are sport shooting.

There is a real complexity to this, and I am trying to understand where the Conservatives are coming from and why they seem to be so opposed to it. I have started to put some of that together in my mind, which I plan to share when the bill next comes back for debate. It is important that we start to look at why the Conservatives are so opposed to this, and look at some of the actions they have taken along the way to get us here. I look forward to doing that the next time the bill is before the House.

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have 17 minutes and 39 seconds the next time this matter is before the House.

[Translation]

It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ) moved that Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (pension plans and group insurance plans), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to my bill, Bill C-253. I want to start by thanking my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville for her invaluable support, both practical and symbolic, in the development and drafting of this bill.

I must admit I am experiencing some *déjà vu*. In 2017, during the previous Parliament, I introduced Bill C-372, which was very similar to the one we are debating today. The House was unfortunately dissolved before Bill C-372 could be put to a vote, but I hope to see this new version get passed.

For a bit of background, I will have to go back in time to talk about how Bill C-253 came to be. Cliffs Natural Resources, a wealthy U.S. multinational mining corporation, once had affiliates in my riding, in Sept-Îles and at Bloom Lake near Fermont. The company employed many of my constituents and people from Labrador, and it was part of the lives of many North Shore workers for many years.

In 2015, the company filed for creditor protection for its Sept-Îles and Bloom Lake affiliates under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. After declaring bankruptcy for these affiliates, the company announced it was ending group insurance for its pensioners and slashing their retirement fund. By discontinuing contributions to the pension fund, Cliffs Natural Resources ran up a \$30-million solvency deficit, which was taken from the workers.

Some 700 pensioners, people from my region and from my riding, lost their group insurance and nearly 25% of their pension fund in the Cliffs Natural Resources disaster, but that is not all. These people were forced into an extremely tenuous situation. They expected a peaceful, secure retirement but suddenly found themselves on the brink of ruin. They had no inkling that financial worries and trouble would come back to haunt them.

Private Members' Business

Fortunately, the Cliffs Natural Resources pensioners, or their widows or spouses, as the case may be, did receive compensation. It was thanks not to the House's legislative efforts but to the tenacity of the Cliffs pensioners' association and the support of United Steelworkers that they were partially compensated for the money that was stolen from them.

The purpose of Bill C-253 is to make sure we never see another tragedy like the ones that have happened in our community, or with other companies, such as White Birch, Mabe Canada and Sears Canada, or even like the ones that the COVID-19 crisis is causing right now.

Canadian law does not adequately protect workers' rights, so it is our duty to end this injustice as soon as possible before history repeats itself and the rights of workers and pensioners are once again trampled upon.

The Bloc Québécois has always been a voice for workers and defended their rights in the House. Bill C-253 reflects our commitments and our actions. Driven by a relentless sense of justice, the Bloc Québécois will never stop stepping up to protect the rights of workers and to prevent them from being cheated, particularly through such unfortunate bankruptcies.

The solution to the problem is perfectly simple. I would like to draw the attention of the House to two points that are the very pillars of my bill.

First, it is vitally important to recognize pensions for what they are: deferred wages, negotiated between the employer and employees through the union and recognized by both parties. Accordingly, pension plans must be considered preferred claims, and paying them out must be considered a priority. To stop the looting, companies must be forced to live up to their commitments to workers.

Second, pensioners must be compensated for the loss of their group insurance, which has obvious negative repercussions for them and their families. Going back to the example of Cliffs Natural Resources, the workers and pensioners were unfairly penalized for a bankruptcy for which they were in no way responsible. They were deprived of money they had worked for. It was their due.

The Liberal Party of Canada just held their convention. I was pleasantly surprised when the Liberals adopted a resolution recognizing that pensions are deferred wages. I hope they will also be pleased when they remember that this was in both Bill C-253 and its previous version, Bill C-372. Logically, the Liberals cannot deny that slashing pension plans during a company bankruptcy constitutes theft, so they will surely vote for Bill C-253.

• (1335)

Of course, Bill C-253 was drafted with the Cliffs pensioners and their spouses in mind. The bill reflects their life stories and the misfortunes they had to contend with.

I want to sincerely thank the Cliffs pensioners' association, which demonstrated ingenuity, empathy and tenacity in the face of the colossal problems that their former employer's bankruptcy caused for them. I want to give a huge thank you to Gordon, Cécile, Daniel, Rodrigue, the other Rodrigue, Serge, and also Nico, as well as all of the others I cannot name in the House, for their invaluable

contributions. They know who they are. Their hard work served as the inspiration for this bill. They are proof that the voice and will of the people can be heard loud and clear in Parliament. This is their space, and I sincerely hope that their fight will inspire others, so that no one else has to go through what they did.

Before I conclude, I want to comment on another rather surprising action that the Liberal government has taken to amend the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

At the beginning of the week, a private member's bill to amend the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act in connection with the situation at Laurentian University was introduced by the member for Sudbury. That bill excludes post-secondary teaching institutions from the definition of company. I am confused. The government had an opportunity to significantly improve the legislation — I say an opportunity, but it has had several — but all it did was add a simple exception to make itself look good and restore its image after what happened at Laurentian University.

Bill C-253 goes much further and truly protects those who need protection for the long term, not the creditors, not businesses and even less so the government, but the workers and what they are planning to live on, the money to fund the retirement they have looked forward to their entire lives.

Bill C-253 proposes real change by amending the order of priority of companies' creditors. Bill C-253 ensures that workers will not be penalized if their former employer declares bankruptcy. It reassures those workers by promising that they will not lose their deferred wages, meaning their pension plans and group insurance.

We have seen hundreds of tragedies where workers have lost their money. Sears, Capital Media Group and Cliffs are just a few of the many examples, and I want to reiterate that the current pandemic is only going to result in more cases like these.

Urgent action must be taken to end these injustices once and for all and to protect our workers' nest eggs. I am asking my colleagues to pass this bill quickly so that other pensioners, who dream of a secure retirement, do not have their modest dream shattered. They worked hard for a comfortable retirement.

On behalf of the workers, pensioners and seniors for whom I am speaking today, I urge my colleagues to share my concerns about laws that do not provide proper long-term protection for our workers. We have a duty to act and make real, much-needed changes to bankruptcy laws in order to protect pension plans and group insurance.

Private Members' Business

Let us vote for our fellow citizens. Let us vote in favour of Bill C-253.

• (1340)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her speech.

I had planned on introducing a similar bill, so I will be supporting this one. However, I do have an idea for an amendment.

[English]

I think it is good to have a priority to make sure that people get their pensions before creditors get anything. However, I think it would be even better if businesses had to have liquidity, and had to declare bankruptcy, at the point that they could not pay their pensions, so that we do not wait until after they are bankrupt for people to have to pay.

Would the member be open to this kind of an amendment?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to hear that my colleague wants to support the bill.

Of course, I hope that it will be referred to committee so that changes can be made, because everything can be improved.

That said, I am not familiar with the bill she was talking about. I just hope that it is not similar to Bill C-405, from the previous Parliament, which went against the intention of my bill.

[English]

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.): Madam Speaker, I am wondering if the member could indicate if she has any concerns in regard to how her bill could incentivize companies to actually liquidate over restructuring, which would ultimately cause some very serious issues in terms of defined benefit plans.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

That is the argument we always hear. I therefore invite my colleague from Winnipeg North to read my bill, which on balance is absolutely reasonable.

My bill is a compromise between the desire to restructure corporations, because we want people to keep working, and a bailout, so that those who retire can also get what they are owed. As I said, pensions are deferred wages that belong to the workers.

I heard several arguments in favour of this bill. The member opposite could even look to members of the Liberal Party of Canada who specifically suggested what is in my bill.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, in 2015, the Liberal government promised the Canadian people that it would change and make sure that their pensions would be

protected. In 2019, the Liberal government did make some amendments, but they seemed to be cosmetic.

Does the member agree with me that the changes the Liberals made did not do anything to protect the pensions under CCAA?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, and I share his views on defending the rights of pensioners and workers.

In fact, I do believe it was cosmetic. We saw this in 2014 and 2019, and also in 2018.

I would like to remind the House that in 2018, when a review was being conducted, a committee was studying the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. It had to be revised. The Bloc Québécois was not involved, but all committee members from all parties of the House agreed that no amendment would be made to the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

I naturally hope that concrete action is taken. My bill is one example of what can be done.

• (1345)

Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for her excellent speech. That is a great idea.

I would like to once again point out that seniors are the ones affected by these kinds of events. I would like my colleague to explain what happens with drug coverage and life insurance in such cases.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I want pensioners to be compensated when they lose their insurance. Most of them have experienced great hardship. When they needed medication or were fighting cancer, many of them found themselves penniless.

We need to find ways to let them keep their insurance or to be compensated for a certain amount of time.

By creating two classes of seniors, the Liberal government clearly showed us that seniors are not a Liberal priority. We are seeing that again with the promises they make to pensioners but never keep.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I recognize the next speaker, I would like to remind members who are participating virtually to mute their microphones unless they have the floor.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Private Members' Business

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.): Madam Speaker, prior to debating the bill, I want to add comments. The member was just speaking about promises to seniors and the two classes of seniors. It is interesting whether it is the Bloc, New Democrats or even Conservatives, how they are being critical of us for fulfilling a campaign promise. It should not come—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Assistant Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole, NDP): Order. The member for Manicouagan on a point of order.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I just wanted to say that I think the member for Winnipeg North is off topic.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As the member knows, there is some flexibility during speeches. The hon. parliamentary secretary is just starting his speech, and I am certain it will be relevant. Let us wait and see.

I remind the hon. parliamentary secretary to ensure that his speech is relevant.

Resuming debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let me digest that for about five seconds. That is ridiculous. I just finished commenting on something that the member just provided an answer to a question on the bill.

Let me get right to the point of the legislation itself. I asked the member a question on how Bill C-253, in its current format, would provide an incentive for companies to liquidate as opposed to restructuring. In response she suggested that I needed to read the bill. It is not a question of reading the bill as much as understanding the potential consequence of the legislation. She has not been able to alleviate those concerns as she has indicated in her response to me that she is already somewhat aware of this.

Pensions do matter. Pensions are very important to Canadians. The Liberal Party talked about retirement plans at the last AGM. Retirement plans are a deferred future income. We need to be there for Canadians in a very real way. The Government of Canada has been there, dealing with and continuing to work on ways we can enhance pensions.

In fact, as was referred to earlier, I would remind the hon. member that the national government worked with different provincial and territorial governments to get increases to CPP, which will ensure that all workers contributing to CPP will have that much more when it comes time to retire.

We recognize how important pensions are. We also need to realize that pensions come in different forms. When I think of pensions, it would be wonderful if all pensions were funded pensions, that the money associated with those future expenditures would be put aside and protected so pensioners would have no issues whatsoever.

Unfortunately, that is not the reality. That is not just within the private sector, but it is in the public sector as well. Often what we find is that employers, and governments, will create unfunded pension plans. Those pension plans are based on revenue or income. There can be hybrid pension plans. A good example of that is in fact the CPP.

There are many different forms of pensions out there. Personally, I like the hybrid version because I believe that is very workable, even though it is not necessarily the ideal.

When I look at the bill, the employee group benefit claims would be weakened and that could ultimately weaken companies in their ability to restructure and affect that sense of competitiveness of firms with respect to defined benefit pension plans as well as group insurance benefit plans, which would not necessarily help pensioners and workers in all cases. It has the potential to threaten the existence of defined pension plans.

That is why I am a bit surprised. The Conservatives seem to want to support the legislation. I do not quite understand their arguments and will wait to hear from the Conservative members. Maybe they could address that specifically. Do they not have any fears with respect to companies that might, as a result, want to liquidate over restructuring? It is a very serious issue.

● (1350)

We recognize that after a lifetime of hard work, Canadians do deserve to have that peace of mind when it does come time for security. Many years ago, I can remember walking on a picket line out in Transcona. Today's industries have modified significantly, but there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. When I was walking this picket line in the early nineties, I was amazed to find that there are workers who have been working for over 30 years and they are getting \$400 or \$500 as a pension after that long commitment to a business. That is not rare, unfortunately.

We have seen significant improvements over the years, but it is important for all of us to do what we can to advocate because we all have a responsibility to ensure that people have that disposable income when it comes time for retirement. On that issue alone, I could speak extensively on why we have some programs, particularly in Manitoba, that will start off financial supports for seniors at age 55 and why some seniors at an older age require additional support. That will be for another day, but the bottom line is we do need to recognize that after a lifetime of hard work, there is a need to ensure peace of mind for Canadian workers. If I genuinely felt this legislation that was going to be achieving that, I would be far more open to supporting it, but I am not convinced of that now.

Private Members' Business

We are taking, I believe, as a government, a holistic approach, one that is based on evidence in terms of addressing retirement security for all Canadians. As a government, we have held national consultations, heard from pensioners, workers, lenders and companies on these very important issues. As I said, over the years, there has been CPP enhancement, working with different stakeholders, working in consultation with seniors, increases to the guaranteed income supplement and the budgetary announcement, most recently, in regard to 75 and over, in fulfillment of that election campaign.

We have taken these steps also to make insolvency proceedings fairer and more transparent. That ensures there is a higher likelihood of oversight over corporate behaviour; for example, by giving courts greater ability to review and claw back unreasonable executive pay that leads up to insolvency. Nothing really gets to the core of the problem and causes a great sense of frustration when workers feel that their pensions, and justifiably so, are being squandered or not being given enough attention, and yet there are huge bonuses going toward corporate greed. We have been taking steps. I appreciate my time is running out. We will continue to advocate for pensions for workers any time of the day.

• (1355)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, before us today is a bill the summary of which says it will give priority to unfunded liabilities and solvency deficiencies in pension plans during bankruptcy proceedings.

As a quick background, right now when a company goes bankrupt, its assets are typically liquidated and a court, a judge, will allocate the proceeds of that liquidation to creditors of all shapes and sizes. Some of them are bond holders, others are contractors with outstanding invoices, and others of course are employees with pension benefits that are deficient. They are not properly funded and therefore require injections of capital in order to make them whole.

These are ugly situations we have seen time and time again. They are particularly ugly because they tend to coincide with major drops in the stock market that reduce what is in a pension fund's assets, so we have a "when it rains, it pours" phenomenon. When companies typically go bankrupt, it is usually when the economy is doing badly. Therefore, the stock market drops and all the money in the pension fund that has been invested in the stock market drops with it. Therefore, the pension is under-capitalized and there is not enough money to pay out the beneficiaries.

What happens then is that the pension is given over to a guardian, usually a company like Morneau Shepell, for example, which just happens to be the case, and that company then converts it into an annuity, which pays out an annual salary to the pensioners that is inferior to what they had been promised in their defined benefit plan.

The problem with bankruptcies is that there are too many people who want what is too little money that is left over. What do we do about that? I will come to my view on that in a moment, but let me describe why this bill is important, especially today. Our corporations in Canada are now more indebted than ever before. Let me read a report from TD Economics, which states:

In fact, nonfinancial corporate debt is high also when compared to international peers. According to the Bank for International Settlements...Canada's...debt-to-GDP ratio of 118.7 percent ranks third amongst G20 countries, trailing only China and France....

The report also says that debt payments are "close to historical highs" and "a higher share of corporate income is going to servicing debt", even with today's low rates. What will happen when rates rise to historically normal levels? The answer is bankruptcies, because all this corporate debt, which is unsustainable today, will become doubly unsustainable when normal rates of interest are applied to it. Then those companies will go bankrupt and their workers will simultaneously see their pension fund depleted by dropping stock markets, and they will be left without the benefits they were promised.

The proposal from my hon. colleague is to see that in the case of bankruptcy, the pensions would be treated as currently unpaid wages are treated: That is to say, they are put at the front of the line, ahead of all the other creditors. The corporation would then liquidate its assets, and the first proceeds would go to make the pension whole. Only then would other lenders and creditors get a payout.

The counter-argument against this is that it would make it harder for companies to borrow money. After all, lenders would say that if they are behind the pensioners in the lineup in the event of a bankruptcy, then their risk level is higher. They stand to lose more and therefore will not lend the money. That is the thinking, and that is true, but the question I ask is whether that is entirely a bad incentive.

Should we not create a present-day incentive for CEOs to ensure that their pensions are not just well funded but rock-solid? If the pension is rock-solid, then lenders would have nothing to worry about in the event of a bankruptcy, because the pension would be able to stand on its own two feet. In other words, the proposal in this bill in principle could act as a present-day incentive for CEOs to put their pensions on a more solid ground lest they face penalty from lending markets.

• (1400)

Right now, we have a perverse incentive. CEOs often underfund pension plans because in the present it causes them no problems. However, down the road, 15 or 20 years later, when they are long gone and have been paid all their bonuses and benefits, the pensions go under and it is not their problem anymore. We saw that with the bankruptcy of the automotive companies. For many years CEOs made promises to workers without any ability to keep those promises, and then taxpayers had to come in and clean up the mess of long-retired corporate management.

Private Members' Business

The benefit the bill might provide is that it would force companies to fund, and even overfund, their pensions in order to give confidence to lenders that, in the event of bankruptcy, their pensions would not consume more of the proceeds of bankruptcy. That kind of market incentive might be helpful in ensuring that present-day management gives our pensioners a solid ground and protects its financial viability against the worst unexpected events that could come down the road.

Let us imagine if a CEO said that instead of contributing the minimum amount to the pension fund to get by, he would contribute as much as it would take to make it foolproof against a massive recession, against a massive drop in the stock market and against even his company's own bankruptcy. That would be the ultimate benefit of a regime that incentivizes corporate management in the present to back up pensions in order to have the viability to raise money on debt markets.

I will not lie. There are certain challenges with the bill, and I think the member might even agree with that.

First, there are challenges of transition. Let us say a company today has committed some of its current assets in collateral to get loans. If we were to change the law all of a sudden, that collateral relationship, which is written into a contract, would be broken, and we would have a potential interruption of our financial system and some companies would end up in lawsuits with their present-day creditors.

Second, we would have to find a way to ensure there could still be collateralized arrangements. We do want our businesses to be able to point to their assets and say they are going to the markets to borrow some money against their assets to hire more workers, buy more machines and create more wealth here in Canada. However, what we need to do with the bill is ensure that it is crafted in a way that allows that to go on and, at the same time, incentivizes businesses to put their pensions on solid ground by ensuring that pensioners come at the front, rather than at the back, of the bus.

While I am not sure the bill has been perfectly crafted, and I do not know for sure if it could pass in its present form, I do think it is worth sending to committee for some study. What is clear is that if somebody works hard all their lives and their company goes bankrupt through no fault of their own, the pension on which they rely, and with which they were intending to pay for their housing, their food and even their long-term care, should not be stripped away from them. Businesses, within the context of the free-market system, should be incentivized to make today's decisions for tomorrow's pension security.

The principles in the bill may allow that to happen. Therefore, on behalf of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, I am here to announce that we will support sending the bill to committee at second reading.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

We pledge to work with the hon. member to improve this bill and take her concerns into account in order to respect the principle of the bill while protecting the financial system, which includes all investments in our businesses.

[*English*]

We will be supporting the bill to send it to committee in order to advance the cause of pension security, and we will look to amend any problems so that we protect the financial system that is the lifeblood of jobs, while protecting the pensions that are the reward of a lifetime's hard work.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise in the chamber as the NDP critic for pensions on what I believe is one of the most important matters in the pension portfolio before us today. The subject matter of the private member's bill, Bill C-253, regards protections of the employer-sponsored pensions for workers in the case where the employer is undergoing bankruptcy proceedings.

I would like to sincerely thank my Bloc colleague for using her spot in the priority list of Private Members' Business to bring forward these measures. As she knows, I feel strongly about the necessity of these protections put forward, so much that my bill, Bill C-259 contains equivalent measures to every article contained in this bill. I would like to let her and the House know that I am calling on all my NDP colleagues to support the bill at second reading and I hope to see it get to committee.

What I would like to talk about in the short amount of time I have is: first, the importance of pensions and the types of pensions we are talking about; second, the current situations by way of the acts of Parliament and some real accounts of the problem at hand when companies go bankrupt; and third, what Bill C-253 does and does not do.

My speech today will be as much for those at home as it is for those present in the chamber. It is important for all Canadians to know clearly what is at stake here in simple terms so they can ensure that their MP is doing the right thing when they cast their vote on this.

Pensions have become so commonplace in society that some may take their existence for granted. While the administration and accounting of the pension plans by those who manage them may be complicated, the concept is pretty simple and makes their importance clear.

During our working years, we put money away in regular amounts so that we can draw on that fund of money in our retirement years in order to live. Canada's government, like many other governments, has a segment of our pension sector which is socialized. For those of us who are fortunate enough to have contributed to the workforce, we pay into the Canada retirement income system that is made up of, among other things, the old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, the Canada pension plan and in Quebec, the Quebec pension plan.

Private Members' Business

While I go on about the importance of these retirement incomes and the necessity for their reform, this is not the matter of Bill C-253. The bill instead touches on what I call employer-sponsored pensions. Employer-sponsored pensions are those whereby in an agreement there exists an employer's obligation with respect to a pension plan that it sponsors for its employees. The employer agrees to deduct from their wages an agreed amount to remit to the pension plan fund and agrees to also remit an amount of its own, oftentimes equal to the employee's contributions.

This brings me to talk about the defined benefit pension plan versus defined contribution pension plan and it is important that we distinguish these in order to talk about Bill C-253.

With a defined contribution pension plan, the amount of income we receive is not set but rather depends on how much we happen to contribute and in fact, can drastically be reduced depending on how the investments in that fund were managed by the employer.

On the other hand, with the defined benefit pension plan, the amount of income we receive is set and the administrator of the fund is compelled to be responsible in investing our money. In this type of pension, there could be a pension deficit. This is considered unfunded liability.

We can discuss the problem that Bill C-253 proposes to fix, the situation where an employer is facing bankruptcy and who has obligations under an arrangement to provide an employer-sponsored pension plan. The bill proposes to change the existing laws that deal with such a situation. The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, BIA, covers the treatment of a bankrupt employer's obligations with respect to a pension plan and its sponsoring for its employees. The Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, CCAA, provides a restructuring framework for insolvent companies. The BIA and CCAA provide for priority for the employer to pay both. The employer's contribution is deducted at source, but not remitted to the pension plan fund and employees' contributions owed, but are not remitted to the pension plan fund. In fact, under these laws, a court is disallowed from approving a proposal or plan unless these two are paid.

- (1410)

Here comes the problem. Unfunded liabilities like pension deficits in the case of defined benefit plans that are accrued and due to the pension plan's fund on the date of the bankruptcy come after secured creditors. This means that banks, investors and parent companies would be paid before the shortfalls in the pension plan are covered.

Pensions and benefits earned by workers are deferred wages, plain and simple. Denying workers what they have earned should be illegal, yet under these laws, corporations are allowed to take money meant for workers' pensions and divert them to pay off their secured creditors, like banks. Bill C-253 would stop this practice.

In recent years, workers have suffered significant losses to their pension plans in insolvency proceedings under the CCAA.

For example, Sears Canada initiated proceedings June 2017. The pension plan deficit was \$206 million, with an expected recovery of only 8% to 10%, and would leave \$200 million unrecovered.

Co-op Atlantic initiated proceedings in June 2015. The pension plan deficit was \$63 million and only \$7.7 million was recovered, leaving \$54.3 million unrecovered.

Wabush Mines initiated proceedings in May 2015 and of the \$55 million of the pension plan deficit, only \$18 million was recovered, leaving \$370 million unrecovered.

Nortel Networks Corporation, which we all know very well, initiated proceedings in January 2009 and of the \$1.84 billion of the pension plan deficit, only a little over half was recovered, leaving \$841 million unrecovered.

For those who follow legislation closely, I would like to state, technically, what Bill C-253 would achieve if passed: it will amend the BIA to prohibit a court from approving an employer's proposal for bankruptcy if there are any unfunded liabilities or solvency deficiency in the associated pension plan of workers; it will require that any unfunded liability within the pension plan be paid in order for a court to approve an employer's bankruptcy plan and given them "super priority" status; it will amend the CCAA to require that an insolvent corporation entering into a "compromise", which reprioritizes the payment of certain debts and liabilities over others, must pay unpaid amounts of any severance pay or compensation in lieu of notice.

There are some protections that Bill C-253 would not provide, and I would like to cover these.

My bill, Bill C-259, includes a provision that would prevent a judge, during a proceeding under the CCAA, from suspending benefits to employees or pensioners during the course of the proceedings. I think this is important and fair.

Another thing that Bill C-253 would not do is something new that I added to my version of the bill in this Parliament. It proposes to change the Pension Benefits Standards Act to allow the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to determine that the funding of a pension plan is underfunded and can order measures to be taken by the employer in order to correct the impairment.

I want to pass on some reflections on some commentary and quotes from the recent past on measures of these bills. For example:

I like the fact that the word "pension" means deferred income. When we go to work, work an eight-hour day or however many hours we put in, a great deal of consideration is given to the benefits that go beyond that hourly, weekly or monthly rate paid to us. A pension is a deferred income.

Who said that? It was the Parliamentary Secretary of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the member for Winnipeg North.

Private Members' Business

The Liberals campaigned on a promise to improve the income retirement security for all Canadian seniors. It is time for the government to put a stop to this organized theft.

I encourage Canadians watching to call their members of Parliament and ask them to vote in favour of Bill C-253 at second reading and help start the process of ending pension theft by large corporations.

We can also talk about Laurentian University, which is going through the same problem right now. This is devastating. The whole process is being abused and it must be fixed. People's lives are going to be turned upside down on this one. The government must step in and change legislation.

I thank hon. members for their time, and I hope the bill will be given the important consideration that it warrants. I recommend to everybody to send Bill C-253 to committee.

• (1415)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to remind the House of a historic moment. On May 20, 2016, during oral question period in the House of Commons, my dear Bloc Québécois colleague, the member for Manicouagan, asked the federal government if it would ensure that retirees are considered preferred creditors when companies go bankrupt.

The member asked this question after great misfortune struck the workers and pensioners of Cliffs Natural Resources. On January 27, 2015, the company announced that the affiliate operating its Bloom Lake facility on the North Shore had filed for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

Since asking the federal government that question, my colleague has continued to work on this file, and I commend her for that. Her bill, which we are debating today, is so important.

Even so, the federal government has been sitting on this issue for around five years, all while companies like Cliffs, Sears, White Birch Paper and Groupe Capitales Médias went through restructuring. Anger is brewing among these companies' workers and pensioners, who feel like shareholders and senior executives walked away with their pension funds. It is a sad situation.

This has been going on for a long time. Conservatives and Liberals alike across several Parliaments propose bills, but the federal government never passes legislation and never protects pensions for workers and pensioners. The profits of executives and shareholders always come first.

I am sure that the vast majority of members in the House of Commons agree with the principle of protecting workers' pensions and the absolute need to end this injustice. Yes, I am calling it an injustice. Not protecting the pensions of workers and pensioners is nothing short of abetting an injustice in plain sight.

We need to put an end to this injustice with Bill C-253. We have to prevent other tragedies. Pensioners are in no position to go earn extra income. They are counting on a pension they paid into for their entire lives to ensure a certain quality of life. Since this is an

injustice, we must stand together in solidarity and put mechanisms in place to protect them.

Canada is one of the most irresponsible countries in the world when it comes to protecting the pensions of workers and pensioners. This needs to change. The members of the House must seize this opportunity and pass Bill C-253. As MPs, we have a duty to fix the situation and amend the legislation to protect the pensions of workers and pensioners.

We need to do this for workers, pensioners and seniors, of course, but also for younger people who may not have access to the same social safety net. Unfortunately, things are not changing, and these tragedies will keep happening again and again in this globalized financial and industrial world. This world is going through a radical digital transformation, with more and more companies going through restructuring and the biggest, strongest players still crushing the smallest and weakest. It is the law of the market, the very essence of capitalism.

That is why we need to ensure that pension funds are bailed out and retirees' pensions are paid out in full. That is why we need to protect group insurance. That is why we need to take action to fix the situation and correct this injustice. If the responsibility is shared among everyone, it will be easier to bear.

We currently have two bankruptcy acts, one for businesses and one for individuals: the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. These acts do not adequately protect workers' and retirees' pensions. Actually, they do not protect them at all. They do not protect group insurance either.

Currently, the law does not say anything about workers' group insurance. It is hard to see workers' and retirees' group insurance as a debt under the current regime if nobody tries to claim an amount to compensate pensioners for this loss.

The status quo is not an option for retired workers who have lost a significant chunk of their pension fund and their group insurance. Their rights were violated, and their anger must be appeased. This is a matter of dignity. I cannot imagine how angry a person would be if their hard-earned money were stolen. Injustice causes anger, and these retired workers feel that their days, their work, their creativity, their skill, their dedication and their trust were stolen from them. Their happiness and dignity were stolen from them.

• (1420)

Pensions are a major source of income for seniors. That financial flexibility completely changes the situation. It means more financial security and less stress for seniors in a world where everything seems to move so fast and, sometimes, in the wrong direction. This financial flexibility is essential to everyday life to pay for food, transportation, personal items, clothing, rent and fixed expenses.

Private Members' Business

This week, in the context of the budget, we spoke about the vulnerability of seniors. The budget does not solve everything. I recognize that there is something in the budget for seniors, but only for those 75 and over. Why create two classes of seniors? Why create unfairness? This bill also reminds us that not everyone has access to the same type of retirement. Perhaps the government should have been more generous to seniors in the budget by giving them additional ongoing assistance of \$110 per month as of age 65. That would have helped them increase that financial flexibility that is so essential to their dignity and to the much-deserved pleasure of living the last years of their lives to the fullest after all their hard work.

What would Bill C-253 do? It would ensure fairer treatment for retired workers while maintaining fair treatment for creditors. It would amend the existing Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act such that, in the case of bankruptcy or restructuring, other creditors will not get access to what should be the workers' pension fund.

If the House of Commons passes this bill, there will finally be a law protecting workers and pensioners so they will never again lose their pension, which they earned by dint of hard work and dedication, sometimes at the cost of their physical and mental health. That last point is worth emphasizing.

The Bloc Québécois is obviously in favour of this bill, since it was introduced by one of our own. It is nearly identical to Bill C-372, which was introduced by the member for Manicouagan in 2016. This bill is the culmination of consultations with the people of the North Shore and with businesses and organizations in Quebec. The Bloc Québécois recognizes that a pension plan is a form of deferred wages and that it can help pensioners deal with the financial blow they are dealt when a former employer files for bankruptcy.

The bill would protect retired workers' group insurance plans, compel businesses to better fund their pension plans and enable the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to study this important social issue.

I want to acknowledge the chair and co-chair of the committee. The co-chair just spoke on behalf of the Conservatives. This is an issue we must consider very carefully and diligently. I serve with some amazing colleagues on this committee and the clerk and analysts do excellent work, so I know that the study called for in Bill C-253 will be both thorough and meaningful and that it will help resolve any impasses on this issue. The committee will have to find the time in our busy schedules to conduct this study.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-253 because it is a reasonable improvement that will help achieve the goal of protecting the pensions and group insurance of employees and pensioners. It will also improve the quality of life of our seniors, who, I should point out, are the most vulnerable members of the population.

Let us also not forget that pensioners use their pensions to spend hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars in the businesses located in the towns and villages of our regions, and are therefore at the very heart of the Quebec economy. Bill C-253 is a step in the right direction and must pass.

As a final point, I would like to mention that I used to sit on the board of directors of the Quebec pension plan. I will therefore be very pleased to dive back into the issues surrounding the dignity of employees and people's quality of life.

I invite our colleagues to support this bill, and I truly hope they do.

• (1425)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As we resume debate, I will remind the hon. member that there are only three minutes now for debate and he will be able to continue his speech thereafter.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is the second time today that this has happened, but it is fine. I look forward to continuing later on.

This is a very important bill, and I am really glad to see that this topic has been brought forward. Shortly after I was elected in 2015, I had the opportunity to meet with a number of executives from my riding, who were former executives of a DuPont plant in my riding, which is now Invista. They included former chief executive officer Peter Krause. He was leading the charge with this group of executives. What is really interesting is that they were not coming forward because they stood to gain from legislation like this, but because they were fighting on behalf of their friends, colleagues and people they came to know as family members. They were worried about Invista being owned by a multinational corporation and what that meant for their friends, the people they had worked with for 30 or 40 years.

They were looking specifically for what is in this legislation. Those executives were talking about the need to give superpriority to pension funds. I recall vividly having a number of conversations with them about it. I think I even had them come to Parliament Hill, and we had a meeting with a number of other MPs at the time and talked about it.

Before I get into some of the details on this, I must admit that, even though the government might not be voting in favour of the bill, I am very tempted personally to vote in favour of it. I cannot speak on behalf of the entire Liberal caucus, as the member for Carleton did earlier for the Conservatives, but I would be interested in hearing about what the committee could produce if they studied this and what recommendations they could give to secure pensions for so many people who are, quite frankly, worried. The reality of the situation is that we had a structure in place that did not allow people to contribute through RRSPs, or that significantly reduced this, because they were contributing through their employer into a pension. Now they are worried about how long their pensions will be around.

I am looking forward to continuing to talk about the legislation when it comes back around, but I will say that I am very much interested in it. At this stage, I can say that I think it is worthy of committee study.

Private Members' Business

• (1430)

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

[*Translation*]

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

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

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