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# House of Commons Debates

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Wednesday, December 15, 2021

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

The House met at 2 p.m.

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*Prayer*

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• (1400)

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Avalon will now lead us in the singing of the national anthem.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### NICOLE BEAUDIN

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, the parliamentary community lost one of its most beloved members. Nicole Beaudin worked at the House of Commons for more than 50 years, 20 of them in the office of the Speaker, serving speakers Milliken, Scheer and Regan, as well as our current Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Nicole was a cherished friend and colleague, a woman filled with energy, generosity and joie de vivre. A fan of Elvis, the Senators and bingo, by her example, she showed us how to live life to the fullest. From now on, our days will be a little duller.

On behalf of her many colleagues, I would like to express my deepest condolences to Nicole's family: her husband Guy, her son Guy Junior, her grandchildren Gabrielle and Alexandre, and her beloved great-grandson Jayse.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### EDMONTON MANNING

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the people of Edmonton Manning for once again putting their trust in me as their representative in Ottawa. It is a privilege to work on their behalf.

During the election campaign, Edmonton Manning residents asked me why the government was not addressing the rising cost of living, especially given the impact on families and seniors. Edmon-

tonians want us, as parliamentarians, to turn our attention to meeting the basic economic needs of Canadians. They do not want politicians using the COVID-19 pandemic for political gain. They are tired of arguments over who is or is not vaccinated. They want parliamentarians to unite to fight this pandemic, move beyond personalities and get Canada back on track.

Let us all in the House listen to their words and act on them.

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• (1405)

## HOLIDAY GREETINGS

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish my colleagues in the House, all who work in the parliamentary precinct, the people of Etobicoke North and people right across the country a very merry Christmas, happy Kwanza and happy new year.

This time of year is full of joy, light and traditions. It is an opportunity to recognize all that is good in our lives and give thanks for all that unites us. It is a time to be compassionate and kind, and to show people that they matter, that they are loved and appreciated.

I thank health care workers across Canada for their life-saving service and care, especially during these difficult pandemic years. We can honour their tireless work by following public health measures, getting vaccinated, wearing a mask and limiting gatherings.

I am thinking of families and friends in Etobicoke North and sending my best wishes for a joyous and safe holiday season.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

## MARGUERITE D'YOUVILLE

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on October 15, 1701, in Varennes, new France, Marguerite d'Youville came into the world. This year marks the 250th anniversary of her death.

Despite a difficult childhood, an unhappy marriage, the birth of six children and financial problems, this widow was always kind and supportive to her fellow men and women.

*Statements by Members*

A woman of action and conviction, in 1737 she founded the Sisters of Charity, also known as the Grey Nuns, to care for widows, orphans, the sick and the elderly. Ten years later, she was recognized for her administrative and leadership skills when she was placed in charge of the Montreal General Hospital. In 1765, she even acquired the seigneurie of Châteauguay and was able to help the colony thrive.

Nowadays, we can still find many traces of her presence, including an RCM named after her in my riding. Her remains are preserved in the Basilica of Sainte Anne, and she was even canonized in 1990. I invite everyone to visit the permanent exhibit devoted to her at the Saint Marguerite d'Youville Shrine.

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[English]

**REFUGEES**

**Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 70 years ago this month, on December 29, 1951, my great-grandmother, Isabel Guirado, and her husband, Antonio, arrived at Pier 21 with their four daughters, who were named Rosita, Maria, Isabel and Carmen.

They arrived here with the bag or two of their most precious belongings that survived the journey. They were fleeing persecution, longing for freedom and opportunity, and in search of a better life.

[Translation]

They fled Franco's dictatorship in Spain and spent two years as refugees in France, then boarded a recommissioned World War II cargo ship, the *Anna Salen*, bound for Canada, the country that has been our home for 70 years and four generations.

[Member spoke in Spanish]

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[English]

**VACCINE MANDATES**

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today on behalf of thousands of workers across Canada, from members of our military to first responders, from nurses and educators to janitorial staff, who have faced, or are facing, the loss of their jobs as a result of vaccine mandates. These are our neighbours, colleagues and fellow citizens. Many of them have sacrificed and given so much to build up our country, and many have served us through the worst of this pandemic. Now, in the blink of an eye, these same individuals, whom we once praised as heroes, are being treated as second-class citizens for a decision every Canadian should have the freedom to make for themselves.

To add insult to injury, the government is denying them EI, money they have long been contributing to and which is rightfully theirs. It is a disgrace to see how the Liberal government is intent on stripping Canadians of their dignity and sending a rift of division from coast to coast.

I hear all the Canadians who have lost their jobs, and all the constituents who have written. I will continue to stand up for them, and for this country, the true north strong and free.

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● (1410)

**NEWMARKET—AURORA**

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the holiday spirit is in the air. For the past 16 years, Dianne and Brian Harrison of Aurora have encouraged people to send holiday cards to members of the Canadian Armed Forces. This year, their initiative generated over 7,000 cards to be delivered to all Canadian bases and Sunnybrook hospital.

I am proud of the Newmarket—Aurora residents for choosing compassion during the holiday season; for shopping locally; for stepping up to support and volunteer for local food banks, coat and toy drives; and for helping neighbours in need. Our community's ongoing kindness is heartwarming, and it inspires me every day during the holiday season and all year long.

From my family to theirs, I wish Newmarket—Aurora residents, my colleagues in the House and their loved ones happy holidays and all the best in the new year.

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**MADAWASKA—RESTIGOUCHE**

**Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before we adjourn this House for the holiday season, I would like to take this moment to thank my constituents for placing their trust in me for a third mandate. After three elections and six years as MP of beautiful Madawaska—Restigouche, I must also acknowledge the efforts of many people.

[Translation]

I would like to begin by thanking our riding association volunteers and our donors for their energy and confidence.

I am grateful to my employees, Carole Leblanc, Michelle Daigle and Gaëtan Saucier Nadeau, for their professionalism and tireless dedication to helping our fellow citizens.

I want to thank my number-one guides, my parents, Ti-bert and Pierrette, for the invaluable advice they have shared with me over the years, advice that continues to prove its worth to this day.

I want to thank my partner, Michèle, and my children, Dominik, Cloé and Olivier, for their unconditional support. I am so grateful that they are the main ingredients and the spice in the best recipe ever: my family.

[English]

Finally, to all residents of Madawaska—Restigouche, and all colleagues here today, I wish a merry Christmas and happy new year.

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in Calgary, the Hope Mission has been giving back to our city since 2012. In my riding of Calgary Forest Lawn, Hope Mission is a partner within the community to care for our neighbours in need. The mission puts on weekly kids and youth programs and provide meals, encouragement and support from adult members and mentors. They prepare and serve meals to those in need, as well as provide school lunches to over 600 kids every week. This holiday season is an opportunity to give back to our communities, just like Hope Mission does.

Let us do what we can to support our friends and neighbours in need. Whether it is donating what we can to charity, or giving our time at shelters, food banks and community centres, every little bit helps. We are stronger together, and, because of the sacrifice and service of Canadians from coast to coast, our country remains the best place to live.

I hope this holiday season brings members and their families hope, joy and good tidings. I wish them a merry Christmas, happy holidays and a happy new year.

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### VOLUNTEERISM IN MISSISSAUGA—ERIN MILLS

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the winter holidays are precious moments to we spend with family, faith and community. It is a season of giving, and residents in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills are some of the most generous people in all of Canada. They have been raising donations for food, toys and warm clothing for our neighbours who need a bit of extra help this time of year.

Before we break for the holiday, I would like to recognize Eden Food for Change, the Mississauga Food Bank, Driven by... Co, Women that Give, Boys and Girls Club of Peel, Erin Mills Youth Centre, Peel Children's Aid Foundation and more. I would also like to recognize the countless volunteers who have given their time and their efforts to supporting our community.

I wish a very merry Christmas, a happy holiday and a joyous new year to the residents of Mississauga—Erin Mills, my colleagues across the House, and Canadians from coast to coast.

To our Premier of Ontario, I say, "Sir, all I want for Christmas is child care for Ontarians".

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### RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

**Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, before I commence my remarks, I was informed of some sad news, and that is the passing of Ken Greenall of 100 Mile House in my riding. I wish to pass my condolences on to his family. May eternal light shine upon him.

On behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, I rise to recognize the extraordinary career of sportscaster Earl Seitz of Kamloops. Earl began his broadcasting career a mere 54 years ago, many years before some in the House were born.

### Statements by Members

Earl has spent 48 years delivering sports news to the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I have fond memories as a child growing up in north Kamloops, and part of our daily ritual was to watch the news with Earl Seitz and Stu Blakely on CFJC TV7 – Take a Look. Things have changed since then, but Earl's characteristic professionalism and presence have not.

Please join me in saluting Earl's legendary career and wishing him the best retirement at 74 years young.

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● (1415)

### HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

**Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today for the first time as a representative of Haldimand—Norfolk.

I want to express my gratitude to the people of Haldimand—Norfolk who elected me. It is on their behalf that I raise this very important issue of rural broadband Internet.

COVID has changed the way we do business and the way we learn. During COVID, rural children were unable to attend classes online due to inconsistent high-speed Internet and the lack of access to Internet altogether. Small businesses could not connect with their clients. Our agricultural sector could not reach its customers.

I call on the government to ensure that every Canadian has the opportunity to succeed by having access to the basic necessities, like high-speed internet. I promise to use my voice to ensure that the people of Haldimand—Norfolk are not left behind.

Merry Christmas, happy holidays and happy new year.

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### COSTI IMMIGRANT SERVICES

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to highlight the incredible work being done by COSTI Immigrant Services in my riding of Davenport.

Over the past few months, it has been helping to settle 1,600 Afghan refugees. In addition to helping them find housing, employment, language training and mental health supports, COSTI has been matching Afghan families with Canadian Afghan war veterans from across the Greater Toronto Area.

I want to thank executive director Mario Calla and director of refugee services Nawal Al-Busaidi for their leadership, and a huge thanks to their entire team for their around-the-clock support and tireless work.

*Statements by Members*

Mario recently related to me that one of the refugees told him that one of his greatest joys in coming here was watching his children play freely outside. He explained that in Kabul children were not allowed outdoors for fear of kidnapping.

As we approach the holiday season and face a fifth wave of COVID, let us remind ourselves how blessed we are to live in a prosperous, free and democratic country, one where we have the resources and privilege to continue to welcome refugees, who help make Canada one of the best countries in the world in which to live.

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**DANIELLE ADAMS**

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on December 9, we lost a friend, a colleague and a fighter for our north, MLA Danielle Adams.

Our north and many across our country have been shocked and saddened over such a tragic loss. Danielle was my friend; we knew each other since high school. She was my colleague; we worked together for almost 10 years. Danielle was a feminist, an activist, a committed New Democrat and a proud northerner. Danielle was one of our own.

As an MLA and as a person, Danielle believed in our region. She believed in people. She believed in building a better future for all of us. She left us on a drive we all take on her way to Winnipeg to represent us, the job she was elected to do. Her life was tragically cut short.

Our thoughts are with Danielle's partner, Bill; her children, Nic and Joe; her whole family; and all her friends. Words cannot express the loss we feel. May Danielle rest in power.

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*[Translation]***JEAN BOUCHARD**

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Jean Bouchard, a former mayor of Mirabel, passed away surrounded by loved ones on December 9 at the Pallia-Vie hospice.

For the past 30 years, Jean Bouchard dedicated his life to the city he loved so much, first as a firefighter, then as a building inspector, a city councillor, and finally as mayor, from 2013 to 2021.

Without question, Jean Bouchard was a fighter. As he said himself recently in a farewell message to the people of Mirabel, throughout his years in politics, improving the quality of life of the citizens of Mirabel was always his priority, as well as his guiding light for every action and decision that shaped his mandates.

On behalf of the people of Mirabel and the Bloc Québécois, I offer my deepest condolences to his children, Frédéric and Gabrielle, as well as his four grandchildren and his wife, Céline, whom I would like to quote in closing: "Jean taught us important lessons about resilience, humility and courage".

Thank you, Mayor Jean Bouchard.

• (1420)

*[English]***SHOP LOCALLY**

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the chamber to thank those in Barrie—Innisfil who do so much to help others in our community. This Christmas season, I want to thank the many individuals, charities and community organizations that help those in need.

It has been a tough year on local charities, so please consider them when gift-giving. Many business owners and their families in Barrie—Innisfil support these organizations, but it has been a difficult 21 months for local businesses. That is why I am asking residents to shop local and support local this Christmas.

Canada's economic recovery will be led by our businesses, the people they employ, the products and services they produce in every sector and every region of our country. Business owners are our neighbours, our friends, community leaders and provide employment for millions of Canadians. Let us support business by shopping local this Christmas season.

Finally, on behalf of my wife Liane, our children Jeff, Court, Matt and Mitch, and, of course, our little Miss Molly, our golden retriever, I wish everyone in Barrie—Innisfil a merry Christmas, happy holidays and a healthy, safe and prosperous new year.

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**CHRISTMAS POEM**

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker,

*Oral Questions*

Twas the last sitting week before Christmas  
and because of omicron, I am playing to a half-empty House.  
So, instead of hearing riotous laughter,  
I am afraid it may be quiet as a mouse.

We just had an election, spending and effort galore,  
yet when it ended, the House of Commons was the same as before.  
Nobody got what they wanted.

For the Liberals, hopes of a majority dashed.  
And for the opposition, its chance of forming government trashed.  
Each party wondering just what to change  
in order to ensure that its dreams come into range.

The Conservative caucus with its leader true blue,  
asked to meet Santa in person to hear what he thought they should do.  
Unfortunately the meeting was refused due to one complication,  
for in-person meetings, Santa requires proof of vaccination.  
"I'm a very old man", said Saint Nick "and COVID I fear,  
after all I was already 500 when Shakespeare wrote King Lear."  
But by email to the leader, Mr. Claus made 3 points:  
the far right of your caucus just do not coddle;  
outhouse videos are nothing but twaddle;  
and please don't try to be a Men's Health Model.

For the Bloc, Santa's advice was very clear.  
If the party ever finds itself in dire straits,  
speak to the network consortium and demand more English debates.

The Greens tried to reach Santa but they completely failed.  
As the ship carrying their leader headed North,  
Her entire caucus and membership bailed.

For the PM, Kris Kringle gave sage counsel,  
"Please find someone to manage your travel, both location and date,  
or your government can unravel."

And finally the NDP who did not need Santa's advice.  
Why try to form government when 25 seats would suffice?

[Translation]

As we head to the new year, I wish everyone the best.  
Good health and happiness and let's all come back here with zest!

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are paying more for food, more for gas and more for housing, and the Liberals either do not know or they do not really care. Housing is up 25%. At the same time, more and more Canadian families are vulnerable to interest rate hikes. The cost of living crisis is at its worst in 30 years.

Why is the Prime Minister trying to fix his budget problem by creating a household budget problem for Canadians?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's economic and fiscal update provided Canadians with a transparent look at our finances as well as our plans to keep Canadians safe, particularly in regard to omicron, to make life more affordable and to ensure our economic recovery leaves no one behind.

Thanks to the choices we made and the hard work of Canadians, Canada has recovered 106% of the jobs we lost due to the pandemic compared to 83% in the U.S.

We know there are challenges ahead and the future remains uncertain, but one thing Canadians can always count on is that we will have their backs.

• (1425)

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has their backs. In 30 years, he has given them the highest inflation rate since the Bank of Canada has been targeting inflation. Gas is up 43% alone.

The Prime Minister likes to blame global supply chains. He does not seem to realize that he is responsible for road, rail and pipelines between Fort McMurray and Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. At least he would be responsible if he could ever get a pipeline built in our country.

How much longer is the Prime Minister going to ignore the cost of living crisis hitting Canadian families.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this global pandemic has been tough on individuals, but it has also been tough on economies. That is why it has led to global inflation and that is why we will continue to keep our promise of having the backs of people. That is what we indicated in the economic and fiscal update yesterday. That is what we are doing by moving forward on historic supports for Canadians, whether it is through tackling the housing crisis, moving forward on historic child care agreements with nine provinces and three territories or whether we are continuing to move forward in supporting Canadians in their day-to-day lives.

We will be there for Canadians. That is what yesterday's fiscal update showed.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the family grocery bill is going to be \$1,000 higher next year for Canadian families, for seniors on fixed income. The Prime Minister has their backs? He is failing them. If they want to dine out, it is just as bad. Even that great Newfoundland institution, Mary Brown's, is raising the price of the Big Mary Monday by 25% because of rising food costs.

How many Canadian families will have to pick between heating and eating this winter because the Prime Minister does not think about monetary policy?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this pandemic, we have been focused on supporting Canadians. Even as the Conservatives kept saying that we were spending too much to support families, too much to support small businesses, too much to support Canadians through this health crisis, we knew that the smart thing to do to help fight this health crisis was to support Canadians. It was also the smart thing to do to support our economy, by investing up front and making sure that Canadians could make it through.

We have come back stronger and better than before. There are many challenges. We are going to continue to stand up for the rising cost of living and support Canadians. We will be there for them.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every bag of groceries is costing Canadians more and more. Many are checking their receipts for errors. No, there are no mistakes; it is just inflation. It is a reality that affects every Canadian family.

What will it take for the Liberal government to fix this problem and help families make ends meet?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the global inflation crisis is a direct result of the global pandemic. That is why the best thing we can do to help families get through this economic crisis is to end COVID-19 for good. That is why we are encouraging everyone to get vaccinated and to get the third dose, to get their children vaccinated, and to be cautious about gatherings and about travelling this winter. We must continue doing what we as Canadians have been doing to stay safe. That will bring us better days ahead.

\* \* \*

**HOUSING**

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in Canada, young people have always had the opportunity to have a prosperous future, but under this government the dream of young workers becoming homeowners no longer exists. Their dreams have been crushed. Young people are worried about their future.

Why is the government shattering young people's hopes of buying a starter home?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we know what a challenge home ownership is for a growing number of Canadians, including young people. That is why we launched the first-time home buyer incentive to help first-time homebuyers pay for related costs and their mortgage.

We have targeted programs to help young people and to combat this housing crisis, unlike the Conservatives, whose only plan to combat the housing crisis was to give a tax credit to large-scale landlords. That is not going to help young people, and that is why we are there for them.

\* \* \*

● (1430)

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's ambassador to the United Nations, Bob Rae, stated that Bill 21 on secularism in Quebec was profoundly discriminatory. This legislation, however, was legitimately voted upon in a parliament that, like all others, is sovereign, and there is broad support for the law in Quebec.

Bob Rae failed in his fundamental duty to show restraint. Will the Prime Minister recall Ambassador Rae immediately, as that is clearly what should be done?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I have often said, I strongly disagree with Bill 21. I do not believe that in a free society someone should lose their job because

of their religion. That is the position of our government and our party.

We will continue to be on the side of Quebeckers who are shocked and disappointed that Fatemeh Anvari lost her job because of her religion, and we support and will follow Quebeckers who defend their rights before the courts because they believe this bill is unfair.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have seen people who do not deserve to be in their jobs, but there they are. I will not name names.

The Prime Minister is condoning a smear campaign against a law and a nation that are just as legitimate as his own pretensions. He is condoning an ambassador's decision to insult the Quebec nation as a whole.

Am I to understand that he was consulted and agreed with his ambassador's statement?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Quebeckers are people who stand up for human rights, freedom of expression and gender equality. We also stand up for conscience rights. In Quebec, we stand up for freedom of religion.

This is why so many Quebeckers are surprised and disappointed that young teacher Fatemeh Anvari lost her job because she is Muslim. That should not happen in Canada. This is what I have been saying for years and what we will continue to say on this side of the House.

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[English]

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are deeply concerned about the omicron variant and how it is impacting them and their families. The federal government has a role to play in fighting back against this variant.

We have three clear steps the federal government can take. Will it help accelerate access to a booster shot, make sure Canadians have access to free rapid testing and invest in our health care system to hire more health care workers to deal with the crisis? Will the Prime Minister commit to these three concrete steps to fight the variant?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, faced with the rise of the omicron variant this coming holiday season, Canadians are frustrated and exhausted. We understand that. It is a real challenge to see rising cases, but Canadians know what to do. We need to keep safe, we need to keep our loved ones safe and we need to keep our public health systems from getting overwhelmed.



That is why getting booster shots and getting kids vaccinated are the most important things we can do. Second is avoiding non-essential travel. We just increased our travel advisories. We are recommending that Canadians stay home at Christmas and stay safe. We will continue to be there with rapid tests and we will continue to be there to support the provinces.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is telling Canadians what they can do. I am telling the Prime Minister what he can do.

[Translation]

We are in the midst of a crisis and we have serious concerns about the omicron variant.

We are calling on the government to take three clear steps: accelerate access to booster shots, accelerate access to free rapid testing and invest more money in our health care system to hire more frontline health care workers.

Will the Prime Minister take these steps to help people deal with this variant?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are already doing the three things the NDP leader mentioned.

As the holiday season approaches, we must do everything we can to keep each other safe and healthy.

That means getting a booster shot as soon as possible. Canada has enough booster shots for everyone. We encourage people to get them.

It also means getting our kids vaccinated. That is important in order to protect our communities.

We will also be there with rapid tests. We will be there to support the health care systems. We will be there to keep Canadians healthy. We did a tremendous amount of work this year, and we are going to keep doing it.

\* \* \*

• (1435)

[English]

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's high-tax, high-deficit report was more of the same recycled promises that have failed for six years. Housing prices are at a 30-year high and gas prices, rent and groceries are all up. The Liberals' solution is to send their bill to struggling working Canadians, families and businesses.

Has the Prime Minister ever struggled to pay a bill, maybe a rent bill, a credit card bill or a grocery bill? Can he relate in any way to what everyday Canadians are going through right now?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the very first thing our government did back in 2015 was to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lower them on the middle class, a measure the Conservatives voted against. We have continued to be there for Canadians every step of the way, including with historic investments in housing and with measures that are fighting the omicron variant and the current pandemic.

### Oral Questions

What the Conservatives do not realize is that the best way to help Canadians and the best way to get our economy back to normal is to end this pandemic once and for all. That is what we on this side of the House are focused on.

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the government and what the Prime Minister continually do is raise taxes on Canadians. On January 1, he is going to be raising taxes again on struggling small businesses. The Liberals and their elite friends are doing just fine with this “justinflation”, but working Canadians are struggling to put food on the table and even dream of buying their own home.

The Prime Minister has been in office for six years and the Canadian dream has never been further out of reach than it is right now, so when is the Prime Minister going to get serious about the finances and economics of this country, pay attention to monetary policy and think about struggling working Canadians?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every step of the way over the past six years we have been there for small and medium-sized businesses. We lowered the small business tax rate. We have been there to support small businesses through this historic pandemic and they have responded positively. We have seen our economy bouncing back faster than many economies around the world because we were there for our small businesses.

What the Conservatives are talking about when they talk about payroll taxes is the fact that we are securing Canadians' retirements. We have made changes to CPP to make sure Canadians can retire better. The Conservatives simply are not there for our seniors.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### HOUSING

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the official opposition rightly said, inflation hurts. It is well documented.

Young families who want to buy a house cannot afford it because of runaway inflation. The dream of owning a home has become out of reach for those aged 40 and under, who are now seeing prices rise every month.

We know that the Prime Minister is out of touch with our young people's concerns. What does he have to say to the young families who are struggling and discouraged and who have to give up their dreams of home ownership?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for years, we have been investing more and more in our young people because we know how important it is to help young people achieve their dreams. That is why we created the first-time home buyer incentive, to help young people buy a home more quickly and pay their mortgage.

*Oral Questions*

We will also continue to help our economy by doing the one thing that the Conservatives never talk about, and that is putting an end to this pandemic once and for all. We are going to get through this economic crisis by eliminating the virus. That is why we need to maintain our measures.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not the one saying it. The Canadian Real Estate Association put out some disturbing figures today, showing that for 2021, house prices increased by 25%.

How can a young middle-class family ever hope to get on the property ladder when the average price for a home in Canada is now \$720,000, and \$445,000 in Quebec?

The Prime Minister keeps telling us it is a global problem, but it is affecting young people here and now.

What is he going to say to those young people? What real action is he going to take?

• (1440)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have put forward an ambitious housing platform to help people of all ages become homeowners here in Canada. With \$4 billion for municipalities to accelerate housing construction, help for first-time buyers, and initiatives to reduce transaction costs, we have real plans.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives had only one plan, which was to give tax credits to wealthy landlords so they could sell their buildings. That is not going to help the young people the member is talking about.

We are going to be there for young people.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the rising cost of living is hitting Manitoba families hard. This year alone, gas prices for home heating went up 30%, fuel for our cars went up a staggering 40%, the average national home price, as we found out today, is now three-quarters of a million dollars and next year Canadian families will be paying an additional \$1,000 on their annual grocery bills. None of this was really addressed in yesterday's important fiscal update.

What is it going to take for the Liberals to realize the cost-of-living crisis Canadians face? Will they have to lose their homes or just the Prime Minister losing his?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the best thing we can do to grow the economy and help Canadians through these difficult times is put an end to this pandemic. That is why we are continuing to move forward with vaccinations, with encouraging Canadians to get their boosters, with support for kids to get vaccinated and with public health measures that are going to support small businesses and keep our economy moving forward.

We know there is always more to do and that is what we are doing. We have done it over the years by supporting families, seniors

and youth, whether through increases to the CCB, \$10-a-day child care, boosts in the GIS, more supports for students or more affordable housing. I could go on.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can make all the excuses he wants, but the fact remains that he has spent more money than all of his predecessors combined, yet his record is declining investment and competitiveness, a lacklustre economic growth record, record inflation and housing prices that are taking away the dreams from half of Canada's young people, who may never own a home. To top it off, the Prime Minister is raising taxes on Canadians on January 1.

Why are the Liberals so out of touch with the financial challenges facing Canadian families?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the first thing we did was raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% so we could lower them for the middle class, and Conservative politicians voted against that. Throughout this pandemic, we have had Canadians' backs, with historic supports for families, for seniors, for—

**The Speaker:** I am going to interrupt the right hon. Prime Minister. I am having a hard time hearing his answer. I am not sure what is going on. It started off really well. People look one way and think I cannot hear them.

The right hon. Prime Minister can take it from the top so we can hear the full answer.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, this government has been there for Canadians, whether by bringing in the Canada child benefit, reducing taxes for the middle class and raising them on the wealthiest 1% or moving forward with historic investments in infrastructure, housing and transportation. These are all things the Conservative Party chose to vote against.

When we put forward a historic housing plan to support Canadians, with billions of dollars' worth of initiatives, the Conservatives put forward a plan to give tax breaks to wealthy landlords who are selling their buildings. That is not how we support Canadians. This government is supporting them.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***JUSTICE**

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants to position a teacher as a victim, but she herself said that she did not consider it a religious symbol but a political symbol of opposition to Bill 101.

She was hired and assigned to a classroom after Bill 21 was passed, but the Prime Minister is commending the Liberal Party's ambassador to the UN for insulting Quebec.

Is the Prime Minister planning to fund challenges to Bill 21?

• (1445)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois finds itself in a tricky position because thousands of Quebecers are asking themselves some tough questions. They are wondering if, in a free society, a person should lose their job because of their religion.

The Bloc has no choice but to do what it always does: try to turn this into a federal-provincial issue and attack the government in Ottawa instead of listening to Quebecers who have genuine concerns about freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and freedom to practise one's religion in a free society.

I know Quebecers are asking themselves these questions. Why is the Bloc not doing the same?

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder why I am tempted to again tell the Prime Minister to grow a spine. Should Quebec hold a referendum on Bill 21? What happens then?

Would the Prime Minister have the courage of confronting Bill 21, after shying away from it in the federal election, and of saying that he will not have the courage to confront Bill 21 in the Quebec election?

Does he have the courage to admit that it is because he is afraid of Quebec public opinion, which is largely in favour of Quebec secularism?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec and Canada are already secular societies.

We do not ask police officers or judges about their religion, because we know that whatever religion someone practises in their personal life should not prevent them from practising a profession or having an important role in our society.

That is what we are defending, and that is precisely why Quebecers are asking themselves some questions. They are wondering how, in a free society, their government can legislate on freedom of expression and freedom of conscience, and how someone can lose their job because they are Muslim.

\* \* \*

*[English]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after cancelling the Keystone pipeline and challenging

Line 5, the United States finds itself in the same boat as Canada, with soaring fuel prices as winter sets in. To deal with this lack of fuel and inflation, President Biden has begged human rights-abusing oil cartel countries to increase their oil production.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his delays, obstruction and lack of ability to get energy infrastructure built in Canada have led to massive fuel inflation that has Canadians paying a lot for energy from climate-destroying countries?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after years of a Conservative government that was focused on “drill, baby, drill” but unable to get pipelines built, this is the government that is actually getting TMX built to access new markets for our oil resources.

At the same time, we recognize that we need to reduce our carbon emissions and invest in the oil workers in Alberta and elsewhere, so we can transform our energy mix to be more low-carbon, to reach net zero and to support good jobs.

The Conservative Party is stuck in its failed past while we look to the future.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, most Canadians do not have the luxury of the Prime Minister's privileged future. No one is going to magically buy them an electric vehicle in the next couple of weeks. Nobody is going to magically build them an LRT in the next couple of weeks. They are struggling to pay their fuel costs now. The Prime Minister has failed to provide them with low-cost carbon alternatives, and his lack of action on energy infrastructure has driven up prices.

The Americans are releasing oil from their strategic energy reserve in order to bring prices down. We do not have one here. Could the Prime Minister tell us what Canada's plan is to lower fuel costs?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our plan from the beginning of this pandemic has been to have Canadians' backs now and into the future. That is exactly what we are doing, not only by supporting them now with initiatives that are making life more affordable, but also by recognizing that the direction our world is going in is toward lower-carbon emissions. Therefore, our investments in clean technology, our investments in renewables and our investments in fighting climate change are what is going to guarantee a better present and future for all Canadians.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister just said is that he has spent Canada into oblivion to make our prices higher for consumers. That is insane. Come on.

*Oral Questions*

Right now, Canadians are struggling to pay for gas. They do not have the ability to magically buy an electric car. We need to get fuel prices under control. Last year, the Prime Minister voted against a bill to reduce fuel price costs for farmers.

Could the Prime Minister tell Canadians what he is going to materially do, after failing to build pipelines, to lower fuel costs?

• (1450)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after a decade of Conservative failure on pipelines, we have actually invested in the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, and we are taking the profits from that pipeline to invest in the green transformation of our economy—

**The Speaker:** I am going to have to interrupt the Right Hon. Prime Minister. I am having a hard time hearing his answer.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable to hear the Conservatives continuing to double down on their anti-climate-change agenda and their oil and gas lobbying efforts to try to hold Canadians in the past, instead of recognizing that supporting them right now with a price on pollution that puts more money in their pockets than before and moves us forward into the future—the right—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, somebody in Papineau who is struggling to pay for a tank of gas is not an oil and gas lobbyist; they are one of his constituents. He owes it to them to not only provide low-carbon alternatives, which he has failed to provide, but also to reduce their fuel costs.

The Prime Minister has failed on all these fronts. He has failed to buy energy infrastructure. He is perfectly fine with having that tank of gas come in from Saudi Arabia, where women are not seen as people. He should have a plan that both sees Canadian energy lower the cost of fuel and ensures that we have climate action.

The Prime Minister has failed on both fronts. Why?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to fail to understand that we do not have a plan for the future of our economy if we do not have a plan for the future of our environment, to fight climate change. That is exactly what we have led on, including with a price on pollution that returns more money to the average Canadian family than it costs them in a given year.

On top of that, we are moving forward with real supports for families and for communities as we challenge the rising price of goods. That is what we are continuing to do. As we finish with this pandemic for good, we need to keep focused on the things that matter for Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

**HOUSING**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there is a housing crisis going on. The cost of housing has increased by almost 25% in one year. It is impossible to find affordable housing.

Despite that, the Prime Minister did not include anything in the economic update to tackle this crisis.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to deal with the housing crisis?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we clearly stated that this government's priority is affordable housing and access to home ownership.

We will help municipalities build more and better housing more quickly with programs such as the housing accelerator fund. We will also help families buy their first home sooner with a more flexible first-time home buyer incentive and a new rent-to-own program. We will reduce closing costs for new buyers.

The economic update presented yesterday outlines our plan to put a national tax on non-resident, non-Canadian owned residential real estate in Canada.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, those are great measures, but the Prime Minister had an opportunity to put them in place, to put them forward.

Not only are Canadians dealing with the omicron variant, but they are dealing with inflation that is driving up the cost of living. They are dealing with a housing crisis that makes it impossible to find a home they can afford.

The Prime Minister promised to take some actions, and we are saying, "Take those actions." Will the Prime Minister fulfill his own promises to ban blind bidding? Will the Prime Minister put a tax on foreign buyers? Will the Prime Minister finally put a tax on property flippers? Why has he not done it already?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's update includes our plan to implement a national tax on non-resident, non-Canadian-owned residential real estate in Canada.

We are moving forward on our commitments, including helping families buy their first homes sooner with a more flexible first-time homebuyer incentive and a new rent-to-own program, and by reducing closing costs. We are helping municipalities build more and better homes faster, with programs like the housing accelerator funds. We are continuing to support Canadians, because we promised to have their backs, and that is exactly what we are doing.

*Oral Questions*

• (1455)

**SENIORS**

**Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my riding of Malpeque is home to many seniors who are on fixed incomes and who are concerned about their economic security in these uncertain times. Unfortunately, many low-income seniors who rely on the guaranteed income supplement saw their benefits rolled back if they collected the Canada emergency response benefit. Seniors I have spoken to now understand this was an unintended effect of the unprecedented urgent support programs that the government rolled out.

I am hoping the Prime Minister will be able to update the House and seniors in my riding on how we plan to address this issue and ensure that seniors have the support they need moving forward.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Malpeque for his hard work.

Yesterday's economic and fiscal update demonstrated to Canadians our government's plan to finish the fight against COVID-19 and ensure our economic recovery leaves no one behind. To do exactly that, we will be investing in a one-time payment to these affected seniors, to alleviate financial hardship for GIS recipients who received CERB in 2020.

We will always be there for seniors, and seniors know they can count on the Liberal government.

\* \* \*

**HOUSING**

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, asked about the \$120,000 year-over-year increase in housing prices, the top economists for The Canadian Real Estate Association say this is the biggest gain of all time and that certainly in dollars it is far larger than anything that has ever happened. Why is this? We cannot blame supply chains, because land does not have supply chains. We cannot blame COVID, because almost all of the houses in Canada were built before COVID happened. In fact, the things that drive house prices, namely wages, immigration and GDP, are all down.

If the underlying means with which to buy housing are all down, why is it that real estate prices are up by record amounts?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been clear that housing affordability and home ownership are priorities for this government. We will help municipalities build more and better homes faster with programs like the housing accelerator fund. We will also help families buy their first home sooner with a more flexible first-time homebuyer incentive and a new rent-to-own program, and by reducing housing closing costs.

Yesterday's update includes our plan to implement a national tax on non-resident, non-Canadian-owned residential real estate in Canada, and we will keep being there to have Canadians' backs as they deal with the rising cost of housing.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the question is: Why did housing prices go up so much with wages, GDP and immigration down? With all of the housing supply being right here in Canada, not linked to a so-called global supply chain, what

is causing this eye-popping record increase in the cost of owning a house?

It just so happens that prices started rising right when the government began printing \$400 billion of new cash into the financial system, \$200 billion of which went into increased mortgage lending, with the investor class getting the preponderance of that new money.

Why did the Prime Minister give so much to the "have yachts" and take from the have-nots?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve a safe and affordable place to call home. That is why in 2017 we moved forward with a national housing strategy. Since 2015, our government has supported the creation of nearly 100,000 new units, repaired over 300,000 more across all housing programs and helped more families get the housing they need.

By supporting families through programs like the rapid housing initiative, the first-time homebuyer incentive and the Canada housing benefit, we are continuing to help Canadians, but those are all programs the Conservative Party voted against.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** We did, because they all failed, Mr. Speaker. The proof is in the pudding. Housing prices now are higher than ever before. It costs \$720,000 for the average house, not a fancy mansion like the one the Prime Minister inherited or the one taxpayers pay to house him in. An average house costs \$1 million in Canada's biggest city. This is broadening the gap between rich and poor. He cannot blame the rest of the world for the problem that is happening here at home.

Why exactly does Canada have the world's second-biggest housing bubble?

• (1500)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives continue to focus personal attacks on me, we are going to stay focused on Canadians. We will continue to invest in housing. We will continue to be there with solutions for Canadians.

Indeed, we will take no lessons from Conservatives when it comes to housing, because the Harper government played no leadership role on housing, and the Conservatives' plan on housing in the last election was to give tax breaks to wealthy landlords selling their buildings. That made no sense.

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what makes sense to him is to give cheap debt to investors to buy their buildings. Investors have doubled the amount they have been able to borrow on the cheap because of the Prime Minister's money printing.

I am sorry that the Prime Minister took my question personally, but the 30-year-olds who will be celebrating Christmas in their parents' homes are taking that personally as well. They cannot afford houses for themselves, because this Prime Minister's policies have inflated those costs out of existence.

Here is a simple question: Does Canada have a housing bubble or is it just inflation?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, young people in Canada, and indeed all Canadians, have faced real challenges over these past 19 months with the COVID pandemic and extra pressures on so many different things. That is why as a government we chose to be there for them. We chose to invest in young Canadians, in seniors and in workers and to support small businesses. These are the things that the Conservative Party continues to say that we should not have done: that we invested too much and spent too much in supporting Canadians through this pandemic. The fact is that not only was it right to support Canadians through this health crisis, but it was also the right thing to do to make sure our economy comes back as strong as possible, as it is.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, there are two little things I want to point out. The Prime Minister seems fine with the fact that I do not have the right to sit in the House with a mask bearing the Bloc Québécois logo. Is that a restriction of my fundamental freedom?

I also want to set the record straight. This teacher did not lose her job. If the Prime Minister could stop repeating lies, that would be great.

I am looking at all these people over there, and I would like all Quebecers to see the Liberals trampling over a law from their own nation.

Let us get this sorted out. Why not hold a referendum on Bill 21 in Quebec? We would not ask the Prime Minister to do it, since the word "referendum" makes him break out in hives. Why not vote on the claims of support—

**The Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my God, does the Bloc Québécois ever want to stir up trouble between the federal and provincial governments. That is all it does. That is why it is here. No matter what the topic is, the Bloc Québécois always finds a way to attack the big, bad federal government.

I am sorry, but this federal government has been there for Quebecers over the past 19 months, with the army in long-term care homes, with \$8 out of every \$10 in pandemic support coming di-

rectly from the federal government, and with billions of dollars for the health care system.

We have been there for Quebecers, and that may be why the Bloc Québécois is so frustrated.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, trouble, trouble, toil and trouble. For goodness' sake, get thee behind me, Jean Charest.

While Bob Rae insults Quebec, the Quebec nation, the National Assembly of Quebec and attacks his own people, the Prime Minister is working so hard here to come off as a nice guy.

What does the Prime Minister have to say to the Uighur nation? Do the same values of humanity apply?

What does the Prime Minister have to say when his ambassador does not stand up for the Tigray region?

What does the Prime Minister have to say when indigenous people do not have clean drinking water?

What does the Prime Minister have to say to Raif Badawi?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is stirring up trouble to avoid facing the reality that many Quebecers who are not represented by the Bloc Québécois are seriously wondering if, in a free society, someone should lose their job because of their religion.

Many people are shocked by this. As a Quebecer, I share this concern. I noted from day one of Bill 21 that I had concerns about a free society telling someone what to wear or not wear when it comes to their religion.

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**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's economic update was not short on spending, but it was missing one word: inflation. That does not seem to bother the Prime Minister, unlike 60% of Canadian families, who are struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table for their children and families. The reality is that the cost of living is the highest it has been in Canada in 30 years.

When will the Prime Minister do something about this increase that is directly affecting families, seniors and the wealthy?

● (1505)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the best way to grow our economy and make life more affordable for Canadians is to end COVID-19, specifically the omicron variant.

The Conservative Party still does not seem to understand that. Inflation caused by this global pandemic is happening all over the world and Canadians are facing rising prices. As we have been saying during the pandemic, we will continue to stand by Canadians with concrete measures to support them during this crisis.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, here are some figures for you and for the Prime Minister. The price of gas has increased 43% and Canadian families will spend \$1,000 more on food next year.

What is bizarre is that the Prime Minister seems to be fine with this, with the cost of living being higher for Canadians. What will people do? They will pay more taxes, and that will give the Prime Minister more money to spend.

Enough is enough. This is costing people a lot of money, and they are having trouble staying within their family's budget. When will the Prime Minister take concrete action to tackle the increase in the cost of—

**The Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this pandemic, we made a promise to Canadians: We said that we would be there for them and would support them during this crisis. That is exactly what we have done, despite the fact that the Conservative Party continues to say that we did too much for seniors, too much for students and too much for small businesses.

We were there to support Canadians, not just because that is how to get through this pandemic, which should remain our priority, but also because it will help our economy and jobs recover more quickly. That is why we are there for Canadians.

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, inflation is only good for the Prime Minister. It is not good for Canadian families, the honest workers who are working hard to earn a living so they can feed their families, buy a home and fill up the tank. That is very clear.

The more people spend, the more expensive it gets because they have to pay taxes to fill the government's coffers. This government loves to spend and increase the cost of living even more. Enough is enough. All we want are some concrete measures. That is what people want.

When will he get to work for—

**The Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been there with concrete measures for Canadians for months and months and we will continue to be there.

We have already made, and will continue to make, life more affordable for families, seniors and the middle class with a range of measures, as we have already done by increasing the Canada child benefit and tying it to the cost of living, by increasing the guaranteed income supplement for the most vulnerable seniors, and by providing more assistance to students and more affordable housing. I could go on, but I will leave it there.

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**HEALTH**

**Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Finance delivered an economic and fiscal update that shares our plan for Canada's recovery. My constituents in Halifax West want a strong, green and inclusive recovery. At the

same time, however, we are seeing a new variant that reminds us that the fight against COVID-19 is not over yet.

Can the Prime Minister share with the House the measures in the economic update that will help people in Halifax West and across the country finish the fight against COVID-19?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Halifax West for her question and her hard work.

The best way to ensure a robust economic recovery for all Canadians is to finish the fight against COVID-19. Our economic update proposes a plan to ensure that booster shots and rapid tests are free for all Canadians, to support workers and businesses through the local lockdown program, and to spend \$2 billion to procure therapeutics and treatments against COVID-19. We will be there for Canadians every step of the way.

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● (1510)

[English]

**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal agriculture minister recently said that it is not like the government can enact a law to lower the price of food.

I have a message for the Prime Minister. Liberal policies have increased the prices of everything, including food. A new Liberal policy to put a cap on fertilizer use would do exactly that: It would increase the price of food, not to mention that the policy would be devastating. It would bankrupt Canadian farm families who would no longer be able to feed the world, and it would increase the price of groceries.

Why is the Prime Minister intent on putting a cap on crop production while at the same time increasing the price of food for Canadians?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Conservatives do not seem to recognize this inflation is a result of the COVID pandemic and disruptions around the world to our economy because of it. We will continue to be there to support Canadians. The first thing we can do, and the thing we recommend so strongly to our Conservative politician friends, is to make sure people are getting vaccinated, to make sure we get out and get that third booster—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I have to apologize to the right hon. Prime Minister.

The member for Foothills asked a question and he wants to hear the answer. I want everyone to keep quiet so that he can hear it.

### Oral Questions

The right hon. Prime Minister has about 10 seconds left.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, the best way to support Canadians from one end of this country to the other, whether workers or farmers or teachers or young people, is to invest in ending this pandemic for good. That is what we are doing.

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian farm families bear the responsibility of feeding the world. It is a responsibility and a burden they carry with pride, but the Liberal policy to put a cap on fertilizer use would set farming back decades.

If Canadians think the price of food at the grocery store is high now, they should just wait. When Canadian farmers cannot use innovative, sustainable and environmentally friendly practices to feed Canadians, it will exacerbate the cost-of-living crisis.

Why is the Prime Minister ignoring farmers and ignoring science? Why is he listening to eco-activists who want to make food unaffordable for Canadians?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been there for farmers and we will continue to be because they put food on our tables, they support Canadians and they are the heart of our rural communities. We have continued to be there to support them through the difficult months of this pandemic, and we have been there in the past.

Farmers have told me how frustrated they were by the Harper government's shutdown of the PFRA, which is why we are bringing back a Canadian water agency and why we are continuing to support them in every possible way as we move toward a lower carbon future. We want farm families to be strong well into the future. That is why, unlike the Conservatives, we are standing up for a cleaner environment and a better economic future for all.

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### NATURAL RESOURCES

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister dismissed the concerns of Canadians and he belittled my province by not taking fuel prices seriously and comments such as “dig, baby, dig”. This is coming from a Prime Minister whose million-dollar trust fund came from a chain of gas stations.

I ask the Prime Minister this. Will he sign a giving pledge and give away his energy wealth trust fund?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will admit to regularly being surprised by the depths the Conservatives will stoop to—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I just want to remind the hon. members in the House that we are here to debate policies, not attack people.

The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor, if he wants to answer that.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, I have to admit it is surprising to see the extent to which, even during a global pandemic and even during a time when Canadians face increased costs of

living and are worried about the omicron variant, these Conservatives find new ways to stoop low on personal attacks.

Let them continue to focus on me. I can handle it. What we are going to focus on is being there for Canadians every step of the way. We will be there to support Canadians through the rising costs of living. We will be there to support them through this omicron variant. We will be there to have Canadians' backs regardless of the noise produced by the Conservative Party of Canada.

\* \* \*

● (1515)

### CHILD CARE

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has exposed what parents in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay have long known: Without access to affordable child care, parents and mostly mothers cannot work. I am proud that earlier this week our government signed another agreement, this time with my province of New Brunswick, to provide accessible, affordable and high-quality \$10-a-day child care to the people of Saint John—Rothesay.

Can the Prime Minister update the House on how \$10-a-day child care will change the lives of Canadian families?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the outstanding member for Saint John—Rothesay for his advocacy for families in his riding.

For Canadian families, child care is not a luxury, it is a priority. Our agreement with New Brunswick will improve child care for all children in the province no matter where they live. By 2026, fees in New Brunswick will average \$10 a day, rather than the current \$35 a day. We will ensure children have the best start in life, while improving access to high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive early learning and child care.

I will remind the Conservatives who are shouting at me right now that they moved against that in the last election, and we got it done for New Brunswickers.



### GOVERNMENT PROGRAM

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in this very difficult time, the Liberal government has cut the help that the most vulnerable seniors in our country rely on. We have received numerous calls from seniors across this country who are telling us they cannot afford to pay for groceries, they cannot afford to pay their rent and they are worried they are going to lose their homes; many of them already have. The response from the Liberal government is a vague promise for a one-time payment sometime in the future. That is not acceptable and that is not a solution.

When will the Prime Minister understand how serious this is and fix it?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, our government's priority has been to be there for the most vulnerable, including our seniors. That is why we worked hard to strengthen income security for seniors, including with increases to the GIS. We know seniors accessed income support because they needed it during the crisis. They should not be penalized for that now. That is why we are making a major investment through a one-time payment for seniors whose benefits have been affected. We will always be there for seniors across this country.

**Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians with disabilities are disproportionately living in poverty across the country. It does not have to be this way.

Last summer's election call put a halt to Bill C-35, which would have created a Canada disability benefit, a guaranteed basic income for Canadians with a disability. While I was glad to see the Liberals promise to move forward with this benefit in their most recent election platform, it was not in the throne speech or in yesterday's economic update.

When will the Liberals do what they said they would do? Are they willing to fast-track the design and implementation of the Canada disability benefit so our neighbours living in poverty do not have to struggle through another three years?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians living with a disability face higher levels of poverty and marginalization than just about any other group in Canada. That is why we have committed to moving forward with a Canada disability benefit. We continue to work hand in hand with stakeholders and community members. We need to make sure that nothing about them happens without them. That is why we are working in partnership with them to do that. We look forward to having the member opposite's support as we move forward on that.

I will take my remaining seconds to wish to everyone a very merry Christmas, happy new year and happy holidays.

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I will take this time to say that the Government of Saskatchewan and its legislature has unanimously passed a motion that I hope the House passes right now.

There have been consultations with the Minister of Justice and House leaders, and I believe you will receive the consent of the House for the following motion. I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the mo-

### Routine Proceedings

tion in my name, the member for Regina—Lewvan, listed on the Order Paper under Business of Supply, with respect to the amending of the Saskatchewan Act in the Constitution, be deemed adopted.

• (1520)

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

If you seek it again, you will find unanimous consent. I am sure the member for Winnipeg North spoke out of turn and meant to agree with the motion. He is the only one who said no.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

This member knows better than that. We cannot ask for a unanimous consent motion after you have already entertained one.

**The Speaker:** It is already gone.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to Bill C-3, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-215, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (illness, injury or quarantine).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce, in both official languages, this employment insurance bill. Canadians confronting serious illness need more than 15 weeks of sickness benefits to recover before going back to work. This bill will support Canadians while they go through the recovery process and get better.

I know I can count on members to debate this bill wisely and constructively.

*Routine Proceedings*

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

[Translation]

\* \* \*

[English]

**HEALTH-BASED APPROACH TO THE SUBSTANCE USE ACT**

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-216, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to enact the Expungement of Certain Drug-related Convictions Act and the National Strategy on Substance Use Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to introduce the health-based approach to the substance use act. I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, for seconding this proposed legislation, for his tireless advocacy for evidence-based drug policy and for this bill, which was tabled by the very same member in the 43rd Parliament.

We all know the situation is dire; over 20,000 Canadians have died of overdoses in the last five years, and in the shadow of COVID-19 the opioid overdose epidemic has rapidly worsened across Canada. Decades of criminalization, a toxic illicit street supply and a lack of timely access to harm reduction, treatment and recovery services has caused this escalating epidemic. It is time to treat substance use and addiction as the health issues they truly are, and to address stigma and trauma. This bill would provide a comprehensive approach to do just that by decriminalizing personal drug possession, providing for record expungement, ensuring low-barrier access to safe supply, and expanding access to harm reduction, treatment and recovery services.

I call on all parliamentarians to support this bill and these urgent and necessary steps to address Canada's overdose epidemic.

This bill would save lives.

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

\* \* \*

● (1525)

**PETITIONS**

## COVID-19 VACCINES

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to present this petition signed by over 4,500 Canadians calling on Canada to act immediately to make vaccines available to the global south. They are calling on Canada to finally add COVID vaccines to the list of essential medicines not subject to patent protections, as is allowed by Canadian law. They ask that Canada allow Bolivia to complete its purchase of COVID generic vaccines from Biolyse, a pharmaceutical manufacturer based in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Forty-five hundred Canadians have a clear message to the send to the government today. They want their government to put people's lives ahead of the profits of big pharmaceutical companies. Canada needs to drop the facade on the world stage and find ways to produce vaccines for the world in our own country.

This petition was signed by 4,500 Canadians. Like all members of the House, they are sick and tired of living with this pandemic.

If Canada does not do its part to vaccinate the rest of the world, the cycle of virus variants and mutations will never end. The government must be there for the rest of the world and do everything it can to fight the virus. That means using the tools at its disposal and authorizing vaccine production for export to developing countries. We must act now.

[English]

**The Speaker:** I want to remind the hon. members that presenting a petition should be very succinct. It is not getting into a debate in the House.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of constituents in my riding who are petitioning the government to introduce just transition legislation. They note in the petition that they are looking for a 60% reduction in emissions below 2005 levels to wind down the fossil fuel industry and bring an end to fossil fuel subsidies; to create new public economic institutions to expand public ownership of utilities; to legislate protection of workers, indigenous rights, sovereignty and knowledge; and also to expand the social safety net and new income supports in lieu of a transition to a low-carbon economy. I am happy to present this on behalf of constituents in my riding.

## HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this petition is in support of Bill S-223. Bill S-223 seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. It would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ.

Bill S-223 has passed the Senate unanimously three times and MPs from multiple parties have been putting forward a form of this bill for over 13 years. This bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in the same form. Petitioners hope that this Parliament is the one that finally gets it done.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, as this is the first time that I have had a chance to speak in the chamber since the last election, please allow me to thank the good people of Charlottetown for electing me and sending me back to the House of Commons for the fourth time.

Some of those fine citizens have been inspired by a book written by Seth Klein called “*A Good War*” that calls for just transition legislation. This petition that I am presenting is on that topic. As we heard from the member for Kings—Hants, the petitioners are calling on the government to enact just transition legislation that would, among other things, expand the social safety net and pay for the transition by increasing taxes on the wealthiest corporations and financing through a public national bank.

## HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to present a petition in support of Bill S-223. Bill S-223 seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. It would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without the consent of another person.

Bill S-223 was passed by the Senate unanimously three times and MPs from multiple parties have been putting forward a form of the bill for over 13 years. The bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in exactly the same form. Petitioners hope that Parliament finally gets this one done.

• (1530)

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Madam Speaker, this petition is also in support of Bill S-223.

Bill S-223 seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. The bill would make it a criminal offence for persons to go abroad and receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ.

The bill has passed the Senate unanimously three times, and MPs from multiple parties have been putting forward a form of this bill for over 13 years. It is the hope of these petitioners that this Parliament is the one that finally gets it done.

## FIREARMS

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from petitioners across Canada.

The petitioners are concerned about Bill C-71. They are concerned about the treatment of firearms owners in Canada. They are calling on the government to treat firearms owners like every other Canadian across the country and not to target them.

Legal firearms owners are among the least likely people to commit crimes in Canada, and they are just asking to be treated like every other Canadian. As such, the petitioners are calling for the repeal of Bill C-71, and I look forward to the government's response to this.

## HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in the House of Commons to present a

*Routine Proceedings*

petition in support of Bill S-223. This bill, like others before it, seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. The bill would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ.

Bill S-223 has passed the Senate unanimously three times, and MPs from multiple parties have been putting forward a form of this bill for over 13 years. Bill S-223 passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in exactly the same form. The petitioners hope that this Parliament is the one that finally gets this bill passed.

## AFGHAN MINORITY COMMUNITIES

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present.

The first petition is on behalf of Canadians who are very concerned about the dire situation facing minority communities in Afghanistan, specifically the Sikhs and Hindus, and other minority communities that were at risk prior to the Taliban takeover but since the Taliban has taken over are at even greater risk.

The petitioners call upon the government to create a special program to help vulnerable minorities receive direct sponsorship to come to Canada. Parliamentarians have been calling for this special program for over six years, but the Liberal government has failed to act. The petitioners want to see real leadership in Canada in defence of justice and human rights, standing with the most vulnerable in Afghanistan and around the world.

## HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the second petition is very similar to those from some of my colleagues with respect to Bill S-223.

The petitioners are increasingly concerned about the international trafficking in human organs that are being removed from victims without their consent. This has not yet led to any legal prohibition on Canadians travelling abroad to acquire or receive such organs.

Therefore, the petitioners are urging the government to move quickly on Bill S-223, to amend the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs removed without consent or as a result of a financial transaction, and to render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who have participated in this abhorrent trade.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, like my colleague for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, I rise to present a petition signed by Canadians who are in support of the passage of Bill S-223 to combat forced organ harvesting. Like my colleagues, I hope that this is the Parliament that gets this done.

*Routine Proceedings*

Bill S-223 has been put forward by members of multiple parties over 13 successive years. The bill is tremendously important to making sure it is recognized as a criminal offence for anyone to go abroad to receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving that organ. This bill deals with the dignity of each person. It deals with a matter of grave human rights, and we look to the House to expeditiously pass this important piece of legislation.

● (1535)

**Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today, like my colleague for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, in support of Bill S-223.

Bill S-223 seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking and would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ without the consent of the person giving the organ. The bill has passed the Senate an unbelievable three times, and MPs from multiple parties have been putting forward a form of this bill over the past 13 years. This bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in exactly the same form. The petitioners hope that this Parliament is the one that will finally get it done.

## FALUN GONG

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise to table a petition on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about the 21-year campaign of gross human rights violations perpetrated by the Chinese Communist regime against Falun Gong practitioners, including the killing of practitioners on a mass scale for their vital organs to fuel the Communist regime's organ transplant trade.

The petitioners call on the government to impose forthwith Magnitsky-style sanctions on those responsible for these gross human rights violations, including former president Jiang Zemin.

## HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise to table a petition also in support of Bill S-223.

This bill seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. It would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ. This bill has passed in the Senate unanimously three times, and MPs from multiple parties have been putting forward a form of this bill for over 13 years. This bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in exactly the same form. Petitioners hope that this Parliament is the one that finally gets this done.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Madam Speaker, like many of my colleagues, I am bringing forward a petition brought to the House by Canadians across Canada that deals with international trafficking in human organs.

Specifically, as mentioned by my colleague for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, it would amend the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs removed without consent, or as a result of a financial transaction, and to render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who had participated in this abhorrent trade in human organs.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am rising today to present a petition in support of Bill S-223. This bill has been before the Senate and it has passed three times. It has been before the House before and was passed unanimously by the House. It would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without consent of the person giving that organ.

Petitioners are rightly disappointed that we have not yet gotten this bill passed in that 13-year time frame. It is time to get this bill done. It is the right thing to do.

**Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise and present this petition, as some of my colleagues have, in support of Bill S-223. It includes some signatures from Hamilton and Toronto. As we have heard, Bill S-223 seeks to combat the abhorrent practice of forced organ harvesting and trafficking, and make it a criminal offence. We have heard that this has been passed by the Senate three times unanimously and also been entertained in the House by multiple parties over the years, including being unanimously passed in 2019 in exactly the same form. The petitioners are hoping that this Parliament is the one that finally gets it done.

● (1540)

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I also have the honour to rise today and present a petition in support of Bill S-223. The petitioners are excited about this bill because they want to see forced organ harvesting and trafficking stopped. This bill would make it a criminal offence to do that. It has passed the Senate unanimously three times before, and this bill has been put forward for over 13 years. The petitioners and I hope that this Parliament is the one that finally passes this bill.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by a number of citizens from my home province of British Columbia who are deeply concerned about the abhorrent practice of forced organ harvesting and trafficking. They are encouraging this Parliament to pass Bill S-223, which has been presented here before. It is time to get the job done.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Madam Speaker, I have 16 petitions to table today and I wonder if there would be unanimous consent of the House to extend the time allowed for petitions. I know the NDP House leader is very much looking forward to hearing all 16 of them.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** No.

### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I look forward to seeing Bill S-223, and would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

#### WAYS AND MEANS

##### MOTION NO. 1

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.)** moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021, and other measures be concurred in.

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. chief opposition whip.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Madam Speaker, I would request a recorded division.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Call in the members.

• (1625)

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

#### (*Division No. 17*)

#### YEAS

##### Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arseneault	Arya
Ashton	Atwin
Bachrach	Badawey
Bains	Baker
Barron	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bergeron
Bérubé	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings	Carr

Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Chahal
Champagne	Champoux
Chatel	Chen
Chiang	Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Collins (Victoria)	Cornier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Desbiens
Desilets	Desjarlais
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Dong
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Frasier	Freeland
Fry	Gaheer
Garneau	Garon
Garrison	Gaudreau
Gazan	Gerretsen
Gill	Gould
Green	Guilbeault
Hajdu	Hanley
Hardie	Hepfner
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Idlout	Ien
Jaczek	Johns
Joly	Jones
Jowhari	Julian
Kayabaga	Kelloway
Khalid	Khera
Koutrakis	Kusmierczyk
Kwan	Lalonde
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larouche	Lattanzio
Lauzon	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lemire
Lightbound	Long
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Martinez Ferrada	Masse
Mathysen	May (Cambridge)
May (Saamich—Gulf Islands)	McDonald (Avalon)
McGuinty	McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod
McPherson	Mendès
Mendicino	Miao
Michaud	Miller
Morrice	Morrissey
Murray	Naqvi
Ng	Noormohamed
Normandin	O'Connell
Oliphant	O'Regan
Paupé	Perron
Petitpas Taylor	Plamondon
Powlowski	Qualtrough
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Sahota
Sajjan	Saks
Samson	Sarai
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)

### Government Orders

*Government Orders*

Sidhu (Brampton South)  
Sinclair-Desgagné  
Sorbara  
Ste-Marie  
Sudds  
Taylor Roy  
Therrien  
Trudeau  
Turnbull  
Van Bynen  
Vandal  
Vignola  
Virani  
Weiler  
Yip  
Zarrillo

Simard  
Singh  
Spengemann  
St-Onge  
Tassi  
Thériault  
Thompson  
Trudel  
Valdez  
van Koeverden  
Vandenbeld  
Villemure  
Vuong  
Wilkinson  
Zahid  
Zuberi — 216

Vecchio  
Vien  
Vis  
Warkentin  
Webber  
Williamson

Vidal  
Vierson  
Wagantall  
Waugh  
Williams  
Zimmer — 118

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.)** moved that Bill C-8, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures, be read the first time and printed.

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

\* \* \*

## CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from December 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to take a moment to recognize the passing of bell hooks today. She was a trail-blazing Black feminist author who brought the intersectionality of race, gender and class into the public consciousness, and really helped shape the conversations that we continue to have today. My condolences go out to her family and to countless people across the world, especially the Black women she touched through her writing. May she rest in power.

The conversation on Bill C-5 is one that I have been having a lot throughout my life, since my university days when I was studying criminology and throughout law school when I was studying the justice system. In the past six years, as a member and the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the question and purpose behind what our justice system is meant to do and what our prison system is meant to do really help guide the moral framework of communities and societies.

Access to fair justice is a vital pillar of our due process. While we have made progress over the past six years, the fact remains that our justice system is not yet properly equipped to provide access to everyone. We see that in Black and indigenous communities and among people who struggle today to find a job, make a living and build a better life for themselves. It is because of their interaction with the justice system.

There are Canadians suffering from addiction and dying from overdoses or withdrawal because the law states that drug possession means jail time. This is not fair justice. Studies show us that mandatory minimums for lesser offences like this do not solve anything and often do more harm than good. They force first-time offenders into a cycle that prevents them from building a better life for themselves.

## NAYS

## Members

Aboultaif  
Albas  
Arnold  
Barlow  
Benzen  
Berthold  
Block  
Brassard  
Calkins  
Carrie  
Chong  
Dalton  
Davidson  
d'Entremont  
Dreeschen  
Ellis  
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)  
Fast  
Findlay  
Généreux  
Gladu  
Goodridge  
Gray  
Hoback  
Kelly  
Kmiec  
Kramp-Neuman  
Kusie  
Lantsman  
Lehoux  
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)  
Lloyd  
MacKenzie  
Martel  
McCauley (Edmonton West)  
Melillo  
Morantz  
Motz  
Nater  
Patzner  
Perkins  
Rayes  
Reid  
Richards  
Rood  
Scheer  
Seeback  
Shipley  
Soroka  
Stewart  
Stubbs  
Tochor  
Uppal

Aitchison  
Allison  
Baldinelli  
Barrett  
Bergen  
Bezan  
Bragdon  
Brock  
Caputo  
Chambers  
Cooper  
Dancho  
Deltell  
Dowdall  
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)  
Epp  
Falk (Provencher)  
Ferreri  
Gallant  
Genuis  
Godin  
Gourde  
Hallan  
Jeneroux  
Kitchen  
Kram  
Kurek  
Lake  
Lawrence  
Lewis (Essex)  
Liepert  
Lobb  
Maguire  
Mazier  
McLean  
Moore  
Morrison  
Muys  
O'Toole  
Paul-Hus  
Poilievre  
Redekopp  
Rempel Garner  
Roberts  
Ruff  
Schmale  
Shields  
Small  
Steinley  
Strahl  
Thomas  
Tolmie  
Van Popta

When people talk about the supposed success of these programs, they are bringing individual lives down to a statistic of those who are being imprisoned. They are too busy trying to appear tough on crime to stop and ask whether these policies are actually accomplishing anything productive and accomplishing what our justice system is meant to accomplish. The supposed success of the mandatory minimums they point to is the over-incarceration of people in Black and indigenous communities. As far as I am concerned, that makes them a failure.

It is time for a better approach. That is why I am pleased to participate—

● (1630)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. I would ask members to have conversations outside the chamber, please.

The hon. member has the floor.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Madam Speaker, I am really pleased to participate today in the continuing debate on Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

A great deal of time has already been spent describing the objectives of the bill, its proposed reforms and the expected impacts of it. I support these changes and really believe they will make a significant, positive contribution to our criminal justice system and contribute to efforts to address the disproportionate impacts that existing criminal laws have had on certain communities in Canada.

We know certain communities in Canada and in other countries are involved in the justice system at higher rates than others. In Canada, the over-incarceration of indigenous persons and Black Canadians is very well documented. Many of these reasons are systemic, including our laws on sentencing. It is clear the issue of over-incarceration must be addressed by revisiting our existing sentencing laws. That is exactly what Bill C-5 proposes to do.

Canada is not alone in recognizing the increased and indiscriminate use of mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, has proven to be a costly and ineffective approach to reducing crime. Indeed, many jurisdictions around the world are moving away from this approach to the criminal justice system. While MMPs can be a forceful expression of government policy in the area of criminal law, we know they do not deter crime and can result in unjust and inequitable outcomes, which contradicts the purpose of our justice system. The Supreme Court of Canada has very been clear about these issues.

Criminal justice policy is not developed in a vacuum. Evidence-based policy is informed by relevant research, including comparative studies from other countries. By examining a particular policy's successes and failures, we can develop reforms that build on what we know works and addresses what we know does not work.

For instance, while the United States, both at the federal and the state levels, has historically made great use of MMPs, in the last decade many states have moved toward reducing or eliminating mandatory sentences, with a particular focus on non-violent and drug-related charges. These trends reveal a shift motivated by, among other things, a need to address high levels of incarceration

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and the corresponding social and fiscal costs. This is being done by governments of all political stripes in the United States, and I encourage all parties in the House to recognize the true impacts of MMPs and work to continue to improve our justice system.

Some in the U.S. have termed the removal of MMPs as being a “smart on crime” movement. This approach recognizes the need to address high levels of incarceration of young Black and Hispanic Americans who are disproportionately negatively impacted by the use of mandatory minimum sentencing laws in the U.S., particularly, as I have noted, for non-violent, drug-related offences.

Some have also pointed out that mandatory minimum sentencing actually encourages cycles of crime and violence by subjecting non-violent offenders, who could otherwise be productive members of society, to the revolving door of the prison system.

Recently, the President of the United States indicated his intention to repeal MMPs at the federal level and provide states with incentives to repeal their mandatory minimums as well.

Other countries have made similar changes. For example, in 2014, France repealed certain MMPs, predominantly citing evidence showing the reconviction rate had more than doubled between 2001 and 2011, increasing from 4.9% to 12.1%.

When we examine the trends in like-minded countries, we can see a clear policy shift toward limiting the use of mandatory minimum penalties to the most serious of cases and restoring judicial discretion at sentencing.

While international comparisons cannot be the only lens through which we develop sentencing policy in Canada, particularly given our unique cultural traditions and diversity, such comparisons provide a useful backdrop to which we assess the adequacy of our own sentencing laws.

● (1635)

Currently, the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act provide MMPs for 73 offences, including for firearms offences, sexual offences, impaired driving, kidnapping, human trafficking, sex trade offences, murder, high treason and drug-related offences such as trafficking, import/export and production of certain drugs such as cocaine and heroin. Thirty offences have been amended in the last 15 years, almost entirely by the Harper government, to increase existing MMPs or to impose new ones.

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Bill C-5 would reverse that trend and in so doing it would make the criminal justice system fairer and more equitable for all. It would repeal MMPs for 20 offences, including MMPs for all drug-related offences as well as for some firearms ones.

These reforms should not be viewed as a signal from Parliament that drug and firearms offences are not serious or are not noteworthy of important denunciatory sentences in appropriate cases. They can be very serious, and I have full confidence in our courts to impose those appropriate penalties.

I realize that I am running out of time, but I have a lot more to add to this. It is a very interesting debate and I look forward to this discussion continuing.

**Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the citizens of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

My question is a narrow one. The mandatory minimum penalties sought to be repealed includes section 95 of the Criminal Code, which is one of the most serious firearms offences, because it is an unlicensed individual possessing a restricted or prohibited firearm. The Nur decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, which my colleague referenced, talked about the seriousness of that offence, endorsing language from the Ontario Court of Appeal, saying:

At one end of the range, as Doherty J.A. observed, “stands the outlaw who carries a loaded prohibited or restricted firearm in public places as a tool of his or her criminal trade.... [T]his person is engaged in truly criminal conduct and poses a real and immediate danger to the public”.

The vast majority of people may fall into this.

We have heard from the government that we do not want to capture people who may not fall into that on a first-time basis. Why then is the government repealing the mandatory minimum for subsequent offences for the people for whom that first time does not apply?

• (1640)

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Madam Speaker, I have to remind the member that it is up to the judges, and the removal of mandatory minimums gives them the discretion to say that these are the circumstances in which a crime has occurred and that they will ensure the penalties are fitting to the crime. That discretion to the judge helps to build that pillar of equitable justice, which we are seeking through this bill.

[*Translation*]

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

Earlier this week, I too had the opportunity to give a speech on Bill C-5. As I studied the bill, several things came to mind and jumped out at me.

Unfortunately, this feels a bit like a kitchen sink bill. The government is combining two very different subjects, when diversion and decriminalization are two very sensitive issues. It is also combining crimes involving the possession of firearms with simple drug possession offences. Having worked for an organization that tries to help people turn their lives around, I am very familiar with that subject.

My colleague even touched on the issue of mandatory minimum sentences for sexual assault in the context of the rising rates of femicide.

Is the member aware that Quebec is also in the midst of a crisis involving gun crime, that the mayor of Montreal and the Premier of Quebec are asking—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Order. I must allow the hon. member to answer the question, and we have to be able to hear other questions.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

[*English*]

My colleague is absolutely right. What we need to understand is that with Bill C-5 and with the removal of mandatory minimums, providing punishment and mandatory minimums is not enough to create the equitable justice we are looking for. We need to find and build that proper framework around society to provide supports for victims of, for example, gender-based violence as the member referenced, and to provide support for those who are suffering from addictions. That fulsome and wholesome approach is the way we will have a more equitable and more fair society, not by punishing people for simple non-violent crimes.

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my community is facing these two interconnected public health emergencies: COVID-19 and the toxic drug supply. Too many people have lost their lives or lost loved ones to drug poisoning, and it is fundamentally because the government refuses to stop treating this as a criminal issue and follow the evidence to treat this as a health issue.

B.C. has taken the important step of applying for the federal government to remove criminal penalties under section 56. Full decriminalization would help reduce the fear and shame associated with substance use.

Will the member push her party to accept British Columbia's application? This bill is a half measure. Getting rid of these mandatory minimums is important, but is the member not disappointed—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I have to interrupt the hon. member. We have issues with translation.

[*Translation*]

Is there a problem with interpretation?

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, the interpreter cannot hear the member properly.

[*English*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Apparently the member's sound is not very clear for the interpreters to catch. The connection is not terribly good, even with respect to image.



*Government Orders*

I will give the hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills an opportunity to comment on the question the hon. member just asked.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Madam Speaker, in the last Parliament, the member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam's private member's bill addressed the issue of decriminalizing those who were seeking those safe injection sites, and good on him for doing that. One bill is not an answer to addressing a systemic problem. There needs to be a lot more cognizant effort by our government and by all parties in the House to ensure we address this issue.

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, Health; the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, Veterans Affairs.

• (1645)

[*English*]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Madam Speaker, because this is my first speech in the 44th Parliament, I hope the House will indulge me to spend a minute to thank the good people of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for again putting their trust in me and sending me to this place for a third time. It is a privilege to be here, and I carry that trust on my shoulders every day. I could not be here if it were not for an amazing campaign team, an army of volunteers and the support of my family. Being here, I really feel the weight of the responsibility of being the voice for approximately 100,000 people on beautiful Vancouver Island.

I am very pleased to be rising today to speak to Bill C-5, which tries to start the conversation on serious criminal justice reform. It is a conversation that we have been waiting for in Canada for quite some time, and it begs a question: Why are we here as members of Parliament?

I am not here to make a fancy video for an email fundraiser. I am not here to launch serious attacks against the government or for a great clip. When it comes to a subject as weighty as this, we each have a responsibility to treat the subject matter before us with the seriousness and responsibility it deserves.

In the 42nd Parliament, I was honoured to serve as my party's justice critic. When dealing with subject matters involving the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act or the Criminal Code of Canada, and when we know that the decisions we make and the reforms we pass in this place have real-world consequences for people, it adds another layer of gravity to the debate and the deliberation.

When I look at Bill C-5, I see the intent of the government. It also had an intention in the previous Parliament, which was interrupted by an unnecessary election call, but it honoured that part of its mandate to bring forward criminal justice reform. As to whether it goes far enough, that is the question before us. I would argue no, it is indeed an important first step, but this bill makes me realize there is so much more that could have been done.

We talk about low-hanging fruit. This fruit is almost on the ground compared to what could have been achieved. The Liberals should find it in themselves to seize the moment and be bold, because I do not think they realize that a significant percentage of Canadians out there are asking us as parliamentarians to seize that moment, to make that once-in-a-lifetime change that would have a significant effect on people's lives.

I want to walk through sections of Bill C-5, and I am going to start with the part that deals with mandatory minimum reform. I have sat through a significant part of the debate on Bill C-5 on Monday, yesterday and today, and I have to disagree with the Conservatives' position. I am hearing terms like “hug a thug” or “criminal-first agenda”, and they not do justice to the seriousness of the subject matter before us.

If we here to follow evidence-based policy-making, the evidence all around us, in peer-reviewed journals and examples from countries all around the world, shows that mandatory minimums simply do not achieve their stated objective. They do not deter crime. They do not reduce rates. In fact, they have been such an abject failure in terms of expanding prison populations, many states around the world have started to roll them back, even in Texas. Texas has decided that system does not work.

We do not know what motivates people to commit crimes. The reasons are as varied as the individuals themselves. Do we think that someone who is about to commit a crime will stop for a single moment to think they had better not do it because they could possibly being put in jail for 14 years as punishment? No. The punishment is not a deterrent. The heat of the moment is often what motivates people to commit crime.

• (1650)

I think that the approach of mandatory minimums, its philosophical underpinning, is a lack of trust in judges to make the right decision. In our corner of the House, we believe that judges are the only ones who understand the facts of the case, the unique circumstances of the individuals and the factors surrounding the crime that was committed.

The Criminal Code, lest we forget, already has provisions which allow judges, through subsection 718.2, to take aggravating factors into account. Judges can look at the severity of the crime, whether it was perpetrated because of racially motivated hatred or whether it was against a person with a disability. They can take all of those factors into account and can increase or reduce the sentence as necessary.

We cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach to criminal justice because no two cases are the same, and no two individuals who appear before a judge are the same. I have every faith that, if a hardened criminal who has not learned his or her ways and is again appearing before a judge for a similar crime, that the judge is going to be fully capable of looking at the individual's record and doling out the appropriate punishment.

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I will leave it at that because the part I really want to focus my attention on is the part that would amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Bill C-5 would add a declaration of principles, and a warning and referrals section. In my mind, these are good, important first steps, but they come nowhere near the importance of actually moving towards full decriminalization.

My home province of British Columbia is the epicentre of the opioid epidemic. Communities in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, particularly Duncan, are seeing the effects of this every day. It is an epidemic that, over the last six years, has left a wake of carnage. It has destroyed families, and loved ones are gone forever, for something that we had the power to prevent through good policy-making, but have so far failed to do so. That is what I was talking about when I referred, in my opening remarks, to missed opportunities and not seizing the moment to implement bold policy.

Warnings, referrals and a declaration of principles is in no way a replacement for the decriminalization that we need to go. I am very thankful that I am in a caucus with members such as the member for Courtenay—Alberni, who today introduced a bill to do just that, because, if the Liberals are not going to go that way, we are going to show Canadians the path we could have taken had they elected a New Democratic government.

The reason this is a problem is that, last year, the public safety committee released a report on systemic racism in policing in Canada. The bill before us would give far too much discretion to police officers, and there are so many racialized Canadians, Black and indigenous people in Canada, who have a fundamental distrust of the police. They are still having problematic interactions with the police. However, the bill would give police officers the ability to make the decision as to whether to engage in a warning or a referral, or to press criminal charges. I do not believe that is right. The City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, the City of Toronto and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police all support decriminalization, and they are calling for this bold move.

To conclude, I would like to see the government take the bold step of referring Bill C-5 to committee before we get to the second reading vote, which would allow the committee to study the bill and possibly expand it beyond its current mandate. If we have a second reading vote and then refer the bill to committee, the mandate of the committee will be severely limited. I am asking government members to allow this to happen so we can hear from the experts, expand the scope of the bill and truly get ahead with the bold criminal justice reform this country so desperately needs.

• (1655)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to pick up on my friend opposite's last comment respecting the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, or CDSA. The amendments to the CDSA would allow prosecutors to also offer diversion. So, there is pre-charge, as well as post-charge, diversion in the bill.

I also want to speak about his reflections on the CSOs provided for here and whether he can give us some insight into how he feels this would impact the overall criminal justice system.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Madam Speaker, I will have to ask the parliamentary secretary to repeat the last part of his question. I did not catch the part about CSOs.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Madam Speaker, concerning the conditional sentencing orders, what are the member's reflections on the provisions that allow for the expanded use of these orders for inmates?

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Madam Speaker, that follows the remarks in my speech where I said this is generally a positive thing, as it is allowing for more discretion. I think it fits within a philosophy that we do not have a one-size-fits-all approach to justice.

Where the circumstances warrant, and when a judge or Crown prosecutors believe that someone would be best served with an alternative to jail time, then we should give them the freedom to do so because they understand the facts of the case, the individual and the circumstances in which the crime was committed.

We have far too many racialized—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I will have to allow time for other questions.

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Madam Speaker, following up on my friend's latter comments, does he think that those convicted of sexual assault, criminal harassment, trafficking of minors or abduction of minors deserve to be punished by way of a denunciatory sentence, which could include jail?

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Madam Speaker, as I said in my remarks, the person who is best qualified to mete out that kind of a sentence is the judge who has heard all the facts of the case and the individual circumstances. I am quite confident that should a person deserve a lengthy sentence and a long jail term, they will get it.

Again, I am asking for Conservatives to publicly declare that they support our judges to look at the facts of the case and mete out the appropriate punishment.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Madam Speaker, at 8:30 this morning, a resident of my riding who was a victim of violent sexual assault 11 years ago, was going to testify before the Parole Board of Canada to prevent her attacker, a multiple offender, from being released. Every time this man has been released since the early 2000s, he has re-offended.

In cases like this, or in sexual assault cases like those raised earlier by my Conservative colleague, is there no way to better to provide a better framework within which judges can operate and use their discretion in sentencing sex offenders, even first-time offenders?

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Madam Speaker, yes, I think the discretion part is very important. In answering my colleague's question, our justice system has struggled from underfunding right across this country, which has led to a lot of people being released without having their appropriate day in court.

We covered this at the justice committee two Parliaments ago, and I believe we need a significant increase in funding and an agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments, which are responsible for the administration of justice, because this hurts victims of crime, but it would make sure that the people before a judge are getting their full day in court.

Yes, the financial problems of our justice system are well understood, and they do need to have this funding to give them the seriousness they deserve.

• (1700)

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, because this is my first time rising in this Parliament to give a substantial speech, if my colleagues allow me I would like to thank my riding of Pickering—Uxbridge and all of the residents for once again putting their faith in me.

I would also like to thank my team of volunteers, my riding association, my family and my mom, who is probably at the door. If anyone thinks I am tough, they have not met my mother.

I would also like to thank my parliamentary family who are here, too: the member for Kingston and the Islands and the Minister of Seniors. My grandfather was not here for this due to COVID. He is in Newfoundland but his MP, the MP for Avalon, is behind me here. My thanks to all for that.

I am proud to rise today to speak on Bill C-5. I have listened to this debate through the course of the week. The Conservative arguments have been incredibly disappointing and frankly disconnected from reality. I want to speak on this because I think it is incredibly important that we speak in facts about the reality in this country and what is going to keep Canadians safe. Conservatives love the idea of mandatory minimum sentences because they feel safe, but they do not actually keep Canadians safe.

I enjoyed listening to the speech of the hon. member before me. I enjoy hearing where we could improve things further, but we must stop continuing the failed, so-called tough-on-crime policies that we know do not work. They do not keep Canadians safe. They do not reduce crime, and they certainly do not help those individuals who could be rehabilitated.

I think it is really important to talk about some of the things I have heard over the course of this debate this last week. Something that Conservatives talked about was a rise in crime. They tried to blame that on Liberal policies, but in fact their Conservative so-called tough-on-crime policies were in effect when they quoted previous years of high crime rates. They do not understand that criminals are not wondering who is sitting in power on this side of the House and whether they should commit a crime. They do not realize that the actual laws of the land were the Conservative policies

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that were not based in the reality of reducing crime. In jurisdictions such as the Netherlands, for example, they have seen that by implementing rehabilitation there have been significant decreases in crime rates. They have seen people be rehabilitated and, in some cases, jails standing empty because they are able to deal with the social issues that in a lot of cases undermine this.

Let us not be naive. Of course there are criminals who commit egregious crimes and absolutely need to be held accountable for them. Anyone who commits a crime needs to be held to account for it. What I have heard over the course of this debate from my colleagues, as well as from those in the NDP, is that there are judges to determine extenuating circumstances and the nature of a crime. Sitting here in this chamber, this place of extreme privilege, we cannot paint everyone with the same brush. It would be fundamentally wrong. We are not here to make a determination on each granular situation of each crime that has been committed in this country. We have in place a legal system that allows the prosecution to present its case and the defence to present its case, as well as a judge and a jury in many cases to determine the facts of a case, rather than a group of parliamentarians who do not have all the details. We are to set a framework of what we think is fair and reasonable for the criminal justice system.

It has been proven time and again in multiple jurisdictions that mandatory minimum sentences do nothing to discourage crime. All they do is overpopulate the criminal justice system with marginalized, racialized and indigenous communities.

• (1705)

On that point, for example, in 2020, even though indigenous people represented only 5% of the overall Canadian adult population, they represented about 30% of incarcerated inmates. That is the fact. It is shocking to me because Conservatives behave as if justice is blind and anyone who is in jail has committed a crime.

Once again, I recommend that those who think that way ought to think about their own privilege. We do not think about the fact that there are many individuals in this country who come from a place of privilege, who may have committed or been charged with crimes and who could afford the best legal defence team that money could offer. Maybe they are not faced with historical trauma or systemic racism as they go into the judicial system and may never find themselves facing the harshest penalties, because of that privilege.

Not all Canadians have that privilege. In our justice system, this is why we see an overrepresentation of people who have mental health issues, who are from racialized communities or indigenous populations. Anyone who suggests that there are not systemic barriers or systemic racism in our justice system probably does not have a very good grasp on the reality of how a lot of people live in this country. I fully recognize my own privilege in making these statements.

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However, I believe, fundamentally, as the previous speaker said, that as a parliamentarian, our job is to move forward on legislation to help Canadians, even if it means lending my privilege to speak up for those who do not sit in this place, who do not have that opportunity to share their experience of how the justice system is not fair and equitable for all people across this country, and to share how mandatory minimums further create those barriers and the inability for some people to have that chance to be rehabilitated and get out of the cycle of crime and poverty.

I would also like to speak about the examples the Conservatives keep raising of heinous crimes I know Canadians would be quite upset about. They are suggesting that this bill would somehow mean that those crimes would go unpunished. That could not be further from the truth. In fact, crimes could still come with harsh penalties and consequences for individuals' actions. However, the point of this legislation is to fix past wrongs, as I just spoke about, and the systemic barriers and racism in the criminal justice system, while still allowing judges to hear from victims, to hear the facts of a case, to hear if offenders are repeat offenders, and to govern themselves accordingly to make the most appropriate determination in sentencing.

I know I am running out of time, and will just conclude with the following. This would allow for the ability to actually rehabilitate people, in particularly younger adults or those who have lived a life of poverty, and would actually provide them with the opportunity to turn their life around, instead of what Conservatives would like, which is for us to turn our backs on them.

We owe it to Canadians across this country to start breaking down systemic barriers and the systemic racism in our criminal justice system while keeping Canadians safe, and actually doing so in ways that give us positive results.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member opposite's speech. She talked about the Conservatives somehow being out of touch on this issue.

I would retort quite simply that she should come speak to many of my constituents who have told me unequivocally that the Liberal government is incredibly out of touch with the challenges faced by the people I represent, including many who have been affected by rural crime. In fact, I spoke to a constituent just the other day who shared with me the terrifying ordeal of how she and her husband were held up, in their home, by somebody with a firearm, somebody who had gone on a crime spree. There were challenges with the revolving door of the justice system. They do not even feel that our legal system does justice at all. In fact, many of my constituents are losing faith in that system.

Could the hon. member justify the justice system to my constituents, who are facing significant challenges regarding the level of trust they have in it, and reassure them that the criminals committing serious crimes are actually put behind bars? It has literally put the lives of my constituents on the line when the system is not working—

• (1710)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I have to give the hon. parliamentary secretary an opportunity to answer.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Madam Speaker, first let me acknowledge how terribly sorry I am that my hon. colleague's constituent went through that, but that is precisely the point. The Conservatives' idea of tough on crime has not worked. As he just said, his own constituent does not even have faith in the criminal justice system because of their failed policies. I recognize that the member opposite would love to blame all of the problems on the Liberals, but we are in fact living under failed Conservative criminal justice policies, so if his constituent does not feel he has good representation, that is precisely why Canadians entrusted the Liberals to fix the Conservative wrongs.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, we could talk and we are talking about minimum sentences. We are talking about firearms, but we cannot—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

[*English*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I would ask that member to respectfully allow the hon. member to ask her question, as was the case when he had his turn.

The hon. member for Shefford.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, thank you for reiterating the importance of showing respect in the House.

I would like my colleague to quickly say a few words about two things.

The message this bill is sending by eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for gun-related crimes is that the government will not intervene and form a joint task force to better control firearms at the borders, as per the key request of the mayor of Montreal and the Premier of Quebec and the suggestion of the Bloc Québécois.

My colleague also addressed the issue of public health. How can she hope to help the organizations when her government is refusing to increase health transfers to 35% of total costs, as requested?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Madam Speaker, what we are discussing here specifically is mandatory minimums, but that does not mean there are not other pieces of legislation we are working on. When I was a young member of the finance committee, I remember one of the very first things we did was restore the funding to the CBSA that the Conservatives cut from the budget to ensure we could stop gun smuggling.

The point I would make for my colleague is this. Yes, there is always going to be more that we need to do. Those are just a couple of examples I have raised in this short time. We are going to continue to deal with serious crimes in this House that will show results for Canadians.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Madam Speaker, British Columbia has seen its worst year ever in opioid-related deaths. As a result of Liberal inaction, non-profits in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith have been working tirelessly to fill the gaps.

For example, the Risebridge project in Nanaimo—Ladysmith posted the following, which I will share, “We do not have enough services to support our most vulnerable of populations. Our overdose rates continue to sky rocket, nobody can find or afford housing in this market, and mental health concerns are at a all time high. Our community is in crisis....”

Can the member clarify when the government will take this crisis seriously and decriminalize the personal possession of substances?

• (1715)

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Madam Speaker, I can say, as the former parliamentary secretary for health, that this government and the Minister of Health are working diligently with the provinces, territories and municipalities to deal with the opioid crisis. It is a crisis. It is something we need to all work on together. I am fully committed to working with the member opposite on that as well.

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have not given a lot of speeches as I have been here only two years, but as some of my colleagues will know, I try to be as non-partisan as possible. I find it to be getting more and more difficult, the longer I am here.

One of the things I like to do with every piece of legislation that is put forward is to try to find what I can support or what I think is good in that bill or piece of legislation, and what I think needs to be improved upon. Unfortunately, when I look at Bill C-5, I cannot find a single thing in it that I think is worth supporting.

I came to this Parliament, that is, I ran for elected office and I got elected, to solve problems, not to create new ones. I find it somewhat hypocritical of the government. It said we needed this urgent election, to come here, dissolve Parliament and have an election, because we needed to deal with things concerning COVID and deal with this pandemic. However, one of the first bills the Liberals have introduced is one that would basically make it easier for criminals to stay out of jail and on the streets. This is not for first-time offenders. This is not for simple crimes. This is for serious crimes, and I will get into that later.

This should be about public safety and victims, and dealing with the root causes of the problems we have with gun violence and the increase in violence across this country. We should be addressing poverty, drugs, gangs and criminals, not focusing on making it easier for criminals. This bill eliminates mandatory prison time for drug traffickers and those who commit acts of violence, and makes it possible to put criminals under house arrest versus doing time in prison. Ultimately, it is going to put victims at risk.

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I want to read into the record, and I know it has been done before, exactly what Bill C-5 is going to eliminate from the mandatory minimum perspective related to gun crimes: robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking excluding firearms and ammunition, importing or exporting knowing that it is unauthorized, discharging a firearm with intent, using a firearm in the commission of an offence, possession of a firearm knowing its possession is unauthorized, possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition, possession of a weapon obtained by commission of an offence, possession for the purpose of weapons trafficking, and discharging a firearm recklessly.

The issue is we have seen the government in the previous Parliament bring in an order in council that targeted the most law-abiding citizens in the country, our legal firearms owners, and made it more difficult for our hunters, farmers and sport shooters. However, at the same time, the government introduced, in the last Parliament, Bill C-22. This bill is identical to that previous bill, which makes it easier for criminals to get off those charges.

The previous speaker indicated that these are policies that were failing that were brought in by previous Conservative governments. No, these 14 mandatory minimums that would be repealed via this bill, of the 67 that exist, are ones that were brought in by prime ministers Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jean Chrétien. These are not bills that were brought in under former prime minister Stephen Harper. These bills were brought in by previous Liberal prime ministers.

My question, in a rhetorical sense to the previous speaker, is why they did not get rid of all mandatory minimums, the other 53 mandatory minimums, if that is the case. They are keeping the ones the previous Conservative government strengthened under Stephen Harper and eliminating the ones that have been around for decades.

I just want to make that clear. They are eliminating those mandatory prison times for criminals who commit robbery with a firearm, weapons trafficking and drive-by shootings, and they are basically doing this because they view the laws as unfair. They are more interested in standing up for the criminals versus the victims and keeping our communities safe.

The next aspect of the bill is eliminating that mandatory prison time for drug dealers. There are six mandatory minimums that they are eliminating that target drug dealers: trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking, importing and exporting or possession for the purposes of exporting, and the production of a substance schedule I or schedule II drug; i.e. heroin, cocaine, fentanyl or crystal meth.

*Government Orders*

• (1720)

Again, we have talked about this, and I fully acknowledge that it happens in my community. We have heard from communities right across this great nation about the opioid crisis and the need to help Canadians who are struggling with addiction. I have family members who have struggled with addiction issues, and I full appreciate that. However, they are not producing drugs, they are not running these meth labs, they are not trafficking drugs and they are not enabling the crisis in this country. There are other people we should be locking up, and we should make sure they serve the appropriate time without letting them off easy.

The next part of the bill talks about conditional sentencing. I am going to read the offences out, because it is beyond me why we would not want these criminals punished. These are not first-time offenders who have committed a theft because they are struggling to get by or do not have food. These are people who are doing serious things. We are talking about prison breach, criminal harassment, sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, abduction of a person under 14, motor theft, theft over \$5,000, arson for fraudulent purposes, etc.

I have an eight-year-old daughter. The last thing I want to see is for some hardened criminal who kidnaps my daughter, or the daughter or son of any Canadian for that matter, to be let off and not get the appropriate punishment because of this potential change in legislation.

I want to address the issue of simple possession. This is not what we are dealing with. Police officers already have a load of tools at their disposal to make a determination as to when charges should be laid. My colleague from Brantford—Brant spoke earlier and he is a former Crown attorney. There are some people here with a lot of knowledge who understand the justice system better than me, and I will trust them on how to address this stuff. However, my point, from a simple Canadian perspective, is that this bill would not do anything to make our communities safer and address support for victims.

I want to expand on the conditional sentencing orders, which allow judges to use their judgment when sentencing. I personally do not think there should be a reduction in penalties and a soft-on-crime approach when it comes to gun crime or repeat offenders. It is important that we do not forget the component of public safety when we consider our aim of reducing the overrepresentation of visible minorities in our prisons. We should be considering how to provide the right help and treatment for those suffering with addiction and mental health issues.

As long as I am a member of Parliament, I will continue to advocate for common-sense policies that keep criminals off our streets and respect law-abiding Canadians. I am committed to fighting for policies that keep our communities safe while ensuring that those who are suffering are getting the best help possible. I will not sacrifice public safety, and I will continue to fight for justice and proper resourcing to help those who most need it.

In conclusion, like many of my colleagues and I think the majority of Canadians, I believe serious violent offences committed with firearms deserve mandatory prison times. It is shameful that a bill is being brought here that would weaken the firearms laws in this

country. I have serious concerns with this legislation, and I really think we can do better. I hope the government will do better.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I heard this member say, as well as a number of members from the Conservative Party, that police officers have a load of tools at their disposal. Police officers have the option to charge or not to charge. They do not have a load of tools at their disposal. The individuals who have the tools at their disposal are the judges.

I do not understand this messaging. Even if he was right and they did have a load of tools at their disposal, why do the Conservatives believe that police officers should have discretion but judges should not? What is it about judges that leads the Conservatives to have a massive lack of trust that judges can properly execute the option of using those tools and be discretionary in their judgment?

• (1725)

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Madam Speaker, police have the option of what charges to lay. I do not disagree that the prosecution and judges have lots of discretion as well. Ultimately, I do not think we should interfere with the independence of any of those systems, especially our judiciary and the prosecution system, unlike the current Prime Minister who seems to think it is okay to interfere with the independence of the judiciary, the Attorney General and the director of public prosecutions.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to hear from my Conservative colleague on something he did not touch on in his speech. The Conservatives love to keep public spending under control.

Of course, the more mandatory minimum sentences there are, the more people there will be in prison; the more people we keep in prison, the more it will cost the government. I would like to hear what he has to say about the fact that there is a cost to putting more people in prison.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Madam Speaker, that is absolutely right.

[*English*]

There is a cost to putting people in jail. Ultimately, though, if people have committed serious crimes like the ones that have been listed, on which the government is proposing to reduce the mandatory minimums, the cost should not matter. We are not going to let people out of jail because we cannot afford it. There are lots of ways we can find the additional funding needed to ensure that we keep these hardened, violent criminals in our prisons.

**Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's well-researched speech. What I find really interesting is that there is what the Liberals say this bill is about and then there is what is actually in the bill, for people like my colleague who read it.

The Liberals talk about simple possession, but the bill proposes elimination of mandatory prison time for trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking, importing and exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting and production of a schedule I or schedule II substance, which is heroin, cocaine, fentanyl, crystal meth, etc. Is it simple possession that is being talked about in this bill?

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Madam Speaker, I fully respect my hon. colleague. He is much more researched on this topic than I am and I appreciate his advice to our caucus.

The member is absolutely correct. This is not about simple possession. I talked about this in my speech. This is about the hardened criminals, the drug traffickers, the people who are producing these drugs, especially the drugs nowadays. This is not simple marijuana. This is crystal meth and fentanyl. These are the drugs actually killing Canadians on a daily basis and we need to do something about that, not letting criminals off.

**Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP):** Madam Speaker, the member mentioned his support for the independence of the judiciary at a time when we know that mandatory minimums contribute to systemic racism and that the TRC has called for departing from them. Why is he not more supportive of trusting in the judiciary in cases like this?

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Madam Speaker, I have all the trust in our judiciary. I just do not think that taking this tool away or taking mandatory minimums away is the best way to address any concerns there.

● (1730)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Madam Speaker, we are here on the eve of the holiday season to discuss, at second reading, Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which was sponsored by the member for LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, our justice minister.

Bill C-5 takes action on two legislative fronts. First, it seeks to scrap around 20 mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, that apply to firearm and drug offences. Second, it introduces the principle of diversion for simple drug possession.

I will focus more on the MMPs, and my esteemed colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques will address the diversion aspect later and in greater detail.

I am particularly interested in this bill because I have a background in criminology as well. My first university degree was in criminology in the mid-80s, which more or less gives away my age. I therefore rise today in this House to speak to this bill partly from the perspective of a humble criminology graduate from the Université de Montréal.

Incidentally, what do criminologists do? They analyze crimes, penalties and risk thresholds, being as objective as possible in their analysis. Prevention, rehabilitation, support, assistance and, obviously, intervention are all in a criminologist's wheelhouse.

I believe in rehabilitation, unlike some Conservative colleagues. I believe that we can reduce crime and so does the Bloc Québécois. That is why we will support Bill C-5.

### *Government Orders*

Black Canadians represent 3% of the total population, but 7% of the prison population. Indigenous people represent 5% of Canada's total population but 30% of the prison population. That number jumps to 45% for indigenous women, who represent around 2.5% of the total population, if I am not mistaken. That is appalling. It is like a bad social novel, and it is shocking and unacceptable.

Fortunately, repealing some mandatory minimum penalties can do a lot to correct this unacceptable imbalance without, in my view, compromising the safety of Quebecers and Canadians in any way.

Mandatory minimum penalties carry few benefits and introduce a number of problems, such as the overrepresentation of indigenous and Black communities in prisons. They also cost the system a lot of extra money, and yet they do not have the slightest impact or deterrent effect on crime. The Bloc Québécois therefore supports the principle of repealing some of these MMPs, once again. We agree on the substance of the bill.

However, I would like to express some reservations about the timing of the announcement of this bill to repeal mandatory minimum penalties, especially in relation to firearms. Is it not a bit inappropriate for the government to introduce this bill when we are seeing one tragedy after another in Montreal?

We must remember that the weapons used to kill our young people in the streets of Montreal and other cities come from somewhere. They are mostly weapons that enter the country illegally through our porous borders. Scrapping MMPs without firm measures from the federal government to counter the illegal importation of firearms sends the wrong message to the public.

● (1735)

To be clear, we are in favour of eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for a first offence, but not for a second or third offence. Generally speaking, I am a big believer in second chances, but when people reoffend, that calls for a different approach. It is called accountability. Maintaining mandatory minimum sentences in such cases is important to Quebecers. We do not want people to lose faith in our justice system.

We think it makes sense to abolish mandatory minimum sentences for firearms possession, but we have concerns about doing so for discharging a firearm with intent and robbery and extortion with a firearm. We do not support eliminating mandatory minimums in situations like that.

*Government Orders*

To sum up, there are benefits to eliminating some mandatory minimum sentences. Obviously, it would reduce the financial and administrative burden on the prison system. It would promote alternatives that support reintegration of offenders from Black and indigenous communities, who, as we know, are overrepresented in the prison system. Last but not least, these sentences do not tend to work. There is no empirical evidence to show that they influence a person's decision as to whether or not to commit a crime with a firearm.

When it comes to drugs, we saw the abject failure of the so-called “war on drugs” in the United States during the Nixon era. It was a failure. They filled the prisons, but accomplished nothing. Harsh sentences have not made so much as a dent in the brisk drug trafficking business, but they have added an enormous financial burden to our system and have had a tragic impact on the lives of many low-level offenders. Former Prime Minister Harper probably admired this tough-on-crime approach, the same way many Conservatives here do. However, the Bloc Québécois is against it. We believe in rehabilitation, prevention, and alternative, adapted sentences. Fines, therapy and community work are examples of other options that would adequately replace MMPs in many cases.

Before I wrap up, I just want to mention again that my esteemed colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques will elaborate further by focusing more on the issue of diversion programs.

For all these reasons, the Bloc will obviously support Bill C-5. I also want skeptics to know that this support does not mean that we are minimizing gun crimes. Quebeckers are more aware than anyone of the threat that guns currently pose to social peace.

For months, the Prime Minister and his Minister of Public Safety have sat on their hands instead of tightening the border. They have to get going and act on the Bloc's recommendations. Until then, Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction, and we will support it.

Mr. Speaker, I wish you happy holidays.

[English]

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's intervention was very thoughtful and I agree with most of what he said. I want to assure him that the issue of gun violence is something we are very concerned about, and our government will take decisive action in that regard.

With respect to Bill C-5, I wonder if the member could speak about conditional sentencing orders and how they will impact the criminal justice system, and about the need for judges to have the discretion to make important decisions about individuals who are before them in their courthouses.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Mr. Speaker, fundamentally, I believe in our justice system. It does need some adjustments, and major adjustments are being made in Quebec regarding crimes of a sexual nature. I believe in the system. I believe in the power of judges, and I believe in their ability to use their discretion. Let us not forget that we are in a democracy, in a system that has proven itself. We are an excellent example in that regard.

• (1740)

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the ongoing stigma from criminalizing the possession of drugs is a major barrier that stops people from seeking help. The City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, the City of Toronto and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police are all calling for decriminalization, but in the bill, all we see is a statement of principles and a warnings and referral system.

I wonder what my colleague thinks about that, and what he thinks of the New Democrats' idea to send the bill to committee before it reaches second reading so that maybe we can ask the government to expand its scope and actually listen to major concerns that are felt right across this country.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Mr. Speaker, Quebec's system places enormous value on diversion in sentencing, with the support of many community organizations. It works.

In contrast, there is the United States, to which I referred earlier. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, but at the same time, they also have some of the highest crime rates in the world in many categories. Again, this proves that incarceration does not work.

Drug use is obviously the first area where we can easily intervene. We in Quebec are not the only ones that have some expertise. It is in our network. We have ways to meet the needs of these individuals besides sending them to prison.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on his excellent speech. I completely agree that it does not make sense to criminalize penalties for certain offences when we could be focusing on rehabilitation.

We have some experience with this in Quebec. What would my colleague say the federal government needs to do in order to support what the provinces are already doing?

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Mr. Speaker, all I can do is point out yet again that Quebec is calling for health transfers to be increased. This funding does not only go to hospitals. It allows the organizations that Quebec subsidizes, and could subsidize even more, to provide health care and rehabilitation services.



*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Earl Dreshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. I have numerous concerns about the legislation that directly affects my constituents.

By proposing this legislation, the Liberals have illustrated just how out of touch they are with the long-lasting effects of criminal activities on Canadians. Their commitment to protecting the rights of criminals tramples on the legal rights afforded to victims of crime and does little to address systemic inequities, including the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples, Black and marginalized Canadians in the criminal justice system. Instead, Bill C-5 would reduce the accountability of violent offenders and encourage their release back into the community instead of facing legal consequences that are proportionate to the crimes they have committed.

My Conservative colleagues have spoken at length about the impacts of the bill on firearm-related offences and weapons trafficking. Has the Liberal government forgotten how gun violence impacts people and communities across Canada?

Violent crime involving firearms is a growing threat to public safety in our communities. Even with the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, my constituents still rank rural crime and gun violence as one of their main concerns. These crimes continue to rise, and almost half of Canadians feel that gun violence is a threat to their community.

Bill C-5 would do nothing to stand up for Canadians. It instead chooses to weaken our laws and empower criminals. It would give more liberties to criminals who have guns than law-abiding Canadians who own guns.

When we look at the text of Bill C-5, we see that it actually would help those who prey on the vulnerable. It would reduce sentencing for drug trafficking, for gun crime and for importing drugs. I believe the average Canadian can clearly distinguish the difference between drug trafficking and someone who is suffering from addiction issues being caught with a small amount of drugs.

This bill would not help the latter. It instead would roll back the offences for the producers and manufacturers of schedule 1 drugs. It uses vulnerable Canadians to cover the true intent of this bill, which is to soften accountability for criminals.

On Monday, my Conservative colleague was attacked for not mentioning systemic racism in his remarks, as if to imply that Bill C-5 has anything to do with correcting racial injustices in our legal system. It is important to point out that in the six years that the Liberals have been in power, the proportion of federal prisoners who are indigenous rose from 24% to 30%.

I am also compelled to bring attention to the fact that the group of Canadians who are disproportionately affected as victims include women and girls, visible minorities, LGBTQ people, children and youth, lower-income families, those living in poverty, and people in northern and remote communities.

Bill C-5 does not mention the victims of crime. Instead the government wants us to believe that racial inequality exists only when

we discuss offenders. Bill C-5 would decrease criminal accountability and ignores issues such as addiction, poverty and mental health issues. It ignores that the communities that experience higher levels of crime are most adversely affected themselves.

I would like to talk about the expansion of conditional sentences for crimes such as sexual assault. It is a complete affront to combating violence against women by a government that hides behind the optics of feminism. Sexual assault victims already face a litany of traumas in our justice system, as they must contend with disclosing information that is intensely personal and private, which could result in victim blaming and often shame.

The bill would add even more obstacles to those trying to heal from sexual assault by allowing sexual offenders to serve their sentence at home. People on house arrest are generally not limited to constantly staying at home, as they can be permitted to leave for certain pre-approved locations and activities. Their movement and freedom may be controlled and monitored, however, unlike being incarcerated, house arrest allows them the ability to continue participating in society and at home.

● (1745)

I want to focus for a moment on the selected phrase “continue participating in society”, because I am unable to understand why sexual predators should be allowed this privilege, when the victims of their crime are not afforded the same respect.

There is no shortage of information about sexual assault survivors and the challenges our legal system faces in prosecuting it, not to mention the traumatization and re-traumatization of survivors throughout the process. Law reform and policy changes have brought about some necessary improvements to the way the criminal justice system processes sexual assault cases, but Bill C-5 is not one of those. It would violate a victim's right to protection, diminish the strength of our court system and may even be responsible for impeding a survivor's reintegration and participation in society.

The Liberals say that they are helping addicts and communities, but they actually would be reducing sentences and eliminating accountability for traffickers and manufacturers, while continuing to punish law-abiding firearm owners. My rural constituents continue to be the target of restrictive gun laws, while the government supports weakening the consequences for weapons trafficking.

*Government Orders*

The Conservatives believe we must take strong action to prevent criminal activity. We stand for victims of crime and we fight to defend their rights. Shorter sentences and house arrest are not a deterrent for sexual assault or firearms offences. The Liberals have promised that conditional sentences, such as house arrest, would never be considered over public safety. If so, why would they offer this sentencing option for sexual assault charges? I am unsettled at the thought that they believe there is a need for legislation that would allow sexual predators to serve their sentences within their community.

Conditional sentencing, as presented in Bill C-5, would not advocate for restorative justice; it instead would give offenders the opportunity to not only escape consequences for their actions, but would cross the line into revictimizing survivors of sexual assault, kidnapping and human trafficking. How can we expect to feel safe and protected when the government is advocating for offenders who are kidnapping 13-year-old children to serve their sentences in our neighbourhood? How is this any regard for public safety?

The government needs to work with its provincial counterparts to combat the increase in rural crime, not pass sweeping legislation that would lessen the penalties for the criminals.

There is nothing in Bill C-5 that explains how eliminating mandatory minimum sentences would undo the systemic racism the government claims plagues our justice system. It would blatantly miss its mark. It would endanger public safety, while doing nothing to help vulnerable Canadians in our criminal justice system struggling with addiction and mental illness.

Bill C-5 ignores the fact that, on its face, minimum mandatory sentencing is unbiased. There is ample administrative law jurisprudence that defines that where the statute gives discretion to decision-makers and they come to an unfair decisions, the problem is the “maladministration” of the statute rather than the statute itself. If the Liberal government believes that mandatory minimum sentences perpetuate systemic racism because of the prevalence of racist policing and improper use of prosecutorial discretion, then why are they not introducing solutions to this problem?

It is disingenuous to say that this bill is being put forward to address the over-incarceration rate of marginalized Canadians. It is also false that Bill C-5 considers public safety over the rights of criminals. Punishing criminals and holding them accountable is only part of the Conservative Party's response to crime. We must also ensure that crime victims and survivors are treated with respect.

• (1750)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the systemic racism that is out there. It is a little upsetting that the official opposition does not even want to recognize that.

I would ask the member for his thoughts about the truth and reconciliation report, particularly call to action 32 which specifically asks for the type of legislation we have brought forward, in good part, to deal with the systemic racism that is there.

Are the hundreds of individuals and Judge Sinclair wrong with that call to action? Is this a call to action that the Conservative Party does not support?

**Mr. Earl Dreesen:** Mr. Speaker, according to the department's own commentary:

To address the overincarceration rate of Indigenous peoples, as well as Black and marginalized Canadians, MMPs for the following offences would be repealed:

Using a firearm or imitation firearm in commission of offence...

Possession of firearm or weapon knowing its possession is unauthorized....

Possession of prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition....

Possession of weapon obtained by commission of offence....

Weapons trafficking....

Possession for purpose of weapons trafficking....

Importing or exporting knowing it is unauthorized....

Discharging firearm with intent....

Discharging firearm—recklessness....

Those are some of the offences being watered down.

Going back to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I was fortunate enough to have spent time on aboriginal affairs and northern development when that was taking place. We had a lot of opportunity to speak with people and not everyone believes all of those recommendations are best for their communities. I think that is important for us to understand because in many cases they are the true victims of these types of crimes.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I was Quebec's public safety minister when the Conservative government passed Bill C-10, which introduced mandatory minimum sentences.

No matter what you call it, the lowering or elimination of mandatory minimums may perhaps send a confusing message in the current context, where there are concerns about firearms circulating and about the crimes being committed with them, especially in the greater Montreal area, but also in Toronto and other metropolitan centres in Canada.

Another question comes to mind. Our Conservative friends can keep repeating over and over that they are in favour of law and order, but that is easy to do when it is simply a matter of changing a few minor provisions of the Criminal Code and making Quebec and the provinces foot the bill. The provinces are obviously the ones that have to deal with the increase in the prison population resulting from mandatory minimums.

*Government Orders*

What does my Conservative colleague think of the idea that the provinces and Quebec are the ones footing the bill for Ottawa's decisions?

[*English*]

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, I believe there is a difference in the realities of urban and rural communities, such as the one I represent, when we look at firearms, the related activities and so on. If we wanted to talk about firearm legislation, then we should talk about that, not throw in the long gun registry, firearms for hunters and so on. If we can get past that, instead of every time we talk about gun legislation they get thrown into the mix, maybe more people in this country would be listening and trying to find solutions to this problem.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments of my colleague from Red Deer—Mountain View. I appreciate him acknowledging the overrepresentation of Black, indigenous and racialized people in our criminal justice system. If he does not support the elimination of mandatory minimums, for which there is a mountain of evidence that they contribute to that overrepresentation, what approach would he support to address that overrepresentation in our criminal justice system, and can he provide examples of jurisdictions where that approach has been effective at reducing the overrepresentation of those communities in our criminal justice system?

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, I have a federal institution in my riding and have a lot of opportunity to speak with people, so I understand the circumstances of those who are incarcerated.

I want to mention I was a teacher for 34 years. I know the biggest victims of youth crime are youth. It is the same sort of situation that occurs in some of these communities we are speaking of. I think what is important is for us to find solutions so that if it occurs in an indigenous community, the people of that community are also safe.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend, neighbour and colleague for Red Deer—Mountain View for his excellent speech.

As this is my first opportunity to deliver a speech on behalf of the constituents of Red Deer—Lacombe in the new Parliament, I want to thank all of my volunteers and my family. Of course, I thank the voters of Red Deer—Lacombe for sending me here for a sixth term. My commitment to them is to do my best in representing the issues and values that we hold dear in central Alberta. One of those is addressed in this proposed legislation.

Many of the hard-working people in central Alberta are law-abiding firearms owners. They get up every day, go to work, follow all the rules, follow the law, work hard and pay their taxes. In return, they simply want to be treated with dignity and respect by their government. They want their tax dollars used effectively and efficiently, and none of them feel very good right now about the direction that our country is heading, particularly when it comes to the legislative agenda of this current government. They are very concerned and very worried about government's approach, which is soft on violent and dangerous crime.

Bill C-5 is another iteration of Bill C-22, which appeared just before the election was called in the last Parliament, and the bill is ab-

olutely abhorrent, I believe, in the minds of most of my voters back in Red Deer—Lacombe.

I am a law-abiding firearms owner, and I am a former law enforcement officer in the conservation law enforcement field. My job was to go into situations and deal with law-abiding hunters and firearms owners on a daily basis. I would go into situations as a conservation officer or as a national park warden where virtually every person I dealt with had an axe because they were camping; a knife because they were fishing; or a firearm, bow or crossbow because they were hunting.

I did this with complete confidence that the people I was going to deal with and work with were going to be honest and forthright people for the most part, and I had nothing to fear and nothing to worry about from law-abiding hunters and firearms owners in this country. I am proud to say that I safely did my job with a respectful group of hunters, anglers, campers and outdoor enthusiasts for a number of years before I ended up in this place.

These are good people, and they do not deserve to be demonized by this current government. They certainly do not deserve to be taken to task or held accountable for dangerous, violent criminals who are operating under the auspices of organized crime in our large urban centres, such as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary. Even in one of the largest cities that my colleague for Red Deer—Mountain View and I share, Red Deer, Alberta, which is a beautiful city full of good, honest, hard-working people, there is the odd one that causes problems. We need to be focusing on the ones that cause problems, which is the problem with the legislation before us today.

Ladies and gentlemen of Canada, and ladies and gentlemen of Toronto, who are watching need to know the crimes the people they voted for are actually reducing and eliminating mandatory minimum penalties for. One is robbery with a firearm. We would think that in a city such as Toronto, where there are virtually daily shootings being reported, that somebody would say, "Robbery with a firearm is a fairly serious thing and people should probably go to jail for that", but not according to a Liberal member of Parliament members from that city.

Another is extortion with a firearm, which must be a pleasant experience for the victim. Why do we not do what Liberals do and get rid of any mandatory minimum prison sentences for somebody who is being extorted with a gun to their head? the thirds is weapons trafficking, excluding firearms and ammunition. Weapons trafficking is the illegal movement, sale and acquisition of firearms. This is the problem.

*Government Orders*

We know from people like professor emeritus Gary Mauser from Simon Fraser University that a person is very unlikely to be a victim of crime from a law-abiding firearms owner. In fact, when we take a look at the statistics from Statistics Canada going back to 2012, we know that 0.6 in 100,000 murders in this country were committed by law-abiding firearms owners. That is less than the average of 1.8 murders per 100,000 in the country.

The safest person we can be around in this country when it comes homicide is a law-abiding firearms owner, but we are going to make sure that smugglers and people who traffic firearms and bring these guns into the country would potentially face zero jail time for their actions. There is also importing or exporting knowing that a firearm or weapon is unauthorized, which is called “smuggling”, and it is smuggling firearms across the border.

• (1800)

This is the problem. This is what Liberals in la-la land think deserves no jail time whatsoever. If voters are in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, these are the people that they voted for and sent here and this is what they are doing to the community. The Liberals are saying to the people who voted for them that they are going to remove mandatory minimum sentences for people who smuggle guns across the U.S. border and instead blame and conflate issues on law-abiding firearms owners. It is absolutely disgusting.

Discharging a firearm with intent, when does that happen on the streets of Toronto? Daily, but if someone is the one with the gun, apparently in Liberal la-la land, they do not need to go to jail.

With regard to using a firearm in the commission of an offence, holding somebody up, committing a robbery, committing a carjacking, using a firearm, in theft or any of these other types of activities, if people take a firearm along with them, they should not worry if they voted Liberal. The Liberals are looking out for their interests and making sure they spend no time in jail as a result.

On possession of a firearm knowing its possession is unauthorized, these are people that are not getting firearms licences like every law-abiding firearms owner in this country actually does. Canadians might be surprised to know that every single day all 2.1 million of my fellow law-abiding firearms owners are checked by CPIC to make sure that we are eligible to continue to possess firearms.

As a matter of fact, the law is written in this country that people cannot possess a firearm at all. Every firearm is illegal, unless they have a licence to have one. That is what the law currently says. Law-abiding Canadians by the millions in this country follow those rules on a daily basis and we are checked on a daily basis to make sure that we can continue to lawfully possess our property.

Instead of harassing people like me, the government is going to make life easier for people who are unlicensed. If people are found in possession of a basketful of handguns in downtown Toronto, they should not worry; they do not have an RPAL, the guns were smuggled and they might even be the smuggler. Guess what? They have the option of going home and sitting in their house and thinking hard about how bad they are because that is the Liberal solution to organized crime in our country. This is absolutely ridiculous.

On possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition, these are guns we are not even allowed to have, so now we are talking about illegal owners. They should not worry; the Liberal Party of Canada has their back. If they have one of these, they do not have to go to jail, here is a “get out of jail” card just like in the Monopoly game; they do not have to face the consequences.

Possession of a weapon obtained by commission of offence is theft. That is someone who comes into my home and steals my gun. That is someone who comes into a rural property in the County of Red Deer, the County of Lacombe, the County of Ponoka, or any one of our communities, steals from us and may be purposefully there trying to steal our firearms. The Liberal response is because our disarmament policy for law-abiding Canadians is not working, they are going to let thieves out of jail for free for stealing a law-abiding citizen's property.

This legislation is absolutely ridiculous. It flies in the sensibilities of everybody. On these mandatory minimums just on the firearms, and not getting into the drugs and all of the other things that the government is reducing or limiting minimum penalties for, in this legislation, virtually all of them except for one, guess who introduced these pieces of legislation in the Criminal Code? Was it Stephen Harper or Brian Mulroney? One of them happened under the government of Stephen Harper. The other dozen of these provisions in the Criminal Code were put in place by none other than Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jean Chrétien. Today's Liberals are certainly not yesterday's Liberals, ladies and gentlemen. Our country is not any safer with these guys at the helm.

• (1805)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for whatever that was. The member talked about a “get out of jail free” card. It is actually just a fundamental philosophical difference of how to approach crime. The approach of the Conservatives is very simple, “lock 'em up and throw away the key”. I believe that the member probably actually believes that.

I would encourage him to stand and say that yes, his approach is to lock them up and throw away the key. Unfortunately for him, the majority of society believes that the government has a role to play in rehabilitation and reintegration of people into society. He talks about a “get out of jail free” card. Where is that even coming from?

*Government Orders*

The bill is about removing a mandatory minimum and giving that power to the judge to be able to prescribe what the sentencing should be. Could the member please explain to the House why he does not have faith in judges to make those decisions?

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, I will gladly respond to that question. My colleague is missing the point altogether. If my colleague would actually read polling information that Canadians are responding to when they are asked the question about confidence in police and their justice system, he would see that the numbers have not looked good for the last six years. Crime is on the rise. Dangerous crime and violent crime are on the rise. Confidence in our police and our justice system is going down. That is because of the tone and the agenda set by the current government in going after the wrong people. The member has it wrong.

When it comes to rehabilitation, my colleague should know that the only way offenders are going to be able to access any of the programs and services offered by Correctional Service Canada is if they spend at least two years in jail. That is the threshold. When they go to a provincial prison they do not get any of that. When they go to a federal prison for two years, they get access to programs and services so that they avoid recidivism.

Why would the Liberal members of this House deny these people an opportunity to get the programs and services they need? They just want the votes of the hug-a-thug crowd in this country, and it is doing nothing for safety.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I would like to take the discussion in a different direction.

Despite the rhetoric from the Conservatives, there are examples of what works elsewhere in the world. Portugal, for example, has chosen the path of decriminalization, and it works. Another country that comes to mind is Switzerland, which has now gone the diversion route, and it works.

The Conservatives are always pushing the “tough on drugs” approach that they took in the 1990s, which did not work. It is interesting that examples of what is being done elsewhere, including Quebec, only make us more inclined to believe in the importance of diversion.

My colleague from Montarville also talked about this. The tough on drugs approach is all well and good, but who pays in the end? Quebec and the provinces end up paying. There is a cost to all of this, as my colleague said, but I would like to hear the member's opinion on the examples that exist elsewhere and that prove that these programs work.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is asking about whether people should be going to jail for simple possession. I would ask her if she shares my interpretation of the legislation.

Here is what the minimum penalties with respect to drugs are in Bill C-5: with respect to drug dealers, trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking, which does not sound like simple pos-

session to me; importing and exporting, or possession for the purpose of exporting, which to me sounds like drug smuggling across the border; production of a substance in schedule I, including heroin, cocaine, fentanyl, crystal meth, which sounds like illegal drug manufacturing.

This bill is not addressing the simple possession issues my colleague is talking about. We can have a discussion about those kinds of things for simple possession and addictions all day long, and I would be happy to have the conversation with her.

This is about criminality and organized crime. Why would we be conflating that with simple possession? These are criminal organizations that are smuggling and manufacturing and distributing drugs. They should go to jail.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, just following on from the previous question, Bill C-5 would amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act by adding a new section after section 10. It would add a declaration of principles and a warning and referral system.

Many jurisdictions across Canada, including the Province of British Columbia, have flatly asked the federal government for decriminalization. It includes the chiefs of police. I wonder if my colleague can comment on the fact that this bill was probably a great missed opportunity to address that fundamental aspect of our justice system.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague missed the opportunity to not get into a coalition with the government of the day, but that is fine.

The diversion measures that are in the legislation are certainly something that can be considered. As a former law enforcement officer, I had the ability to decide to pursue something or not. A Crown prosecutor has the ability to decide to pursue something or not. That is where the judgment needs to be made.

We do not need to legislate that judgment. We need to trust the men and women on the ground, not only in our law enforcement but in our prosecutorial services. They are the ones who can actually decide and are best positioned to weed out who is doing what on the ground, whether it is somebody caught up with addictions and simple possession or it is actual criminal activity. Let us let them do their work. They are—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

**Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as this is my first time rising to give a speech as a member of the 44th Parliament, I want to take a moment to thank the people of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for re-electing me to this place on their behalf. It is a responsibility, honour and privilege that I do not take lightly. I am really grateful to them for sending me back here.

*Government Orders*

My re-election was made possible by everyone who supported my campaign, believed in me, had my back and helped me through this journey. With the dedication and professionalism of my team, the passion and commitment of our volunteers, the generosity and sacrifice of our donors and, of course, the love and support of family and friends, we were able to share our positive Conservative vision. I am grateful beyond words.

I would not be here without my amazing campaign team. I thank my campaign manager David Sverginsky, my official agent Doug Plummer, and the rest of my core team and staff without whom I would not be here. They are Russ Kykendall, Tony Reznowski, Yvonne Hundey, Anna Marie Young, Todd Gurd, Cheri Davies and Kim Heathcote; and the group of volunteers who canvassed with me almost every day: Archie Nugteren, Mark Etienne, Gerry Rupke, Steve Stellingwerff, Marius, Juliette, Hannah Kurjanowicz, Brandon MacDougall, and my predecessor, Bev Shipley.

I would also like to thank Julie, Angela, Holly, Candice and Jennifer for always being there and for their steadfast support throughout my political journey.

The sign crew put up over 3,000 signs. I thank them for their hard work and dedication.

A special thanks to my parents, Diane and Theo Rood, for their love and support. My dad took on the enormous task of installing the signs, removing them and just being there for me throughout this.

I thank my brothers Jeremy Rood and Steele Leacock, and my grandma, Helen Jamrozinski, for their love and support throughout this journey.

Going on to the bill that is before us, it should come as no surprise when I say the Conservatives are the party of law and order. We are the party that stands with victims of crime and their loved ones. We are the party that applies common sense and outcome-based principles to protect innocent Canadians from violent criminals who would harm others. We are the party that understands that it is criminals who are committing these crimes, not law-abiding firearms owners, anglers, hunters and sports shooters.

The Liberals claim to be serious about getting tough on crime, but their hypocritical actions speak louder than words. Last February, in the previous Parliament, the government introduced Bill C-22. The goal of this harmful legislation was to reduce the sentences for illegal gun smugglers and remove mandatory minimum sentences for many serious offences. That bill died when the election was called, but here we are again with the same bill, but with a different number.

Just months before the Prime Minister called an unnecessary election in the middle of a pandemic, my Conservative colleague introduced a private member's bill, which would have imposed tougher sentences for criminals who were caught smuggling or in possession of illegal guns, which is the larger problem.

Brian Sauv , who is the president of the National Police Federation, has said that policies like what the Liberals are advocating for may be politically popular, but they fail to address the root cause of gun violence. He says:

The narrative is that we need to restrict gun ownership because that will curtail crime, when really the evidence is that illegal gun trafficking leads to criminals owning guns, which leads to crimes with firearms.

Therefore, we need to look at the source of the problem.

Crimes with firearms are exactly what the government claims it wants to stop, yet it voted against a bill and continues to fail to support legislation that will do just that. Does that sound like a government that is serious on tackling gun crime for the people of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex? It sounds kind of hypocritical to me.

Bill C-22 is back as Bill C-5, but with the same purpose. This legislation is a revolving door for criminals. It would do nothing to stop crime. It would do the exact opposite. It would repeal the penalties for crimes like weapons trafficking, reckless discharge of a firearm, discharge with intent to wound or endanger and armed robbery. It would also remove conditional sentencing for heinous crimes like sexual assault, kidnapping, child abduction, human trafficking, vehicle theft and arson.

That tells me the Liberal elites in Ottawa do not care about our safety or the safety of our loved ones. Conservatives like myself will always fight against harmful legislation like Bill C-5. Canadians do not want the justice system to be a constantly revolving door. Common sense must prevail for all common good.

I studied criminology in university, and I have friends who are corrections officers, probation and parole officers. I hear the same thing from them all the time. It is the same people revolving through the doors committing the same crimes over and over again. If it is a provincial offence, which is two years less a day, they will not get the kind of help they would need. If they were sent to a federal facility, they would have help for mental health and addictions problems.

*Government Orders*

● (1815)

The government has a role to play in ensuring that Canadians, victims of crime and their families can exist freely and without fear in our society, but in Bill C-5, the Liberals are telling Canadians that these offenses are no big deal. Is it no big deal that someone could leave prison, steal a car, rob several businesses, assaulting the occupants with a weapon, and then attack a police officer on their way out? Apparently, the Liberal government thinks that scenario only deserves a slap on the wrist, not a guaranteed minimum punishment for harmful criminal behaviour. In fact, what is proposed in this bill would allow someone who did all the above the opportunity to not even spend a single day in jail.

Again, as a Conservative, I have to stand here and attempt to bring common sense to a government that is clearly showing no indication that it has any sense left, common or not. In fact, some days it feels like the Liberals have removed the words “common sense” from the dictionary entirely.

At the end of the day, Bill C-5 gets soft on gun crime and gives great relief to criminals and offenders. It is missing any good reasons why this policy cares for, protects or prevents repeat offences against victims of violent crime in Canada. It misses the mark on what should be targeted to stop crime and illegal guns. As Winnipeg police constable Rob Carver said, “When we seize handguns, the handguns are always, almost 100 per cent, in the possession of people who have no legal right to possess them. They’re almost always stolen or illegally obtained.” Again, it is not the law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters who are committing serious crimes.

Let us now look at the final part of this so-called landmark progressive legislation. During an unprecedented national overdose crisis, we have a government that is actively trying to enable the criminal proliferation of drug trafficking, importing, exporting and production. Where is the sense in that?

I heard from Louis, a constituent in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, who asked me, “Can we address the fact that known drug dealers are getting away with murder? We lost a grandchild.” What Canadians want and need is a compassionate approach to mental health and addictions recovery, and this is not found in Bill C-5. In fact, no part of this bill even attempts to touch on the subject, and it is too busy enabling the pushers.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health estimates the economic burden of mental illness in Canada at \$51 billion per year, which includes health care costs, lost productivity and reductions in health-related quality of life. Addictions and mental health issues have costly and far-reaching impacts in our society and must be given proper attention in legislation to combat the crisis.

When will the government put forward legislation to address this impact instead of using a real crisis to score cheap political talking points at the cost of protecting Canadians? The Prime Minister and the Liberal members across the floor are all talk. They talk big and they make sweet-sounding promises to address serious concerns about gender-based violence, opioid addiction, systemic racism and other forms of discrimination. They make boldfaced claims to be helping Canadians, but then offer nothing of use.

● (1820)

What I see, and what the constituents I represent see when the Liberals grandstand, is hypocrisy. I see before the House a bill that is soft on gun crime and soft on the criminal drug enterprise. Canadians know bills like Bill C-5 are contrary to evidence, countless news stories and the testimony of victims. It should be impossible to ignore the madness of the government’s relentless attempts to gaslight Canadians otherwise.

Canadians expect the government to stand up for the rule of law, to protect victims first and to stand up for their rights. The government should be targeting violent criminals, sexual offenders and criminal gangs, and ensuring that the Criminal Code protects Canadians. Any changes should be made in a well-informed manner that protects public safety.

As legislators, we must represent and reflect the values of the average Canadian, and Canadians consider the crimes that Bill C-5 relaxes measures against to be extremely serious. By reducing mandatory sentences for serious crimes, Bill C-5 says elected representatives do not need to be accountable to the victims of these crimes. The utter hypocrisy of this bill and those who vote for it is staggering.

To vote in favour of this bill signals a victory for violent criminals who commit some of the most heinous crimes against the most vulnerable victims in Canada. It comes at a cost to victims and their families, present and future, and to the dignity of our great nation. That is a fact I find unacceptable, and it is why I will be voting against the bill.

● (1825)

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was listening intently to the member opposite, and I really cannot believe what my ears were hearing, this vehement defence of the failed Harper, so-called “tough on crime” policies that have failed Canada over the years. They have resulted in nothing but over-incarceration of indigenous people and Black Canadians for offences that are not serious in nature. This is a defence of policies that the courts have found to be unconstitutional in many respects.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Why are the Conservatives so focused on championing policies that have failed us and not looking at data to ensure that Canadians, no matter what background they come from, have an opportunity to be able to serve their sentences in the community and to be rehabilitated and reintegrated back into society?

**Ms. Lianne Rood:** Mr. Speaker, I talked about victims and needing to protect them. A lot of victims are exactly what the member said; they are also racialized Canadians. I believe that people who commit a crime should be punished for their crime. On mandatory minimums, when I talk to people who are working in corrections and who see these people coming in every day, they feel that if these criminals had actually done time that was reflective of the crime they committed, it would deter them from coming back again and again and committing the same crimes. We need to be protecting victims of crime here.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois really believes that there are distinctions to be made when it comes to mandatory minimum sentences.

As my colleague stated, we believe that this is not the right time to abolish mandatory minimums for firearm offences, given the Liberal government's failure to respond to the catastrophes and tragedies that have taken place in recent weeks and months, particularly in Montreal.

We see that the Conservative Party is hemming and hawing over gun control, particularly for assault weapons.

What concrete action is my Conservative colleague proposing to reduce murders committed with firearms if her party does not support initiatives like banning handguns?

[*English*]

**Ms. Lianne Rood:** Mr. Speaker, it has been stated here before, and I will state it again: I am an RPAL holder myself. I have to go through rigorous background checks. I have to submit documents every day my background is checked. I do not own a firearm personally. The law-abiding citizens who have a possession and acquisition licence, who are trained, who are hunting and who are farmers like me, who have been out in the woods or in the middle of a field in the middle of the night with wildlife around them, are abiding by the laws of this country. It is not those people who are committing crimes.

The people who are committing crimes with handguns are obtaining them illegally. They are getting them from illegal sources. They have no permit or right to own that gun, and then they are committing crimes. Most of these guns are being smuggled across the border from the U.S. People committing these crimes are the ones who should be behind bars, not law-abiding hunters and farmers.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the problem with the arguments the Conservatives are making is that they are equating the elimination of mandatory minimums with the end of sentencing altogether, and nothing could be further from the truth.

On the example the member cited in her speech of someone getting out of prison and committing robbery and assault with a handgun, there is no doubt in my mind that the judge looking at that case would recommend jail time. The Criminal Code already has provision 718.2, sentencing principles, which allow a judge to increase or decrease a sentence based on aggravating factors.

My question is a simple one: Why do Conservatives have so little faith in judges to mete out the appropriate sentence based on the crime committed?

**Ms. Lianne Rood:** Mr. Speaker, I have faith in judges and the judicial system, but sometimes the judges need to have something in front of them in the form of a mandatory minimum sentence so that people who are committing these crimes can get the help they need from the institutions they would go to so that they are not out on the streets.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1830)

[*English*]

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Insurance Bureau of Canada declared the B.C. floods the most costly severe weather event in the province's history.

The quote for insured private damages is \$450 million, but the actual cost is much higher because many affected were uninsured or under-insured. This also does not account for public infrastructure lost. As well, \$155 million in insured damage was incurred by wildfires this year, but again this does not take into account those people without coverage.

Yesterday the fall economic statement promised \$5 billion, through the disaster financial assistance arrangements, for recovery costs related to the recent natural disasters in British Columbia. While this response to the ongoing advocacy of my Conservative colleagues and me is appreciated and reflects the team Canada approach I have been taking, especially with the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, I look forward to the government unpacking this promise and outlining how and where the financial support will be provided in conjunction with the Province of B.C.

The funds are tied to fiscal year 2021-2022, which ends in just over three months. The dikes and roads in question that were washed out cannot be rebuilt that fast. Will there be flexibility for these funds to be accessed after March 31?



*Adjournment Proceedings*

Providing these funds through the disaster financial assistance arrangements program creates additional concerns and questions. Small communities such as Princeton and Merritt in the riding of my colleague, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, have expressed that due to the scale of the damage, their tax bases are simply unable to support what would likely be required of them in matching funds. What about Lytton, in my constituency? There literally is no tax base, as 90% of the village burned to the ground.

The federal government's disaster financial assistance arrangements with the Province of B.C. provide no assurances that these small communities will actually receive the support they need. This is causing a lot of stress on local leaders.

In his answer on Monday, the Minister of Emergency Preparedness indicated that the federal and provincial governments and indigenous leaders were meeting that very day on this topic. Could the minister share the results of that meeting? Specifically, will a portion of the funds announced go to dike repair and enhancements?

I am glad that indigenous leaders were at the table for those meetings, because as wildfires devastated Lytton and surrounding first nations this summer, it became clear that emergency coordination with and notification of indigenous communities affected is woefully insufficient. The recent flooding has only reiterated this reality.

In B.C., the First Nations' Emergency Services Society has called for a more integrated alert system and consistent funding after it took days to coordinate and reach remote indigenous communities cut off by the flooding. I spoke with Chief Lampreau of Shackan First Nation last week. Many first nations leaders like him are at a loss.

The AFN reports B.C. signed a \$29-million emergency services agreement with Indigenous Services Canada in 2018 that included 28 emergency management coordinator positions for first nations. However, these positions were unfilled. Why is that? What concrete measures is the government going to take to ensure resources are in place for the remote indigenous communities that were impacted the most by some of our most recent natural disasters?

Again, I would like to thank the government for the \$5 billion towards British Columbia and for the collaborative approach the Minister of Emergency Preparedness has taken with me. I hope I hear some concrete answers to some of my questions this evening.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon for allowing me to provide a more fulsome response on this very important issue.

The recent flooding in British Columbia was a nearly unprecedented disaster for the people of the Lower Mainland. It devastated local communities, including those my hon. colleague represents. We must also not forget that this is but the latest weather-related disaster to hit British Columbia this year, with many communities still recovering from the severe wildfires that occurred just a few months ago. As devastating as these events have been, we unfortu-

nately know that they will likely not be the last. Research shows that weather-related natural disasters will only increase in frequency and severity across Canada in the coming years, thanks to the effects of climate change.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats of our time. We need to act quickly to build resiliency and better protect our communities. Continued collaboration with our provincial and territorial counterparts will be essential as we move forward with this work. That is why our government has created a new climate disaster resilience committee with our B.C. provincial counterparts. The committee will work closely with indigenous leadership to respond to the immediate needs of British Columbians and look at ways to build back with greater resiliency.

One of the main ways that the federal government provides support to Canadians in the wake of disasters such as this is through the disaster financial assistance arrangements program, or DFAA. Through the DFAA, we can provide funding directly to impacted provinces and territories for costs they have incurred. Under the program, the federal government cost-shares up to 90% of all eligible disaster response and recovery costs with provinces and territories when eligible expenditures exceed an established initial threshold based on provincial population. The DFAA also offers an additional 15% top-up for mitigation enhancements for innovative recovery activities that increase future resilience.

In yesterday's fall economic statement, as the member acknowledged, our government announced we have set aside \$5 billion in 2020, 2021 and 2022 for the federal share of recovery costs under the DFAA, as well as other costs related to the recent natural disasters in British Columbia. I can also confirm that on November 19, B.C. submitted a request for financial assistance and an intent to request an advanced payment under the DFAA. As the event is still active, estimates from the province are still forthcoming and public safety officials are actively engaged with their provincial counterparts to begin work on this package. We know that there is more work to do to support British Columbians, not just through the recovery from this crisis, but also to protect all Canadians from future disasters.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Through the flood focused national disaster mitigation program, our government supports cost-shared investments in flood mitigation that help to identify, plan for and prevent floods risk. The disaster mitigation and adaptation fund delivered by Infrastructure Canada also provides funding for infrastructure projects that reduce our risk. We have also set up a task force on flood insurance to explore ways to protect homeowners in areas with a risk of flooding, including the possibility of a low-cost national flood program. It is expected to submit its report by spring of 2022. At the same time, Indigenous Services Canada is working with first nations partners to examine the unique context on reserve by establishing a dedicated steering committee on first nations home flood insurance needs.

As we look at building back, people in communities deserve to be better informed about their flood risk as they plan for the future. That is why we are investing \$63.8 million over three years to work with the provinces and territories to complete flood maps for higher-risk areas.

• (1835)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member for Ottawa Centre into the House of Commons in his new role as parliamentary secretary. I would ask him to answer a couple of my questions very specifically.

First, the funds announced under the DFAA are for this fiscal year. Will they still be available in the following fiscal year? As the member mentioned, some of the requests coming from the province are still forthcoming.

Second, again related to the DFAA, the situation in B.C. is so unique. Will there be flexibility with small communities that may need more assistance than usual to cover their portion of contribution under this program?

Third, can the member opposite comment on the need for the Government of Canada to renegotiate the contracts with the Province of B.C. on disaster mitigation and management on reserve?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Mr. Speaker, I again want to thank the member for his advocacy on behalf of his constituents. This is obviously an unprecedented circumstance, but I want to make it very clear that the government will be there for the people of British Columbia. We will work with British Columbians and the Government of British Columbia to ensure they have all the necessary supports to rebuild after this disaster, and to be ready for any future disasters as well.

As the funds were announced yesterday, we will continue to work closely with the British Columbia government to make sure we have all the estimates, expenditures and requests in order. I assure the member that the minister and I will work closely with him to make all information available to him in due course.

• (1840)

HEALTH

**Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, tonight I am following up on a question I first asked on December 7, eight days ago. For the context of my question, it is important to note that in the eight days since I asked this question, according

to the statistics, 88 Canadians will have died by suicide. In that time, in those eight days, we will have lost 88 Canadians to suicide.

It was 370 days ago that the House came together and voted unanimously on a motion from the member for Cariboo—Prince George to take immediate action to establish a national 24-7 suicide prevention hotline: 988. The motion that everyone in this place agreed to was:

That, given that the alarming rate of suicide in Canada constitutes a national health crisis, the House call on the government to take immediate action, in collaboration with our provinces, to establish a national suicide prevention hotline that consolidates all suicide crisis numbers into one easy to remember three-digit [number] (988) hotline that is accessible to all Canadians.

We unanimously passed a motion that referenced the “alarming rate of suicide in Canada”. We called it a “national health crisis”, and we demanded that the House take immediate action to institute this nationwide 988 suicide prevention hotline. That was over a year ago: 370 days ago now. I will note that in the six months Parliament sat after the motion passed, the government did nothing substantive on the issue. We then left the House in June, knowing we were going into an election campaign. The government had trouble instituting a three-digit hotline to save what amounts to 4,000 Canadians who lost their lives to suicide over the past year, according to the statistics. We have not been able to institute that.

We are still consulting, apparently, according to the answer, and the CRTC is reviewing, but let us point out that this is a number that is not being used right now. Parliament has agreed, stakeholders are unanimous in their support and I would assume Canadians would be unanimous in their support for this. We managed, in the ensuing five months after the House broke in June and knowing we were going into an election, to hold a \$600-million election in the midst of a global pandemic. We were able to do that, but we are still consulting on a three-digit suicide prevention hotline.

I was not satisfied with the answer from the minister that this is sitting with the CRTC's bureaucratic process. In this country, there are very few issues that all parliamentarians agree on. Certainly this is one such issue we could act on with some urgency, in the interests of saving the number of lives of Canadians we are talking about.

**Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin for his important question.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

I would first like to say that our thoughts are with the families and communities that have lost loved ones to suicide.

Our government is committed to implementing and fully funding a three-digit mental health crisis and suicide prevention hotline.

• (1845)

*[English]*

The CRTC launched a regulatory proceeding on June 3, 2021, to consult on the proposed three-digit hotline, and the initial public consultation closed on September 1.

*[Translation]*

The 247 interventions from stakeholders and members of the public are available online.

The parties were able to respond to these interventions before October 1.

*[English]*

Following a petition from stakeholders representing persons with disabilities, the CRTC reopened the consultations to allow for new interventions in accessible formats, such as video. The public consultations will remain open until January 31, 2022, and these interventions and replies will become part of the public record that the CRTC will examine to make its determinations.

*[Translation]*

We understand that this crisis line is urgently needed and we are going to make sure it is done right. This includes making sure that the crisis line is able to connect people to the most appropriate service in the most appropriate way.

Canadians must have access to suicide prevention services when they need them. Our government is committed to expanding the capacity and providing virtual services.

*[English]*

The implementation of a three-digit suicide prevention number will build upon our current support of a pan-Canadian suicide prevention service. Budget 2019 provided \$21 million over five years to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health to develop, implement, expand and sustain a fully operational pan-Canadian suicide prevention service.

*[Translation]*

Through this initiative, by 2023, people across Canada will have access to crisis support in English and French when they need it and through the platform of their choice, including telephone, text messaging or chat.

*[English]*

Through the 2020 fall economic statement, our government invested a further \$50 million to bolster the capacity of distress centres.

*[Translation]*

The Public Health Agency of Canada is currently overseeing a first round of funding for 57 distress centres for the fall and winter of 2021-22.

A second round of funding, which closed on October 6, targets recipients with new or unmet needs, as well as organizations excluded from the first round of funding.

*[English]*

Funding applications are now under review. In addition, \$2 million of this funding will support the development of resources to assist distress centres in meeting the needs of diverse and vulnerable populations.

*[Translation]*

The pandemic and lockdowns exacerbated many people's social isolation and distress and made it harder to access health care, which is why it is so important for us to work with our partners to introduce this national mental health support line.

We are there for Canadians when they need us most.

*[English]*

**Hon. Mike Lake:** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful this is an issue that members of all parties can agree on. I will point out for those watching who are interested right now that if they do a Google search and wade through all of the documentation on the government website eventually they will find that there is a 24-7 number for the Canada Suicide Prevention Service. The number is 1-833-456-4566 for those who need that help. Hopefully, soon they will not have to do a Google search to find that number.

To close, my question for the hon. member is this. By what date will Canada finally have an operational three-digit 988 suicide prevention hotline?

**Mrs. Élisabeth Brière:** Mr. Speaker, I assure the member opposite that I share his concern.

*[Translation]*

Our government is 100% committed to fully funding this three-digit mental health crisis and suicide prevention hotline.

*[English]*

The ongoing consultations by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission will help identify barriers and, should any be identified, determine how best to address them. We look forward to the outcome of this proceeding.

The CRTC process will also inform our understanding of the resources necessary to implement a three-digit number.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

In the meantime, the Canada Suicide Prevention Service will continue to make direct and immediate suicide prevention support available to people across Canada. Anyone can talk to a trained responder in French or English 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[*English*]

## VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today on behalf of the citizens of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Veterans and their families feel left behind by the government, to say the least. The veterans ombudsman, veterans advocacy groups and caseworkers from Veterans Affairs Canada have all come forward ringing alarm bells about the failures of the government when it comes to veterans. What has the government's response been on this point? It has been largely silence.

Allow me to paint a picture of Veterans Affairs Canada and the reality of its situation today. Currently, there is a backlog of tens of thousands of veterans waiting for their claims to be processed and adjudicated by the department. Some are waiting as long as two years for therapeutics or assisted-living devices. I would ask government members to imagine waiting two years for the necessities of life, such as a wheelchair and hearing aids, or compensation for injuries sustained while serving our country.

With the greatest of respect, it is shameful that we treat our veterans this way. In the two years that the backlogs have been particularly accrued, we have seen two elections from the government and a doubling of the national debt. However, none of the money seems to be going toward veterans.

How should we deal with these claims? The way to deal with them would be through case managers at Veterans Affairs Canada. The department set a target of 25 cases per manager. This would allow each case manager to get to know files quite well. Unfortunately, the reality is that there are 40 to 50 different files for each case manager. That is less than one hour per week for each person who served our country.

I recall that in my former life as a parole officer, it was the same thing. When a person doing a job does not have time to adequately address files, things will ultimately slip through the cracks. We should be supplying veterans with more resources, not less. When workloads get too high, we see burnout. Commensurate with burnout, we see stress leave and medical leave, and then work gets shifted onto peers. When work gets shifted onto peers, we see more of the same, and a vicious cycle keeps perpetuating itself.

Seventy-four per cent of caseworkers say their workload has negatively affected their health, 32% have had to take time off work, 18% sought professional help and 25% have considered leaving the department altogether. The government plans to cut 300 caseworkers in March 2022, and these are some of the people, if not all, who have been hired to alleviate the current backlog. Apparently, according to the government, veterans are asking for more than we can give them. That is straight from the Prime Minister.

The budget never balanced itself. Will the backlog of veterans also clear itself, in the government's eyes?

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for his question. Of course, I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Once again, it is an honour to be parliamentary secretary for Veterans Affairs. My riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook has one of the highest per capita populations of veterans in Canada, and it is an honour to represent them.

First, I would thank all past and present members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families for the sacrifices they have made to keep us safe inside and outside of our country. It is not uncommon for some CAF members to leave the military bearing physical or mental wounds from their service. What they do is hard and gritty work that most of us cannot imagine, yet they do it anyway, well aware of the hazards and risks they will have to face along the way.

As a government, we know we have the responsibility for veterans and the Canadian Armed Forces and their families, whether they go to Veterans Affairs to improve their physical or mental health, to get financial assistance or some help to find a job, or maybe to learn about the post-service training and education we offer. The department has programs and services available to them.

We recognize that some veterans are sometimes frustrated with the process and indeed that case managers are dealing with a heavy workload. Our government is grateful to them for the good work they are doing to manage this difficult situation and to ensure that all veterans, including those with complex needs, are receiving timely and efficient services. I can also say that on many occasions this year, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has expressed his appreciation to his staff for their hard work and urged employees to always take care of themselves. More concretely, here are some of the steps our government has taken to address this issue.

Going back to 2018, Veterans Affairs received temporary funding for additional case managers. In November 2021, there were 476 case workers at the department, which is double the number of case workers since 2016. They are there to support veterans who are facing complex challenges. It is a collaborative process between veterans and their case manager teams to identify needs and goals and to create a plan to help veterans achieve independence, health and well-being. The case management efforts aim to ensure that all veterans receive the support they need when they need it.

As recently as last month, our minister committed to hiring even more staff, as we indicated in our platform. We have also implemented several initiatives to improve management practices, like implementing guided supports, which sees a veterans services agent work to support veterans with various challenges.

These are some of the large-scale changes we have made, and we continue to work toward implementing them fully. However, the fact that we are making these investments for veterans services shows we are placing a high priority on ensuring that veterans and their families receive the supports they need.

• (1855)

**Mr. Frank Caputo:** Mr. Speaker, I commend and congratulate the hon. parliamentary secretary on his appointment. I had some remarks prepared, but I want to address some of the parliamentary secretary's comments.

The parliamentary secretary said that people had been hired. However, the information in my office is that many of the people who have been hired will not be retained past March 2022. Could the hon. parliamentary secretary please answer this question: How many will be retained after March 2022?

The hon. parliamentary secretary further noted that the government is committed to hiring more staff. My second question is: When will that staff be hired? The third is: What are the case num-

bers today? The fourth is: What will the case numbers be in March 2022?

These are four tangible questions. If the parliamentary secretary could answer them, I would be obliged.

• (1900)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, Canada's veterans have all made enormous sacrifices, for which we are very grateful. We recognize our responsibility to them and in particular to those who come to Veterans Affairs Canada with complex post-career cases that require close attention.

We recently invested nearly \$200 million to improve services to veterans and ensure we make decisions in a more timely manner. That investment is paying off and we are already seeing major decreases in the backlog of claims.

We will continue to do everything we can to make sure that our veterans and their families are assessed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)



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