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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 2, 2022

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a remarkable Canadian: Valerie Dunn. Valerie celebrated her 90th birthday on January 18. That in itself is remarkable, but I want to focus on Valerie's most significant contributions.

In 1980, she started editing and publishing Hi-Rise Community Newspaper. The paper has always been by and for people living in apartment and condo buildings in the greater Toronto area, focusing on community news. After 42 years, Valerie is still the editor and publisher of Hi-Rise. It is published 11 times a year, going to many areas in Toronto, including my riding, and just as it was 42 years ago, it is free of charge.

It is people like Valerie Dunn, energetic, innovative seniors helping and informing neighbours and building community, who motivate me to do the work that I do. Congratulations to Valerie, who at 90, in her words, will “keep on trucking”.

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HARRY STEELE

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past week, Newfoundland and Labrador lost one of its most accomplished citizens. Mr. Harry Steele passed away on January 28.

Born in Musgrave Harbour in 1929, he graduated from MUN and went on to join the Royal Canadian Navy, where he rose to the

rank of lieutenant commander. Serving in the navy prepared him for life in the business world, where he became an entrepreneurial icon. Mr. Steele began his business life with the purchase of the Albatross Motel in Gander. He quickly grew his hospitality business and expanded into aviation, transportation, printing and publishing, broadcasting and the auto industry, to name a few.

Mr. Steele received many tributes and, most notably, was awarded the Order of Canada. After reminiscing with our mutual friend Terry Hart, it was noted that Mr. Steele, like many from my province, enjoyed a good feed of salt fish and, like many as well, having a good chat.

Please join me in sending our heartfelt condolences to Mr. Steele's wife Catherine, their sons John, Peter and Rob, and their families.

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RECOGNITION OF HEROISM

Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the morning of Saturday, January 15, there was a dangerous house fire that took place in my riding. A 15-year-old and an infant were able to escape; however, three other children were still trapped on the second floor of the home.

Adam Attalla, a resident of Mississauga—Streetsville, bravely jumped into action when he saw the semi-detached home on fire. A neighbour let Adam into their home, allowing him to jump from the neighbour's roof onto the roof of the burning house. Adam was able to assist two of the children, who were already on the roof, down to safety. As a third child was still trapped in the home, Adam broke the screen of the window to help the child evacuate the smoke-filled room. Adam's heroism and courageous actions ensured that all members of the family were able to flee the home harm-free.

Adam's actions reflect the true Canadian spirit of how we as a country can come together to help our fellow Canadians in their time of need. I ask my colleagues on both sides of the House to join me in thanking Adam for his heroic actions.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

GHISLAIN PICARD

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to congratulate Ghislain Picard for being elected for an eleventh term as the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador.

Ghislain Picard is an Innu man from the community of Pessamit. He is a wonderful example of the dedication, perseverance and hope that drive efforts to increase the recognition of first nations' interests and promote their development and self-determination.

As the Bloc Québécois critic for indigenous affairs, I want to assure *Utshimau* Picard that I will be pleased and honoured to continue to build bridges with the first nations that he represents through respectful, attentive and ongoing nation-to-nation dialogue.

[Member spoke in Innu and provided the following text:]

Nanitam nika minu-uauitsheuat Innuat, kie anumat akua nika tuten tshetshi pimutaian tshitaimunnuaua

[Member provided the following translation:]

I will always be an ally to the first nations and will humbly relay your requests.

[Translation]

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to say thank you or *tshinashkumitin* to *Utshimau* Picard for the tremendous work he has already done, and I wish him great success in what he still needs to do, what we still need to do. Good luck.

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CULTURAL SECTOR

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, new public health measures allowed movie theatres and performance venues to reopen. Everyone was eagerly awaiting the announcement. It goes without saying that the pandemic has hit the cultural sector particularly hard. Let us not forget that arts and culture contribute to our conversations about society and are crucial to our mental health.

The riding of Hochelaga is chock-full of creators of all kinds who have kept our neighbourhoods culturally vibrant. The Théâtre Denise-Pelletier, Foutoukours, Cirque Alfonse and the Maison de la culture Maisonneuve are just a few that come to mind.

Yesterday, our government announced the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund, which will provide \$60 million in emergency financial support. This support will bring relief and comfort to those who provide others with just that every day by inspiring hope and courage during these tough times.

* * *

• (1410)

BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian athletes will soon be in Beijing for

the Olympic Games, and on behalf of the entire Conservative Party team, I wish them every success and hope they win a lot of medals.

However, according to the NGO Human Rights Watch, the freedom of expression that the International Olympic Committee is supposed to provide to athletes during the Beijing Olympics is worthless in China. We are very familiar with the situation in terms of human rights and freedom of expression in China: They simply do not exist.

Recognizing concerns related to data privacy and spying in China, some European Olympic teams have advised their athletes not to bring personal phones and laptops to Beijing. Tennis player Peng Shuai could attest to this, but she made the mistake of posting on social media that she had been sexually assaulted by a former senior member of the ruling Communist Party, after which she suddenly disappeared.

Yes, we are happy for our athletes, but let there be no doubt about this: The Chinese Communist Party is not worthy of hosting the Olympic Games.

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[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in communities across the Northwest Territories, access to affordable housing is one of the biggest issues my constituents face. That is why I was so pleased last month to join the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and local leaders for three announcements that will help more people in NWT have a safe place to call home.

With a \$9-million federal investment, the Borealis Housing Cooperative will be able to improve the quality and energy efficiency of its 50 units in Yellowknife. We also announced a \$5-million top-up to our government's contribution to the Avens Pavilion project. This brings the total federal contribution to this 102-unit seniors facility to \$38.7 million. Finally, the communities of Fort Good Hope, Lutselk'e and Fort Providence will have 29 new units thanks to \$9.8 million in funding from the Government of Canada.

Our government is making real progress on making housing a reality for more northerners, and I look forward to adding to this list of investments throughout the rest of 2022 and in the years to come.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. The interpretation service has indicated that the sound quality is not good enough for interpreters to work because the member was not using a headset, so his remarks were not interpreted.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Manicouagan.

[English]

I would like to remind all members, if they are talking online in the virtual setting, to please use their headsets. Without the headset, interpreters cannot hear what is being said, and people will not get the full impact of what members are trying to get across.

I know all members have very important messages that they want to get across, not only to other MPs, but also to all Canadians.

The hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington.

* * *

VERONICA TYRRELL

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month celebrates the many past and present accomplishments and contributions of Black Canadians that make our nation culturally diverse, resilient and inclusive. This year's theme is "February and Forever: Celebrating Black History today and every day".

I would like to pay tribute to Veronica Tyrrell. She was a community leader, founder of the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton, recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and tireless advocate for diversity and inclusion, and she was my friend. She was a trailblazer in our community, who worked with disadvantaged youth and police services, and who highlighted Oakville's Black history by focusing on the town's role in the Underground Railroad and more.

She was a champion of Black history and believed in equal opportunity for all. Veronica's hard work and legacy lives on, but I know she would also say there is more work to do to empower all Canadians, especially Black communities, and it is incumbent on each of us to finish her work.

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HOUSING

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the late Colin Powell once told a US president that if you break it, you are going to own it. The Prime Minister broke the real estate market, and now he owns this entire crisis.

The year 2021 was a boom year. A total of 667,000 residential properties changed hands that year, which is a 30% increase over a 10-year average. Average prices went from \$434,000 to \$811,000, which is an 81% inflation increase. The Prime Minister's solution is a scheme from the CMHC called the first-time homebuyer incentive, which was supposed to help 100,000 Canadians. However, government documents show it has only helped 14,000. The government expanded the criteria three times. CMHC said it would reach 65,000 in a memo from November 2020.

It is a booming real estate year with record sales and record inflation. Only Canadian families have suffered. Fixing this mess starts with admitting mistakes. The FTHBI is a failure. It is time to abolish it.

Statements by Members

• (1415)

RECIPIENTS OF THE ORDER OF VAUGHAN

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that great cities are built by exceptional citizens who contribute their time and efforts to building an inclusive community.

Today, I wish to recognize community leaders in the City of Vaughan who were recently appointment to the Order of Vaughan, an honour which pays tribute to those who have made a meaningful impact on Vaughan's civic life by dedicating their time and talents to the city's ongoing success.

I want to send my heartfelt congratulations to Joseph Sgro for his unwavering commitment to bring health care services to our community; Elvira Caria, an outstanding leader dedicated to public service; and Iolanda De Simone Masci, a lifelong philanthropist. As well, I congratulate all other recipients for their remarkable life work.

They embody the spirit of generosity that characterizes the residents of the city of Vaughan and make our city a better place to live in. Their achievements and contributions will impact many generations, and their stories will be forever etched in Vaughan's social fabric.

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RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last August, I was honoured to attend the start of the ground sonar search at the former residential school St. Joseph's Mission in my hometown of Williams Lake. Last week I, along with Canadians across the country, were heartbroken to hear the news out of my hometown that, after completing phase one of the ground sonar search and searching only four of 400 hectares, the burial sites of 93 human remains were discovered.

This impacts my family and the families of friends, as we had loved ones who attended St. Joseph's Mission. Some came home and some did not. My heart breaks for the families and the communities who continue to be affected by the intergenerational trauma associated with the residential school system. Their pain is real and they deserve justice. To the communities and families, I want to say I stand with them. I continue to walk with them down the path of reconciliation.

I want to also thank my good friend, Williams Lake First Nation Kúkpi7 Willie Sellars, and his council and elders for their strong leadership through this extremely difficult time. As Kúkpi7 Willie said last week, "There can be no reconciliation...[without] truth." I agree.

*Statements by Members***SIMON EDGAR DICKERT**

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Simon Edgar Dickert loved dinosaurs and sharks, the Kratt brothers and *Wild Kratts*, and he was always smiling. Even while battling brain cancer for four years, he smiled through everything. He fought hard, and he stayed true to his beautiful personality and his sense of humour.

When it came time for him to make a wish to the Make-a-Wish foundation, he thought of everyone else first. He thought of his younger siblings, Sadie, Sean and Emily, and his parents, Samantha and Tyler. While he was thinking of everyone else, the community of Mount Forest was thinking of him. Through their Gold Bikes for Simon campaign, he became their superhero, raising funds and awareness for childhood cancer.

Mount Forest lost its superhero on Christmas Eve. Simon was only seven years old. May we all work for the day when kids can be kids, and childhood cancer is no more.

* * *

CANADA'S FIRST WOMAN IN SPACE

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when people think of Sault Ste. Marie's most notable individuals, one person always comes to mind. Dr. Roberta Bondar was born and raised in the Sault. She later went on to study at numerous universities and obtained a Ph.D. and a medical degree.

On January 22, 1992, Dr. Bondar made history as Canada's first woman and the world's first neurologist to enter space. This year marks the 30th year since her amazing mission. She is the recipient of numerous accolades, including a companionship of the Order of Canada. In addition to her extensive scientific career, she is an avid photographer renowned for her exhibits on nature. Dr. Bondar continues to be heavily involved in community work and champions promoting literacy, science and arts, and her foundation.

I congratulate Dr. Bondar on her 30-plus years of excellence. I thank her for all she does for Canada. She continues to inspire boys and girls of all ages to reach the stars. I ask members to please join me in congratulating Dr. Bondar.

* * *

● (1420)

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to find out that in Nova Scotia sexual health centres are being forced to close between April and September due to lack of funding, leaving individuals without access to services. Further, nine provinces have declared outbreaks of sexually transmitted infections.

Access to sexual health centres and services are foundational for reproductive justice. The government is a self-proclaimed feminist government. However, its behaviour reflects otherwise.

I would like to remind the government that reproductive justice is critical for gender equality. This includes the right of individuals to freely make choices about their reproductive health and to access reproductive services. I am imploring the government to recognize

this right to bodily autonomy and support provinces in funding sexual health services to ensure this right is upheld.

* * *

[Translation]

TROIS-RIVIÈRES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to an institution in my riding that is celebrating its 140th anniversary: the Trois-Rivières Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Chamber was founded in 1881, making it one of the oldest chambers of commerce in Quebec.

It contributed to establishing the Port of Trois-Rivières and building the railway station. The mid-1940s saw the advent of the so-called modern Chamber with the introduction of a permanent secretariat. Women were able to join for the first time.

The Chamber then orchestrated a campaign to convince the Government of Quebec to build a bridge over the St. Lawrence River. The theme was, "We need the bridge and we will have it". In the 1980s, the Chamber contributed to several projects that helped shaped Trois-Rivières, including Parc portuaire, the revitalization of the downtown, and Saint-Quentin Island.

Today the Chamber has 750 members, who make up a strong and dynamic business network. It contributes to the promotion and success of its members and to the development of the community.

On the occasion of this 140th anniversary, I am sure that the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain will join me in congratulating Cassy Bernier, president, Geneviève Scott-Lafontaine, acting director general, the entire board and the administrative staff.

* * *

[English]

RACISM

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House we took steps to adopt multiple motions deploring and condemning hateful and racist symbols that were adopted unanimously. It was the right thing to do.

We must denounce hateful and racist actions whenever they happen, whether anti-Muslim, anti-Black or directed at any group. Every person possesses inherent God-given dignity. As legislators, it is incumbent on us to protect that dignity and condemn racism in all its forms.

Blackface has a painful history. From minstrel shows in the 19th century to more recent examples, blackface continues to portray racist caricatures of Black people. Yesterday, the Liberals blocked the unanimous consent motion I brought in this chamber condemning the use of blackface. I urge all parties in this House to be united in fighting all forms of racism and anti-Black hate, including the use of blackface.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every February, I normally rise to encourage parliamentarians and Canadians to celebrate Black History Month. These are not normal times. This past weekend, a small minority thought it acceptable to bring swastikas and Confederate flags to Parliament Hill. Let us not mince words: The Confederate flag is a symbol for slavery. Whips deformed Black bodies. Forced labour mangled limbs. Torture almost always preceded lynchings.

Intellectually, I know that very few people today would support what the Confederate flag represented. I will assume that the Confederate flag was tolerated this weekend out of respect for the individuals' freedom of expression. However, in my heart I was left wondering who else supports this flag. Without real-time denunciations, how am I to know? That is what scares me. Even 188 years after the abolition of slavery in Canada, in some people's eyes I am not equal, nor should I be free. This is why I celebrate Black history, and Black Canadian history, every February and throughout the year.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1425)

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the protest outside is now in its fifth day. I know the Prime Minister does not agree with the truckers and their supporters, but he does have some responsibility as the Prime Minister to help bring some resolution.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House, and tell all Canadians, if he has any plans to help these folks feel like they have been heard? Does he have any plans to bring some resolution to the situation that is going on right now outside?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by recognizing the member for Durham and thanking him for his service. There is a lot we do not agree on for the direction of this country, but he stepped up to serve his country. I want to thank him for his sacrifice and also particularly Rebecca, Mollie and Jack for being part of what is a very difficult life for even the most successful of us.

In regard to the vaccine mandates, we had an election on those six months ago, and Canadians overwhelmingly supported politicians who were firm that vaccinations are the way through this pandemic.

Oral Questions

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister. We were not fully able to hear his answer, but I heard the beginning of it and the end and I thank him for the remarks he made about the member for Durham. We really appreciate that.

I want to go back to the issue at hand. I totally get, and I think we have all heard, that the Prime Minister does not agree with the position of these protesters. I think that is clear, but he has a responsibility as Prime Minister to help bring some resolution. If they feel that they have at least been heard, they could maybe start to make some plans to go back home to their families.

What is his plan to bring some resolution to this impasse?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this pandemic, we have been focused on encouraging Canadians to do the right things and to be there for their neighbours, for frontline health workers, for vulnerable people and for their families. That means following public health advice. That means getting vaccinated. That means being there for each other as communities in respect and in support.

We have been extraordinarily engaged in encouraging people to continue to get vaccinated. Over 100,000 Canadians got their first doses just last week. There is more to do, and we will continue to listen to people who have concerns as we work together.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know the supply chain is fragile and it is causing great challenges to families across the country who are facing price increases. We know the pandemic has created tremendous stress on all parts of the economy, but the Prime Minister has definitely added another layer to this already problematic situation.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he is responsible for adding another layer of burden upon families, and what is he going to do to fix this?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives seem to be under the mistaken understanding that our supply chains have been disrupted by vaccine mandates when, in fact, our supply chains have been disrupted by COVID. The best way to counter COVID is to make sure that people can do their jobs and continue to deliver goods to Canadians so we can get through this in safety. That means following the lead of the almost 90% of Canadian truckers who have been vaccinated, and getting vaccinated. That is how we get through this.

Oral Questions

• (1430)

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the least we can say is that COVID-19 is the excuse that the Prime Minister uses for everything.

However, there is one person who is looking at the figures very objectively, and that is the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In his recent report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer stated that if the government continues its unbridled spending spree, it will have a direct effect on inflation.

The Prime Minister should stop talking about COVID-19. The Parliamentary Budget Officer himself said that COVID-19 has no impact on the inflation of government spending.

Will the Prime Minister, who does not listen to the opposition or families struggling because of inflation, at least listen to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and control spending?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the Parliamentary Budget Officer did not say that COVID-19 has no impact on inflation.

We know full well that the current global inflation crisis is directly related to COVID-19. The best way to strengthen our economy and help people get through this health crisis is to be there for each other. That is what we promised from the outset, and that is exactly what we will continue to do.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reality is sinking in for all Canadian families, from the most vulnerable to the wealthiest.

Inflation has a real, direct impact on grocery bills for the most vulnerable families. Their grocery bills are now \$1,000 higher than they were last year because of the 4.8% rate of inflation. Inflation has not been this high in 30 years.

The government claims that this is no big deal and that the rest of the world is experiencing the same thing. No, Canada is suffering because the government is out of control and has gone on a spending spree.

When will the government act sensibly and responsibly and rein in its spending?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to see that the Conservative Party of Canada is completely ignoring the facts, the reality, and refuses to acknowledge that inflation is a global phenomenon directly tied to COVID-19.

This is not a just a Canadian phenomenon. It is something we are responding to, and our government has been there all along to support Canadians as much as necessary and for as long as necessary.

The Conservatives want us to do less, but we will be there to help families, as we promised at the beginning of this pandemic.

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to recognize my hon. colleague from Durham and commend him on his sincerity and unwavering commitment.

This does not happen often, but I actually agree with the Prime Minister on several points. Protesting is a right that must be regulated. It is reckless to do so in the midst of a pandemic. The current protest has gone on long enough. The possibility of escalation is cause for concern.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what concrete action he plans to take, aside from just pointing fingers, to put an end to the crisis?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Beloil—Chambly knows full well that it is not the place of the government or politicians to give directives or orders to police services. They do their work independently.

However, as a government, we are making sure that we provide all the resources required to enable our police and law enforcement services to do their jobs, keep Canadians safe, and ensure that the residents of Ottawa can get back to their normal lives, hopefully soon.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I suggested to the Prime Minister some possible courses of action that fall under the federal government's responsibility and purview. One of them was to simply urge those who are occupying Parliament Hill to leave.

Every suggestion we make is one more than the Prime Minister has made. He has still not suggested anything at all. Meanwhile, protesters seem to be settling in for what is beginning to look like a long siege.

Has the Prime Minister done anything to get the truckers to leave? How long does he intend to let this situation go on before he does something about it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague knows very well that, a few days ago, I said that it was time for these protesters, who have made their voices heard, to leave Ottawa so that residents and parliamentarians can continue their work of representing and serving Canadians.

We will continue to work with law enforcement agencies to ensure that people are protected and to ensure that this protest, which is now becoming illegal, does come to an end.

* * *

• (1435)

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this pandemic, health care workers have been harassed. They have been the subject of verbal assaults. They have been blocked from going to their places of work. Vaccination centres have been shut down.

We passed a law to protect health care workers, but it is not being enforced. At a minimum, we need to make sure frontline health care workers are safe in doing the important work of protecting us and saving our lives.

Why are the laws to protect health care workers not being enforced?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the leader of the NDP, and indeed all parliamentarians who supported our law to bring extra protections to frontline health care workers. There is no excuse, and no reason, for frontline health workers to be verbally assaulted or harassed on their way in to work to save the lives of Canadians. That is why we moved forward on that, and that is why we will always stand to ensure that our frontline health workers are getting the protections they need while they are busy protecting the rest of us.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the work and the sacrifice of the member for Durham. We disagreed fundamentally on how to help Canadians, but I want to thank him for his service.

[*Translation*]

Since the beginning of this pandemic, our health care workers have been harassed on their way to work.

Our priority is to at least ensure that these people, these health care workers who take care of us and help us, are safe when they are working. We passed a bill to protect them. However, that legislation is currently not being enforced.

Why are the laws to protect our workers—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we completely agree. I want to thank all members of the House, including the leader of the NDP, for supporting our proposal to create new protections for health care workers.

They do not need to be harassed, insulted and intimidated when they are working to protect other Canadians and save us all during this pandemic. That is why we will continue to do whatever it takes to protect them in their work.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are undoubtedly frustrated with the continued COVID restrictions. This weekend the transport minister stated that the cross-border trucking mandate is temporary, but that new interprovincial vaccine mandates for truckers are on the way. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the CFIB, manufacturers and exporters have all called the existing vaccine mandate harmful and bad policy for our fragile supply chain. The government continues to ignore the frustration.

Is the mandate temporary, or is the Prime Minister expanding it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Conservative Party seems to continue to not understand

Oral Questions

is that the threat to our supply chains is COVID, not vaccinations. That is why we will continue, as we told Canadians we would in the last election, to encourage strongly all Canadians to get vaccinated, including with mandates for anyone who travels by plane or train, including members of the federal public service and including people in federally regulated industries. The way we get through this is through vaccines, and that is what we are going to stay steadfast to.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should talk to the transport minister, because the transport minister knows that 14,000 fewer loads entered Canada in the first week of this cross-border mandate. The minister knows that the price of a load has increased 300% to 400% since the beginning of this mandate, and the minister knows that the Canadian business community, as well as trucking organizations, have all expressed their concern about this cross-border mandate on our fragile supply chain.

When will the minister officially ignore all of these stakeholders and all of these facts and announce an additional provincial mandate?

• (1440)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the vulnerabilities to our supply chain come from COVID. The way to counter COVID is through vaccinations. I would encourage the members of the Conservative Party to listen to the almost 90% of truckers in this country who have chosen to get vaccinated to keep themselves safe, to keep their families safe, to keep our frontline health workers from getting overwhelmed and to continue to be able to do their jobs of putting food on Canadians' tables. We thank them deeply for their continued work and will always be there to support and protect them.

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PRIVACY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December we found out that the Liberals were secretly tracking the mobility data of 33 million Canadians during the pandemic. The only reason Canadians found out is that a request for proposal was issued to continue tracking the mobility data for another five years. Serious concerns have been raised by security and surveillance experts on what security measures and protocols were put in place to protect the personal privacy data of 33 million Canadians who were spied on. On Monday, the ethics committee unanimously passed a motion to postpone the RFP.

Will the Prime Minister respect the committee's decision and cancel the RFP?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservative Party, we believe data and evidence need to inform our response to COVID-19. It is crucial to inform policy and decision-making. The Public Health Agency of Canada has used de-identified data without personal identifiers to inform the government's response to the pandemic and worked closely with the Privacy Commissioner throughout.

We have also publicly provided Canadians with that information since 2020 to keep them informed. We remain focused on Canadians' health and safety and continue to uphold the privacy standards they rightfully expect.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish the Prime Minister felt that way about the Winnipeg lab documents.

Security and privacy experts are concerned about the security protocols and measures that were put in place to protect the privacy of Canadians in this data scoop. Why was it done in secret without the users' consent? Why was the Privacy Commissioner not consulted?

Where a Canadian eats, where they get gas, what family members they visit and how many times they go to Costco is no business of this government, especially in a pandemic. Does the Prime Minister not understand that personal privacy protection is the foundation of our democracy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again we see the Conservatives continue their ill-informed and ill-advised war on data.

As we said, we have worked with the Privacy Commissioner to ensure that all data is de-identified, but Canadians can understand that, in a public health crisis like this pandemic, it is important to be able to do everything necessary to keep Canadians safe while respecting their privacy, which is exactly what we have done.

While the Conservatives continue their war on data and vaccines, we will continue to do everything we need to keep Canadians safe and uphold their rights and freedoms.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Frigos Pleins and L'essentiel des Etchemins, two food banks in my riding, are starting to see families they have never seen before. Requests for food hampers have actually doubled. These organizations are now helping not only people who are unemployed, but also people who have jobs and earn money but cannot make ends meet.

Does the Prime Minister realize that Canadians are having a hard time paying for groceries, housing and even gas, which was at \$1.61 per litre yesterday in Lac-Etchemin?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know food insecurity has been affecting a huge number of Canadians since the start of the pandemic. That is why we invested hundreds of millions of dollars in supporting community organiza-

tions that are there for families who are in need because of the pandemic and the rising cost of food linked to global inflation caused by COVID-19.

We will continue to be there for the organizations and volunteers who are working tirelessly to help their fellow Canadians, and we will continue to be there for Canadians, just as we have promised ever since the pandemic started.

• (1445)

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not seem like it. Those efforts are not having an impact. People are unable to buy food, are struggling to buy homes and are having difficulty paying their rent. Can we go from leading with the head to leading with the heart and respond to Canadians who are struggling today?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that Canadians are tired and frustrated and that they are struggling. This pandemic has been going on for two years, and it is causing enormous difficulties for Canadians, including the cost of living issue.

That is why we are there to invest in affordable housing. We are there to invest in more child care spaces. We are there to help Canadians in this extremely difficult situation. We will continue to be there. Moreover, \$8 out of every \$10 spent to help Canadians during this pandemic came from the federal government. We will continue to be there for Canadians.

* * *

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the money always comes out of taxpayers' pockets.

I hope that the Prime Minister will not do the same thing he did with the indigenous crisis at the beginning of 2020 and download the problem onto the provinces and municipalities. Ottawa residents are being forced to live with incessant honking. The people of Gatineau and Ottawa are having a hard time getting around town. Journalists are being harassed. There are rumours that the protest will escalate and that protesters will start setting up camps.

Is it not time to set a deadline for ending these unwelcome protests?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest concerns in this situation is to uphold that our institutions, our systems and the public order.

The member for Beloeil—Chambly knows full well that politicians cannot order the police around.

Our responsibility is to provide the necessary resources if requested, and that is what we are doing. We are here to help resolve this situation peacefully so that the people of Ottawa and Gatineau can get on with their lives.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister takes responsibility for things when it suits him but refuses to take responsibility for things he does not have the courage to deal with. It is that simple.

Yesterday, we made clear suggestions that fall under his responsibility, including providing direction, such as distributing information and talking to the truckers' real representatives, who support vaccination.

Does he intend to actually do something, or is he just going to keep throwing out little insults before going back into hiding for a long time?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the other parties play partisan games, we are going to stay focused on Canadians, on the people who need help, and on the people of Ottawa, who are having trouble getting to work and living in their city right now.

We will be there to work to end this protest and, more importantly, to continue investing to help families, to help small businesses, and to help the country get through this pandemic.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the Prime Minister please update the House and tell us what percentage of Canadians currently rely on foreign imported energy to heat their homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know how important it is to continue to invest in transforming our energy mix in this country. With climate change a reality that almost all Canadians understand and accept, we need to make sure we are drawing on the expertise of our energy sector, of our energy workers, to be able to transform toward lower-carbon sources of electricity and energy. That is exactly what we are focused on right now.

I am pleased that Conservative Party members seem to understand that we need to transform our energy mix. I look forward to working with them and with all Canadians across this country to make that happen.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually did not expect him to know the answer. Why would he? The answer is 30%. Thirty per cent of Canadians rely on foreign imported energy to heat their homes. Energy prices are out of control. When he talks about transforming our energy mix, he should be talking about transforming it to sovereign-produced Canadian energy that is rapidly decarbonized instead of offshoring our jobs.

Oral Questions

Will he commit to ending Canada's reliance on high-carbon imported foreign energy?

• (1450)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have committed Canada to ending its reliance on carbon-intensive fuels. We are going to reach net zero by 2050, and that is going to be something that we will only accomplish by working with and leaning on the extraordinary energy workers across this country, who have created such an extraordinary energy industry across this country and who are going to be a central part of moving us beyond our reliance on fossil fuels to be able to support ourselves with cleaner energy. That is the goal that we have on this side of the House. It would be nice to see—

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

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is really interesting, because he has asked the natural resources minister, in his mandate letter, to end energy sector jobs. That is actually in the natural resources minister's mandate.

Instead of diversifying our energy mix, he should be trying to ensure that Canadian energy workers have jobs, not offshore it to Saudi Arabia.

Will he say today that he will commit to ending the tankers of Saudi high-carbon, high-fossil fuel oils and instead commit to protecting energy sector worker jobs in Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada is doing no benefit to workers in the oil industry when it pretends that all will be well as they whistle past the graveyard, because the reality is the world is moving off fossil fuels. It will take decades, but it is doing that. What we need to do is plan for and create those good jobs in the energy industry that will come from renewables, come from hydrogen and come through technologies like CCUS. Unfortunately, the Conservative Party of Canada is doubling down on an approach—

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

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know what “Justinflation” looks like: higher prices and less stuff on the shelves. Let me tell the House what “just transition” looks like: higher greenhouse gas emissions and more offshore jobs.

The Prime Minister has seen greenhouse gas emissions rise under his time in office. He has seen us spend billions and billions and billions of dollars on debt, all while erasing good-paying Alberta and Saskatchewan jobs in the energy sector. Instead of giving our jobs to Saudi Arabia, he should be working with the energy sector to reduce its reliance.

Why has he not done so?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at least Canadians are faced with a very clear choice right now. I thank the member for Calgary Nose Hill for being so articulate about it. Canadians can either move forward on continuing to rely on fossil fuels or can choose the path that this government has taken to ensure that we are supporting our energy workers as we transform toward less reliance on fossil fuels, as we get to net zero.

I know the future that Canadians want to choose, because that is how they voted in the last election: for a party serious about fighting climate change. I really hope the Conservatives take a hard look at that policy.

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HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is inexcusable that after every wave, our health care system continues to be on the brink of collapse. This is not a surprise. COVID has exposed that our health care system is fragile because of decades of underfunding by federal governments, whether Conservative or Liberal.

We need to make sure our health care system is there for people when they need it most. The Prime Minister wants to wait until after the pandemic. We disagree. People cannot afford to wait. People need that care now.

Will the Prime Minister commit to increasing health care transfers immediately to protect our health care system and the people who need it most?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year the federal government transfers over \$40 billion to the provinces for the delivery of health care in their jurisdictions. On top of that, over the past two years we have invested an additional \$63 billion in health care investments for things that include vaccines but also include transfers to provinces.

We know there is a need for us to step up in health care. We have done so immediately, and we have committed to doing so in the future. We look forward to robust conversations with the provinces on how best to deliver good health care for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is, our health care system is in danger. We need long-term funding increases. That means upping health transfers.

It is inexcusable that our health care system continues to be on the brink of collapse every time a new COVID-19 wave hits. We need more funding now. The Prime Minister says we should wait until after the pandemic, but people cannot wait.

Will the Prime Minister commit to increasing health care transfers immediately?

• (1455)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that, in addition to the \$43 billion we send the provinces every year for their health care systems, we also spent a further \$63 billion over the past two years on vaccines, tests, transfers to the provinces and support for health care systems because

we wanted to make sure we were there for people across the country.

I have already pledged to transfer more money to the provinces, but we need to have conversations about how best to deliver real results for Canadians.

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[*English*]**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2014, Russia twice invaded Ukraine, first in Crimea and then in eastern Ukraine. Recently, Russia has amassed over 130,000 soldiers on Ukraine's border and is threatening a further invasion of Ukraine. This further Russian aggression is a threat to not only Ukraine's security, but Europe's security, that of our allies and Canada's security.

Would the Prime Minister please explain what steps Canada has taken and will take to deter a Russian invasion of Ukraine and to protect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his tireless advocacy on behalf of the Ukrainian community both here in Canada and abroad.

We are working with our NATO allies, and we have extended Operation Unifier. We continue to work with them to coordinate our responses to deter further Russian aggression. When Ukraine needed support financially, we were there with a loan of \$120 million. When Ukraine needed more support for military training, we stepped up. When Ukraine needed more cyber-support, we were there.

Rest assured that we will continue with our support for Ukraine.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers and ranchers across western Canada are out on the roads protesting and desperately trying to be heard. The feed crisis across western Canada is devastating, and a chinwag with CP Rail and a virtual supply summit have done nothing to address a critical animal health issue. The trucking mandates are making things even worse for Manitoba pork producers.

With this crisis, why is the Prime Minister ignoring western Canadian farmers? Why is he not doing something to address this feed shortage crisis?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, COVID has disrupted our lives in many, many different ways and things are hard for farmers, as they are hard for people right across the country. Even as we rely on them, they continue to put food on our tables and continue to support us. We thank them for that.

We will continue to make sure we are getting through this pandemic the best way possible. That means making sure people get vaccinated to stay safe and not overwhelm our health systems, and being there with supports for small businesses, for farmers and for industries that have been hard hit by this pandemic. Those supports are what are helping us through and making our recovery so strong.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Liberal policies are making it more difficult for Canadians to even purchase groceries and afford the food they need, but when they are contributing to an animal health crisis, it is a new low for the government.

Instead of gauging the feed in their bins by the weeks or even the months, ranchers are gauging it by the minute. Many of them are scraping the bottom of the bin. Producers and cattle ranchers are putting their animals on rations. Pork producers in Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario are culling their herds. This is an animal health crisis.

When there is a crisis, why is the Prime Minister's default to blame Canadians instead of finding a solution?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know what the solution is and we have been working on the solution with Canadians for the past two years: keep supporting small businesses, keep supporting our ranchers and farmers, continue to rely on science, evidence and public health measures to minimize the impacts of this pandemic, and continue to invest and be there for people.

While the Conservative Party has criticized us for doing too much to support Canadians, we know that investing up front to support Canadians is what has led us to have a strong economic recovery and low impacts of COVID. There are still challenges. We will continue to be there—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Foothills.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the agriculture minister came back from Washington and said the U.S. mainland is going to be open to P.E.I. potatoes in the coming weeks and we will have access to Puerto Rico maybe this week. Shockingly, I guess it was a political dispute and had nothing to do with the quality of P.E.I. potatoes.

Knowing now that it is a political dispute, will the Liberals lift their self-imposed export ban on potatoes to the United States this month, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I sat down with President Biden just a few months ago, we spent time directly speaking about this potato issue. We know that

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the hard work behind the quality of the potatoes grown in Prince Edward Island is without dispute. We support those farmers. We support farmers across the country.

We will continue to work with our partners, particularly the United States in this case, to resolve this and demonstrate that Canadian potatoes are among the best in the world.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Islanders are not looking for promises; they are looking for results. The agriculture minister said that Secretary Vilsack said they would have access to the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico perhaps this week, yet still nothing has happened. Now, Secretary Vilsack has said there is absolutely no timeline to reopen the United States mainland or Puerto Rico to P.E.I. potatoes. That is not what the agriculture minister promised P.E.I. potato growers.

Do we believe the agriculture minister, the Prime Minister or Secretary Vilsack? Who is telling the truth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Islanders know well, we have been engaged in this issue from the very beginning. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the member of Parliament for Cardigan had a very effective trip to Washington just last week, where they were able to engage directly on finding solutions for this issue.

We know how difficult it is for Islanders, but we are going to continue to stay on their side, by their side, working with them to resolve this as quickly as possible.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone is fed up with COVID-19. Those most fed up certainly are not the ones honking their horns outside, but rather the health care workers who have been struggling for two years. Unfortunately, health care workers are not getting any attention or support from the Prime Minister.

At a time when health care systems everywhere are crumbling, the Prime Minister needs to do his part to rebuild them. He must contribute to hiring more staff, increasing the capacity to provide care and improving the quality of care.

Contributing means increasing health transfers. Does the Prime Minister understand this?

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Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, not only have we transferred \$43 billion per year to provincial health systems, but we have also invested an additional \$63 billion in health care to help Canadians and health systems get through this pandemic.

We have demonstrated that we are there to help Canadians, just as we promised. In fact, \$8 out of every \$10 spent to help Canadians during the pandemic has come from the federal government, not provincial governments.

We will continue—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Jonquière.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what reassuring words. The \$63 billion the Prime Minister is talking about is for emergency measures. That money will not go to health care.

We knew that the health care system was underfunded before the pandemic, and it will be underfunded afterwards. That is why Quebec and all the provinces are calling for an increase in health transfers to rebuild the health care system.

I say to the Prime Minister: This will be the big issue for 2022. Will he step up?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. Last year, I promised that we would be there to increase health transfers.

What can we do to deliver the best health care systems and results for Canadians? That is part of the discussions we are currently having with the provinces, but we will indeed be there, as we have been throughout the pandemic to ensure high-quality health care for all Canadians across the country.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been battling the pandemic for almost two years.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Finance how parents were supposed to pay for groceries with inflation rocketing to a 30-year high. The only answer I was given was the following: Inflation is higher in other countries.

That does not put food on the table for Canadian families. I will try again today with the Prime Minister. Everything is getting more expensive. How poor will he let Canadians become?

• (1505)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the start of the pandemic, we made a simple promise to Canadians, a promise we first made in 2015, that we will be there for them and support them in trying times. That is what we did during the pandemic, even though the Conservative Party told us that we were doing too much for families.

We will continue to be there. The initiative to create more day care spots in Quebec and make day care more affordable in the rest of the country will play a huge role in families' lives. Unfortunately, the Conservative Party is against this initiative.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when shoppers see that the cost of chicken and other meats, the cost of all items, has gone up by 5.7%, they are not wondering where the money is coming from or who did what. They are wondering how they will pay for it at the register. Will they be forced to put some items back because the total is more than they can afford? This is what families are worried about.

Demand at food banks has increased by 10% to 15%, and we are talking about demand from working people, not from the homeless. I have to wonder just how poor the government is prepared to let Canadians get.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of the pandemic, we have recognized that the best thing we can do for Canadians is to support them, which is exactly what we have done. This includes not only dealing with the health crisis and saving lives, but also ensuring that the economy recovers quickly during and after the pandemic.

That is what we have done, and we are now seeing an extremely strong economic recovery. Canada has recovered more jobs than other countries, including the United States. We will continue to be there to help families, including during the cost-of-living and affordability crisis. We will—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only ones benefiting from runaway inflation are governments. If everything costs more, then people pay more taxes. That is the reality.

If the economy is doing so well, as the Prime Minister just said, why are fathers and mothers unable to make ends meet? Why do they have to make tough choices when it comes to feeding their families?

What we want to know is this: When will the Prime Minister do something? When will he realize that inflation is hurting families? Will it be when inflation reaches 5%, 6%, 7%, 8%, 9%, 10%, 11%—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see that the Conservative Party is having a hard time understanding the reality facing Canadians.

We are in the midst of a global pandemic, which is having a huge impact on the cost of living, supply chains and, yes, inflation. The best way to address inflation is to minimize or put an end to the pandemic.

The best way to do that is through vaccination and public health measures. If the Conservative Party cannot even convince its own members to get vaccinated, then—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pontiac.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, suicide is the ninth leading cause of death in Canada and the second leading cause of death among youth aged 15 to 34. The suicide rate among indigenous peoples is even higher. It is an especially serious issue for the Algonquins of Barriere Lake in the northern part of my riding.

This is Quebec's 32nd suicide prevention week. The theme is "Talking about suicide saves lives".

Does the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

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

Our thoughts are with the loved ones of those we have lost to suicide and with those who are grappling with suicidal thoughts. I encourage all Canadians who need help to download the Wellness Together app, which is available 24/7.

We have also pledged to fully fund and implement a national suicide prevention hotline. Nobody should be embarrassed to ask for help.

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• (1510)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Russia is threatening to further invade Ukraine and has amassed over 100,000 troops on its borders. While the world is watching, hoping Canada would do more and stand up and do the right thing, the Prime Minister sent his foreign affairs minister and defence minister to Kyiv empty-handed. Half measures are not going to get this job done. We know that President Putin is provoked by weakness, the very weakness the Prime Minister is demonstrating.

When will the Prime Minister actually stand with Ukraine and send it the lethal defensive weapons it has asked for?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman has a strong Ukrainian community in his riding and I am glad he continues to stand with us for Ukraine.

However, I will highlight that if he had actually spoken with Ukrainian officials and leaders, he would know that their number one ask was for \$120 million as a sovereign loan for economic supports, which we delivered in days, and an extension of Operation Unifier to make sure that Ukrainians themselves have all the neces-

Oral Questions

sary training and abilities to defend their territory, as we know they will.

Canada stands in solidarity with Ukraine, and we will continue to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, empty rhetoric and good wishes are not enough to stop the Russian invasion. The Prime Minister knows he is offside with our NATO allies. Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the United States and the United Kingdom have all provided lethal defensive weapons. Ukraine needs our support now, before Russia invades, not after.

When will the Prime Minister send defensive lethal weapons, restore the supply of RADARSAT images and apply Magnitsky sanctions against those responsible for this escalation?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Once again, Mr. Speaker, we see the Conservatives trying to mislead Canadians on what we are actually doing. We are delivering the support that Ukraine asked for, both economic support and, most importantly, the immediate expansion of Operation Unifier, which is an extraordinarily successful operation that has trained over 33,000 members of the Ukrainian military forces to be able to stand strongly against any further Russian incursion.

We are working closely with the Government of Ukraine and all of our NATO allies to demonstrate that we are strong with Ukraine and united against any further Russian incursions.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows that an invasion is imminent and he knows that sending soft aid is not going to fix the situation. Buying pillows is not going to work. This is not a pillow fight. He knows that the non-essential diplomatic staff at our embassy in Kyiv have been evacuated. He knows that our soldiers in Operation Unifier have all been moved west.

Instead of standing by and watching Russia invade, will the Prime Minister finally do the right thing and give Ukraine the lethal weapons it desperately needs now—not later, now?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada, alongside its allies, stands with the Ukrainian government, the Ukrainian people and Ukrainian territorial integrity. That is what we have always done. Every different country looks for the best ways it can help, and what Canada is continuing to do is something that is extraordinarily valuable to the Ukrainian people, which is Operation Unifier, which is direct training of tens of thousands of Ukraine military personnel to be able to defend their country. It has been the number one ask of President Zelenskyy and others, along with financial supports that we delivered in days.

We will continue to do what is needed to de-escalate the situation and to stand with Ukraine.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, one of the ways we can prevent transmission of COVID-19 and protect our families and communities is through the use of rapid tests. At the beginning of January, our government committed to obtaining 140 million rapid tests by the end of the month.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how many rapid tests Canada has received since the beginning of 2022?

• (1515)

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

We are working around the clock to keep Canadians safe and ensure provinces and territories have the tools they need to fight COVID-19, first and foremost with enough vaccines for everyone. However, that also includes procuring more rapid tests. We committed to procuring 140 million new rapid tests in January 2022, and that is exactly what we have done, with millions more arriving every day.

We hope all parties will support the legislation we introduced this week, a \$2.5-billion investment to continue purchasing all the necessary supports for Canadians.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats have long been raising the concern that clawbacks to the GIS are impacting vulnerable seniors who cannot pay their bills or pay their rent. We know that the Prime Minister talked about fixing this problem in May, but seniors cannot afford to wait until May.

We just learned of a senior who passed away yesterday. They had their GIS clawed back. They could not afford the nutritious meals they needed, nor could they afford the type II diabetes medication that they needed. I am haunted by the thought that this senior might still be with us today if their GIS had not been clawed back.

Will the Prime Minister commit to fixing this problem now, rather than waiting until May?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our priority has always been to be there for the most vulnerable, especially our seniors. That is why we worked hard to strengthen income security for seniors, including through increases to the GIS. We are making major investments through a one-time payment for seniors whose benefit has been affected by pandemic supports, but we know that we have more work to do. We are still going to be there to support seniors and we look forward to working with all parliamentarians to do exactly that.

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HEALTH

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Colleagues representing urban centres, along with just about everywhere else, are fully aware of the opioid crisis in Canada. The

number of deaths and related destruction in our communities is staggering. I have seen this first-hand on my safety walks with Toronto police. In 2020, my riding of Spadina—Fort York saw 57 deaths. It is the second-highest fatality zone in Toronto.

Opioids claim the lives of 19 Canadians per day, and over 24,000 have died. Could the minister inform the House what the government is doing to end the carnage?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the opioid epidemic has worsened during this pandemic. We have to continue treating this as a health issue, not a criminal one. The first-ever federal Minister of Mental Health and Addictions will be advancing a comprehensive strategy supporting the provinces and territories and working with indigenous communities to provide access to a full range of evidence-based treatment and harm reduction, to improve public education and reduce stigma and to create standards for substance use treatment programs. We will use every tool at our disposal to end this national public health crisis.

The Speaker: That is all the time we have for question period.

I want to take this opportunity to say that it has been brought to my attention that a couple of terms were used during question period today that were trying to accomplish indirectly what we cannot do directly in the chamber. I want to remind everyone in the chamber that this is something we have to respect. It will increase the respect we have for each other in the chamber, allowing us to better operate and get through our business.

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[*Translation*]

ROLE OF JOURNALISTS

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House reaffirm the primordial and essential role of journalists in a democracy and deplore the attempts to intimidate them in recent days as part of their coverage of the events in Ottawa.

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

Okay. The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1520)

[*English*]

EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CANADA

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the annual report of the 2019-20 Canada account, as prepared by Export Development Canada.

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[*Translation*]

BROADCASTING ACT

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the first report from the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in relation to the motion adopted Monday, January 31, 2022, regarding the collection and use of mobility data by the Government of Canada.

It calls upon the government to suspend the Public Health Agency of Canada's cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, which was supported unanimously by the members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to the motion adopted on Thursday, December 16, 2021, regarding the request for government response to the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food entitled "Room to Grow: Strengthening Food Processing Capacity in Canada for Food Security and Exports", which was presented to the House of Commons on Tuesday, May 4, 2021, during the second session of the 43rd Parliament.

[*English*]

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

I would like to thank all those involved, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for the opportunity today.

Routine Proceedings

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-225, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985 (pension plans and group insurance plans).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a bill that would correct a long-standing deficiency in Canada's bankruptcy laws, which have had the perverse impact of expecting Canadian workers who have paid in good faith into pension plans throughout their entire career to take a back seat to professional risk-takers, whether those be banks, creditors, investors or others, who invest in companies with surplus capital in order to make money when workers do not have the opportunity to have a whole other 25-year career on the cusp of their retirement.

It is really important that the pension promise be honoured in Canada, as it is in other jurisdictions that have far better protection for the pensions of their workers.

I would be remiss if I did not say a big thank you to the former MP for Hamilton Mountain, Scott Duvall, who did excellent work in developing this piece of legislation, not only as a parliamentarian but also out of his personal experience as a worker and a union officer at Stelco, where workers for many years had the future of their pension called into question because of these inadequacies in our bankruptcy laws.

I look forward to working with members of all parties to find a way forward to get this change finally done.

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

* * *

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL STRATEGY RESPECTING ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-226, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy to assess, prevent and address environmental racism and to advance environmental justice.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to rise today to introduce this private member's bill. It deals with a critical issue and it is very important to act against environmental racism.

[*English*]

I am very honoured to present this bill, and I want to take a moment to thank the member of Parliament who initially put it forward.

It is appropriate today to bring this bill forward as we begin February and Black History Month. This is a way to confront racism. Part of me thinks it is also appropriate to present it on Groundhog Day, because here we go again.

Routine Proceedings

This bill was initially presented by the wonderful former member of Parliament for Cumberland—Colchester, Lenore Zann. Lenore did me the enormous honour of asking me, a member of Parliament from a different party, to second the bill when it first came forward in this place. The bill enjoyed widespread support, as members will remember. It cleared second reading and went to committee.

A lot of work has been done, and I want to keep this non-partisan. This is a bill that has enjoyed widespread support, and many members of Parliament are very keen to see it pass. I urge all colleagues to reflect on the fact that the United States and the Environmental Protection Agency, for more than three decades, have had active programs to confront environmental racism, while the term is hardly well understood in our country. I look forward to working with colleagues across party lines.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to present a petition that deals with an issue that touches on so many other concerns of Canadians, including reconciliation, climate action and specifically, of course, the urgent necessity to stop building fossil fuel infrastructure.

The petitioners note that the Trans Mountain pipeline violates indigenous rights and it will be banking on the ongoing production of bitumen and the production of fossil fuels well past the point that we need to act to live up to our commitments under the Paris Agreement. The petitioners ask this House assembled to cancel the Trans Mountain pipeline.

[*Translation*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I present a petition signed by residents of my riding.

These citizens are concerned about businesses based in Canada that contribute to human rights violations and environmental damage around the world.

The people who protest against these violations and stand up for their rights are often harassed, attacked or killed. Indigenous peoples, women and marginalized groups in particular are threatened.

Canada encourages but does not require businesses to prevent such harm in their operations and global supply chains.

The petitioners are calling on the government to ensure due diligence by these businesses when it comes to human rights and the environment, by evaluating and reporting on their actions that lead to significant consequences for those affected.

[*English*]

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition in support of Bill S-223, which 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 tak-

en without the consent of the person giving the organ. This bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in exactly the same form, and the petitioners are hoping that this Parliament is the one that finally gets this done.

• (1530)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you will indulge me, I want to begin by thanking the member for Durham for his excellent and ongoing service to this place.

I have a number of petitions to present on international human rights issues.

The first petition is particularly important to reflect on this week in light of the opening of the Beijing Olympics. The petitioners are highlighting the ongoing genocide facing Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. The petition notes a campaign of coordinated violence against Uighurs and calls on the government to act, to recognize that Uighurs in China have been and are being subject to genocide and to use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act, to sanction those who are responsible for the heinous crimes being committed against the Uighur people.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition also deals with a human rights issue in the People's Republic of China. It is in support of Bill S-223, a bill I tabled in this place that would make it a criminal offence for a Canadian to go abroad and receive an organ taken without consent.

This bill has now passed three times unanimously in the Senate. It has passed this House unanimously in the same form in a previous Parliament. I know this bill is supported by many members on all sides, and I think it is supported by all members. We need to make sure that we actually get it passed into law to protect people who continue to be victims of forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights ongoing human rights concerns in Ethiopia, particularly in the Tigray region. Some of the asks in the petition are a bit dated now. For instance, it references election monitoring in the elections that have already taken place. However, I think many of the asks are still relevant in terms of seeking peace and reconciliation, and independent investigations of crimes with respect to human rights.

The petition is calling on the Government of Canada to be engaged in an ongoing way with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments with respect to the situation in Tigray.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to limit myself to a mere four petitions today. I will try to do better tomorrow.

The final petition I am tabling is with respect to the situation in Afghanistan. There continue to be significant concerns about the human rights and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. In particular, the petitioners are highlighting the situation of the Hazara minority community. They seek recognition from the government and Parliament of the past genocides committed against the Hazara people, the designation of September 25 as Hazara genocide memorial day, and policies that allow development assistance to get to vulnerable people and that ensure development assistance is consistent with our commitment to advancing peace and security.

Of course, the situation for the Hazara people has significantly deteriorated since the Taliban takeover, and much work needs to be done to stand up for minority communities and religious and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan and around the world.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF CONTENTS OF BILL C-10

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to respond to the question of privilege raised by the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent respecting the alleged premature disclosure of the contents of Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19.

On Monday, the Prime Minister made a general statement of the government's intention to introduce a bill to purchase rapid tests. The Prime Minister did not divulge the details of the bill, namely the amount of money for the purpose, nor the mechanism for purchasing and distributing these tests across Canada. This is a very short bill with two clauses: the amount, which is about \$2.5 billion, and the mechanism for distributing these tests. As a result, I submit that speaking in very general terms about the bill does not meet the bar for a question of privilege respecting the divulgence of the contents of the bill during the notice period. Furthermore, as part of the government's consultation process, a draft legislative proposal on the statutory spending authority for rapid test procurement was shared with parties of the House last week before the bill was placed on notice.

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On June 8, 2017, the Speaker ruled on a question of privilege related to the alleged premature disclosure of Bill C-49. He stated:

The right of the House to first access to legislation is one of our oldest conventions. It does and must, however, coexist with the need of governments to consult widely, with the public and stakeholders alike, on issues and policies in the preparation of legislation. Speaker Parent explained on February 21, 2000, at page 3767 of Debates:

Although the members of the House should always be the first ones to examine legislation after it has been introduced and read the first time, this rule must be balanced against the need for the government to consult both experts and the public when developing its legislative proposals.

Speaking in very general terms of the bill without divulging the specific details of it does not meet the threshold of a question of privilege. Any risk was further mitigated by the government sharing a draft bill with opposition parties four days prior to its introduction. This clearly satisfies our long-standing imperative that members of the House should always be the first ones to examine the legislation.

• (1535)

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for that intervention. I am sure the Speaker will consider it in his work.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (for the Minister of Finance) 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 second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to begin debate on Bill C-8, the economic and fiscal update implementation act, 2021. This legislation builds on important measures enacted by another critical piece of legislation that received royal assent in December, Bill C-2, which provided certainty to Canadians and Canadian businesses in the face of the omicron variant. Like this legislation, Bill C-2 provided essential and targeted support for businesses still deeply affected by the pandemic, including the Canadian tourism sector, which continues to be one of the most affected by COVID-19.

[Translation]

As the Minister of Tourism, I want to reiterate that our government remains fully committed to supporting the tourism industry in these difficult times so that it can quickly get back on its feet and prosper.

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I have said it many times and I will continue to say that Canada's economy will not fully recover until our tourism sector recovers. With the support measures that our government has put in place since the beginning of the pandemic, I am convinced that local tourism businesses will recover from the pandemic and be better positioned to take advantage of the opportunities afforded to them in the future.

[*English*]

I can say, as the Associate Minister of Finance and as the member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre, that first and foremost, the best way to keep our economy growing and supporting businesses like those in our vibrant tourism sector is to win the fight against COVID-19. Bill C-8 includes numerous measures to win this fight, including \$1.7 billion to help the provinces and territories secure the additional rapid tests they need to keep Canadians safe and healthy, including through expanded school and workplace testing programs.

[*Translation*]

Access to rapid tests is important for breaking transmission chains, especially for new variants like omicron, and for protecting the people around us.

Our government also supports the provinces' and territories' proof of vaccination initiatives.

[*English*]

Developing a standard proof of vaccination would help fully vaccinated Canadians to travel within the country and internationally, and despite the claims of some it is an essential tool in protecting Canadians. Let me be very clear. Vaccine mandates and proof of vaccination credentials protect our families, our workplaces and our communities. They give us the confidence to have a meal at a restaurant, attend community events with families and friends, and even begin to travel safely in accordance with public health guidelines. This is also another way we can support Canada's tourism sector, by making Canadians and international visitors feel safe as they explore all that our country has to offer.

As I always note, safety comes first, then travel. Bill C-8 would support these efforts by allocating the necessary funds, some \$300 million, for the government to reimburse provinces' and territories' expenditures related to the implementation of their proof-of-vaccination programs.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-8 will also support Canadians' health and safety by investing in adequate ventilation, which can help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Whether it is ventilation for a classroom, shopping centre or meeting room, the government is determined to help businesses and organizations improve the ventilation and air quality in their buildings and to ensure Canadians' safety.

Many small businesses are on the front lines in the fight against the pandemic. They want to do their part and make indoor air cleaner, but investing in equipment to improve ventilation can be very expensive.

That is why in Bill C-8 we are proposing a refundable tax credit for small businesses of 25% of qualifying expenses made to improve air quality.

[*English*]

Our government also wants to improve ventilation in schools and protect students, teachers, school staff and parents from outbreaks. To do this, Bill C-8 proposes to provide up to an additional \$100 million to provinces and territories through the existing safe return to class fund. This funding would continue the support provided through the original \$2-billion safe return to class fund by specifically targeting ventilation-related improvement projects.

As the pandemic continues to affect the lives of Canadians, our government knows that elevated inflation, a global phenomenon driven by the unprecedented challenge of reopening the world's economy, is leading Canadians to worry about the cost of living. We understand concerns about the higher cost of living, and we are taking action.

Our government has cut taxes for the middle class while raising them on the top 1%. Building on the success of the 2015 and 2019 middle-class tax cuts that lowered taxes for millions of Canadians, our government has put more money in the pockets of Canadians. We are also working with provinces and territories to implement a Canada-wide \$10-a-day community-based early learning and child care system that would make life more affordable for families and create new jobs. Because of this measure, the fee reductions in the coming year would help deliver thousands of dollars in tax savings to families with young children.

Additionally, on December 13, our government and the Bank of Canada announced that we would renew the 2% inflation target for another five-year period, which will keep the bank focused on delivering low, stable and predictable inflation in Canada.

As members can see, our government is already working hard to address the cost of living and to make life more affordable for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

For example, we are proposing to increase support for teachers, whether they are teaching from home or in the classroom. Teachers have shown, throughout the pandemic and always, that they are willing to go above and beyond to make sure their students receive a high-quality education.

To support teachers and early childhood educators in Canada, we are proposing, with Bill C-8, to expand and enrich the eligible educator school supply tax credit.

[English]

Bill C-8 also seeks to address housing affordability through the implementation of a national, annual 1% tax on the value of non-resident, non-Canadian-owned residential real estate in Canada that is considered to be vacant or underused, something our government announced as part of budget 2021 to crack down on underused housing. The bill would introduce a new act, the underused housing tax act, to ensure that non-resident, non-Canadian owners, particularly those who use Canada as a place to passively store their wealth in housing, pay their fair share of Canadian tax, beginning in the 2022 calendar year.

Be assured that this is not a new capital gains tax, as the opposition continues to misinform Canadians. It is a sound fiscal measure to address housing affordability. Bill C-8 would also support Canadians living in northern parts of the country by expanding access to the travel component of the northern residents deductions to give all northerners, including those who do not receive travel assistance from their employers, the option to claim up to \$1,200 in eligible travel expenses.

Our government has put in place unprecedented relief measures throughout the pandemic to support Canadian families and businesses. As we continue to provide targeted support to those who need it the most, we will be there for Canadians.

• (1545)

[Translation]

As we emerge from COVID-19, we are focusing on jobs and growth, and we are making life more affordable so that Canadians can prosper. Bill C-8 would continue to support our government's work on this important issue.

[English]

Colleagues, we are all tired. We are all eager for this pandemic and the challenges it has created to become things of the past. Our message to Canadians from coast to coast to coast is clear. It is that our government is taking action to win this fight, to support Canadians and businesses, and to keep them and their families safe.

That is why I call on my colleagues here today to join me in supporting the passage of this important bill.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on a comment the minister made with respect to vaccine mandates.

One of the concerns I am hearing from my constituents is particularly around how the government's vaccine mandates are affecting services and the access that people have to them, whether or not they are vaccinated.

We have the truckers' mandate that is in place, and of course we know that most truckers are vaccinated, but removing those truckers from the road who are not vaccinated creates a significant strain in terms of goods. We recognize that they work alone and that they have to abide by other public health measures when they visit restaurants, etc.

We could talk about the public service mandate that is impacting my constituents' ability to access government services. We are seeing

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ing significant backlogs in terms of immigration and other services that people need to access from government. Constituents of mine need those services. It does not matter whether they are vaccinated or unvaccinated, they are impacted by these mandates because the impacts on supply chains and the impacts on access to government services are very significant.

Recognizing that the vast majority of Canadians have gotten vaccinated, but that these mandates are still having a significant impact on the vaccinated and unvaccinated alike, could the minister comment to my constituents on why he thinks these mandates, and their impacts on Canadians, my constituents and his, are justified?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we need to look at as Canadians is the fact that the fight we have here is against COVID, and the number one tool we have in our tool kit to defeat COVID is the vaccine program.

To that effect, I have to congratulate truckers across the country for the fact that 90% of them are vaccinated. Our commitment was to ensure that we would continue to encourage and, in the case of federally regulated industries, mandate vaccines to keep Canadians, our families and our communities safe. We fought an election over this. We will continue to work through supply chain issues.

The number one mission that we have as a country is to get fully vaccinated and to make sure that we end this fight against COVID.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech.

I have a question for him about the new federal tax on underused housing. The government claims that this new tax will bring in some \$700 million over four years and that will help fix the housing crisis. Earlier this week, the Parliamentary Budget Officer reported that the tax would bring in \$100 million less than that. Quebec is currently in need of around 50,000 new affordable social community housing units.

I would like to know how this money will help build social housing units in Quebec and across the country. Does the minister truly think that this amount will fix the housing crisis?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question and for her dedication to affordable housing.

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This is a concern in my riding of Edmonton Centre and in the entire country. The revenue that this new tax is expected to bring in will be added to the significant amount of money, \$72 billion, that we have already allocated for the national housing strategy.

Furthermore, the rapid housing initiative will help build affordable housing from coast to coast, and that includes Quebec. This is a priority for the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, for our government and for me.

● (1550)

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not that long ago the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report in which he expressed concern about the late tabling of Canada's public accounts, and about the government's accounting for money and the way it is spent.

The situation we have before us is that in Bill C-8 there is a proposal to spend \$1.72 billion on COVID-19 rapid tests, and then of course we just heard a question of privilege about Bill C-10, which proposes to spend \$2.5 billion on rapid tests.

Is the intention that the amount in Bill C-10 would replace and get rid of the clause in Bill C-8 for purchasing rapid tests, or is the idea that the government is asking for money in two places and ultimately intends to spend about \$4.2 billion on rapid tests?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, if we look very closely at what is in Bill C-8, it is to do what we said we would in the fall economic statement, and that is to provide \$1.7 billion to get rapid tests into the hands of provinces and Canadians.

As we have said all along the way, and I thank my hon. colleague for his lens on this issue, we are going to continue to do what we need to as a government to get rapid tests into the hands of provinces and into the hands of Canadians, so we can stay safe in our communities and ensure that we can move about our communities in a safe and responsible way.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of discussion between members of Parliament and their constituents to try to get a better sense of the type of legislative support that Ottawa should be providing.

I wonder if the member can provide his thoughts on some of the consultations he has done in Edmonton or in Alberta. What does he think about the federal government's participation in his home province of Alberta?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary knows, as I do, that the amounts in Bill C-8 are in addition to the amounts in Bill C-10, but let me share my reflection. When I was at the doors of constituents before the election, the three things that kept coming up the most were climate change, COVID supports and child care.

I was in a particular area of my riding that has not always been, let us say, the most politically friendly, but there was a woman on her doorstep who asked me to come and sit with her, so I did. She asked me to look at the three houses to the left of hers and the three houses to the right of hers, and then to take a good look at her

house. She said that all seven of those houses would have been gone without our government's supports. She told me that we had the block's support because we had saved the block.

To the parliamentary secretary's question, the average across Canada is that our government provided \$8 out of every \$10 in COVID support. In Alberta, that number is \$9 out of \$10. That is how much the federal government has had the backs of Edmontonians, Calgarians and Albertans through this COVID pandemic, and we will continue to do so.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as a former tourism industry operator myself, I am passionate about this industry and know it is still hurting. The tourism sector has been walloped. There are obviously other service sectors that have suffered, such as restaurants and so on.

I want to ask the hon. minister specifically about the ground transportation sector. Regional bus companies, whether it is Maritime Bus in Atlantic Canada or Wilson's bus lines here in B.C., have been asking about their coach lines.

Big bus companies such as Greyhound have left British Columbia, and Alberta coach companies are privately owned. We need federal government funding support to maintain ground transportation. Does he have any thoughts on how that agenda is moving forward?

● (1555)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her devotion to the tourism sector and to this particular issue.

Let me just say, to begin, that through the pandemic we invested \$15 billion in Canadians and businesses in the tourism sector. The critical importance of Bill C-2 legislation passing in December was also extremely important, with \$7.2 billion and an extra \$4.5 billion in reserve in case we needed it and, as we have seen, we do. These supports are critical because, the member is right, the tourism sector has been walloped. It is important that we work together.

To the member's particular issue, it is an active conversation. There is a jurisdictional issue with the federal government and provincial and territorial governments, so I am happy to get back to the hon. colleague on this particular question.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health transfers, the government always tells us that it invested heavily during the pandemic.

It is true that it invested heavily, but if it is short of money, it can always get some by cracking down on tax havens. Last spring, everyone was pleasantly surprised to see that the Minister of Finance appeared to be taking a firm stand against tax evasion in her budget. Since then, nothing, radio silence. There is nothing in Bill C-8 that would allow us to go after the money in the places where it ends up.

Can my colleague explain why tax havens are not mentioned in Bill C-8?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I can say that the government is addressing this important issue. I think we can show just how much we have done, with the Canada Revenue Agency, to deal with this problem. I will take note of the question.

With respect to health transfers, we invested \$63 billion in the health care system. The Prime Minister said today that, when the time is right, we will have the conversation with the provinces and territories.

[English]

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I rise today, February 2, in the House, I want to pay homage and respect to my party leader, who resigned today from being party leader of the official opposition. Being in the job of party leader in an opposition party is an incredibly difficult job, and he has done yeoman's work over the past couple of years. In a time when Canada was locked down, expectations of what we needed to do as a country changed dramatically and we continue to try to adapt. This is a difficult time to be in this kind of job, and I pay respect right now to him and his family for having committed and having given so much to this country, to our party and to this Parliament.

I am here today to address the new Bill C-8 proposed by the Liberal government about how to address some more spending that we need to commit for coming through COVID, some of which we find is going to be on the backs of Canadians again.

The bill is in seven parts. I cannot address all seven parts adequately in this sitting in the next 20 minutes, so I am going to focus on the real estate part of this bill. My colleague across the way spent a lot of time on the real estate section of this bill as well.

Starting in the 2022 calendar year, we are going to look at a 1% federal surtax on passively held non-resident owners of real estate in Canada. That means that foreigners who buy real estate in Canada are going to pay an extra 1% annually on the value of the real estate, much like a municipal tax for those people who own property or own their single-family home. Therefore, we would transport some of this tax mechanism that usually rests at the municipal level, and we would put it onto the federal government's balance sheet at this point in time. For what effect, I do not know but it would be an overstep into municipal jurisdiction.

It seems a bit of an overstep and I will give some examples, but first I am going to refer to what my colleague across the way was referring to, a report by an organization called Generation Squeeze, which was commissioned by a crown corporation, the Canada

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Mortgage and Housing Corporation, to look at ways to get more housing built in Canada. It did not look at better ways to get more housing built in Canada. What it looked at and what it reported to CMHC, which it was of course paid to do, was ways to tax more housing ownership in Canada. Its proposal was much like this one: a 0.5% surtax annually applied on properties over \$1 million. I know that sounds like a big number, but the annual surtax doubles on properties over \$2 million.

Vancouver itself has an empty homes tax already, effectively the same thing as what Generation Squeeze is providing, except it is 3% of the assessed value and it has been applied since 2017. Now there is 0.5%, 1%, 3%, but there is more. The Province of British Columbia has a speculation and vacancy tax applied on such properties, starting at 0.5% for a resident and going up to 2% for an off-shore property owner. That has been applied since 2018, so with 3% plus 2% plus 0.5% plus this proposed 1%, we really are just tacking on and on here and really overstepping as far as which level of government is collecting this.

What are we trying to accomplish in this?

Foreign ownership still accounts for approximately 7.7% of Vancouver home purchases. We are still getting a lot of foreign ownership growing into the housing base in the Lower Mainland, despite the fact that we are tacking on significant taxes here that were supposed to slow this down. This is a great discrepancy between the actual people who work in the city and the people who are coming to live in the city. That is one of the major factors that is pushing up housing prices in Canada, but particularly in the Lower Mainland.

Have we looked at the increase in home values under the current Liberal government?

In the last six years, the price of a typical family home has gone up 87%. Since the government has come to power or shortly thereafter, six years ago, the average price of a family home in Canada is up 87%. That is inflation. Since 2016, when it was at \$476,000, it is now \$811,000 according to the Canadian Real Estate Association.

• (1600)

Are we trying to jam the price above \$1 million just to collect a proposed federal surtax? The average house in Toronto and Vancouver now sells for over \$1 million. Think about it: A home that costs over \$1 million in two of Canada's large cities. That is not counting the interest paid on the mortgage. It is not counting the upkeep required on a regular basis. It is not counting the maintenance. It is not counting the furniture and window coverings. To get into a home now, it is over \$1 million for a starter home. The cost of home ownership is going through roof in Canada, and that is not just bungalows, split-levels or two-storeys, but all single-family homes.

What has caused this?

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The government keeps professing that it needs to spend more, and thus collect more, to build more housing in Canada. Who is going to pay this tax? It is the home sellers who, according to Generation Squeeze, are primarily retirees. They have made gains in the value of their homes that is not taxable at the federal level, so they obviously deserve to pay more tax in their retirement years, according to Generation Squeeze. This is a ridiculous oversight of the financial snapshot faced by retirees in Canada, many of whom are and will be augmenting their incomes by working longer and receiving government programming like the guaranteed income supplement. The proposal from Generation Squeeze, commissioned by an arm of this government, is an inequitable tax grab on some of our most vulnerable citizens. I will oppose it strongly.

Why are seniors having difficulty saving for retirement? It is inflation, inflation, inflation. Things are costing more, but people's incomes are not going up on a commensurate level. It is a real monetary factor that this government does not really pay any attention to. As the Prime Minister said during the election, he does not really think about monetary policy, unfortunately. Government should be thinking about monetary policy.

I would point out to the government that, this year, CPP payments for everybody in Canada have been increased in their payroll tax by 10%. If a 10% increase in our CPP is not more reflective of the inflation people are actually feeling, then I think the government is trying to mask something here. The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board has said that its investments are sound for what it is expecting to spend for the next 75 years, but the government thinks a 10% increase in deductions is important at this point in time. That might tell us what the government thinks the real rate of inflation is in this country, because most consumers have lost faith in the numbers calculated by Statistics Canada and the Bank of Canada. These statistics are meaningless as far as what they are experiencing in the stores, with their rents and at their doors. Everything they pay for in Canada is going up significantly more than indicated by Stats Canada or the Bank of Canada.

Housing takes up more than 11% of our gross domestic product, partially because we do not have much more gross domestic investment going on in this country, so most people are building into housing at this point in time. Also, this is double of where it has usually been in this country. It is usually around 4% to 5%, but it is now north of 11% of our gross domestic product going into residential housing at this point in time. It has been that way for a number of years, yet, supposedly, we are short of housing stock. What housing stock? It is single-family homes, to be precise, and starter homes.

I can tell members that, when knocking on doors in Calgary Centre, when I knocked on condo doors, I saw some of those buildings had a 50% vacancy rate, and there is a 10%-plus vacancy rate in apartment buildings. However, developers are still building more condo buildings, encroaching on neighbourhoods filled with single-family homes, and this is referred to as "densification". Condo resale prices are down 15% over the past six years in Calgary, and Calgary's downtown commercial core has been decimated by the government's aimless policies towards Canada's most productive industry, oil and gas.

The City of Calgary's approach is to spend taxpayers' dollars to retrofit some of the vacant office towers into residential towers, in the hopes of bringing life back into the downtown core, at a cost of over \$400,000 per door, which is in contrast to a new build at \$250,000 per door.

• (1605)

We are overspending to solve a problem the government created in the first place, so we are just supposed to ignore the negative effects of the outcome of what we are doing here. We cannot go on doing that. We have to look at the outcomes.

For a young condo owner, a loss of 2.5% per year on a condo is a daunting issue, especially as they try to get into a single family home at some point in time. We have government dollars chasing retrofits to a problem the government created, and around and around we go. Someone is paying the bill.

Let us go back to inflation. We have incurred over \$560 billion of deficit spending over the past two years. One-third of it, over \$170 billion, had nothing to do with the COVID pandemic. Never miss out on a good crisis to move an agenda forward, as the Liberals have said.

Let us look at more things here, as far as inflation goes. Let us look at what we are abetting here in the process. Let us look at where the numbers are actually leading us. As members know, I am somewhat analytical at looking at what the solutions to these problems might be.

Some of this money coming into Canada, such as 7.7% of the purchases in Vancouver, is still foreign money coming in. Investment properties are on top of that from Canadian investors, but much of this foreign money is not clean foreign money. Much of it, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index from Transparency International, is actually money laundering. It is what is called "snow washing". Snow washing happens more in Canada than in any other country in the G20 for one reason: because we allow it to. The government keeps the rules loose on money laundering coming into Canada, and it is a shame for us in an international sense around the world.

In a national criminal intelligence estimate, the Canadian Criminal Intelligence Service said that money laundering of about \$133 billion per year was one of the factors driving up real estate prices in Canada. In the last year, let us recall, real estate prices went up 26% for a typical family home in Canada. That is corruption. We are allowing corruption to enter Canada.

I know some people think that it is just the money part of corruption, but the money part of corruption leads to all other kinds of criminality. When we actually invite dirty money into the country, we are inviting everything else associated with that dirty money into the country.

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Let us take a look at the fentanyl deaths on the streets of our cities, including Calgary, where I live. Fentanyl deaths and overdoses and homeless people living in the streets have abounded over the last number of years because of these laws that allow people to launder their money in Canada and bring with it the commensurate crime that arrives with money laundering. This is a problem we need to address. The government needs to address it.

I am concerned that the government does not want to address it, because it is complicit in a lot of areas where it is actually involved in what we will call “shady practices”. That includes SNC-Lavalin and the cover-up of what happened there and the ditching of one of the brightest lights on the Liberal front bench when she tried to expose what was going on there. This includes the WE scandal and the hundreds of millions of dollars that was buried in bureaucratess before we could get to actually following the money trail.

That brings us to where we are today: How do we come through this? We need to build a system that is not inflationary and does not continue to have government money thrown at the wall while continuing to not solve problems and issues like housing. Housing is a big issue. Putting a 1% extra tax on top of housing is not part of the solution. Curbing foreign money laundering is in the federal government's bailiwick and should be instituted as quickly as possible.

I know I am running out of time, but it is my pleasure to be here today again. I do propose that we actually start with legislation that leads somewhere and, as opposed to an extra tax that is already being applied locally and provincially in many areas in Canada where it is a problem, that we look at how we address money laundering laws in Canada.

• (1610)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member would not want to intentionally mislead the House. I know he would not want to do that, but the reality is that when he says that we would be adding a 1% tax on the sale of housing, he knows better. He knows it would be specifically with respect to non-resident, non-Canadian vacant land or unused housing. However, he is projecting it as though it would be a 1% tax. He equated it to a municipal property tax, and I am sure he knows better than that.

Would he like to correct the record and acknowledge that it would be for non-Canadians and non-residents on vacant land or unused residential housing?

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, if I left the impression that it was for anything other than what he described, I am remiss and I apologize. If that is the way he took those remarks and if I mis-spoke in that respect, he is exactly right. It would be for foreign money that is coming into Canadian property.

As I said earlier, it would actually be on top of a municipal tax that is applied to it, and a provincial tax as well, including a transfer tax of 20%. What I am suggesting to him is to take a look at the federal government's incursion into the same taxation measures that municipalities and provinces are already taxing and ask why the federal government needs to be there, as opposed to acting where the federal government currently has jurisdiction and addressing the money laundering laws.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-8 addresses the housing problem.

We need to remember that the national housing strategy was put on the back burner for 20 years, which prevented the construction of 6,000 housing units a year. Also, the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain said that we failed to build more than 80,000 social housing units since 1994. In Quebec, we need about 50,000 housing units.

What does my colleague think about the proposals in Bill C-8?

• (1615)

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, I think I understand most of what my colleague said.

It is important to see what kinds of buildings are being built in Canada right now. Do the condos we are building meet the population's current needs? We need to address the current gap relative to single-family homes, especially in cities.

I hope I answered my colleague's question.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to be talking about the issue of housing here today in the House of Commons.

There absolutely has been an astronomical increase in the cost of housing over the last five or six years. I have been particularly acute in the last two years, but we have to note that this is part of a longer-standing trend. House prices in December 2010 were at about \$345,000; by November 2015, they were at about \$450,000. Now they are at about \$713,000. Just in the five years between 2010 and 2015, that is still a 32% increase, and that coincided with another government that was largely absent when it came to the housing file.

The fact of the matter is that these prices, even if we go back to 2010, are still out of reach for a lot of Canadians. The answer has to be substantial investment in rent-geared-to-income housing and housing that is non-market housing, a strategy that would not treat our homes as if they are a commodity to be traded on the market. That answer requires public expenditure.

Government Orders

The member continues to say the answer to the housing crisis is for government to stop spending money. That clearly cannot address the issue with the kinds of rent-geared-to-income housing that we need in order to address a significant part of the housing crisis in Canada. I would like to know what the member proposes if it is not any kind of government spending. If developers were going to build housing for all the Canadians who need it, presumably they would have done it by now, and they do not just need another incremental tax break to finally start doing that. That is not their business, so what is the member's proposal for a real solution to get the kind of housing built that we need in this country?

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, the member is an excellent colleague on the finance committee and he comes up with some great proposals going forward.

I think I did address in my speech, and I hope he heard it all, some of the solutions we have for bringing down the escalating prices of Canadian houses. One is to address money laundering.

Money laundering by foreign buyers in the Canadian marketplace is excessive. It is like any purchase: When there are a whole bunch of excess buyers in the marketplace, it inflates the cost. Those foreign buyers are coming here for one reason, and one reason only: because it is safe to launder money in Canada, more safe than it is in the rest of the G20. That money is arriving on the shores of Canada and going into one of the safest investments in Canada, housing.

Who is being impacted by that? It is people who work in Canada, who are having the housing that they usually occupy being bought as an investment and being occupied sometimes by people who do not work here or live here. That is a problem, and that is what we need to address more than anything else.

My colleague addressed the issue by saying the government needs to invest much more in this sector. The government invests in sectors because there is a short-term gap. This gap is growing, and it is not because we are not building enough in Canada. As I said in my speech, we spend a far greater percentage of our gross domestic product on residential housing than any other of the G7 countries. There is a reason for that: We are building the wrong kind of product. We are building product for investment, primarily foreign investment, that is not necessarily the right foreign investment we are looking for.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the issue of a capital tax or an equity tax on homes came up in 2019, the Liberals have been denying it. I would like to take them at their word, but since then, as my hon. colleague mentioned in his speech, CMHC, a Crown corporation of the Government of Canada, requisitioned a report on the recommendation of its former head, Mr. Siddall, from Generation Squeeze, which recommended this very policy.

I appreciate the fact that members opposite have been denying that they are going to do this, but why have they not specifically repudiated this report, particularly after Mr. Siddall went public and endorsed this recommendation himself after he was no longer head of the corporation?

• (1620)

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Siddall, the former head of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, did accept and did hire Generation Squeeze to give him this report. That is government money, a quarter of a million dollars. We are still trying to figure out if it paid a quarter of a million dollars for one report and another quarter of a million dollars for the second report. We have asked for that answer and we have not received it yet.

One of the issues is that we are pushing money to people to come up with solutions, but the solutions they are providing have nothing to do with the problem they are supposedly addressing. An extra surtax on the sale of a house when it is sold is a capital gains tax, whether one calls it that or not. This is the inequity I talked about in my speech.

Who is going to pay that tax? Canadian senior citizens are going to pay that tax, by and large, and that is a shame, because we are doing everything we can to keep them above the inflation line as a result of the diminishing returns they are getting because of inflation in this economy. Fixed incomes get hurt the most by inflationary economies. We need to make sure we stay above that. Adding a tax onto our seniors is the wrong approach.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that the pandemic is not over and people are struggling, yet his party has fought consistently to claw back support to individuals, including calling to abolish the CERB. We know rent is going up and we know groceries are going up, and we know that support is not coming and people are ending up on the streets, including seniors who had clawbacks to their GIS.

I wonder if the member's concern extends to ensuring people continue to get the support they need and whether he would consider implementing instead a permanent guaranteed livable basic income for all.

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am not a fan of a guaranteed basic income. I am a fan, frankly, of making sure that our monetary base stays relevant. As we inflate that monetary base, we effectively devalue the spending power of the money that people have. By devaluing that spending power, we are actually hurting the people who have to spend that money on basic goods. We should get ahead of it. If we do not debase the currency, we will not have to do more spending later.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by asking the consent of the House to share my time with my esteemed colleague and friend, the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

There being no dissenting voice, the motion is carried.

The hon. member for Joliette.

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Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, we are studying Bill C-8, the bill to implement last fall's economic update. There is not much to it. We more or less support the bill, but there is one thing we take issue with. I will explain what I mean in a few minutes.

I would like to remind my colleagues that part 1 amends the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations. Everyone supports the new refundable tax credit for ventilation expenses made to improve air quality. Obviously, we support expanding the travel component of the northern residents deduction. Expanding the school supplies tax credit from 15% to 25% and expanding the eligibility criteria to include electronic devices is great. That is not a problem. A new refundable tax credit to return fuel charge proceeds to farming businesses is important. We are happy to see it included, and we support it.

Part 2, which is a hot topic in this debate, contains the much-touted 1% tax on the value of vacant or underused residential property directly or indirectly owned by non-resident non-Canadians. We agree in principle, but we have a big problem. The problem is that, of all possible taxes, property tax is the only one not under federal jurisdiction.

The goal itself is a noble one. We could discuss the 1% tax. Would it really be effective? We could discuss that. However, there is a very troubling precedent being set here. My colleagues will remember what happened with income tax. The federal government said that it was a temporary measure to finance the war effort, but we are still sending half of our income tax to Ottawa today. There is nothing more permanent than a temporary tax measure implemented by the federal government. That is what we are concerned about.

Will the federal government acquire a taste for this sweet, sweet tax revenue once it has tried it and want to go back for more?

This is a big problem. It is troubling because this is an area under municipal jurisdiction. We know that municipalities are having serious financial difficulties, and this is their jurisdiction. If, from now on—not right away, but in a few years—the federal government came back to demand some of that revenue, there would be less for the municipalities. There would be an even greater fiscal imbalance.

We therefore have a serious problem, and we are asking the government to please find another way of implementing this policy, because interfering in property tax, which is under municipal jurisdiction, is a serious problem and a dangerous precedent. Although the intention is noble, as I have said before and will say again, the method is a problem because of the precedent it would set.

Could the government come to an agreement with the provinces and municipalities so that they could levy the tax instead?

There are other ways of solving the problem, with capital gains, for example, but this one poses a serious threat. Right now, the Bloc Québécois is still deciding whether it will support Bill C-8 because of this measure. The principle is noble, but, in our opinion, it sets an extremely dangerous precedent.

Part 3 provides for a six-year prescription period for the Canada emergency business account. That is great.

Part 4 authorizes payments to be made out of the consolidated revenue fund. I would like to take this opportunity to give a shout out to the President of the Treasury Board, who is listening attentively to my speech. I thank her. The bill talks about supporting ventilation improvement projects in schools. We fully support this, and we support part 5, which authorizes payments to be made out of the consolidated revenue fund for the purpose of supporting coronavirus disease 2019 proof-of-vaccination initiatives.

Part 6 supports COVID-19 tests. There is a lot of money involved, and we are obviously on board with that too.

Part 7 amends the Employment Insurance Act to specify the maximum number of weeks for which benefits may be paid in a benefit period to certain seasonal workers. All this is important.

This is not a historic implementation bill. These are good measures, even the measure in part 2 that we have doubts about. The goal is noble, but once again, the precedent it would set is troubling.

• (1630)

Governments are often judged on what they achieve in their first 100 days. In our opinion, there could have been much more in Bill C-8.

Throughout the election campaign and since the beginning of the pandemic, we have heard a lot about the labour shortage. There are many different measures that could be put in place to mitigate this issue, such as a tax credit that would make it easier for young retirees to continue working. Earlier this week, the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec told the Standing Committee on Finance that many young retirees would be willing to work one or two days a week if they did not have to give all their earnings back in income tax. The Bloc Québécois would have liked to see something like that in this bill. It would not have been very complicated, and it could have been included, but it was not.

The other important point is the fight against tax havens. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance wrote a book on the subject. It is important. We need to take action and move forward. We have been calling for this for years now. Just under a year ago, when the last budget was tabled last spring, the minister assured us that the fall update would fix the web giant problem by taxing their revenue to offset unpaid taxes, as is done in other countries. Last December we were even pretty sure that something was going to be introduced.

Government Orders

It is frustrating that there was nothing about this in Bill C-8. We have been hearing for years now that measures are on the way, but they keep getting pushed back. We are almost beginning to feel like a donkey chasing a carrot in the fight against tax havens, but the carrot is always just out of reach. We should not be taken for donkeys.

I would now like to talk about health. Earlier this afternoon the government sent out the Minister of Tourism to speak to the government's Bill C-8. The minister said that the government would negotiate health funding with the provinces "when the time is right". I think now is the right time. It was the right time last year, it was the right time during the pandemic and it was the right time even before the pandemic. The time has been right for 20 years. Frankly, the government needs to smarten up.

Everyone knows that the health care system is struggling, emergency rooms are swamped, and the pandemic has posed challenges for hospital care, emergency care and life-saving care. This is all because the health care system and sector has been weakened and damaged by 20 to 25 years of underfunding by the federal government. It is as simple as that.

After the 1995 referendum, there was a renegotiation with respect to deficits and the debt, which were too high. Ottawa's solution to the problem was to reduce transfers to the provinces. Jean Chrétien then chose to mock Quebec among his G7 colleagues telling them that the funny thing about reducing health transfers was that everyone would protest at the National Assembly of Quebec and the other provincial legislatures, but he would be fine. It was that decision by Ottawa to reduce its health transfers that has compromised the system. Today, we are paying the price during the pandemic.

The government can say that it spent a lot of money during the pandemic, but to be clear, that spending is not recurring funding. We need recurring funding. The government said that it has been spending more every year. That is true, but it is not contributing its fair share when we consider that health care system costs are going up 6% while the government is increasing its share by only 3%. The government is actually contributing less and less every year. For the government to say that it is spending more every year is dishonest. That is clear from even a cursory analysis of the situation.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that, even with the extraordinary expenses incurred during the pandemic, the pressure of public funding rests squarely on the shoulders of the provinces. This has to change.

I also wanted to talk about seniors. We need to do more for them, particularly with respect to inflation. There was also a lot of talk about social housing. Action needs to be taken on that.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I hope that the member opposite recognizes the work our government has done during the pandemic to support the provinces. We have paid out billions of dollars to support provincial health care systems.

We also supported Quebec by sending soldiers to long-term care facilities. I hope he recognizes the government's leadership during the pandemic.

My question is the following: Does the member support the elimination of interprovincial trade barriers to help pay for additional health care costs?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate my colleague for his excellent French. I find we do not hear French often enough in the House. I tip my hat to him and thank him.

I recognize that the government has done a lot to support people during the pandemic, but it did not do it alone. We had a minority government, and I can say that the Bloc was an excellent partner. We brought forward several proposals made by various organizations and we worked together for the common good.

Tariff barriers are a provincial jurisdiction. The Bloc Québécois believes in respect for jurisdictions, and we condemn Ottawa's penchant for always interfering in areas that are none of its business when it fails to solve the problems that do fall under its responsibility, for example border protection.

• (1635)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize but I am going to speak in English. I am a little rusty right now and will try next time.

[*English*]

The member was speaking about federal and provincial jurisdiction. One thing that has frustrated me during the pandemic is that there has been a lot of pointing of fingers. The federal government has been telling provincial governments what it thinks they should or should not be doing with policies, rather than stepping up in the federal area of jurisdiction.

We had a federal minister telling provinces they should bring in mandatory vaccinations. Aside from thinking that is a terrible policy, I think the federal government should be focusing on areas of its own competence where we have seen problems, such as a lack of procuring rapid tests earlier on and the disaster that is being created as a result of the truckers' mandate.

Would the member agree with me that rather than sticking its nose into provincial jurisdiction, the federal government should focus on doing its job better? It is a tough question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for starting off his comment in French. His French is excellent, and I am sure he could have said the whole thing in French.

Naturally, we do not always agree with our fellow MPs. Take vaccination, for example. The Bloc and the member alike know that vaccination falls within the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, but we want everything to do with that to be evidence-based. That is how Quebec is operating.

Government Orders

The Bloc condemns Ottawa's tendency to stick its nose into areas under Quebec's and the provinces' jurisdiction. Ottawa tells them what they should do and imposes conditions, but it is not doing anything about the issues under its own jurisdiction. We would like to see a little humility. The federal government is not the supreme omnipotent ruler of everything.

For example, for health care, what the provinces need is more transfers and more money with no strings attached and no standards. The people who actually work in health care know this, but those at a distance do not. This reminds me of the British Home Rule and how Great Britain ran the colonies. That is how Ottawa is behaving.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to a City of Edmonton report released in 2019, there were 2,800 folks living in poverty and without a home in my city of Edmonton. One of the Bloc members mentioned some of the program deficits from 1994 related to the implementation of social housing. Recently, I spoke with members in my community, like Judith from the Bear Clan Patrol, who knows from working directly on the ground that this number is about 3,200 people today. Social housing is a key part of the solution: more units, more housing.

Would the member agree that the housing crisis cannot be fixed merely by a 1% tax that does not address things like a flipping tax or looking at how housing auctions are done? Would the member agree that we need to build more units now?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right.

It makes me so sad to see how the gap between rich and poor seems to have widened in recent decades. There is more poverty because we are investing less in social housing, which is not to be confused with the bad concept of affordable housing. Meanwhile, the richest are gaining greater access to perks such as tax havens.

The state is supposed to narrow the wealth gap, not widen it.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. 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 Brantford—Brant, The Economy; the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying hello to my new team members: Meili Faille, who is a former Bloc Québécois MP, Anaïs Thibodeau and Mishka Caldwell-Pichette, who are probably watching right now. A warm welcome to them all.

I listened closely to members' speeches on this bill to implement the federal government's priority measures. I found the speech given by the member for Joliette to be particularly interesting.

I have an opportunity to remind members that even though Ottawa may be shelling out billions of dollars during this pandemic, the government is still trying to avoid showing the leadership expected of it to help those doing their part to ensure a real economic recovery.

I salute the contribution of all the political actors who realize the challenges we face in the regions and who, like me, will demand recognition for the importance of these vast territories, Abitibi—Témiscamingue in particular, and demand investments befitting their people and their aspirations. What we want is a real economic recovery for the regions.

As an aside, I want to salute Patrick Perreault of Métal Marquis and the great leadership he has shown with the Table Métal Abitibi-Ouest. Faced with a serious labour shortage, the people in that group know how to be proactive.

Although everyone is affected by and dealing with the pandemic, people still have every right to expect the government to speed up measures that affect the public directly. Let us not forget that voters declined to give the Liberals the privilege of a majority government, and rightly so.

I want to make it very clear that the Liberals do not want to solve anything at the end of the day. They systematically refuse to acknowledge the ongoing problem that is putting a stranglehold on the finances of Quebec and the provinces.

Let us have a look at what is in the minister's economic update. The government is maintaining the Canada health transfer escalator at 3%, which is the legal minimum and below the annual increase in health care costs, until 2027. What are the actual needs when it comes to the health transfer?

Quebec and the provinces are unanimously calling for an immediate payment of \$28 billion to cover up to 35% of health care costs, followed by a 6% escalator. This is what the provinces are talking about when they speak with the minister and her officials.

To put that in perspective, the Abitibi—Témiscamingue region accounts for roughly 2% of the population of Quebec, so it should receive around \$120 million in recurrent funding every year. The problems we are having, in obstetrics for example, could be solved with permanent funding from the federal government through a transfer to Quebec.

As I see it, the federal government's categorical rejection of the provinces' demands is nothing new. A lot of ink has been spilled on this subject. However, people now have a better understanding of the significance and consequences of Ottawa's inaction. People are seeing how worn out, inert and craven the Liberal government is.

Let us not forget that ordinary people, our heroes, are the backbone of the health care system. I commend the leadership of Caroline Roy, CEO of the CISSS of Abitibi—Témiscamingue, and her entire team, as well as the nurses and all the health workers in Abitibi—Témiscamingue and elsewhere. I thank them for their work and encourage them to keep going.

Government Orders

People are wrong if they think they will never understand what a fiscal imbalance is. The pandemic crisis has exacerbated problems in health care, and the on-the-ground impact of underfunding is very real. I am sure my esteemed colleagues will agree that the money should be in the provinces' hands, not in the federal government's coffers.

Now, where is the investment the government promised, the tens of billions it was going to spend to lay the foundation for a strong recovery and create wealth without falling back on the oil economy of the last century? How about accelerating investment in aerospace, green energy and forestry? Those sectors are important to Quebec.

I have asked myself the same question my colleague posed about the utility of the new tax and its impact on unoccupied buildings owned by foreigners, and I recognize that this overheated market needs cooling.

What the Liberals are serving up now are measures that were announced in the 2020 economic statement, in budget 2021 and in a public consultation carried out last summer that, may I remind the House, did not attract much interest.

It is worth noting that this is the first time the federal government has stuck its finger in the property tax pie. It is all part of the Liberal pattern of interference. The federal government should work with the Government of Quebec and the City of Montreal rather than encroach on their jurisdiction.

• (1640)

The government should not be allowing property owners to leave their units vacant and unoccupied during a housing shortage. This measure does nothing to help regions like Abitibi-Témiscamingue, which is also experiencing an unprecedented housing shortage. The solution is investments in affordable housing and transfers to the provinces. Once again, the federal government is infringing on an area of provincial jurisdiction.

I would also be remiss if I failed to mention the needs of Abitibi-Témiscamingue residents. I live there, and it is a region blessed by nature. However, in order to live there and develop the area, we need to act now and make sure it is developed in a sustainable way. We will never succeed in solving our labour shortage issues if we choose to be content with strategies that do nothing meaningful to ensure the vitality of our region and our homes. That does not reflect the strong economy that we have in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

We are in a position to capitalize on the emerging critical mineral economy, but I have some concerns. We want to process our resources close to where they are extracted. The current paradigm needs to shift. No more plundering our resources and sending them elsewhere in the world to be developed. We want these resources to be processed close to where they are extracted, in the mining regions.

The government needs to respond to our strategies to revitalize the forestry industry and develop new forest-based products.

We also have the right to promote our agri-food industry, what we process locally, and to make it easier to get our local products to

market and ensure they can be competitive. What can be done to get more of the local products that our agri-food industry produces into the hands of a wider public?

Access to high-speed Internet is very important for SMEs and is critical to helping them go digital and claim their share of the market. There are apps available to them now, but they need access to high-speed Internet to use them. Some business owners are unable to access the tools to market their products.

According to the Agri-Food Innovation Council, small and medium-sized businesses in the industry cannot adopt some new technologies as quickly as their competitors in the United States and Europe because technological advancements rely on high-speed Internet access. GPS and videoconferencing are just two examples of this. People in urban areas take these things for granted, but people in many rural parts of Quebec and Canada do not yet have that luxury.

I think everyone understands what I am talking about. The government can make a real difference for the thousands of people in rural communities by adopting policies and measures that will enable economic undertakings to succeed.

On December 9, I spoke to the House in detail about the affordable housing shortage. The regions need money to build desperately needed housing. This is an unprecedented crisis.

The current housing situation in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, in Quebec and in Canada is a perennial one caused by the chronic housing shortage, among other things. That is why building new homes is key.

We know that the need and the demand for housing will very likely continue to increase in the coming years. The government should therefore learn from the mistakes made in recent years and find innovative ways to stimulate the construction of housing, especially social, community and truly affordable housing.

I will now address one of the items in this budget statement. I believe that we need to get rid of fly-in, fly-out work and stop thinking of commuter workers as a magic bullet that will solve the labour shortage in remote areas. This system causes capital flight and does not attract new residents. I am really worried about this measure. Are we going to be able to let people develop resources in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and then spend their wages elsewhere? Are we going to go so far as to pay for them to do that?

I think we need a new paradigm, one that encourages people to move to the regions and to settle in the area where the work is found. This measure seeks to expand the travel component of the northern residents deduction by giving them the option to claim up to \$1,200 in eligible travel expenses. I am concerned that it will encourage specialized tradespeople to deduct their travel expenses from their income when they work in remote areas. In other words, this measure would cancel out much of the efforts being made by elected officials in remote areas.

This phenomenon is occurring at a time when the regions have a high birth rate. What kind of future will young families have in remote areas? Instead, should we not encourage people to move to the regions permanently to promote settlement and promote special status for Abitibi-Témiscamingue in particular?

This could offer a long-term response to the labour shortage.

• (1645)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will proceed in English, because I have a direct question.

• (1650)

[English]

I would agree with the member opposite, particularly on the importance of the forestry industry and agriculture. I know that is big in Quebec. It is big in my own area in Nova Scotia.

I have had interactions with the member before on the oil and gas industry. I know his answer will be that we are a petrostate and it has prevented Quebec from having its success. However, what I find challenging is how that resource has been so crucial for all of Canada, including for his province and mine.

Will he at least recognize that Quebec receiving transfers through equalization, which is driven in part by the revenues generated through the oil and gas sector, has been of benefit to the country and of benefit to Quebec, notwithstanding the fact that, yes, we are going to be making a transition in the days ahead?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, if there is one thing I will never bother to whine about here, it is equalization. Quebec never gets its fair share of budgets. Meanwhile, billions pour in for southern Ontario's automotive industry and for oil and gas.

The issues raised by the automotive industry include the processing of the critical minerals required for electric vehicles. Where will the lithium from our regions, particularly Abitibi-Témiscamingue, be processed? Will it be done near the source? Will it create jobs? Money does not need to be transferred, but can we at least spend our own money that will be generated by creating salaries and jobs in the regions? The entire economic system needs to change.

Otherwise, there is only one solution: Quebec independence.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague to take a deep breath. Quebec receives the majority of Canada's equalization payments.

That being said, my question relates to another subject. My colleague was talking about Abitibi and its fly-in, fly-out workers. There is no need to go that far. I live in La Pocatière. Many people who work in La Pocatière live in Quebec City and commute a little over 100 kilometres every day.

Right across the province, we need employees and people to come and work in our areas. I would like to ask my colleague what measures he would have liked to see in the budget or in the 2021 economic and fiscal update to help keep people in his region.

Government Orders

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology for the question. Regarding the health transfer, I want to note that when we talk about the fiscal imbalance on the one hand and the absence of \$6 billion in health transfers to Quebec on the other, to me that amounts to the same thing. Quebec is being taken for a ride, and I will never allow that.

On the issue of the labour shortage, there are also some solutions. We agree that the budget statement does not offer any tangible solution to the labour shortage problem. For example, hundreds, if not thousands, of students from francophone countries are systematically rejected. There is a problem with the system right now, seeing as a certain “systemic discrimination” is causing these people to be rejected.

Back home in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, there have been four such cases. These people are part of the strategy to attract workers to address the labour problem. These are people who are coming to study here in specialized fields at our universities and CEGEPs and who will fill jobs in the labour market. We want to welcome them to our regions, but right now, Ottawa is preventing us from doing so.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the cost of housing has skyrocketed, and I want to thank the member for bringing up the housing crisis. In my riding of Victoria, people are struggling. We need affordable rentals. We need housing that has rent geared to income. We need more co-op housing. We need home ownership to be within reach.

After decades of inaction from Liberal and Conservative governments, investors and big corporations have taken over the market. Speculators continue to buy properties to renovate and resell quickly for a profit, outbidding families and driving up prices in communities across Canada.

Housing is a human right and the government's half measures are not working. Now we see that the Liberal's approach is not only too little, but also has multiple loopholes.

Does the member agree that instead of protecting wealthy speculators who drive up the cost of housing, the government should introduce a tax on flipping, while making significant investments to build truly affordable housing?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern.

Government Orders

We absolutely need to focus on building social housing. We will have to find ways to fund it. I dream of seeing a new plan for figuring out how to maximize land use and build new housing across Canada. It is the challenge of the century.

We must ensure that everyone has access to affordable housing. One of the solutions for finding money is the fight against tax havens. That seems obvious to me. It is time to take action.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-8. It is my first time giving a speech in the House in the new year. It is not my first time on my feet but my first time speaking at length, so it is my first time speaking in the House since the omicron wave seriously took hold. I want to take a moment to recognize what a punch in the stomach it has felt like to Canadians across the country, many of whom had some hope that we were getting beyond the pandemic. When this wave came, I think many of them felt all of those many feelings we have been feeling over the past two years kind of condensed into a new wave of the pandemic.

I want to give special thanks to all the frontline workers we talked about at the beginning of the pandemic, who never went away and never stopped doing those important tasks even though the limelight shifted away from them.

Health care workers continue to labour in really difficult circumstances, and they are overworked, tired and under-resourced.

Teachers and child care workers have had to face the pandemic all the way through. In this particular wave, and I will speak to my own experience in Manitoba, they were having the challenges of remote learning and are now having to deal with full classrooms and students and colleagues who are getting sick, or they are getting sick themselves.

Grocery store workers are putting themselves at risk once again. As my colleague from Windsor West has rightly pointed out, some of the big grocery chains said that when another wave came they would bring back hero pay to recognize the risks workers are taking in order to help Canadians, but they have not stepped up to reinstitute that pay.

All of these things together are leading to a lot of outrage, and I am going to talk a bit about some of the things I find particularly outrageous today and that inform my work.

I am outraged when I get emails, as I did today, about another senior who has lost their life, not because of the pandemic directly but because they took the government at its word when it said it would be there to have their backs, would support them through the pandemic and told them to apply for help when they lost their job. They did. They applied for CERB.

Because the government could not figure out its own rules, and that is probably the most charitable interpretation, or because it did not care, it decided to claw back those benefits that were supposed to be for working seniors in need through the guaranteed income supplement. Not only did the government do that and not catch it before it happened, but the government was advised at least as early

as May of 2021 that it was happening and it chose to do nothing about it. The government chose to do nothing about it.

One could say that the government did nothing about it until it happened, except that it happened in July and it still did nothing about it. The Liberals called an election and did nothing about it. They came back from the election and did nothing about it. It took weeks of persistently raising this in the House of Commons to get an announcement, and that announcement did not solve the problem because that money still is not in the pockets of seniors who are in dire need.

The money is not in the pocket of the senior I heard about today, the senior with type 2 diabetes who could no longer afford the food and medication they needed to be healthy and passed away. I have an email open in front of me about a couple from Mississauga who are in dire straits. The two of them are trying to live on \$1,300 a month because their GIS payments are gone.

The government says not to worry and that it has a solution with a one-time payment in May or June. There are already seniors who are no longer living and who cannot receive that payment, and there will be more by May or June. That outrages me. It outrages me on the substance of the matter, because Canada should do better. It outrages me because it breaks the promise the Prime Minister made to people in this country that the government would be there for them.

Instead, on a principle of bureaucracy, the Liberals are not, because they could not figure out their internal systems, or they did not have the right lists or they were not sure about this or maybe needed to do that. This is after just proving to the country that when the political will exists they can roll out a program to millions of Canadians almost overnight.

• (1700)

Liberals expect us to believe that, for those seniors who were already receiving money from the government, already on a list, already in a system where we were paying them, they cannot find a way to get money into those seniors' hands so that they are not dying in the cold. It is not believable and it is shameful.

I am outraged about that. I am proud that people in Elmwood—Transcona sent me here to relay that message to the government. I am going to keep doing that until that money gets into the hands of seniors who can then get back into their homes and out of the jeopardy they are in because the government cannot be bothered to take on its own bureaucracy, which is telling it something that needs to be done cannot be done, when we all know that is not true.

That outrages me.

I am outraged that people during the pandemic were dying in personal care homes because of years of cuts, at the federal and provincial level, to health care. We know our system has been under-resourced. Those cuts did not come because Canada could not afford to do those things. Over the years that those cuts came to our health care system, the corporate tax rate in Canada went down from 28% to just 15%. That is a huge decrease. That is almost a 50% tax cut to the largest corporations in Canada, while our government was telling us it could not afford to pay its fair share of health care to the provinces.

That is shameful.

What is more shameful still is that we are two years into this pandemic and there has hardly been a long-term care centre in Winnipeg that has not had a COVID-19 outbreak. There has been no work done by the federal government to convene the provinces to talk about better national standards and funding those standards.

I am not talking about the federal government telling the provinces what to do. I am talking about convening them so they can talk about best practices, so that every Canadian can benefit from the best things our provincial governments are doing to serve Canadians in long-term care, and then ensuring the federal government is at the table to help resource those things.

That was the power of—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt. Would the hon. member be able to move the microphone up? Interpretation is having a hard time. There is a lot of popping coming off of the microphone.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that may have something to do with the shouting, but I did say I was outraged and I suppose that has some technical consequences.

Here we are. We are two years into the pandemic. We have not made significant progress on long-term care. It is not like the experts that have been advising governments on how to handle the pandemic were caught off guard that there was another wave of the pandemic. Even early on, they were saying there would be probably at least four waves. We know that these are problems that need to get fixed, even if somehow magically the pandemic were to end tomorrow. We hear certain members in the House, even today, suggesting that somehow the pandemic is a function of public health restrictions or something. If we end the public health restrictions, we do not end the pandemic. I wish that were true, but we are fighting a virus. We are not fighting each other. We need to bear that in mind.

The way to get through this is with a lot of care and resources to be sure. As we were cutting those taxes for big corporations and telling people that we could not fund the health care that they needed, that was also being done by a lot of governments provincially. We are seeing it in Manitoba, Alberta and around the country because we have people in the government who do not believe in public health care in the first place and would rather see it privatized and would rather give tax cuts to big corporations instead of ponying up the funding that we know is necessary to have proper health care.

Government Orders

I am outraged at the Liberal Party, which promised as long ago as 1997, and the government has said again and again until their most recent Speech from the Throne, that they were going to make progress on pharmacare. Why am I mad about that? It is because I understand that people are really getting hit hard in the pocketbook with the inflation that is happening. I know there is no magic wand in the desk of government and some of the factors driving inflation right now are beyond their control. However, what is in their control? They could certainly help with the cost of prescription drugs because a national pharmacare program would do that. It would save money. It actually costs less to have such a program than Canadians are spending right now on prescription drugs.

We are going back a couple of years now to the PBO study, but the PBO was very clear. Right now Canadians are spending about \$24 billion a year on prescription drugs with the many provincial systems that we have and the many private plans. One national system would cost about \$20 billion a year. That is a way to save money and serve people better and help bring down some of those costs that are making things so hard for Canadians right now. It is something the government absolutely needs to do and would help.

The NDP has long proposed taking on telecom companies. Canadians are paying among the highest rates for cellphone and Internet. That is not a luxury anymore. It is not a “nice to have”. If people want to participate in the labour market, good luck finding a job and keeping a job if they do not have access to the Internet or to a cellphone. That is something that the government could do. It could take a regulatory approach to bringing down prices and making sure that, at the very least, there is a genuinely affordable plan for basic access to something as important as cellphone and Internet rates.

What is in Bill C-8? There is nothing particularly offensive, but not a lot of the things that we really need. I think that is the dilemma. Certainly there are many Canadians who are frustrated, in this time of real difficulty and real challenge with the pandemic but also with, for many of us, a real looming sense of challenge when we look at what is happening to the planet and all the extreme weather events and we look at the economic disruption and the displacement of people that it is going to cause, that we are just not rising to the occasion. Yes, absolutely we should be helping businesses improve their ventilation systems. That is the right thing to do in the context of the pandemic and these measures make sense as a way of contributing to that.

Government Orders

We ought to be helping schools improve their ventilation systems. It is not a real answer to reimburse teachers for some of what they are paying out of pocket, because I do not think teachers should have to pay out of pocket. Until we have governments that are willing to fund education to the extent that it needs to be, so that every student has what they need, I am thankful to teachers who are willing to go above and beyond, and I am willing to support a measure that gives them a little relief for doing things out of compassion for their students that they really should not have to do because that is a compassion that we should have collectively. We should work collectively to fund the things that students need, instead of leaving it to their teachers on an individual basis.

● (1705)

I am glad in principle that the government is looking at having some kind of tax for underused housing. However, I think it will be important to interrogate that seriously at committee, because initial analyses suggest that there are loopholes that we could drive trucks through in this legislation. There is a lot more we need to do to tackle the problems of the housing market, some things the Liberals themselves promised in the last election, like banning blind bidding. That was a platform commitment of the Liberal Party.

Why is that not here? What could they possibly be waiting for? Are house prices not high enough? Do they need to escalate faster for the Liberals to make good on their own election commitments? Give me a break. That stuff should at least be here.

We also know that we need a serious plan, not the national housing strategy they love to tout, because it is inadequate. We need to get more real units, and I am not talking about so-called affordable housing, which has a technical definition that really just means “high rent” for most people, rent they cannot afford.

We need to build housing with rent geared to income, and we need to explore non-market options, like co-ops and other things like it, so that we take the speculation out of enough of the housing market that people really can access housing. That would also help relieve cost pressures among people for whom home ownership is a real goal. It would be a larger group if prices came down, as it was not that long ago. That would help them out too by relieving demand in the housing market and helping to lower prices overall.

These are things that we really need to be doing. I look forward to having an intensive study at committee of this new proposed underused housing act. I think that is a good piece of parliamentary work. However, we are kidding ourselves if we think it is really going to change the fundamental trajectory of the Canadian housing market, not just in the last two years, as the Conservatives would have us believe, but over the last 20 years, during which prices have been going up consistently because we have had federal governments that, since the mid-nineties, have not come to the table with enough funding to build enough non-market housing to relieve serious pressure on the market. That absolutely needs to happen.

There is more money proposed for things we need, particularly rapid tests, and we are quite supportive of that. There are some questions, though. I did ask the Associate Minister of Finance about this earlier, and I was somewhat dismayed that he did not have an answer. In Bill C-8 there are proposals for money for rapid tests, and in a stand-alone bill, Bill C-10, the government proposed to

spend money on rapid tests. Bill C-8 asks for \$1.72 billion for rapid tests and Bill C-10 asks for \$2.5 billion for rapid tests, and the Associate Minister of Finance and the government could not give a clear answer to whether it is asking for \$4.2 billion combined, the \$2.5 billion in Bill C-10 or the \$1.7 billion in Bill C-8.

I think Canadians should know, and I think Parliament should expect to have some reliable reporting on those numbers as we go, because as we know, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, not that long ago, said the government, when it came to tabling its public accounts, was considerably late and was an outlier among other G7 countries. I think the government really needs to get with the program. There has been a need for a considerable amount of public spending, but the fact that we need to spend is not a reason not to report well on what the money is being spent on and not to do it in a timely way. In fact, it becomes that much more important that the government reports well and in a timely fashion on its spending when so much money is going out the door and so quickly. There are certainly things to talk about in that regard.

● (1710)

Suffice it to say, while I am not impressed by the extent to which many of the things we need to do to rise to the moment are not in here, whether they are in facing the pandemic or the climate challenge, I am not of the view that this is a reason for things not to proceed. However, I really think the government needs to figure out how to rise to the occasion and move forward with a sense of urgency, particularly, to reiterate it one more time, the extent to which is has to internalize the sense of urgency required when it comes to seniors who have had their benefits clawed back by the government. They are not just losing income; they are also losing access to provincial programs in many cases. They were part of their support network and kept them housed, fed and alive. All of that has been called into jeopardy because of the government's refusal to act swiftly in May of last year when it knew that this was going to be a problem. This is something the government absolutely has to act on with urgency.

Government Orders

It also has to address all the people who are still out of work because of the pandemic. Let us not kid ourselves. We all know somebody, at least one person if not more, who is struggling to get back to the job they had or to get enough hours in a new job and who cannot support their family. The 40% cut to pandemic benefits was bad enough, going from \$500 a week to \$300 a week, but in addition to that, with the Canada worker lockdown benefit, the government made it way harder for people to access help. My office is hearing from people in Elmwood—Transcona and from people across the country who are trying to access this benefit at a time of incredible need and cannot access it. They are being told that it should take a matter of days for a response, but they have waited weeks and still have not gotten a response. The government had a system that was providing income support for a lot of people, and when it ended, the government was still providing support to about 900,000 people. What it was replaced with is not adequate to the task, both in terms of how much it delivers and in terms of the criteria that people have to navigate to access it.

As I said, Bill C-8 can certainly go to committee and there are things worth looking at, but this is not the kind of leadership we need at the moment. The government has to do more to rise to the occasion. I will continue to be here, as will my New Democratic colleagues, to press the government to rise to the occasion.

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the overall assessment the member made when he talked about seniors. As a politician for over 30 years, I have witnessed many years of NDP governments at the provincial level in Manitoba and many years of Progressive Conservative governments, and I can tell the member that in the last five or six years, since the Prime Minister, his cabinet and my colleagues have been at work, we have done more to support seniors in real, tangible ways.

The member talked about corporate tax breaks. I would like to remind him that there were maybe six corporate tax breaks from the NDP in the Province in Manitoba while there was a need for funding in long-term care, which was the total responsibility of the NDP provincial government.

Does the member see any hypocrisy there? Would he not recognize that as a government we have been very progressive in providing for and being there for our seniors, because it is the right thing to do?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member what is different. In this case, we had seniors who were working to top up their guaranteed income supplement benefit, but they lost their job when the pandemic started. They were told to apply for help and that they would get some supplementary income to replace what they had lost. When they said it was a little more than they usually make, the government said not to worry and to just apply. It said, “We have your back; there's not going to be any penalty.”

Some seniors ended up fixing their car, some fixed their teeth and some paid bills that were in arrears. Then the time came to assess them for the guaranteed income supplement for next year, and without the government having told them, their pandemic benefit

counted against them in the calculation of their GIS. This represents not only their GIS, but a bunch of other programs for which GIS enrolment is a precondition and that support them. The government just started clawing it back. The government knew for months that this was coming, but it did not care and did not do anything about it.

Now people are being evicted and some are dying. That is a huge difference. This has to do with the government and how it has managed its own internal bureaucracy, and it is costing lives. That has not happened before.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what a wonderful, passionate, sincere speech my colleague just gave. We do not always agree on everything, but he spoke from the heart.

I think he and I have observed two facts. Any social worker or economist would agree that, regardless of the government's attempts to make us believe whatever it says by throwing numbers at us, seniors are getting poorer. Instead of helping the people who built Quebec and the rest of Canada, the people to whom we owe our quality of life, our freedom and our democracy, we are letting them get poorer. That is the first fact.

The second is that the rich are rapidly getting richer. The ultra-rich are making even more money than before, plus they are hiding their money in tax havens.

In light of those two facts, I would like my hon. colleague to explain why this government is doing nothing for seniors and, to add insult to injury, why it is not tackling the tax haven problem.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I think we can do a lot more for seniors and for all Canadians who need support. This is not just about direct financial support. I am also talking about more funding to help the provinces upgrade their health care systems, for example. That can come from the federal government.

There is also the issue of tax loopholes and tax rates for large corporations and the wealthy. A few months ago we learned that 1% of Canadians own 25% of all wealth. That is not sustainable.

The government cannot fund all of the services Canadians need without more revenue. We have a serious problem when 1% of the population has this kind of wealth and does not contribute its fair share.

Government Orders

• (1720)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate having the opportunity to ask my colleague a question. I am really disappointed in the House today listening to the member for Winnipeg North talk about something that he clearly does not understand.

The reality is that a few days ago, a senior in this country was put into the ICU because they could not get their GIS after it was clawed back. It meant that a member of our community, of our country, could not get the medication for their type 2 diabetes and could not feed themselves in a way to stay healthy. They went into the ICU and last night they died. That is a human being, a senior in this country, who worked hard to build our country and did nothing wrong. Like every other working Canadian who lost their job, they applied for the only money they could to make ends meet. I really hope the government will listen to Campaign 2000, which is requesting, desperately, a small payment in advance so that seniors do not have to wait more months.

I am wondering if the member could talk about how long seniors have to wait for the government to take seriously the deaths among seniors that are due to its decisions.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for North Island—Powell River for the all the work and advocacy she has undertaken on this file since we first found out about this.

The reality that is stark, which we are seeing very clearly, is that poverty kills. Poverty can kill people just as sure as the pandemic can. It is why it was so important to have a full economic response and financial response to the pandemic. That is why the New Democrats fought so hard for a benefit of \$2,000 a month. It is why, given that we are clearly not out of the pandemic, it was wrong for the Liberals to cut that down by 40%. It was wrong for them to claw it back from seniors.

I do not know how long we will have to wait for the government to make this right. However, I know there are many seniors out there who cannot afford to wait any longer than they already have. The government needs to find a way to act on an urgent basis.

Campaign 2000 had two calls. One was for a direct emergency payment to affected seniors, and the other was for a housing fund to get the ones who have already been evicted or who are facing eviction rehoused or kept in their home. The government should do both. It needs to pick at least one so that we can get these seniors off the streets and somewhere safe. Then they can make it to a day when the government is finally ready to offer compensation.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed the speech of my colleague from Winnipeg. There was one thing that he raised in that speech that I want to ask him some questions about.

He talked about the federal tax rate going from 28% to 15% at the same time as the federal government, under the Chrétien Liberals in 1992, 1994 and 1995, actually reduced the contribution from the federal government from 50% of health care funding down to its current level of 22%. Of course, that thrust a whole bunch of

costs onto the provincial governments, which have to invest that money now, but it also ceded those tax points from 28% to 15%.

My hon. colleague over there from Elmwood—Transcona does not seem to like that idea. However, the issue is that it is supposed to allow those provinces that space to fill.

My colleague knows that health care costs have gone up in every province, yet our health care outcomes have not met the increase. We still have desperate need for better facilities, yet we are not getting great outcomes. Can he tell us what he thinks the solution to this should be?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the other decrease in the corporate tax rate from 22% to 15% happened under the Harper government, and that it did that while it reduced the escalator for federal funding to provinces for health care. Therefore, there is enough blame to go around between Liberals and Conservatives for the diminishing amount of money that goes out to the provinces.

Part of the solution, frankly, is the health accord model, in which the federal government brings provinces around the table to talk about best practices. I worked in the minister of health's office in Manitoba, and some of the things we saw the most success on were the five priority areas coming out of the 2004 health accord. This was because provinces decided what the priorities were and how to measure progress, and then they had federal money to meet those standards.

That is when we see progress: when we get together, plan and fund success. That is the promise the Liberals broke when they were elected in 2015 after running on a new health accord. Shame on them. That is the model we need to get back to.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so happy that our ridings share a border.

Today we are debating Bill C-8, which contains a series of legislative measures that the Minister of Finance presented during the economic update in December.

I will use my time today to talk about the economic update as a whole, including what the government did to prevent the worst economic impacts of the pandemic, the legislative measures in the bill, and the important role of economic growth in ensuring the financial viability of our country and its ability to provide major social programs in the future, especially in certain areas that I think would be beneficial for the government.

[English]

When we are discussing this bill, it is important to take a step back to look at March of 2020. We were faced with one of the biggest economic challenges of our time. Indeed, it was the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. At the time, as we were learning more and more about this novel virus COVID-19, the government really had two options. The government could intervene and help support the economic stability of the country by supporting individuals, businesses, provinces and territories, or it could take a bit more of a laissez-faire approach and say that there would be some economic harm, but the government would hold back some of its spending. It would be what it would be.

I compare those two strategies because, although the economic crisis of 2008-09 was different, the approaches that those two governments took, the Harper government then and our government now, are completely different. I say that because we saw the economic scarring at that time. The Harper government did not intervene with the necessary liquidity at the time, and it took years to return to our economic prosperity, to where we had been prior to the challenge.

Let us compare and contrast that to this government. Yes, it is a different crisis, and we intervened hard and put money on the table to make sure that people were taken care of.

As we will see here today, as we go through the different measures the government introduced, we have now returned to our prepandemic GDP and we have returned to having more jobs than were lost at the height of the pandemic. I want Canadians and parliamentarians to think about that as we discuss this bill here today and reflect on where we are now and where we have come from.

I remember it. I remember being at home in my riding of Kings—Hants as a new member of Parliament, recently elected in 2019. Actually, you and I both were, Mr. Speaker. I remember wishing and wanting to be here, but being privileged to have the opportunity to represent my constituents in a virtual manner. I remember how quickly the government moved to put measures in place, whether it was the Canada emergency response benefit, which made sure that individuals who were losing their jobs as a result of the pandemic could take advantage, or the wage subsidy, which was provided to businesses as their economic situation changed.

It was a very uncertain time, as we can all appreciate as parliamentarians. I have countless stories, whether about the CERB benefit helping a family get through that difficult period or the wage subsidy. Businesses owners have said their businesses would not be here today if it were not for that government intervention.

I was in Windsor last week to see Mermaid Theatre. For Canadians watching who may not know, Mermaid Theatre does tremendous work. It is a puppet show. It goes around the world plying its trade right out of little Windsor, Nova Scotia. If we had not been there with those wage subsidies, Mermaid Theatre company would not exist today.

Instead, it has been supported through the pandemic. It is now pivoting to online learning and the ability to put their puppet shows in a digital format because of the support our government gave to

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get it through that period. It is using innovative technologies to provide their work around the world because it is limited in its ability to go to theatres and have 3,000 people in the audience. That is just one example.

● (1730)

I want to talk about the Canada emergency business account. Again, it is another tool to help provide that liquidity for businesses. Members will recall that 25% of it is a grant contribution if businesses are able to pay back that amount. We have now extended that deadline to December 31, 2023.

I like to call it as I see it in the House. The government is not perfect. The government on this side is not perfect, but we headed programs that were by and large meeting the needs of Canadians. There were some businesses that did not meet the criteria of what we put out. That is why we focused on the regional relief and recovery fund. This was administered through the regional development agencies. In our area of Atlantic Canada, that was done through the CBDC, the Community Business Development Corporation.

The CBDCs worked with businesses. Perhaps a business did not need \$40,000 worth of loan and it only needed \$10,000 to see it through. The CBDCs could work with businesses that were not otherwise meeting the criteria in the programs. It is an extremely beneficial program.

I want to credit our former minister of economic development, who now serves as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. There was a provision that allowed for the equity the CBDCs were earning to actually stay with them. Those monies would be returned and will be available for small initiatives for businesses across the country.

We have had a lot of conversation about seniors here in the House. It is a very important topic. In my riding of Kings—Hants, we have a large proportion of seniors. I want to highlight that during the pandemic, notwithstanding that there remain challenges, we were there for them.

We gave a \$300 top-up to those recipients under old age security. We gave a \$200 addition for those who were under the guaranteed income supplement. We have increased the old age security by 10% for those who are 75 and up, and we are pledging to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$500. It is part of the platform commitment of the government. Of course, as was highlighted in the economic update, there was also an important measure to reduce and eliminate the clawbacks for those seniors who were being impacted because of the pandemic benefits.

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We were also there for essential workers with some of the benefits that we were putting on the table. There is a lot in it. Parliamentarians in this House collectively passed these measures. I know with some members of the Conservative Party, I found something frustrating. I will go on the record and perhaps some members who are in the House today can have a back and forth with me when we get to questions on this.

In one breath, the Conservative Party of Canada would say that Liberals were doing too much and putting too much water on the fire, saying we were helping Canadians too much. Then we would hear, literally the next question in question period, that our government was not doing enough. It was that inconsistency that members on this side of the House have asked members of her Majesty's loyal opposition to pick a lane and decide what they stand for as it relates to economics. Perhaps we can engage in that later.

I want to talk about what the government's efforts have resulted in for Canadians who are listening at home. I mentioned before that 108% of the jobs lost at the height of the pandemic have been returned. We have actually created more jobs than were lost during the pandemic. We can compare that to the United States, for example, our cousin to the south, and they stand at 84% right now. We are doing well in terms of the returns of jobs. In fact, as I will get to in my remarks, we have to do more to bring Canadians here to fill our job vacancies because of the economic success we are having right now.

The economic update has projected a return to prepandemic levels of GDP. I believe the Minister of Finance answered a question yesterday stating that is the case. Notwithstanding, we know there are challenges with omicron. We have maintained the best net-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Of course, the Department of Finance is projecting a declining debt-to-GDP ratio over the next five years. Importantly, Canada has maintained a strong credit rating throughout this entire pandemic.

The Minister of Finance has said to this House, and I believe publicly, that the best economic policy is a strong health response. We will talk about the measures in the bill, but I could not agree more with that. Members will remember the government and its work on procuring vaccines and boosters, and we will remember the rush that was happening globally to make sure those were available.

• (1735)

I want to give a tip of the cap to the former Minister of Public Services and Procurement, and of course I could give a tip of the cap to our current Minister of Public Services and Procurement, with regard to the tests and good work that she continues. To my colleague for Oakville who has ties to the riding of Kings—Hants and grew up in Kentville, she did tremendous work. Our government was there to make sure that those vaccines and boosters were available.

On rapid tests, the work continues. This legislation lays out \$1.72 billion that can go from the consolidated revenue fund to help support the acquisition of rapid tests for the provinces that are distributing those in their respective jurisdictions.

There have been billions for personal protective equipment. Again, perhaps it is a lesson learned and a conversation for all parliamentarians about the need to improve domestic supply chains. This government worked hard to make sure that we utilized the assets and tools in Canada to make sure that PPE was available for health care workers, but also leveraged relationships internationally as well.

There are other elements around billions of dollars in health-care-related direct support during the pandemic. The COVID-19 resiliency fund was really an opportunity for provinces and territories to look at the infrastructure bilaterals that exist, pull up to 10% out of that and put it exclusively toward health-related COVID resiliency projects. I know that there have been some in my own riding. For example, Port Williams Elementary School received about \$1 million for ventilation programs. There were other initiatives across the country. These are the work of our government.

I want to make sure that I also talk about the legislative measures of the bill. There are seven of them. I am going to go through them quickly, because I think they are extremely important.

First is the small business tax credit for businesses that are making investments in ventilation. We know that this is important. We are working with the provinces. That tax credit is available at up to \$10,000 per location, or \$50,000 for a series of organizations that might be owned by one beneficial owner. These are important investments that we are making. This pairs with some of the tax credits that were in budget 2021 around digitization that small businesses can use, particularly vis-à-vis the changing consumer behaviour of not necessarily going to the business itself but shopping online. I think that is extremely important.

We have a new refundable tax credit for farmers in the backstop jurisdictions of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and New Brunswick. This is extremely important for the competitiveness of Canadian agriculture. It is a \$100-million commitment that was in budget 2021, and I am very pleased to see it come forward.

We have expanded the travel component for northern residents' travel exemptions. We know that this is extremely important in terms of their ability to get a refundable tax credit on their tax returns, and these are good measures. Especially as a rural member on the governing caucus, I can appreciate what this measure will mean.

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Let us talk about the underused housing act. We know that housing is a top issue in this country. We have moved the yardstick on this particular piece of legislation to introduce a 1% tax on the actual overall valuation of property. This is not for Canadians. It is for non-residents: non-Canadians who own property that is not being used for the purpose of housing someone. It could perhaps be speculative property. This is but one of the measures the government intends to introduce in the days ahead, but I certainly give it a tip of the cap because I applaud what it could mean. Is it going to solve the issue? It absolutely will not, alone. I really think that some of this lies in the municipal jurisdiction, and in ways we can work with municipalities to expedite their development processes to give more certainty so that developers who are building houses perhaps are not delayed for a number of years. That adds costs that end up going onto the housing that, of course, all Canadians are seeking to buy.

I mentioned the CEBA extension, and I certainly mentioned some of the other elements in the bill.

I want to talk about where we are going. As a member of Parliament, I think it is extremely important that we focus on economic growth. We have taken on a lot of money during the pandemic, no doubt. The spending was there to prevent the worst economic scarring. If we are going to maintain a fiscal balance in the days ahead that has to be a key element, and I know that it will be.

• (1740)

There are a couple of perhaps stormy clouds on the horizon that we all need to be mindful of as parliamentarians. One is omicron. When this was tabled before the House, omicron was not something that was necessarily prevalent at the time, and it is going to have an impact on of course the economic forecast into 2022. It is also going to have a cost, and the government will be focused on the amount of money.

We have heard about additional health care funding. The government promised it in its electoral platform, and premiers are calling for it. We have to be mindful of how we make sure that spending remains sustainable over time.

We are in a protectionist global economy. We saw this before the pandemic with the United States and China and the tariff wars being undertaken at the time. Brexit was certainly more than an economic decision, but had the economic consequences of splitting up the European bloc vis-à-vis the U.K. and Europe. Also, with respect to the Appellate Body being able to handle appeals under the WTO, it has been sitting and unable to move forward for a significant period of time.

We now have a government in the United States that is very consumed with its own domestic affairs. We have seen elements of the Buy America Act, EV vehicles and some of the proposed Senate legislation with COOL, the country of origin labelling, which would have impact on and perhaps concern, if it ever moved forward, our producers and ranchers in the west. We need to be mindful of that. It could have economic consequences. Our government has been there to work with challenging governments in the United States. We share strong economic ties. We will continue to do so, but we need to be mindful.

I will quickly move through the areas I think this government needs to focus on as part of what I believe to be a comprehensive economic growth strategy. The Minister of Finance's mandate letter includes words around that. I really think now is the time to pull together to perhaps work with, most importantly, the private sector, as well as different levels of government, non-profits and indeed indigenous leaders to see how we can create a growth strategy that will support the prosperity of this country in the days ahead.

We need to be focused globally with respect to our competitiveness and providing what Canada can provide to the world. That includes, as I have heard other colleagues say, agriculture, forestry, the Canadian oil and gas sector, and mining. Those are going to be major areas that we need to continue to focus on. We need to focus on allowing small and medium enterprises to think globally and leverage the trade agreements we already have.

We also need to be focused on internal trade and harmonizing barriers to increase economic efficiency. We have a Senate report that was prepared by a series of senators known as the prosperity action group. They suggest there is about 2% to 4% of GDP that sits on the table because of interprovincial trade barriers.

This is a well-trodden subject. We have been down this road before. If we look at measures in my own riding, we have a world-class wine industry and my producers say it is easier to get a bottle of wine to France or the U.K. than it is to New Brunswick. In today's society we need to be able to move that forward.

We have had tremendous co-operation with the provinces as it relates to the health response. Let us use that to also drive economic barriers that can create success as well.

Let us also talk about the regulation of professions in a way that we can harmonize them. Whether it be health care, labour, trades or mobility, those are really key areas where the government needs to go.

My predecessor Mr. Brison introduced regulatory reform in the 2018 budget. We have a good start, but we need to continue. With respect to innovating the Canadian economy, there is important work being done on the superclusters. There is more that can be done.

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I will finish with SMR technology. There is more that I could say, but unfortunately 20 minutes, although I am very privileged to have it, is not enough. Canada's oil and gas sector will play an important role in the economy in the days ahead, perhaps not to the extent that it has in the past, but we need to work at leveraging SMR technology, small modular reactors, to bring down emissions in Canadian oil and gas. This is so we can continue to provide that product, which the world will need in the decades ahead. Working with the industry and innovation, is a key synergy that we should be focused on as a government.

• (1745)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, what a lovely night it is to be debating in Parliament.

Yesterday, I had another exchange with the member for Kings—Hants, and I asked him why, since the government has spent so much money on supporting Canadians through COVID-19, we have not increased our ICU capacity or the number of hospitals we have in Canada to help treat COVID-19 and address the consequences of COVID-19 more broadly on the health care system.

He said it would be foolhardy. That was his exact word. He said it would be foolhardy to think that the Government of Canada could fix the health care system, but I read over Bill C-8, and what it seems is that the Liberal government is picking certain sections of provincial jurisdiction that it wants to intervene in.

Obviously yesterday when I debated the member, I was not opposed to the government putting money into health care and building bricks and mortar hospitals, but why would this member say that was foolhardy when Bill C-8 would do exactly that? It talks about ventilation systems for schools, and it is talking about giving provinces the capacity to do their vaccine passport programs. Why is there the discrepancy between those certain aspects of health care and others?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, as I recall, the question that was asked was how many hospitals have been built by the provinces as a result of federal funding. I perhaps would have said that was a foolhardy question: to ask how we are building hospitals in the middle of a pandemic. The monies that are being provided are to try to stopgap the challenges that the health care system is seeing right now.

However, I will answer his question. Yes, we are there to help provide support to the provinces and territories. Let us be honest as parliamentarians: The entire western world right now has a large baby boomer demographic going through. The idea that we will fix all issues in health care overnight is foolhardy, and the reality is that right now we are focused on making sure the health care system does not collapse.

As we get beyond the pandemic, we do have to talk about revitalization to strengthen the health care system in the days ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech and congratulate him on his efforts to learn French. He began his speech in French and he is getting better every day.

I noted several very interesting points in his speech that I would have liked to discuss. However, he ended by talking about small, or modular, nuclear reactors. I always get it wrong, but I think both terms can be used.

I find it interesting to hear the current Minister of Environment and Climate Change say that the government will not say no to new provincial projects involving this new technology. Meanwhile, just a few years ago, he himself was campaigning against that very same technology, particularly because of the danger toxic waste poses to the environment.

I would have liked to hear my colleague from Kings—Hants talk about the fight against tax havens and about seniors, but now I want to hear his comments on this technology. Does he really think it will help protect the environment by capping and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I apologize but I am going to answer in English because it is a direct question, and I want my answer to be very clear.

[*English*]

Yes, as a member of Parliament, I absolutely believe that SMR technology is going to be crucial for us to reduce emissions associated with the production of oil and gas, for us to meet our environmental targets, and to create economic prosperity in this country.

I am not a member of the cabinet. I am a member of Parliament, and my job is to bring forward the ideas that I think are important. I would suspect that although my colleague opposite might agree with absolutely everything her party stands for, perhaps there are other areas where she can think outside the box. I cannot speak for our party on this issue, but it is where I stand as a parliamentarian.

• (1750)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is no secret that the pandemic continues on and that it is getting harder for families to make ends meet. Families are struggling, yet the government has cut back supports and in fact has clawed back support from seniors. The Liberals have not gone after their corporate friends. They have actually gone after seniors and families trying to make ends meet.

I am wondering where my colleague is on the current cutbacks that have been made by the government, and whether he is willing to at the very least give a one-time payment in the interim to seniors who have been impacted by GIS cutbacks, some of whom are actually ending up on the streets. As our colleague for North Island—Powell River indicated, we actually lost a senior due to poverty yesterday.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre is certainly a passionate advocate every time she is on her feet in this House.

I have a number of seniors in my riding, including those I would consider vulnerable, and I am proud of the work our government has done. Let me address the question first as it relates to the GIS clawback.

The government, in the economic update, said that we absolutely will be addressing that issue. It is a \$700-million measure that the government is putting forward. I hope the member opposite will be going back and telling her constituents that the government will do this. With regard to the timeline, I am not the Minister of Finance, but I am happy to say that I know this is a priority for our government, and it will be addressed.

However, let us go back. On the old age security increase and guaranteed income supplement increase, we have increased the thresholds at which people have to start paying taxes, which also supports low-income seniors. The government is certainly proud of its record, and we have no reason to be disappointed, because we have been there for seniors throughout.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, at the end of the speech the member said he did not have enough time to cover everything he wanted to cover. I would like to give him an opportunity to speak on the so-called blue economy and how it would affect his province and the province I come from. It is so important.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I did spend time in Newfoundland this fall. What a beautiful part of the country. I know the member has one of the best areas from coast to coast.

The blue ocean economy that the member mentioned is extremely important. There is a \$1.5-trillion opportunity that exists in ocean technology and innovation. We had the opportunity as the Atlantic caucus to engage with Kendra MacDonald, CEO of Canada's ocean supercluster. They are doing tremendous work, and I know it matters to that member's riding. We need to continue that work through the superclusters, whether it be the automation one in Ontario or the protein industries supercluster in the west. Those five superclusters are doing tremendous work, and we need to continue to support them.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my good friend from Kings—Hants about some of the statistics he quoted, including the one about the best debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Surely he has some better numbers than that, because that is clearly not the case when we look at the country as a whole and when we look at the nature of what he is talking about here.

The member said Conservatives need to pick a lane. Which lane are we in as far as overspending by \$560 billion goes? The Parliamentary Budget Officer says \$176 billion had nothing to do with COVID. Money has been spent on COVID, which we have supported while we get through this pandemic, but could the member please tell us why the government had to spend \$176 billion extra on things that had absolutely nothing to do with the pandemic?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, let me congratulate the member for Calgary Centre. He is very articulate, and I really appreciate his opportunities and interventions in the House.

I will say that I was quoting, and he will have to go back into *Hansard* to see if I misrepresented. I was quoting that Canada was

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the best net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, and that number is quoted directly from Finance Canada. If he takes issue with it, I would encourage the member to raise it in his committee.

What I find ironic about the Conservative Party is that when I ask the question back as to what program they would not have supported, there is very rarely any answer as to what that would be.

To answer the member's question, the pandemic is front and centre in terms of the issues that the government is tackling, but we have other issues to tackle, such as reconciliation, climate change and continuing to support different innovations in the economy, as we were just talking about. The idea that the government could only spend on the pandemic and not on other priorities is certainly not the way we see it on this side of the House.

• (1755)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to be speaking tonight.

I am going to be totally honest with members: Given all the great and wild events of today, I am going to be doing this speech extemporaneously and sharing my time with the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

When I look at the bill, Bill C-8, in the context of where we are today in Canada, I have a number of key concerns. Bill C-8 in itself is not necessarily the worst bill, but the concern is the context in which we are looking at Bill C-8 in Parliament today and all of the other things happening in our great nation. Part 1 of Bill C-8 talks about changes to the Income Tax Act, including a new refundable tax credit for improving air quality. Paragraph (b) of the summary talks about a new tax credit for travellers in the north. Paragraph (c) talks about the school supplies tax credit and increasing it from 15% to 25%. Paragraph (d) of the summary talks about a new refundable tax credit in the backstop provinces for fuel on farms. All of these measures, in and of themselves, are not bad measures.

Furthermore, the Underused Housing Tax Act taxing foreign buyers in this country is not necessarily the worst thing. The part 3 six-year limitation on the loans offered to small businesses in Canada to be in line with the student loan program in Canada is not the worst measure. Part 4 would authorize payments to be made from the consolidated revenue fund to put new ventilation systems into schools. Part 5 has more money for vaccine- and COVID-19-related initiatives. Part 6 has \$1.72 billion from the consolidated revenue fund for COVID tests. We have actually been asking for those for a long time, and even despite all the money being spent, the government still has not brought them to us. Part 7 has changes to the Employment Insurance Act.

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All of these measures in this omnibus bill, in and of themselves, are not bad clauses. The problem, however, relates to accountability, transparency and the state of the nation. This afternoon, right before I ran into the House, realizing I was going to be speaking soon, I had a quick call with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. He reminded me of the report he provided to Parliament and all Canadians on the state of the government's finances and what they have reported to Parliament.

Since the election, this is only the fifth sitting week we have had, and I remember very clearly that the public accounts were finally tabled on December 14. This was six to seven months later than normal. In fact, the PBO report outlined that Canada was an outlier compared to other developed nations with respect to financial transparency and accountability. What is even more egregious is that two days later, with barely enough time for us to receive a copy of the audited reports from the various government departments to look at what the consequences of that spending were and how it actually materialized on line-item reporting in government departments across the country, the government tabled Bill C-2.

In Bill C-2, the government requested billions upon billions of dollars more, which it asked Parliament to approve to address the economy and COVID-19. How can the government ask parliamentarians to indebt future generations with more and more spending when we have not even had the time to review what was already tabled? We have to be more serious about how we are treating taxpayer dollars in the House.

I can also remember that in the early days of this pandemic, this official opposition was there for Canadians. We stood with the government to approve the necessary expenditures to make sure people did not lose their homes and that they were going to be able to be paid when the lockdowns came, but we are past that time now. The country has changed a lot in two years. In fact, on January 21, when I was driving into Vancouver for some meetings and I was listening to Dr. Bonnie Henry on CKNW, I was shocked by what I heard, because just the week prior, my son's day care had been shut, and my wife and I had to juggle a two-year-old at home while we were both trying to do our jobs. The school had to shut down because they were following provincial health orders. We agreed that was a great thing and that we needed to follow those protocols to keep children safe. No one is disputing that.

• (1800)

However, the week afterward, when I got out of the car after listening to CKNW and Dr. Bonnie Henry, I actually walked away feeling that things were going to improve, that the omicron virus was not having such a bad impact on people as Dr. Henry had originally anticipated. She said it was time to start changing our thinking about how we treated this virus and its mutations. She actually said we need to start looking at COVID-19 and omicron in the context of other respiratory illnesses like influenza and other viruses.

More recently, Dr. Kieran Moore from Ontario said, "We have let our lives be controlled for the last two years in a significant amount of fear and now we are going to have to change some of that thinking." He goes to say that we cannot eliminate this threat and that we have to learn to live with it.

Here in Parliament, Dr. Theresa Tam recently said, "I think many experts believe that the so-called herd immunity may not be achievable with this virus because it undergoes constant evolution, so what you're looking at is this endemic state where people will get reinfected over time as immunity wanes".

I interpret that to say, in other words, that versions of COVID-19 are going to be with us for a while and that our public health officers are telling us to start re-evaluating both the lockdowns and the way, perhaps, that governments are spending money in conjunction with this terrible virus that has had such a negative impact on all of our lives.

How does this relate back to Bill C-8? It starts back in our ridings.

On Saturday, I went by my office to pick up some materials before flying into Ottawa on Sunday, and there was a protest at my office. There were a lot of angry people who were not pleased with me. I went and spoke with them. A lot of people were ticked off that I spoke with them. The people at the protest were also ticked off at me because I am pro-vaccine.

I said to them they have a right to be angry right now. For two years, we have been living in a state of fear. For two years, our lives have been upended. For two years, my young children have not known anything different. My two-year-old son only knows the world of COVID.

What I am encouraging the government to do today is to start looking past COVID-19 now and to stop telling Canadians we still have to live with the same type of fear that we perhaps had to live with two years ago. We can start to move on.

That is why I am so displeased that the government is not giving Parliament and the House enough time to review expenditures, to understand the consequences of how we are spending money, the consequences of what lockdowns are doing and the consequences of not changing our thinking very rapidly.

People are angry. We see that outside today. People are looking for hope, and what all Canadians are looking for is a bit more transparency and a bit more openness from the Liberal government in terms of getting our lives back.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, although I really did appreciate the references to the provincial chief medical officer, Dr. Kieran Moore, a good friend of mine from Kingston, I fail to see the connection the member was trying to make between what those medical professionals were saying and the state of the pandemic we are in now.

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I do not think the member is incorrect at all when he says the pandemic is moving into an endemic state and that COVID will be with us for a while to come, but that is what this bill is specifically about. It is about starting to put resources into places so we can deal with the endemic state that the pandemic is entering into. For example, we are making sure we give schools, through the provinces, money to improve their ventilation systems and we are making sure we help provinces with their proof of vaccination certificates.

• (1805)

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, the Province of British Columbia was able to handle its vaccination certificates just fine. That clause in this bill is a political clause more than anything else. We already have the technology in every province to implement that system. What we need to look at now is when we can move past that so that people can get their lives back to normal.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The Bloc Québécois is very concerned that the government has remained silent about the health transfers Quebec and the provinces have called for. As my colleague talked about in more depth earlier, the federal government has been failing in its duty to transfer sufficient health care funding to the provinces for a very long time. Now this problem has caught up with us.

I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks about the fact that the government absolutely does not want to hear about immediate health transfers with no strings attached for the provinces and Quebec so that we can finally deal with this urgent situation.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

I agree with some of what she was saying. We need to let the provinces do what they want when it comes to managing our health care and education systems. The federal government needs to respect the provinces' jurisdictions.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from the Conservative bench.

Many aspects of the bill, particularly the sections related to housing and pandemic relief for schools, are in fact good measures. However, what I am concerned about is where the government has not put the resources.

There are many things in the bill that, of course, have some good aspects to it, but there are many that do not. One of the biggest aspects that I believe is missing, and that I hope the member can comment on, is related to making sure that there is support and resources for enforcement to ensure that our health care providers across the country are truly protected, and also to ensure that we provide the resources, as the member from the Bloc just mentioned, for more support for the provinces.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I have two quick points, and I thank the member for Edmonton Griesbach for the question.

I believe that the Government of Canada should not be choosing which provincial program it wants to support. Provinces are better off making those decisions on the ground. They know where to allocate their resources most effectively.

Secondly, on housing, the government could have done what the House agreed to do in June, which is to ban foreign buyers, and not make a complicated taxation system that will have very little to no effect on the role of foreign buyers in our market already.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today, as at any time, and to address another bill from the government that deals with the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will get to some of the specific provisions of Bill C-8, but I do want to start by talking broadly about some of the issues that are very live in debates around the circumstances of the pandemic right now.

Two of the big areas of discussion we have are about the relationship between science and policy-making as well as questions about freedom and the importance we attach to freedom and how we define that concept in the country. I want to talk about those two concepts to set the stage for the rest of my remarks.

By most accounts, the history of modern science starts with that great figure of Galileo, who tragically ended his life under house arrest, persecuted for championing the simple idea that the earth revolves around the sun. Galileo's story is often presented as a clash between scientific rationalism and religious dogmatism, but I think the truth is not quite so simple. Galileo was a person of serious faith and Copernicus, whose heliocentric theory Galileo defended, was actually a priest as well as a scientist.

While having plenty of religious supporters, Galileo also had many scientific detractors. In many cases his critics opposed him on scientific grounds, arguing that his theories constituted bad science and should be suppressed because they involved misinformation. Regardless of their deeper motivation, both sides in the argument over heliocentrism claimed to have science on their side.

A better way of understanding the conflict between Galileo and his detractors is as a dispute within science and about the appropriate method of scientific inquiry. Galileo championed free scientific inquiry while his persecutors emphasized trust in established scientific authority and conclusion. Galileo was presenting new data and advancing new ideas, ideas that challenged an existing scientific paradigm and establishment.

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He believed, rightly in my view, that the progress of science requires constant empirically grounded questioning. He did not believe that efforts to preserve public trust in established science justified the rejection or suppression of emerging empirical data. It was a dispute between empiricism on the one hand and the demand for trust in the cultural, religious and scientific authorities on the other.

As a student growing up and hearing the story, it was very easy to feel superior to Galileo's establishment-perpetuating persecutors. However, in the context of the current pandemic, it may be a bit easier to understand why some people thought that the propagation of scientific ideas outside of the scientific consensus was dangerous. The questioning of scientific authority in any time can lead to distrust, confusion, unrest and the drawing of erroneous conclusions. Galileo's ideas could have turned out to be wrong, but despite its risk, this process of reasoned and empirically grounded questioning of received wisdom has always allowed the society to draw new conclusions and soar to new heights, figuratively and literally. Our commitment to questioning old ideas and seeking new discoveries has the potential to push ourselves still further, despite the friction that we may experience along the way.

During this pandemic, the public has been encouraged to trust the science, but in practice this has generally meant trusting the established public health authorities, rather than holding public health authorities accountable through rigorous empirical critique. Public health authorities deserve our thanks for their incredible efforts during immensely challenging times, but they have also gotten some things wrong and given health advice that has been contradicted later or was being contradicted by public health authorities in other jurisdictions.

Points of dissidence have generally been explained on the basis that the science has changed. In many cases though, such as with masking at the beginning, public health advice changed quite independently from new empirical evidence. Public health advice on masking seemed to be much more a function of the available supply of masks than it did of actual new evidence on mask effectiveness.

Even so, science can only ever move forward if it is first questioned and put to the test. The process of inquiry of advancing hypotheses that are initially regarded with skepticism is not anti-science, rather it is fundamental to science. There would never be any scientific progress if people were not willing to question established ideas or patterns of thinking.

There are many potential examples of the seeming disconnect between official scientific advice and emerging empirical evidence. Many people are asking why the scientific advice in different jurisdictions around the appropriateness of lockdowns is very different from public health authorities in other countries, looking at the science or coming to very different conclusions than some public health authorities in Canada.

● (1810)

I have spoken in the past about some of the evidence around the relationship between low vitamin D and COVID-19. A systematic review of scientific literature published in January 2021 found the following:

Most of the articles demonstrated that vitamin D status in the blood can determine the chances of catching coronavirus, coronavirus severity, and mortality. Therefore, keeping appropriate blood levels of vitamin D through supplementation or through sunshine exposure is recommended for the public to be able to cope with the pandemic.

About half a dozen meta-analyses conducted since have come to the same conclusion.

This is an interesting example, because in response to a question about vitamin D asked here on April 22, the former health minister described recommendations for vitamin D supplementation as emerging from “the myriad of fake news articles that are circulating around the Internet”. While the former health minister I am sure would like to be thought of as being pro-science, her approach to new empirical information has many of the hallmarks of the Inquisition, that is, an approach that defends conventional wisdom even when that conventional wisdom is contradicted by emerging empirical evidence that is clear throughout the scientific literature. If we falsely equate a pro-science position with a pro-establishment position, we are then undermining the process of questioning an analysis that is vitally necessary for any kind of scientific process.

I encourage this kind of open-minded re-evaluation to be applied to all aspects of COVID-19 policy. This applies not just in the natural sciences but also in the social sciences. Our policy responses to COVID-19 need to continually grow and change in response to new evidence. We will not be able to grow and change if the necessary process of challenging pre-existing conclusions with emerging evidence is suppressed.

On the subject of freedom as such, we can see how what is true for science is also true for other domains of human action, including the freedom and the capacity to ask questions, to present unpopular opinions and to live according to one's sincerely held beliefs while respecting the rights of others to do the same. The ability and the character competency required to do this are what make the process of human progress possible.

On these issues, John Stuart Mill points the way for us. Mill did not argue that freedom was necessarily natural or that freedom was some a priori human right. He did not need to make those arguments because he was able to show that freedom is good because it is useful. This seminal thinker of what we used to call liberalism argued persuasively that when people are able to challenging existing norms and practices and to live in different ways, society is furnished with empirical data that helps others understand what actually leads to human happiness.

If I live my life in one way and the Speaker lives her life in another, then others are able to see the degree to which these modes of behaviour contribute to human flourishing or not, and are therefore able to shape their lives, at least partially, in response to that information. Mill used the term “experiments in living” to describe this process of learning from the choices of others and their consequences. That applies to experiments in science and also applies to experiments in living. Greater variation and a willingness to buck established trends help to furnish a broader range of data points from which we can then draw useful conclusions.

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Unfortunately, modern progressivism deviates from liberalism in its lack of humility. Modern progressives assume they know the right path and therefore can impose it. They assume that an inevitable trajectory of history makes every step they take necessarily right and good, so they easily justify any action that moves things along toward their chosen ends.

Concretely, the government's agenda includes highly coercive policies. For instance, it is imposing vaccination on the unwilling. We can also talk about draconian new Internet regulations and a planned new values test for charities. That is just what we know so far.

True liberalism is about saying that people should not go to jail, should not be penalized and should not lose their jobs just because they hold views or want to make choices that I personally do not agree with. A person can be anticoercion while still being provaccination. A person can be for free speech without liking everything that gets said as a result.

We see clearly from its agenda that the government is not a liberal government in the classic sense. It is an illiberal government. It is a government that has turned its back on classic liberalism and is instead embracing an authoritarian progressivism. It is a government that values being woke over being free. We need to re-engage, in our response to the pandemic, with classic wisdom around the importance of honest scientific inquiry and the importance of human freedom.

• (1815)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that the member promised he would get to the bill and he did not, he did address the issue of science and the evolution of science. In particular, he used an example about masks.

The member would have us believe that because some people questioned the use of masks in the beginning, and as we have evolved through our understanding of the virus we have now come to the conclusion that certain masks, i.e. cloth masks, are not as good as others, that somehow means those people were right.

What the member is basically trying to do is say that science is the process of proving that because we claimed it in the beginning, when it is not. Science is a process of evolving through learning about the disease, learning about how it is transmitted, and learning about how masks work.

• (1820)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the member had a very confrontational tone in the process of posing the question. I am not sure if we actually disagree, very much, on what the process of science is. What I said is what I think he said at the end, which was that the process of scientific inquiry requires asking questions, challenging received wisdom, experimenting and putting forward hypotheses, and then that empirically grounded process of questioning leads to new conclusions.

I made a point in my remarks about the importance of that process and of legitimate empirical questioning of received authority. At the time the member refers to, I was looking at the science on

masks. I took a bit of a risk as a member of Parliament by saying that I thought our public health authorities were wrong in their advice not to wear masks. I said that at the time, which was maybe a bit of a risk, but I read the empirical evidence and I thought that it was an important thing to say. It turned out that the thing I said was correct. It shows the value of empirically grounded questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, to be honest, I am not sure where my colleague was going with all that. He said a lot of things in his speech that I find problematic, including the fact that he is questioning the science here.

I am not sure that we are all ready to say that people are free to think differently and to believe that what science is telling us now is wrong. He suggested that people have been imprisoned for disagreeing with the government.

I find that freedom is a convenient excuse for a lot of things, and we are seeing that in the streets right now. Is my colleague saying that the health measures that have been put in place to combat the virus are not legitimate?

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, there were many things I could respond to in that question, but I probably will not have time for them.

The member was sort of saying that freedom is used in a lot of different ways these days, and that freedom could be used in this way and that way. My point is that there is this space for human freedom that should go beyond the things that I like. I might say that people should get vaccinated, but that does not mean that I should force that view on other people. That does not mean that I should try to coerce people by saying they should be fired, for example.

There is a legitimate space for individuals to say that, for whatever reason or through whatever process, they have come to a different conclusion. I believe we have to retain the idea of classic liberalism that individuals should be able to make choices about themselves and their own private spheres without being threatened with job losses or other consequences for coming to different conclusions.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the member's speech was a welcome attempt to find some place where we could have a conversation without yelling at each other. We need to find more occasions like that. I have had similar conversations about vitamin D, and wonder why we cannot, after we start being out of the pandemic, open up a space where we could provide the evidence and convince each other that we need vaccinations, but maybe we need other things as well.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her kind words. I look forward to hopefully being able to see her in Ottawa at some point soon and to continue that conversation.

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I have also launched a great new podcast called Resuming Debate, which is entirely dedicated to this idea of civil conversations, substantively with other members about issues. I encourage everybody to download it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As I go to resuming debate, I will, unfortunately, have to interrupt. The member will be able to continue his speech when this is before the House again.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope that podcast is not going to be monetized; otherwise, the member might find himself in a slight conflict of interest having just used this floor to advertise it.

I realize that I am going to be cut off, so maybe I will further conclude on the question I had for the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

What I was getting at was not that I have a difference of opinion with him in terms of allowing science to take its course, but I have a problem when people start saying, “The answer is vitamin D”, or “The answer is that masks don't work”. When people are saying this stuff without having any kind of scientific background to support it, that is when it is problematic.

It is like me saying to you, Madam Speaker, that it is four o'clock, and you say “No, it's not four o'clock”. Then, five minutes later I say, “It's four o'clock,” and you say, “No, it's not four o'clock”. Then I say it again, and you say “Yes, it's four o'clock now,” and I say, “See, I told you I was right.”

An hon. member: No, that is not the same.

• (1825)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That does not make any sense.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, yes, it is. My point—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I would remind members that they will have a chance for questions and comments, maybe not today, but they will still have a chance for questions and comments. I would ask them to hold on and let the hon. member do his speech because he is limited in time this evening.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, maybe I will be invited on the podcast and we can have this conversation there.

The point that I was trying to make was that, when we look for those answers, we have to look for them through the proper processes and get those answers through the scientific process. What I fear in what I heard in the member's speech is that he is trying to validate some claims that were made previously that ended up becoming true and saying they were right all along. I just do not agree with that.

I do not agree with a number of the comments that I heard today. I do not agree with the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon who said that the part of the bill that talks about supporting the proof of vaccination is somehow a political tool. I encourage him to go and talk to the Premier of Ontario, who is more than willing to take assistance from the federal government in order to make these programs successful and make sure that they work. The member then completely downplayed the situation by saying, “Any province can develop an app, show an app, etc.”, as if to suggest that it is that simple. The reality is that it is not and we know that.

Just last night, I walked into the Rexall at the corner of Metcalfe and Nepean Street and there was a gentleman who, I am going to assume, was one of the protesters. He was holding a phone, without a mask on, in front of the face of the clerk saying, “You can't make me wear a mask”, and essentially challenging this individual. I think it is extremely problematic.

Therefore, when the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon talks about—

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the member is inferring that I am opposed to wearing masks when my question had to do with vaccination status in—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is debate and I would ask the member to hold that for his comments. There is very limited time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I was saying that, when it comes to the proof of vaccination and the resources that it will require, it is a lot more than just the “app” that the member said every province already had. It is about putting the right supports and mechanisms in place to support provinces and territories, the supports that they are asking us for and that they want in order to help them get through this.

I recognize that I will have to use the rest of my time tomorrow to conclude my remarks, and I look forward to talking about this. There is a lot in this bill. In particular, I want to talk about the housing tax that relates to non-Canadians, non-residents and the member for Calgary Centre's obsession with trying to conflate it with other issues that the Conservative Party has been touting around for the last few years about Liberals and housing. I look forward to the opportunity to do that tomorrow.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have 16 and a half minutes the next time this matter is before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)
[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, last December I asked the Minister of Finance if she had heard from Canadians about all the difficulties that people are facing these days. I highlighted how dire and tragic the situation really was as parents were having to choose between putting food on their tables and buying clothing for their kids and as Canadians were finding it increasingly hard to keep up with the rising prices on just about everything.

In her reply, the finance minister said that I was talking down on the Canadian economy. Knowing that her answer was filmed and would be watched by my constituents in Brantford—Brant and many others across this great country, she rhymed off a number of abbreviated references that mean nothing to hard-working Canadians and brought up our net debt-to-GDP ratio, as if it had anything to do with my question. Then she added that Canadians should be proud of our economic recovery.

One of my constituents, Ben, commented on that particular video, “The arrogance of [this minister’s] tone is so disrespectful. The Liberals do not look out for the everyday Canadians.” Another constituent, Bren, said as follows: “I don’t believe there is a Politician out there today that will answer a direct question on point. It seems there is no direct interest in showing what is truly happening in Canada today.” Krystal commented, “Well said! I got lunch snacks the other day, literally three bags of food, and it cost me \$120. I remember when \$100 used to fill my cart.”

This is what Canadians are saying, and the government must listen to them.

Recently I rose in the House and brought to the government’s attention that Canada’s inflation is reaching a 30-year high, that gasoline is over \$1.50 a litre on average, that nearly 60% of Canadians are finding it difficult to feed their families and that throughout this year, thanks to “Justinflation”, people have to find an additional \$1,000 for groceries because everything is going up. If that is not bad enough, the government recently announced that the CPP tax would be an extra \$700 coming out of families’ paycheques. Again I told the government that it may mean nothing to the Prime Minister, but it matters to everybody else.

“Justinflation” is making life harder for everybody. They earn less, they spend more, they save nothing and they accumulate more debt. Canadians are concerned, worried and stressed. The mental health crisis does not only exist in the government’s talking points; it is real. It is a reality that people are facing each and every day.

It is a well-known fact around the globe that the Liberal government has spent the most money on its pandemic response and achieved the least. It printed money and distributed it irresponsibly, such as to prisoners. It sent millions to help wealthy corporations that were profitable during the pandemic and that simply used those funds to pay dividends to their shareholders. It paid Chinese state-owned companies, while small businesses and communities from coast to coast struggled to get well-deserved support. At the same time, while free cash flows left and right, the Liberal gov-

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ernment is delaying many important projects due to a lack of funding.

Kawenní:io/Gawęńi:yo school is a federally funded elementary and secondary school with 145 students located in my riding on Six Nations of the Grand River territory. For over 30 years, this school has provided instruction to its students in Mohawk and Cayuga until the eighth grade, when English is introduced. They are in urgent need of funding for a new school. Currently lessons are being delivered in a space leased from the privately owned Iroquois Lacrosse Arena. The classrooms are—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, the hon. member’s time is up. He will be able to continue in his one-minute question.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will try to provide as fulsome an answer as I can in response to my hon. colleague who just rose.

Canadians can rest assured that our government takes the rising cost of living seriously, and has been very focused on addressing issues surrounding affordability for Canadian families. Canadians know all too well that the global pandemic continues to impact our everyday lives in a variety of ways.

COVID inflation is a global phenomenon and it is caused by economic complications that include the challenging economic impact of the pandemic itself and the unprecedented challenge of reopening the world’s economy, something that we have never had to do before. Indeed, the Bank of Canada and other private-sector economists anticipate that inflation may stay higher for somewhat longer than initially expected, but they also expect it to ease back toward the 2% target over the next two years.

That being said, Canadians should rest assured that when it comes to essential government programs that families rely upon, the government has had the foresight to utilize inflation indexing. The Canada child benefit, a program that has lifted hundreds of thousands of Canadian children out of poverty and helped this government reduce poverty rates to historic lows, continues to be indexed to the cost of living. This is also true for old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, the credit for the goods and services tax and other benefits that some of our most vulnerable Canadians rely upon.

I would remind the member that our government also moved to cut taxes for the middle class while raising them on the top 1%. In addition, we have made major investments in affordable housing, launching a historic \$72-billion national housing strategy.

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We also lowered the qualifying retirement age for seniors from 67 years to 65 years, putting thousands of additional dollars into seniors' pockets when they reach retirement age.

We are working to build a national early learning education and child care framework. This program would not just create tens of thousands of jobs, but reduce the average cost of child care by 50% within a year and to \$10 a day over the next five years. This would not only make life more affordable for young families, but also get parents back into the workforce and help grow the middle class while giving every child a real and fair chance at success.

I would also remind the member opposite that on December 13, our government and the Bank of Canada announced the renewal of the 2% inflation target for the Bank of Canada for another five-year term. This renewed framework will keep the bank focused on delivering low, stable and predictable inflation in Canada as we continue to help support Canadians through this historic crisis.

As members can see, our government is already working hard to address the cost of living and to make life more affordable for Canadians. However, we know that more is to be done, especially as we emerge from COVID-19. As we look to the years ahead, the government's focus will continue to be on jobs and growth and making life more affordable. These are priorities that will form the foundation of our upcoming budget.

• (1835)

Mr. Larry Brock: Madam Speaker, following up on my latter point before I ran out of time, Indigenous Services Canada has reviewed and supported the design brief for the new school on the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve. They have confirmed that they consider this phase of the process complete. In fact, the then Minister of Indigenous Services attended my riding, toured the particular location and agreed that the funding had to be made available for the completion of the new school.

However, to this day, they still have not provided funding to actually build that school. The construction of the school is shovel-ready and should be funded. At a time when we see billions of dollars being irresponsibly spent, the Prime Minister and his government have turned a deaf ear to a request from the largest first nations reserve in Canada. It is time they had one.

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, by delivering significant fiscal policy support to Canadians during the pandemic and avoiding harmful austerity policies, we have seen a rapid and resilient recovery so far.

In short, our government's economic plan is working. Canada has exceeded its goal of creating a million jobs well ahead of schedule and ahead of expectations. In fact, Canada's job recovery is among the strongest in the G7. As of December, Canada had recouped 108% of the jobs lost in the depths of the pandemic, compared with just 84% in the United States.

In addition, just yesterday, data released outlined that as of November Canada's GDP had recouped all of its pandemic losses and surpassed its prepandemic level. We will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure Canada's economic recovery leaves no one behind. We will do this by focusing on jobs and growth, and by making life more affordable for Canadians.

I look forward to working with that member to deliver affordability for all Canadians.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real honour to be able to follow up on some questions I had of the government related to infrastructure in the context of disaster recovery in the number one riding in all of Canada, Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, and the number two riding in Canada, that of Abbotsford.

Everyone in the House knows the challenges my constituents have faced, the challenges the constituents of Abbotsford have faced, the challenges the constituents of Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola have faced and also the constituents of Chilliwack—Hope. Over the last couple of months, we have been working very collaboratively with the government. We send our sincere gratitude and thanks to the Minister of Public Safety. The Minister of Finance and I also had a chance to discuss some of these issues yesterday.

British Columbians are asking what the government is going to do related to the major infrastructure deficit that our province is facing as it relates to the once-in-100-years flood that we just had. Specifically, they want to know how our municipalities are going to cover the full costs. The member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola and I represent small, rural, mountainous communities that will have a hard time even covering their 20% contribution on some of the recovery effort.

In the Fraser Valley, the dike infrastructure was downloaded onto the municipalities. Communities like Abbotsford, Mission, the District of Kent and many indigenous nations, like the Stó:lo community, will have a very hard time funding the requisite infrastructure that we know we need and that our engineers have told us needs to be fixed to prevent yet another devastating flood. Today, we would like the government to give us an update on what it is going to do in the next budget, or foreshadow what it will do in the next budget, as it relates to these infrastructure expenditures.

The next point I would be remiss not to add relates to our agricultural sector. Throughout some of the ridings I have mentioned, many farmers are at a complete loss. They do not know what to do. They do not know how to recover. It is very difficult making sense of the business risk management programs, disaster financial assistance, contributions from the Red Cross and whether the government is working with the province through the special committee on an AgriRecovery framework, which would allow the Province of B.C. to request additional funds for the unexpected disaster we just went through.

An update on some of these measures would be very helpful for B.C., and I hope we can get some answers today.

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• (1840)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would gently remind the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon that Ottawa Centre is the number one riding in Canada, and I am so glad that he is here, in my riding, at this moment. In all seriousness, I want to thank him for his continued advocacy on behalf of his constituents on this matter.

We know that November's flooding had a life-altering impact on many in British Columbia, and our thoughts continue to go out to everyone affected. The severity of this event is already clear. While we still do not have final estimates of the damage, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, or IBC, has estimated that the insured cost of November's floods is \$515 million, the single most costly severe weather event of 2021.

Not too long ago, this would have been seen as a once-in-a-decade or a once-in-a-century type of event, but the science is clear that the impacts of climate change are real and becoming increasingly more severe. According to the IBC, of Canada's most costly years on record for natural disaster-related damages, four of the top five years occurred within the last decade. Our government knows that, in this changing environmental context, we need to not only help people build back, but also build back in a better way that creates local resiliency and protects communities for many more years to come.

That is why our government has set up a joint committee with the Province of British Columbia, co-chaired by the federal Minister of Emergency Preparedness and his provincial counterpart, Minister Farnworth. This climate disaster resilience committee, which is composed of federal and provincial ministers, is working closely together and with indigenous leadership to provide immediate and ongoing support to the people of British Columbia. This committee will collaborate to build back in a way that better protects British Columbians from future climate events, creates cleaner and healthier communities, and supports Canada's efforts in reaching our climate goals.

Work is also already under way with the province on a request for financial assistance through the disaster financial assistance arrangements, also known as DFAA. Under the DFAA, the federal government cost shares up to 90% of all eligible disaster response and recovery costs with provinces and territories. The DFAA also offers an additional 15% top-up for mitigation enhancements or innovative recovery activities that increase future resilience.

As I have previously mentioned in this House, we received an initial request from British Columbia in November. Officials are fully engaged as we await further estimates on costs from the province. I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary generosity Canadians have shown in response to this disaster. In the aftermath of the event our government made a swift announcement that we would be matching every dollar Canadians donated to the Red Cross B.C. flood response fund. With the province's contribution, that meant that every dollar Canadians donated turned into three dollars for those most heavily impacted by November's disaster.

By the time the program ended in December, thanks to the generosity of Canadians, just under \$90 million total has been raised, and I am pleased to inform my hon. colleague that the Red Cross has already distributed over \$17 million in evacuation-related financial assistance to more than 7,200 households. The Red Cross continues to undertake the critical work providing recovery support to those who are the most in need.

• (1845)

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ottawa Centre for acknowledging that we need to make very real and very targeted investments in British Columbia right now to keep our population safe, update our infrastructure and account for these natural disasters, and we need to do so quickly.

When does the hon. member think we are going to hear something from the joint committee? Has the joint committee been granted any authority to approve spending, or does it have to report back to the respective treasury boards of both the province and the federal government?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Madam Speaker, I would like to answer the member's question around support for farmers. The hon. member raised that issue, and I have to say that farmers have had to deal with unique and extraordinary hardships. Our government stands with them and is committed to supporting farm families through these challenges. I understand that the Minister of Agriculture is fully engaged on this issue, and I will also endeavour to bring the concerns of the member's constituents to her attention.

In recognition of the changing global climate and the realities of Canada's climate emergency, this government has further demonstrated concrete commitment to augmenting our national state of readiness and creating a culture of preparedness across the country. The creation of a dedicated emergency preparedness portfolio will help our government focus on combatting climate-related disasters and improve our overall resilience, and an ongoing review of the disaster financial assistance arrangements program will also ensure there is an updated sustainable system available to provinces and territories.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, when I originally asked the Minister of Agriculture what it would mean for farmers if the government restricted fertilizer use, I stressed how crucial it is for all Canadians across the country. Since then, the problem has only gotten more obvious. After all, we are talking about the people and operations producing our food and other essential supplies. It is something so critical for people in their daily lives and for the basic functioning of our entire economy, as one in six jobs relies on agriculture. However, ever since the Liberals first announced it over a year ago, they have kept everyone in the dark. Producers, industry and Canadian consumers are still waiting to get some clarity and reassurance about what they are actually going to do, or, rather, what they are not going to do.

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After throwing out an open-ended announcement, will the Liberals finally rule out a restrictive approach that aggressively cuts down fertilizer use, much as what we saw in the European Union? It is a fair question, and they should be able to answer it by now. Associations and industry have been asking this for a long time, but the government will not say anything. Whenever I ask them, they all say the government has not been consulting with them. As time goes on, it seems like the government is unwilling to clear the air and it starts to feel like a bad sign.

Let us consider what is at stake and what damage can be done by a rash decision. Meyers Norris Penny worked out a projection based on the European Union modelling over the next decade for losses as a result of a significant cut to fertilizer use in Canada. Year after year, yields would drop by millions of tonnes. It could get so bad that we would have a steep decline in what we can export after filling our own domestic demand. For those working in agriculture, the sector could lose up to \$10 billion in a year, for an estimated total loss of \$48 billion by 2030.

No one can afford these devastating losses to a key part of our economy, especially when the federal government is already trying to bring down other high-performing industries, such as our natural resources sector. While maintaining food supply is a big enough challenge by itself, whether it is for here at home or to feed hungry populations all over the world, we can expect more problems to come along. We had a terrible drought this past year, compounded by bad years of lack of moisture in the years prior, which brought yields to lows unseen since 2007. It could happen again with future bad years.

Aside from weather conditions, the government is already pushing for a rapid expansion of biofuel production. It is going with the expectation that Canada can produce 26 million tonnes of canola by 2025, which we can definitely do, but only if we do not also remove the tool that makes it possible.

In the Order Paper question I submitted, the response that came back said that the government is specifically looking to reduce emissions from nitrogen-based fertilizers. One of the fundamental problems with that, which it is unwilling to recognize or admit, is that canola and corn, some of the main crops used for biofuels, are some of the biggest-consuming crops of nitrogen-based fertilizers to grow the bushels to get the yields that we need to meet demand. By creating more demand, we will need the same crops for food and fuel supply together, and we definitely cannot afford to sabotage our own yields by taking on a fertilizer-usage reduction, which is what we saw in the European Union. Unfortunately, the minister has not said much about this. She quoted an informal survey of a dozen professionals, who in the end actually agreed with what farmers and industry are already saying.

It has been clear for far too long that the Liberals do not recognize the practical realities of producers and how the difficult decisions they have to make will impact everybody else. I challenge the Liberal government right here and right now to remove all doubt and confusion.

Can the parliamentary secretary, right here and right now, guarantee to our farmers that there will not be a restriction on the amount of fertilizer used in farming?

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his important question.

In the context of extreme weather events and the global rise in temperatures, it is obviously more important than ever to preserve our land, air and waterways.

We must ensure that our farmland is healthy and productive for generations to come and, to do that, we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector, which still represent roughly 10% of total emissions in Canada.

The use of fertilizer has played a major role in the success of the agricultural sector over the past decade. However, emissions associated with the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer also increased during that time. That is why, in Canada's strengthened climate plan, the government set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with the use of fertilizer by 30% over 2020 levels by 2030.

I want to make clear that this target does not seek to reduce the use of fertilizer by 30%. Our approach seeks to reduce emissions from fertilizer, not impose a mandatory across-the-board reduction in fertilizer application rates.

Our target is ambitious but achievable. The Western Producer conducted an informal survey that asked a dozen soil-nutrient experts about this 30% target. Most of these experts agreed that the emission reduction target was achievable and would not require a reduction in fertilizer use.

If we want our agricultural and food production industries to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable in the future, this target will have to be met. Canadian farmers are not facing this alone. We will work closely with the industry to understand the challenges that lie ahead and find out how we can achieve this target together.

We are looking at all of the solutions that could help us reduce fertilizer-related emissions while investing heavily in programs to help farmers branch out to new products and adopt sustainable practices.

We recently invested \$165.7 million to expand the agricultural clean technology program, which supports the research, development and adoption of clean technologies, such as precision agriculture, that can help make fertilizer use more effective.

We invested \$185 million in the living laboratories initiative, which brings together farmers, scientists and other collaborators to develop new, climate-adapted practices and technologies.

In addition, we invested \$200 million in the on-farm climate action fund, which is also part of the agricultural climate solutions initiative.

We want to support the immediate adoption of nitrogen management practices and other practices that store carbon and reduce greenhouse gases right on farms.

Our top priority is supporting sustainable agriculture. We believe that the practices, innovation and expertise Canadian scientists and farmers have already developed and implemented will improve the management of agricultural nutrients, reduce emissions and maintain the quality that Canadian agriculture is known for around the world.

• (1855)

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, again, this shows the lack of awareness that the government has on how innovative farmers already have been. Having grown up on a grain farm, I definitely understand how that works. I have seen the farming practices evolve over the years when it comes to rotational crops and when it comes to being more efficient with how we apply fertilizer. Farmers have made those changes for years.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned extreme weather events. Yes, this last year was definitely, I would say, an extreme weather

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event with how dry it was, but in the region of the country that I live in, it naturally is already dry. We have already made all the adjustments that we need to make sure that we are preserving moisture in the soil. We have better farming practices. We have already improved yields, but we have also better protected the soil. The government is too afraid to recognize that farmers have made those changes themselves.

Will the member again here, today, comment and will he commit that the government will not restrict fertilizer use? Much of the European Union did. It said it was going to reduce 30% emissions as well, and it came up with a 20% fertilizer usage hard-cap reduction.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, our approach is focused on reducing fertilizer emissions and not an absolute reduction. Having said that, I challenge the member to say that farmers cannot innovate even more. If my grandparents still farmed the way they did way back then, I mean, they would not be in business today. I know farmers are innovators, and they are great at introducing new technologies.

Precision farming is actually used to reduce fertilizers. Thirty years ago, fertilizers were sprayed all over the land. It is not done like that anymore because they use precision farming, which is fertilizer at the right place, at the right time and at the right moment.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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