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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 4, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*English*]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of the motion 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.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning to offer some reflections with respect to Bill C-8.

I would like to start with some points I appreciate in this bill. Specifically, I think we can all agree that, in the midst of a pandemic, adding more ventilation and more supports is a good thing. In this bill is \$100 million to improve ventilation in schools. There is also a refundable tax credit on taxes payable for up to 25% of ventilation expenses for small businesses.

In addition, I really appreciate that the bill includes \$1.72 billion for provinces to allocate rapid tests to expand school and workplace testing. In the Waterloo region, for example, the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce shared last month that it was short on 200,000 rapid tests. This is the kind of support I know businesses in my community will really appreciate.

When it comes to housing, house prices in Kitchener went up 35% last year alone. In 2005, the average house price was around three times the median income. In the last year, it rose to 8.7 times the median income. There is no doubt that house prices are skyrocketing out of control. Young people are concerned they might not ever be able to purchase homes of their own. Seniors on fixed incomes in my community are anxious about whether they will be able to stay. I spoke to a nurse last summer who shared that her rent is going up too, and she wondered if she would be able to stay in our community at all.

We need policies that address this crisis head-on. Homes should be for people to live in, and not commodities for investors to trade. One of the problems we have in this crisis is the number of vacant homes across the country. A recent study showed that 1.34 million homes across the country are sitting empty because speculators bought them with no interest in ever living there. They were simply speculating on the value. That is 8.7% of the housing stock. At our current rate of construction, it would take us six years to build the housing supply we already have in vacant homes.

Now, we have solutions that work. For example, Vancouver has gradually raised its empty homes tax to 3%. In doing so, it has reduced the number of vacant homes by 25%. It has added at least 18,000 units back onto the market, and generated tens of millions of dollars in revenue for new, affordable housing.

If we turn back to this bill, there is what is called an underused housing tax. It is set at 1%. For speculators who are earning returns well over 8%, my concern is that this level will not meaningfully discourage the speculation from investors we are currently seeing in the market. Not only that, but almost everyone is exempt from this tax. Canadians are exempt. Permanent residents are exempt. Every corporation is exempt. It applies only to a small fraction of non-resident, non-Canadian-owned vacant homes.

It feels to me like we all know the house is on fire and someone has called the fire service, but the fire service arrived with a bucket of water. I wonder why the governing party will not move more quickly to bring on the variety of tools we know we need to address this crisis, such as new investments in non-market public subsidized housing and co-op housing.

I noticed that there was a promise in the platform of the governing party to consider introducing an end to the blind bidding process. There are so many tools we can and should consider, and I strongly encourage the governing party to look into doing so.

• (1005)

If the Liberals are serious about addressing the housing crisis and they are looking to set the priorities, I would encourage them to at least look at the tax in this bill to consider if we could be more serious about ensuring that this is a tool that would address the reality of the crisis we are facing across the country. Certainly in Kitchener, it is hitting home across our community.

Government Orders

I am also disappointed that there were two other opportunities in Bill C-8 that were not addressed. I would like to bring those forward here.

The first is with respect to the crisis in long-term care. This past summer I spoke with a woman whose mom had been waiting in a hospital for three months. She was in tears as she shared with me that she wondered if her mom would make it to long-term care before she passed.

She was one of 52,000 people on the wait-list, as of this past summer, for a spot in long-term care. The solutions are self-evident. Last year, the former MP for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Paul Manly, introduced Motion No. 77. That motion offered a number of potential solutions, including national standards for long-term care and an end to for-profit care; ensuring that personal support workers were not providing four minutes of care a day, but four hours of care a day; eliminating the wait times altogether, and ensuring adequate pay so that PSWs would not have to run from one care home to the other in the gig economy.

Thankfully, the Parliamentary Budget Officer costed the plan out. The good news is that for less money than we currently offer to oil and gas companies every year, \$18 billion, we could be taking better care of our seniors.

Finally, another disappointment for me that I would encourage the governing party to consider prioritizing, if not in this bill than in another, the introduction of a national pharmacare program. We have been hearing promises about pharmacare since 1997. It has been 25 years.

This past summer, I spoke with a woman who shared with me that, given the cost of her medications, she needed to intentionally take less than she required every day so that her medications might last longer. This is in a country where we claim to be proud of truly universal health care. Obviously that is not the case.

Because we have had this many years of study, we know that currently Canadians are spending \$24 billion a year on pharmaceuticals. We also know that we would save money by having a national program. Not only is it more compassionate and a moral imperative, but economically, we would collectively save \$4 billion a year by introducing a national pharmacare program.

I would encourage the governing party, and all parliamentarians, to continue to advocate for Canadians across the country who deserve access to truly universal health care. One element of that is ensuring we have a national pharmacare program.

In closing, there are elements of good propositions in this bill. I am glad for those, specifically around rapid tests. Those will really help in my community.

However, if we are going to be serious about the housing crisis, and we are going to follow through on promises that have been made over many years, I would encourage all parliamentarians to continue not only to advocate for improvements in long-term care and a national pharmacare program, but also to meaningfully address the housing crisis that we find ourselves in.

• (1010)

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my hon. colleague for Kitchener Centre to the House of Commons.

I am going to gut-check him here. I know it is his first time being elected to the House of Commons, and he will find out that when he presents misinformation to the House, and some of us here actually know that information to be false, we will correct him.

I will ask him about the \$18 billion in subsidies that he has stated the government gives to the oil and gas sector, which is completely false. We would like to hear him tell us where that \$18 billion is allocated, or if it is actually part of the \$500-billion credit the sector has paid over the last 20 years into federal government coffers. It is about \$25 billion per year, averaged out.

I will give him this opportunity to answer that question and make that correction.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to reiterate for my hon. colleague for Calgary Centre that these are not numbers that are coming from me. They are from the International Institute for Sustainable Development. It has already done the research on the funds that Export Development Canada currently allocates, which is around \$13 billion a year. We purchased a pipeline for another \$4 billion. In fact, we intend to spend many billions of dollars more on expanding that pipeline.

I would be glad to have a conversation with the member across not only about the dollar amounts, but more meaningfully about how we can use those funds to reinvest where we need it most, which is in workers across the country who are on the front lines. We either allow them to go through an unjust disruption, or we support them today to ensure they have the supports they need to transition to the economy of the future.

[*Translation*]

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

For starters, he said a lot about the underused housing tax. The Bloc Québécois completely agrees with this concept, but there is just one small problem. This is yet another federal incursion into an area of jurisdiction that has not been used so far: property tax.

We think that, instead of interfering, it would make much more sense for the federal government to work with municipalities to provide them with information about the people who own buildings but do not live in them. Depending on their own situations, municipalities might even want to impose taxes on a broader base than that outlined in the bill and use the money for their own assets and infrastructure.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for her question. I have been really impressed over the past two months with the Bloc Québécois's reminders about federal versus provincial areas of jurisdiction.

*Government Orders**[English]*

I would be happy to have a follow-up conversation. We need all levels of government working together, which includes the leadership we are seeing from the cities of Vancouver and Toronto with respect to a vacancy tax. It also includes provinces stepping up.

I think that is part of the conversation we then need to have to ensure that, with respect to jurisdiction, we can move past and ensure that the funds are there so all levels of government can invest in the affordable housing that we so desperately need.

• (1015)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising a number of issues in the context of this debate.

The member spoke of bringing a bucket of water to a fire that is raging out of control. One of the big problems that is not on the horizon anymore, but is bad and getting worse, is the problem of climate change and the climate crisis that we are facing. This is the first big opportunity since the election for the government to show its tangible intention when it comes to fighting the climate crisis. When we look at Bill C-8, which is the legislative piece of the fall economic statement, we really do not see much at all about climate change.

Does the member want to take some time to speak to what is required in order to combat the climate crisis? Are there some things that the government could have done in this bill in order to start getting serious about that, now that it is about as far away from an election as this government is going to get in Parliament?

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, it is so important that across every piece of legislation while we are in the midst of a climate emergency, we take the opportunity to ensure that the funds are spoken about. When we talk about being a climate leader, we need to actually follow through.

One of the ways we can do that is by looking at buildings across the country. We need to retrofit buildings right across the country, from workplaces to homes. To do so will take a significant investment and it will also create millions of jobs, while reducing energy poverty for those who need it most.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-8, even though it is not exactly my favourite subject. I would like to talk about health transfers, and I hope this subject does not get overlooked.

To begin my speech, I want to come back to the subject of the emergency funds and programs the government put in place. The wage subsidy and the rent subsidy in particular come to mind, because flexibility was a huge problem with those programs. Anyone who started their businesses after March 2020 is ineligible.

In my riding, Daniel Bolduc, the owner of Auberge Les Deux Tours, meticulously follows all public health rules. He purchased an inn that was already an existing business, but is getting zero support from the federal government.

I find it quite ironic that there are other entrepreneurs who sometimes post some rather questionable things on social media with respect to compliance with public health rules, yet they still get support from the government. Sadly, some folks who follow the rules scrupulously are left with nothing.

Mr. Bolduc invested his life savings in this inn and now he is in a difficult situation. I know he appealed to the Deputy Prime Minister through the Association Restauration Québec. Dominique Tremblay, director of public and government affairs, sent a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister on this matter.

I want to take a couple of seconds to encourage Mr. Bolduc. We speak frequently. I know he is motivated and wants to resolve this situation. I wanted to indulge in a little aside here to tell him that I support him.

I would like to talk about Bill C-8 and, especially, about what is not in Bill C-8. In the economic update, which we could describe as pretty anemic, what I think is most surprising, especially in the context of a pandemic, is the fact that it contains nothing for health up to 2027.

An hon. member: That is true.

Mr. Mario Simard: That is true, Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean just said. It has nothing for health up to 2027, and that is a disaster.

I would like to look into the origins of the Canadian federation's biggest problem, health care funding. For that, we have to go back to a key concept, which is the fiscal imbalance.

I know that federalists do not want to talk about the fiscal imbalance, but we have to look at it again. This concept has been extensively studied, and not by sovereignists.

For example, we have Quebec's Séguin report. I am not talking about the Mr. Séguin from the fairy tale about a goat, but about the former Liberal minister who was anything but a sovereignist. In his report, Mr. Séguin clearly states that there is a fiscal imbalance between the two levels of government.

According to the literature on the tax system of the Canadian federation, there are two types of imbalances. There is the horizontal imbalance, which is addressed through equalization, or what my Conservative friends call oil subsidies, and there is also the vertical imbalance, which means that the federal government's tax base is far greater than that of the provinces.

Year after year, the government has far greater capacity, but, unfortunately, fewer expenditures. That is where the fiscal imbalance comes in, with the provinces struggling with crushing health care costs and meagre financial resources.

Government Orders

To convince members of the House, I will refer to Jean Chrétien, a man I really like. Jean Chrétien had two—or maybe more—moments of lucidity in his life that I truly appreciate. The first was when he said that if he had invested as much in Quebec as he invested in the oil sector, Quebec would have been a Liberal province until the end of the 2000s. I love that Jean Chrétien said that. The other enlightened moment was when he said to G7 members that the miracle solution for balancing budgets was to cut transfer payments to the provinces without paying the political cost.

Jean Chrétien told the G7 countries that there is always this option of cutting transfer payments to the provinces to balance the budget. The beauty of it is that there is no political price to pay.

• (1020)

All the premiers stumbled over this. In 1996-97 and 1997-98, the federal government made successive \$2.5-billion cuts to health transfers, which led Lucien Bouchard to make the shift to ambulatory care, for which the Government of Quebec paid the political price. The federal government's responsibility is clear. Even though I am not a fan of Philippe Couillard or of austerity, he has also paid the price for the federal government's underfunding of health care.

I am not making any of this up. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's reports since 2013 have all observed that if the government does not invest more in health care, the provinces will rack up deficits year after year, while the federal government posts surpluses.

In case that is not enough to convince members, I will inform them of a Leger survey released this week. A couple of days ago during question period I asked the Prime Minister whether he would step up and address health care, the big issue for 2022. The Prime Minister said yes and then repeated his hallmark phrase, “we will be there for Canadians”.

However, Canadians clearly do not feel the Prime Minister has been there for them, since 85% of Canadians surveyed by Leger said that the Prime Minister does not provide an adequate amount of funding for health care. Furthermore, when Canadians were reminded that in the late 1950s and early 1960s the federal government paid 50% of health care costs, 90% of respondents then said that the federal government is not doing enough.

I have a solution to share. Our leader came up with a brilliant idea to hold a public summit on health where this issue could be debated, using the provinces' demands as a starting point.

Earlier, I mentioned how, year after year, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's reports have shown that the situation is untenable. The Conference Board also issued a report indicating that the best way to put an end to this situation would be to increase transfers from 22% to 35%. If the federal government would agree to do that, it would be a good start. It would represent \$28 billion more for health care.

Another critical component involves covering the costs of the system by increasing the federal share from 3% to 6%. The Conference Board's report also mentions that. We definitely want this done with no strings attached.

One thing surprises me. At the start of the 44th Parliament, we learned that the federal government was going to create a department of mental health, but I believe health care falls under provincial jurisdiction. What would the federal government have done if Quebec decided to create its own department of national defence? The federal government would have thought Quebec was crazy, and rightly so. However, the federal level decided to create a department of mental health, which is a waste of public funds. Since health falls under provincial jurisdiction, the solution is to increase health transfers to 35% of expenses. Unfortunately, there is absolutely nothing about that in the economic update.

The situation is so untenable that 43% to 47% of Quebec's total budget is going to health care. That means there is not much left for all other areas, such as education, family services, child care and economic development. The federal government's paltry contribution to health care is leading to underdevelopment in the provinces and creating an untenable situation.

I will end my speech there. I would be pleased to respond to any questions or comments, particularly those of my colleague from Winnipeg North.

• (1025)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, who am I to disappoint the member opposite? At the end of the day, there is one thing I know that is fairly consistent with the Bloc party, and it is that they seem to be of the opinion that the federal government's only role in health care is to give money to the provinces. I beg to differ.

When we are talking about the Canada Health Act or what our constituents want in all regions of the country, including the province of Quebec, it is that they want the federal government to have a role in health care that goes beyond just giving cash. For example, during the pandemic, we know that Canadians from coast to coast to coast have been concerned about long-term care and the idea of national standards for long-term care facilities.

Could my friend and colleague at the very least acknowledge that constituents in all ridings are concerned with the federal government ultimately having to play some role that goes beyond just giving cash?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I thought I was the one who was supposed to speak for 10 minutes. I am surprised.

I would say to my colleague that the federal government does have a role to play, and that is to transfer money to repair a health care system that has been underfunded for the past 20 years.

What I would have liked to hear from my colleague from Winnipeg North is his explanation as to why. Instead, he explained the famous Jean Chrétien quote, saying that we can balance public finances by cutting transfer payments without paying the political price.

Government Orders

We could already be out of the crisis. The government has spent staggering amounts of money on CERB and supports for businesses. I realize that it had to be done.

My concern, though, is that the government will do the same damn thing and balance its budget on the backs of the provinces by cutting transfer payments. I can guarantee that that is what is going to happen.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Jonquière on his speech and I would like to ask him a question.

We have heard so much about health care, which is of course very important to the Conservatives as well. I think that was made quite clear during the last campaign. However, I would like to hear from my colleague on Bill C-8.

I did not hear him say much about inflation. Is inflation not a problem in his riding? Does everyone have enough money to pay for their housing and groceries? Is everything just fine and dandy there?

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, to be honest with my colleague, I did not talk about inflation because I do not know a lot about it.

I always find it funny when people rise in the House to talk about things they know nothing about. I know quite a bit about health transfers. I have done my research.

The Conservatives are fixated on inflation, and I get it. It is a major concern when it comes to health transfers. Inflation will make the cost of operating our health care system even higher, hence the importance of certain transfers.

I did not talk about inflation because I do not talk about things I do not know. What I do not know, I do not talk about.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing that really concerns me is that so many seniors still have to work during the pandemic. Even though they are supposed to be able to live on their pensions, they cannot. The government did not claw back the hundreds of millions of dollars it gave to big oil, which was spent on whatever, but it went after senior citizens.

We have senior citizens who are losing their homes because of the government's clawback. The Liberals promised that sometime in the spring, sometime down the road, they are going to help seniors. Does the Bloc agree that we need to get that money to seniors now, that we need to tell the government that if it is going to claw back, it can claw back from the CEOs and it can claw back the money it gave to big oil, but it must leave our senior citizens alone?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay. That is what we call an assist.

If we want to do something constructive, maybe we should stop sending financial support to the fossil fuel sector year after year and start thinking about those with the greatest needs who will suffer

the most from inflation, in other words seniors and the most vulnerable.

I agree with my colleague 100%.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to a bill that would implement certain measures of the November economic and fiscal update. Although these are trying times for our country, I have every reason to feel hopeful, but it is not because of this legislation. On January 25, I stood at the side of the road in Whitewood, Saskatchewan, as truckers drove away from their families toward Ottawa. By now, every member of Parliament, and I am sure almost every Canadian, has seen and heard what these peaceful protesters are asking for. They are in our capital because a whole two years into the pandemic, the Prime Minister has decided to put our supply chain at further risk with a punitive vaccine mandate for our cross-border truckers. These are the same truckers who have been going above and beyond to keep our grocery and retail store shelves stocked over the past two years with no issue.

At the start of the pandemic, politicians of all stripes, including the Prime Minister, encouraged Canadians to thank truckers as some of the unsung heroes of the pandemic. Now, a whole two years into the pandemic, his vaccine vendetta will disrupt supply chains further and raise the cost of everyday goods more, impacting our economy and quality of life.

Already feeling the pinch of what bills like Bill C-8 are doing to our economy, these truckers are losing their means of providing for their families. They are joining doctors, nurses, police, firefighters, teachers, lawyers, members of our armed forces, miners, factory workers, public servants and so many others whose income has been or will be cut off because of their medical choices. They are not encouraged by bills like this one, which promise even more money for proof-of-vaccination requirements across the country. It sends completely the wrong message to our economy, to our trading partners and to Canadians. That is why they are standing up.

This convoy has exposed many of the frustrations truckers, farmers and hard-working families are feeling with the Prime Minister and his government. They are tired of overburdensome taxes and reckless spending. They are tired of heavy-handed limits on their ability to provide for their families. They are tired of a government that is intent on driving Canadians apart.

I am pleased to see that the convoy, which was initially focused on ending a punitive vaccine mandate for truckers, has evolved and bloomed into a voice for all Canadians who fundamentally believe in personal freedom. To see people standing up for their rights and freedoms makes me so proud to be Canadian—

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Government Orders

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I understand that MPs have the right to say whatever they want, including misinformation about our medical community and vaccines, but that is not germane to this issue. We have to debate the—

The Deputy Speaker: I accept the intervention. I will ask the member for Yorkton—Melville to continue and take into consideration what we heard.

The member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I certainly will, and I think we need to take all aspects into consideration when we are talking about Canadians and their tax dollars. Fortunately, I was at the last sentence before moving into why this impacts our truckers and others so extensively.

Truckers gave me more hope for the future of our economy than we have received from the government in almost two years, so why should truckers and all Canadians be fearful of our economic outlook? Look no further than the likes of this bill. The economic and fiscal update increases new government spending by \$71.2 billion. Since the start of the pandemic, the Liberals have doled out \$176 billion in new spending that is unrelated to our COVID response. That is according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who says, “It appears to me that the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as ‘stimulus’ no longer exists.”

The PBO, Canadians as a whole and, I would even wager, the finance minister’s own staff know that never-ending and extreme deficits contribute greatly to inflation. We started off the year on the wrong foot, to be sure. Inflation has hit a 30-year high of 4.8%.

What does this actually mean for Canadians in everyday terms? Let us look at housing. When the Prime Minister took power, the typical home cost \$435,000. The cost has almost doubled since, to \$810,000. Young Canadians looking to buy their first home are facing a perfect storm of runaway inflation and a lack of supply. As a means to combat the housing crisis, this bill proposes to add an annual tax of 1% on the value of vacant or underused residential property directly or indirectly owned by non-resident non-Canadians. I argue that this is completely insufficient. In our 2021 platform, we proposed a ban on foreign investors not living in or moving to Canada from buying homes for a two-year period, after which it would be reviewed. The Conservatives would have also encouraged foreign investment in purpose-built rental housing that is affordable for Canadians.

Even if they are not able to buy a home in today’s market, every Canadian is also feeling the pinch at their local grocery store. Chicken is up 6.2%, beef is up 11.9%, bacon is up 19.1%, bread is up 5%, cooking oil is up 41.4% and white sugar is up 21.6%. This is just over the course of one year. Sixty per cent of Canadians are finding it difficult to feed their families. That figure has increased 36% from when the same question was asked in 2019.

These prices affect every normal Canadian, but maybe not the Prime Minister, so I want to put the concerns of some average Canadians on the record. Lindsay tells me her grocery bill for her family of four was once \$200 a week and is now \$400. She thought she was overbuying, but confirmed that it was the same items and the same quantities. Robin, a tattoo artist, says the nitrile gloves he

buys were nine dollars per box two years ago and are now \$27. Carol reports the price of groceries, clothes, medicine, gas and everything one needs has shot up. Susan believes absolutely everything has increased in price. The gas tax on her power and energy bills is \$100 dollars before she even begins to pay for the usage. Dennis has found that the price of groceries, especially eggs and produce, has gone up, but also sees increases across the board, including, of course, for lumber and fuel. Noel sees everything has gone up and notes utilities are through the roof.

Inflation creates a dangerous spiral. Increased costs borne by the service industry, utility providers and large corporations are passed along to the consumer. Just as the carbon tax is a tax on everything, the inflation tax punishes hard-working Canadians the most. It is important to remember that added pressures like the carbon tax and inflation occur directly because of the poor choices of the Liberal government. The government chose to introduce a carbon tax at \$20 per tonne and said we were misleading Canadians when we predicted it would be raised to \$50. Now we know the government plans to raise it to \$170 per tonne. That is a choice the government has made, and Canadians are literally paying the price.

The “Justinflation” tax is hitting families hard at the grocery store, the garage, on the farm and when they sit down at night to pay their bills each month. Rather than address the highest inflation in over 30 years, this bill would be adding another \$70 billion of spending as fuel for the fire. As a result of these choices, two in five Canadians believe they are worse off than they were last year. Adding to their fears, the Liberals have not provided a plan for our way out of this pandemic and to get public spending under control.

In yesterday’s Calgary Herald, Chris Nelson warned that endless deficits and a weakening dollar will drive up the cost of imports, making inflation even worse. He says “a rock and a hard place” does not come close to describing the spot Canada is in.

Government Orders

• (1035)

He suggests a surefire way to prevent this would be to invest in our innovative, productive and export-driven oil and gas sector. It provides a bump of \$68 billion in our exports each year, and despite that, the environment minister is determined to eliminate it outright in 18 months. This is a perfect example of why the Liberals are doing far more harm than good when it comes to our economy, job growth and the impact on the environment around the world. Canada should be playing a leading role and we are not.

Rather than passing the bill and aimlessly spending more, what are the common-sense solutions to get our economy moving again? My mind is immediately drawn back to the truckers and how we can keep them all moving safely. The government should respond quicker than it has to the need for rapid tests as a means of better controlling the spread of COVID at the federal level, the Liberal's responsibility. Instead, they want to further restrict mobility rights.

The Liberals have limited Canadians' ability to fly or take a train without proof of vaccination. They argue that these measures are motivated by scientific recommendations to control the spread of the virus, but they are contradicting what medical officials of health have stated: that those who are fully vaccinated are also carriers and spreaders of the virus. I believe that the more appropriate measure would be to require all passengers to provide a negative rapid test prior to travel, respecting the mobility rights of all Canadians.

Let us safely but permanently restore Canada's spirit of hard work, free will and unbridled innovation. Let us defeat the bill, which only serves as a discouraging reminder of unending economic malaise and heavy-handed control. Let us provide all Canadians with the ability to work and contribute to our postpandemic recovery no matter their medical status.

• (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, today in the debate on Bill C-8, we see the Conservative Party taking a very hard right turn. I am surprised and quite disappointed that the Conservatives seem to want to defeat a very important piece of legislation.

In Bill C-8, we are seeing over \$1 billion going toward rapid testing. Does the member believe that Ottawa should not be paying for rapid testing? Does she want the provinces and territories to be paying for it? Who should be paying for it, if not Ottawa? Who does the member suggest should pay that bill?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, our problem here is what the government chooses to do with the vast majority of the money that it is printing and spending carelessly. That is the focus, just as our focus has been on those who speak up across this nation, as they have the right to be heard on issues that impact them as taxpayers, and those who are going to be footing the bill.

I wish I had the opportunity to give my time to the member to answer why he supports a Prime Minister who calls everyday Canadians racists and misogynists, and refuses to meet with those who he basically calls untouchables. I posted on my Facebook page an article this morning from an individual who lives in downtown Ottawa called "A night with the untouchables". I encourage every

member of Parliament in the House to take a look at what that article says and ask these questions. Why are they not downtown? Why is their leader, the leader of this country, not speaking to everyday Canadians—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am feeling microaggressions. I am having fingers pointed at me. I would ask the members opposite to be a little more civil.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, we have the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to the same point of order.

Let us be serious here. The member for Timmins—James Bay heckled the member for Yorkton—Melville throughout her speech and heckled members on this side throughout the speech. Now he rises on a point of order to claim that he is a victim of some kind of—

The Deputy Speaker: I am hearing a lot of debate here, and I am not seeing a point of order.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I just have to protect my reputation here. I see that the member fell apart on his point of order. It is hard to heckle someone when they are on TV. We can talk to a TV screen, but heckling is something that is done in the House.

I have such respect for you, Mr. Speaker, but I will not continue putting up with these kinds of shenanigans from the Conservatives.

The Deputy Speaker: We are getting into a lot of debate here, and I would really like to get back to questions and comments.

I will entertain another one from the member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I believe that member was very close to the line of referring to someone's presence or absence in the House. I know that in this hybrid format, members, whether they are attending virtually or in person, are entitled to the same rights and privileges that each and every member of this House is given.

I would ask that that line be respected within this place.

• (1045)

The Deputy Speaker: I think we are all ready to move on. We were on questions and comments for the member for Yorkton—Melville.

The member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do have a question. I appreciated the member for Yorkton—Melville's speech, as she brought up some important points.

Government Orders

We see in Bill C-8 a doubling down on the failed economic policies of a government that has led our economy into a challenging state between large inflation and economic metrics all over the map.

Could the member for Yorkton—Melville comment on that?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a very good example of very poor mismanagement by the government. I know members of the government complain that we are in the same scenario as the rest of the world, but this country faced the same challenges back in 2008 and 2009 with a collapse of the world economy. Our country, under the leadership of the wonderful deceased Mr. Flaherty and the then prime minister Stephen Harper, led the world, and we were highly recognized for the way we handled the economy during that time.

The government is really impacting Canadians with all kinds of stress and duress with the way it is managing its finances.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I myself recognize and feel a lot of frustration with the ongoing public health orders, not because I think they should be lifted but because it has been tough on people. In the face of a crisis, sometimes we are called on to do hard things.

I support people's right to protest peacefully, but I have to note that the organizers of this event have an MOU, which they have been asking people to sign, that is about deposing a government in an undemocratic way. They are calling on a committee of their own selection to rule the country with the Senate and the Governor General, as if that is something that makes sense under our Constitution and considering good principles of democracy and government.

I have been a part of many protests. I have not seen the kinds of hate that we have seen, which is not to say that everyone who supports the cause supports those symbols, but there is a lot of it. There are a lot of people who have been accosted and harassed in the streets. Those are things that I absolutely do not support. I do not see the leaders of this protest denouncing in any way.

I have been part of protests where the leaders have told people to go home because of the activities that they are engaging in that are detracting—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We will move on.

To answer the question quickly, the member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I totally hear what the member is saying, and I appreciate him a great deal. What challenges that whole line of thought could be answered very easily if some time is taken to read the article “A night with the untouchables” and hear what is not being reported versus what is being reported in our news and from various sources. It gives a totally different perspective on this.

I agree with the member that this needs to be dealt with, but I want every member of Parliament in this House to have a true sense of who these people are. I would encourage them to do two things: read the article, “A night with the untouchables” by someone who lives downtown, and please go talk to some truckers.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking for the first time at length in this 44th Parliament representing the citizens of Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

Before I go on to make some comments on this specific legislation, I want to congratulate two of those citizens, my parents, as today is their 61st wedding anniversary.

With respect to Bill C-8, it should come to no one's surprise that I will be opposing this legislation and these additional spending measures. Why? It is because they are adding more fuel to the inflationary fires. The recent report by the Parliamentary Budget Officer states that more stimulus spending will only stoke these inflationary fires, resulting in an inflation tax. Asked at the finance committee if government deficits contribute to inflation, the PBO stated very clearly that, yes, they can.

How much money are we talking about? Another \$71.2 billion in spending is referenced in the economic and fiscal update, and since the beginning of this pandemic, the government has introduced \$176 billion in new spending that is unrelated to responding to the pandemic. Our interest-bearing debt is approaching \$1.4 trillion.

I will borrow some descriptions my colleague from Edmonton West used yesterday when he outlined what that means. We understand what \$1 million looks like. It is a one and six zeroes, but \$1.4 trillion is \$140 million millions. Folks should think about that. Yesterday during question period, the finance minister stated that 8 out of 10 dollars spent as a COVID response have come from the federal government, even if they have been delivered provincially, so the accountability for this spending lies with the government.

Let me mention two areas where Canadians would have been better served by a government being more proactive, which would have lessened the need to be so reactive to pandemic effects. The first is securing rapid tests. Conservatives supported the sourcing of rapid tests well before we had vaccines, almost two years ago now. Late in this pandemic, the government seems to have seen the light and now wants more rapid tests. After five waves of infection and the economic carnage that lockdowns bring, we are now finally seeing an effort being made.

The second is ICU capacity. Lockdowns have been invoked by provincial governments largely in response to the fear that critical care capacity will be overwhelmed during peak infection periods. It is not that often that my colleagues agree with opposition colleagues in this chamber, but on the point of increased health transfers, we do agree. In particular, while in some places we lack bricks and mortar in our health care system, we primarily lack doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners. It is the critical care capacity deliverers that we need so many more of.

Government Orders

While this is of course a provincial responsibility, in my federal role I have been closely monitoring the local health care capacity in my riding at Erie Shores hospital in Leamington and at Chatham-Kent hospital, especially because of the overlap of providing this care to our citizens combined with care for the guest worker community of the agricultural sector in my riding. I could spend 10 minutes just talking about the experience there in the last two years.

I did not realize that Canada only has one-third of the health care capacity of our neighbour to the south. I did not know that until we got into this pandemic. That is why such a low percentage of people who are critically affected by COVID so quickly overwhelm our health care capacity. These are the two areas where, especially early on in this pandemic, it would have been far better to respond proactively.

However, the cumulative effect of government spending in areas responding to, rather than preventing, the economic damage of COVID have led to a very predictable outcome: inflation. This form of taxation, and that is what inflation is, affects so many areas of our lives. It affects those particularly who can least afford it more than those with assets who can actually benefit from it.

Let me touch on just two areas. The first is housing and the crisis in housing inflation. The injection of so many printed dollars into our economy has exacerbated the rise in the cost of housing. While in Chatham-Kent—Leamington the average costs are not as high as national averages, the rate of increase, particularly on the lower end of the spectrum, is even higher. With the interest rate now below the rate of inflation, because it is rising, this provides a further incentive to bid up prices.

• (1050)

We have not yet seen the end of this inflationary housing bubble. The end is not written. The Bank of Canada has signalled that interest rates will rise. How many people will face an even greater pressure on their personal finances when it comes to renewing their home mortgage? The main solution of course lies in the basic laws of supply and demand. We need more houses built, not more taxes, and not more spending, which only drive the inflationary cycle.

Second is food inflation. Anyone who eats or, more specifically, buys groceries understands the rising cost of food in Canada. Prior to having the honour of standing in this place today, I actively farmed and produced food for most of my adult life. I also had the opportunity to be involved with the business of representing food producers at negotiation tables and in industry circles.

I understand that the broad inflation is not the primary driver of the cost of raw product of food prices in Canada. Weather events, geopolitical tensions and other trade issues impact the cyclical nature of these markets more than broad inflation, but, and this is a big but, I am speaking of raw food pricing. What the Canadian consumer experiences at the grocery aisle is only minimally impacted by the price of what a farmer receives. In most food stuffs, the percentage cost represented by the raw component is very small. The labelling, packaging, transportation, processing and preparing are cost components that dwarf the raw component, and of course, these are all cost drivers that are affected by inflation.

In conclusion, what would it take to get us out of this mess? First, the government needs to reorient its approach. It is encouraging to hear from our health care leaders, and in particular I want to point out Ontario's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Kieran Moore, who support our need to learn to live and work with COVID. We need to move from a pandemic state of COVID to an endemic state. The vast majority of Canadians have done what we have asked of them. They got vaccinated and observed public health measures.

We have the tools, the vaccines and the rapid tests, or we should have the rapid tests. Now we need to learn to live with COVID, and we need to open up.

Second, we need to rein in government spending. We need to tamp down inflation, and we need to blunt the trend of rising interest rates, which inevitably result from inflation. It appears that the government's tax-and-spend approach, which resulted in inflation, is almost intentional. This is its way of inflating its way out of massive debt.

Lower taxes, less spending, leading to lower inflation and more economic growth is the only way out for all Canadians.

• (1055)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have now seen the occupation of Ottawa by right-wing radicals and racists, an occupation that has been supported by some of the member's colleagues and denounced by others. We have seen Confederate flags, swastikas, anti-indigenous racism, not to mention the total shutdown of small businesses in Ottawa.

My hon. friend has said he does not support any new spending because that is not necessary. Given what he has seen in Ottawa this week, would he not agree that spending to support small businesses, women-owned businesses, indigenous innovation and Black-owned businesses is actually good policy and good for this country?

Mr. Dave Epp: Mr. Speaker, that is actually not what I said. What I said is that we need less spending broadly. I supported measures for rapid tests, particularly if it had come much sooner. Targeted spending at preventative measures would have lessened the need for gross spending in response. I cited two areas, rapid tests and investments in health care. That would have prevented much of the spending in response and the resulting inflation that Canadians are now experiencing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member about support for seniors. He talked about not having government spending, but one of the things the NDP has been calling for, even before the election, is for the government to support seniors and not claw back their GIS. This is because seniors are getting evicted and rendered homeless at this point in time.

Statements by Members

Does the member think the Liberal government should immediately restore the GIS to seniors?

• (1100)

Mr. Dave Epp: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have a question. The government has promised that a payment is coming to seniors. When? My constituents have not seen it.

Second, seniors and all people on fixed incomes are experiencing inflation. That is the tax that is eroding what they are already receiving. We need to blunt the force of inflation, and the resulting higher interest rates, to help our seniors and all of us in this economy.

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have two minutes or so of questions and comments remaining when we come back to this.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

UKRAINE

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago, I participated in a conference on integrating Ukraine into Europe's economic and security structures. I was studying overseas in Poland and invited the Ukrainian delegation of young people and professionals to my apartment. We talked about the yearning of Ukrainian people for true independence and for building stronger relationships with Europe. A year later, those same young people texted me from the streets of Kyiv during the Orange Revolution that reasserted Ukraine's independence.

Today, I join the Ukrainian community in Windsor—Tecumseh anxiously watching the aggressive Russian military buildup on Ukraine's border. As Polish Canadians, we have seen this movie play out many times. A revanchist and imperialistic Russia is a danger, not only to Ukraine and bordering countries like Poland and the Baltic states. It poses a danger to democracy around the world.

My message to our Ukrainian friends and to all Canadians is that Canada stands shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine.

Slava Kanadi. Slava Ukraini.

WORLD CANCER DAY

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge all those celebrating the lunar new year, wishing them much success, peace and happiness in the Year of the Tiger.

I would also like to acknowledge that today is World Cancer Day. I would like to recognize and give thanks to an avid volunteer and constituent of King—Vaughan. Mrs. Meni Pitoscia is a two-time cancer survivor who lives with the positive attitude that a cure can be found.

I also want to recognize a dear friend, Mr. Tony Gallo, who is currently undergoing treatments so that he too can count himself a survivor. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family, Dona, Joseph and Mario, and his family and friends.

We recognize that every one of us has the ability to make a difference, no matter how little. By working together we can make meaningful progress in reducing cancer globally.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Black History Month. It is an occasion to celebrate, show appreciation and recognize the accomplishments of Black Canadians throughout our history to building a better Canada. They include trailblazers of yesterday, among them boxer, activist and Nova Scotia sergeant-at-arms Buddy Daye, and civil rights pioneer and Nova Scotia businesswoman Viola Desmond; and the change-makers of today, including the inspiring women who joined me at the minister's Black women's round table in Halifax in November.

I especially want to acknowledge the diverse Black communities in my riding of Halifax West, such as the historic community of Lunenburg as well as the newer generation of Black immigrants.

[Translation]

Many of these new immigrants are francophones who are making important contributions.

[English]

Let us keep moving forward to support Black Canadians.

[Translation]

I wish everyone a happy Black History Month.

[English]

OPIOIDS

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on average, Canada sees a staggering 19 deaths per day due to opioid-related drug poisoning, but the opioid crisis is not affecting people equally. Youth, racialized folks and indigenous people have been hit the hardest, and federal policies that treat addiction with arrests and incarceration are only making things worse. We see the human toll of this failed approach every single day in my riding of Edmonton Griesbach.

Over the past few months, I have met with groups like Moms Stop the Harm and the Bear Clan Patrol who are doing the truly heroic work to save lives and promote healing on our streets and in our neighbourhoods. Their message is clear: It is time for the federal government to act by decriminalizing drug use and making sure there is safe supply. It will save lives.

That is why I am calling on members of the House to pass Bill C-216. Harm reduction will save lives.

* * *

• (1105)

VACCINATION CLINIC

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of visiting the Pharmasave Avalon Compounding Pharmacy last October, along with my counterpart, MPP Stephen Blais. The owner and pharmacist, Andrew Hanna, specializes in bringing customized medication with a doctor's prescription to his clients. It was truly impressive to see the technology on site.

[Translation]

Today, I want to thank Mr. Hanna for his involvement and leadership in the Orléans community.

[English]

On January 7 in Orléans, I had the pleasure of attending the first and largest pharmacy COVID-19 vaccination walk-in clinic in eastern Ontario. This overnight clinic was held from 8 p.m. and ran until it administered all 1,000 doses it had to give out. It was truly a team effort and, thanks to initiatives like this one, more individuals in my community were able to be vaccinated.

[Translation]

Some members may recall that January 7 was one of the coldest evenings, and it was a pleasure to serve coffee to those who were waiting patiently outside.

[English]

I thank everyone who participated to help fight COVID-19.

* * *

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent the riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and I want to share my appreciation for the good deeds being done across our communities.

I thank the public libraries for organizing winter clothing drives. I thank the many churches, large and small, for the hard work they do preparing meals and sharing food. I thank the volunteers at our local shelters and food banks. I thank the individuals who do random acts of kindness without expecting to receive any praise. While the winter continues, we see families struggling and I am proud of all of my constituents for stepping up, supporting our communities and taking care of our neighbours.

On February 26, the Coldest Night of the Year walk for the homeless will be happening throughout Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and across Canada. I encourage all who can to come out and continue to show that community spirit by creating a team and walking to raise money for organizations that support people who are homeless and hungry.

Together, we can continue to make a difference for those in need and I hope to see everyone there.

Statements by Members

2022 OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2022 Olympic games are here and we are all looking forward to cheering for the 215 athletes representing Team Canada.

Sport brings communities together and I will be joining Canadians across the country to watch our very best compete as they inspire people of all ages.

From this House to theirs, I send a special best wishes to Newfoundland and Labrador's own curlers Brett Gallant, Brad Gushue and Mark Nichols, and all our amazing athletes.

Go, Canada, go.

* * *

DEMONSTRATIONS IN OTTAWA

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak about what has been going on in my community of Ottawa Centre.

[Translation]

Residents are feeling terrorized by the protests, which have been going on for seven days now.

[English]

Members of my community are being harassed, being subjected to hurtful and racist symbols, and the incessant honking is unbearable. Our parking lots are being used as urinals. Fireworks are being hurled down streets at night. The air is thick with diesel fuel. Residents are not sleeping. Businesses are shuttered.

Parliament Hill is regularly used for peaceful protests as they are a hallmark of every democracy.

[Translation]

This is not a peaceful protest. It is an occupation.

[English]

Enough is enough. This needs to end now, so my community can live in peace again.

* * *

TRIBUTES

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I struggled in deciding what to focus my statement on today. I could easily spend a minute talking about the loss of my uncle Morley Kaufman; the loss of retired Colonel John Fife, a great friend, mentor and leader from Oromocto, New Brunswick; or the loss of World War II veteran Charles Fisher from Owen Sound, among the many others whom we have lost over the last couple months.

Statements by Members

I could do a full statement in recognition of Dr. Kelly Barratt, a local veterinarian who was the first woman bovine practitioner of the year, as awarded by the American Association of Bovine Practitioners this past October. She is one of only three Canadians to win the award this century. I could do a full statement thanking the member for Durham for his service, leadership and dedication as the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

However, in the end, I will end my statement by simply asking all members of the House and all Canadians watching to please respect each other. The pandemic has been hard on everyone. We should treat each other as we want to be treated ourselves.

Also, Wiarton Willie predicts it is going to be an early spring.

* * *

• (1110)

TEACHERS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister, the Manitoba caucus and I met with some teachers virtually. I wanted to highlight that discussion.

It included teachers from Children of the Earth, Garden Grove, Meadows West, Sisler High School, and other areas of the city of Winnipeg. Teachers are mentors to our students. They are coaches and advocates. Their wisdom and guidance bring out the best in students and inspire them to aim high and persevere. Every day, teachers play an important role in our communities and society.

However, since the pandemic started almost two years ago, teachers have had to drastically adjust to many challenges. They had to adapt to increased workloads, pressures and virtual classes. The love and care shown for our young people every day by teachers is inspiring. Our teachers have risen to the challenge and have gone above and beyond in engaging every student.

On behalf of the Prime Minister and the caucus, we want to thank and applaud the efforts of all teachers across Canada.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, COVID has painfully proven that Canada's health care system is not capable of handling a high volume of emergent patients, particularly over a sustained period of time.

Today, in year three of COVID, provincial governments are still closing businesses and imposing restrictions because of this. Even with these restrictions, doctors and nurses tell us that this approach does not reduce their burden. Business closures and restrictions on gathering and movement will not fix our health care system. As of today, there is still no coordinated, funded plan to do so.

On behalf of my constituents and health care workers, I call on the federal government to immediately act as a convener and establish a framework to support provinces and ensure that this problem is permanently rectified, because shutting down our way of life to reduce the burden on hospitals without a plan to fix the problems that have been persistent for decades must end.

MYLES LYNCH

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Myles Lynch, a vibrant young man from St. Andrew's West, who used his lived experience to advocate organ donation. Myles battled cystic fibrosis and made history when he became the first Canadian to receive three double lung transplants in his lifetime. However, I am sad to say Myles passed away at the young age of 24 on December 31.

Myles was what I would define as a happy warrior: positive, passionate, even humorous, as seen in his documentary *8 Thousand Myles*.

I had the pleasure of chatting with Myles several times about ways more organ donors could save lives for generations to come. In 2019, 260 Canadians died while waiting for an organ donation. We need to change that.

Therefore, I ask Canadians to think of Myles Lynch and his family and friends today, and to take a moment to sign up and be an organ donor in this great Canadian's memory.

* * *

74TH INDEPENDENCE DAY IN SRI LANKA

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark Sri Lanka's 74th Independence Day, a day filled with enormous pain and anguish for Tamil people on the island. Victims of history, the Tamil people hailing from the north and east of the island have lived as second-class citizens. They have been denied education, employment and even the freedom to practise their faith.

[*Translation*]

Although Sri Lanka is currently experiencing an economic crisis and is on the verge of bankruptcy, it continues to fund its military sector, which represents up to 15% of the government's total annual spending.

[*English*]

On this difficult day, I want to express my solidarity with the Tamil constituents in Laval and Tamils around the world and wish them justice and 10 minutes of peace on the island.

* * *

• (1115)

SALMON FISHERY

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak once again to the very serious situation facing wild salmon and steelhead on British Columbia's north and central coasts.

A recent study shows Alaska's fisheries are catching hundreds of thousands of fish bound for our rivers. Alaskans have become the biggest harvesters of many B.C. wild salmon populations, even while we see our stocks decline.

Last year, B.C.'s commercial fleet was tied up at the dock, sport fisheries were closed and many first nations could not catch their food fish. That same year, southeast Alaska caught 650,000 Canadian sockeye salmon, and 470,000 of those were headed for the Skeena River alone. That is just sockeye. The same story holds true for chum, pink, coho, chinook and steelhead.

The Pacific Salmon Treaty was negotiated during times of relative abundance, but now it is failing to deliver on its key mandates of equity and conservation, and it is not up for renewal until 2028. We need the fisheries minister to act now. We must use mechanisms to open the treaty and begin emergency negotiations with the Americans. Our wild salmon cannot wait until 2028.

* * *

[Translation]

WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the opening ceremony for the 24th Winter Olympic Games took place this morning in Beijing.

We have a duty to remember that these Olympics never should have been held in China, whose government is guilty of committing genocide against its own people, the Uighurs.

However, we also need to remember that this is not our athletes' decision and it is not their fault. Quebec's athletes are as brave as the Government of Canada is cowardly when it come to China. These Quebecers have dedicated their entire lives to their sport and, today, they have the opportunity to show the whole world just how talented they are.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to wish the best of luck to all athletes from every region of Quebec. I hope that they will perform as well as they hope, that all their hard work will pay off and that their Olympic dreams will come true.

All of Quebec is rooting for our Olympians.

* * *

[English]

JOHN HOPKINS

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take a quick second to say hi to Nickson, Clare, Jameson and my wife Larissa in the gallery today.

This past week, Regina lost one of its best-known and respected community leaders. John Hopkins, CEO of the Regina Chamber of Commerce, passed away on Wednesday after a courageous battle with cancer. John was a staple in the Regina business and political community, lending his organizing skills to many Regina initiatives over the 21 years that he was the CEO.

I will particularly miss John's judgment and thoughtful advice about Saskatchewan's political discourse. We enjoyed many coffees and lunches together. His opinions were always respected, and his

Oral Questions

kindness and generosity made him a joy to chat with whenever one ran into him at local events.

When John was diagnosed with cancer in 2018, he took the challenge head-on. He continued to be visible in the community, taking advantage of each day to educate others about his illness and to raise money with his garage band buddies.

John's passion for Regina's business community was infectious, and he undoubtedly made Regina better when he became the CEO in 2001.

I ask the House to join me in honouring John Hopkins for his years of service to Regina and in sending condolences to his family, friends and colleagues at the Regina Chamber of Commerce for their significant loss.

* * *

THE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, February 6, Canada celebrates the platinum jubilee. It marks the 70-year reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

There is no doubt that she has seen many heartbreaking moments and heartfelt joys during her reign as our sovereign. Throughout all these years, she has been a hallmark of prudence, stability and insightful leadership, articulating values that we have seen stand the test of time.

The majority of events for the jubilee will actually take place in June. On June 2, Coronation Day, there will be the lighting of a giant beacon in Ottawa, one of 1,500 beacons being lit around the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom.

In honour of Her Majesty's steadfast service to Canada, our government is funding community-based projects to pay tribute to Canada's long-standing relationship with the Crown.

I encourage all Canadians to plant a commemorative tree or plan a cultural event to celebrate 70 years of leadership from Her Majesty the Queen.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1120)

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a week, and it is time to put an end to the protest at Parliament Hill in Ottawa. It is also time to put an end to the restrictions that sparked the protest.

Oral Questions

The expressions of hatred and racism we have seen at the protest are unacceptable. What we are witnessing is an appalling lack of leadership. The mayor of Ottawa, the police and everyone else are asking someone, somewhere to step up and put an end to this.

So far, the Prime Minister has opted to add fuel to the fire and maintain the restrictions rather than listen to the protesters. It is time to act like a leader.

What specific actions will the Prime Minister take to end this situation peacefully?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I had a productive conversation last night with the mayor of Ottawa, Mr. Watson. Then I checked with the RCMP, which confirmed it is adding resources on the ground.

It is important to follow the law, recognize how destructive the convoy has been, and continue to support residents. The RCMP will be ready to assist the Ottawa Police Service, who are the police of jurisdiction.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been two years since the pandemic started. More than 34,000 Canadians have died. The COVID-19 virus has strained a health network that was already stretched thin before the pandemic began.

The health network is sick. COVID-19 is not the only reason. Canada ranks 30th among OECD countries with respect to number of hospital beds per capita, with 2.5 beds per 1,000 inhabitants. That is almost half the OECD average, which is 4.4 beds per 1,000 inhabitants.

Will the Prime Minister immediately commit to launching discussions with the provinces about health transfers?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to highlight the challenges that all Canadians face with respect to care, including shortfalls in infection prevention and control equipment.

We have been there to support the provinces and territories from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will continue to work with the provinces and territories to fight COVID-19 together.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some more numbers to share with my colleague.

The situation is even worse when it comes to the number of doctors. Canada ranks 32nd, with 2.7 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants, while the OECD average is 3.6 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants. It is no wonder that people are having a hard time finding a family doctor.

The Conservatives have promised to increase health transfers by at least 6% per year and to initiate discussions with the premiers within the first 100 days to come up with solutions.

The Council of the Federation is meeting today. Will the Prime Minister commit to an unconditional increase in transfers to the provinces, yes or no?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I also thank him for giving me an opportunity to practise my French.

[English]

I will answer in English so that I do not stumble over my numbers, because the question was about numbers.

Indeed, we have provided \$63.7 billion in support of Canada's health response, including \$14 billion for vaccines, including \$5.3 billion for PPE, and, last year alone, we provided almost \$42 billion in cash support to provinces and territories.

I wish to work together with my colleague on the committee for health so we can find better solutions for health care in this country.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has exposed inefficiencies, a lack of depth and chronic underfunding of our strained health care system. It is a pandemic that the federal government has no strategy to end. The limited capacity, staff shortages and backlogged health services have caused irreversible harm to Canadians, and it is caused by the government's refusal to increase funding.

Why is the government refusing to negotiate health transfers to the provinces?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share with my hon. colleague a position on the health committee, so I look forward to tackling some of these issues in committee.

Once again, I will reiterate the numbers. The Government of Canada has indeed provided almost \$42 billion in cash support. We will continue to be there for our provinces and territories.

I will also acknowledge that we must continue to work to ensure that people are getting vaccinated, talk to our communities about getting vaccinated, and not bow to pressure from the anti-vax lobby, which seems quite insistent to remove that from the conversation.

• (1125)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised to meet the premiers in our first 100 days of governing to address the urgent needs of the provinces and to boost the growth rate of the Canada health transfer to at least 6%, providing stable, long-term and predictable health funding.

The Prime Minister has failed to create a plan to work for all Canadians, and he has failed to bring Canadians back to normal. Why has the government not met with the provinces and territories to discuss fixing the health transfers?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again that is simply not true. The Prime Minister meets with the provinces and territories on a regular basis, as does our amazing Minister of Health. I represented the Minister of Health at a recent FPT meeting. We were proud to discuss issues of pertinence with provinces and territories, making sure that we continued to work in conjunction with them and providing the supports that were necessary. Every request they have had of us recently has been fulfilled. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I know it is Friday and people want to get home, but I ask them to keep it down so I can hear the answers to the questions.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing a significant deterioration of the situation in the streets of Ottawa and in front of Parliament, and I believe this warrants a very peaceful and very reasonable call for calm on the part of all parties involved. The media is talking about a permanent encampment. They are talking about an occupation that could last until spring, which is a major concern for many people.

What does the government itself realistically plan to do to ensure people's safety? More specifically, does it agree with our recommendation for creating a crisis task force that would bring all police services together under one command?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of co-operation going on between the RCMP and the Ottawa Police Service, which is the police of jurisdiction here in Ottawa.

This communication began at the start of the protest and is continuing. As I already told my colleague, I spoke with the mayor of Ottawa last night and subsequently confirmed that the RCMP is going to add more resources to ensure that everyone on the ground is safe.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from what I understand, everything that is happening is happening without or in spite of the government, which is quite worrisome in and of itself.

The extremists are waiting for reinforcements, many of them from outside the region. The truckers are expecting reinforcements. There are plans for a counterprotest, which would quite likely devolve into a confrontation.

Oral Questions

In light of this, has anyone contacted the spokespeople, who have finally been identified among the protesters, to ask them to leave before the situation really escalates?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleague understands that operational decisions are made by the police of jurisdiction, which in this case is the Ottawa Police Service.

That is how our democracy works. We must always respect the fact that police have the jurisdiction to make operational decisions. I know that the Ottawa Police Service is in discussions with some of the convoy leaders, but all that is a police matter.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, veterans continue to wait for their disability supports. The backlog of applications is long and has been for years, and the minister is not committing to extend temporary workers past March 31. The list of veterans still waiting for help is far too long, and without these much needed workers, it will only get worse.

Where is the commitment from the Prime Minister to support our veterans? These temporary workers must be made permanent to honour Canada's commitment to those who served our country.

When will the minister stand up for those who stood up for us?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her work on the veterans committee. Our government's investment of nearly \$200 million has increased staff, with hundreds of staff workers, and allowed us to speed up processes. Budget 2021 also allowed us to extend those resources.

I want to share with the House something that is very important. We have seen, in the last year, a decrease of 40% in the backlog. Tackling the backlog is our top priority, and we will continue to do what we need to do to support our veterans.

● (1130)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Marten Falls First Nation has declared a state of emergency for their children who have gone all year without school, not because of COVID but because they have no teachers. Teachers cannot be brought to a community suffering from a massive housing and infrastructure crisis.

If it is not safe for teachers, it is certainly not safe for students. They have pleaded with the minister all year for help. The school year is now half over, and nothing has been done.

Oral Questions

What steps will the minister take to guarantee that the children of Marten Falls First Nation have a right to quality education this year?

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the events at Marten Falls are concerning. Our department will follow up with the community, and continue to follow up with the community to ensure a path forward that works for them. Everyone deserves the right to clean water and proper infrastructure to help with the needs of the community.

This is why we have invested in drinking water advisories since 2015. To date, we have lifted 127 long-term advisories and prevented 208 short-term advisories from becoming long term. There is still more to do across the board for these communities and for water operators, and of course the proper infrastructure all communities need—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

* * *

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was crystal clear in this place when he told the people of Princeton, British Columbia, that he had their backs and would be there for them as they rebuilt from flooding. The community needs \$2 million as soon as possible to rebuild, or their property taxes will have to go up by 70%.

Can the Prime Minister tell the people of Princeton when they will receive the federal support that he has committed to them?

Hon. Bill Blair (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member for the important question and for his strong advocacy on behalf of his constituents and the people of British Columbia. I want to assure the House that we are working very closely with the provincial authority. I spoke extensively with the deputy premier on this very issue the other day.

We have made over \$5 billion available through the disaster financial assistance fund. We are working with communities and speaking to B.C. municipalities in order to facilitate recovery from the terrible events that took place as a result of the flooding. I want to assure the member that we will continue to work with him and with the affected communities, to be there for them and to help in the recovery.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made a commitment in this place. This is also a Prime Minister whose government gave Loblaws, a billion-dollar grocery chain, \$12 million to buy new refrigerators. The people of Princeton just want to receive today the \$2 million they were promised by the Prime Minister to rebuild their community.

Can the Prime Minister answer why they are waiting when others are receiving supports for things that are nice to have, but not necessary?

Hon. Bill Blair (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I understand the member's frustration. We share it.

We are working very hard with the province. As I am sure the member knows, the disaster financial assistance arrangement is done in partnership with our provincial authorities, and we are working with them to move money as expeditiously as possible to those communities that need it.

We know there is an enormous amount of work to be done, and there are issues with respect to interim housing. I would also point out to the member that as a result of money that we, as well as the province, have provided to the Canadian Red Cross, we have been able to provide financial supports and services to individual families. Over 7,500 families have received direct support as a result of that contribution. We will continue to be there for the people of Merritt, and for all of the people of British Columbia.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the average family will spend almost \$1,000 more on groceries in 2022. That is in addition to the rising cost of food, gas, unemployment and housing. That extra \$1,000 for food alone is equal to a Canadian worker's average income.

Quebeckers and Canadians have had enough. When will this government step up and take meaningful action to tackle the rising cost of living that is affecting us all right now?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadians are concerned about issues of affordability. We also know that inflation is a global phenomenon. We take protecting Canada's most vulnerable people very seriously.

We are the government that introduced the CCB and the GIS, which are both indexed for inflation, and which lifted almost 300,000 Canadians out of poverty. In fact, by 2019 our government lifted 1.3 million Canadians out of poverty, which lowered Canada's poverty rate to all-time lows. We are going to continue to stay focused on affordability.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada data released just this morning, 200,000 jobs were lost in January and the unemployment rate is now 6.5%. Those are real numbers, not the numbers the minister has been playing on repeat all week.

People are struggling. The cost of living is soaring. People have less money in their pockets now, all because of the Liberal government's decisions.

Meanwhile, what have the Liberals been doing? Spending, spending, spending. That has a direct impact on inflation.

When will the government take care of what really matters: jobs and the cost of living that is affecting everyone?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians understand that inflation is a global phenomenon.

Here are some numbers that prove it: Canada's latest inflation rate was about 4.8%. In the U.S., it was 7%. In Germany, it is over 5%.

I would note that our inflation rate is lower than the G7 average, the G20 average and the OECD average.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to use 20th-century rules to address the digital world of 2022. Through Bill C-11, the government is once again delegating more power to the CRTC for some future solution at some future time.

However, the government can act now and give support to Canadian broadcasters by simply abolishing CRTC part II licence fees. Will it?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill for Canadians, for artists and for our creators. Its objectives are very important. It is about streamers contributing to our culture. We heard that there were concerns about social media. We heard, we listened and we fixed them.

Now, the question is this. What are the Conservatives going to do this time? Are they going to support our artists and creators, or abandon them once again?

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Liberals are also supporting Facebook, spending \$4.2 million in advertising on Facebook alone in the last two years.

It was like Groundhog Day on the day this bill was introduced, because the challenges that were in Bill C-10 are there again in Bill C-11.

In the old Bill C-10, there was an exclusion for user-generated content, but then the Liberals excluded that exclusion in committee. This time, the exclusion for user-generated content is excluded by another exclusion.

Why can the government not simply exclude user-generated content that is on social media, and protect Canadians in that way?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would be a pleasure to sit down with my friend and colleague to talk about the bill and maybe explain some of the sec-

Oral Questions

tions in it, because the bill is very simple. It is about the platforms contributing to Canadian culture. That is extremely important. That is how we tell our stories. Our culture is our past. It is our present. It is our future. It is our story. It is our Canadian stories, our music and everything. This bill is very simple. Platforms are in and users are out.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Ottawa has requested additional human resources to counter this occupation, which is clearly illegal.

Ottawa police officers definitely need a break, and the rising tension has the potential to become quite dangerous. If the Prime Minister ever returns to the House once he recovers from COVID, he will be in for a big surprise.

Does the government realize that the message it is sending to the protesters is that they can stay as long as they like? The government is practically rolling out the red carpet.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague did not hear my answer earlier in this question period.

Yesterday I confirmed whether the RCMP could provide additional support and resources on the ground to assist the Ottawa Police Service, the police of jurisdiction.

Laws must be obeyed, and the rights of Ottawa's residents must be respected. The RCMP will assist the Ottawa Police Service.

● (1140)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about obeying the law when, on the contrary, the number of trucks could increase.

The protest is illegal, not because of the ideas it espouses—ideas that I disagree with, but they have the right to have different ideas and express them—but because trucks are parked on the white line in the middle of the street. That is illegal. There are fines for doing that.

Normally, when that happens, we look around and see a sign that says “tow-away zone”. Is it not time to post a sign that says “tow-away zone”?

By the way, where is the Prime Minister?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns, because there have been a number of disruptions and examples where the convoy has not obeyed the law.

That is why it is very important for the RCMP to be there to provide its support to the Ottawa Police Service and to assure everyone that the law must be followed, even on Wellington Street and throughout Ottawa.

Oral Questions

[English]

COVID-19 ECONOMIC MEASURES

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CEOs of companies received extravagant compensation in 2020, even the companies that received the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The government allowed corporations receiving federal supports to still give massive payouts to their CEOs at the same time that Canadians were struggling to make ends meet.

Why has the minister allowed for federal supports to go to CEOs instead of Canada's workers?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when COVID first hit, businesses had to close their doors to keep Canadians safe. Today we have more active businesses than we did before COVID, and we are seeing that bankruptcies and insolvencies are below normal levels. Thanks to our government's decisive economic policies, we have avoided the economic scarring that followed the 2008 economic crisis.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ESDC was made aware in July 2020 of over \$442 million in double payments for the Canada emergency response benefit. However, the Auditor General cannot audit the program until the CRA verifies whether recipients meet eligibility requirements, which will not be until 2023.

Will the government start verifying eligibility now so that Canadians can know how their tax dollars are being spent?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is focusing on making sure that Canadians and Canadian workers have the measures they need to be supported during this pandemic crisis. It is unfortunate that with the wave of omicron, the Conservative Party voted against Bill C-2, which brought in measures that are currently supporting Canadians.

We are going to be there for Canadians. We made a promise to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes and we are going to continue doing just that.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has again stiffed Canadian IT companies and awarded a sensitive tech contract to a foreign company. It is so sensitive, in fact, that it stated the work had to be done here in Ottawa using a government computer, yet the work is actually being done outside the country and certainly not on a secured government server. However, do not worry. For security, it told the company to merely turn the screen away from the window when working.

Is this seriously the government's idea of cybersecurity?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to national security and cybersecurity, members on the other side of the House and Canadians at home understand that we take them very seriously. I can assure the member that all issues relating to cybersecurity and national security are reviewed by the relevant agencies

to make sure that we protect data and we protect the safety of all Canadians.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): That is not at all the case, Mr. Speaker. The government, when queried, actually claimed the workers had to stay in the U.S. due to COVID restrictions, but during the first year of the pandemic, seven million people were able to cross the border into Canada. The Liberals famously even exempted wealthy, connected American CEOs from the border restrictions.

Why would the Liberals give a pass to the wealthy and connected, but tell contractors working on our sensitive security tech abroad to simply turn the monitors away from the window when working?

● (1145)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues understand that throughout this pandemic, we put in place a number of measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians. A number of them were regarding our borders.

As I said before, when it comes to cybersecurity, I do not think we can take lessons from my colleagues. We take that very seriously, as well as national security. Canadians at home know that we will always take decisions to further their best interests.

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HEALTH

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been promising to lift the blood ban for years. In December, Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec submitted a recommendation to lift the ban and move to behaviour-based policy for donations. The Minister of Health said his government would be moving quickly, but it has been six weeks and we still have no idea about the process, how long it will take and when changes will be implemented.

Will the minister share the timeline for ending the ban on blood and plasma donations for men who have sex with other men and trans women once and for all?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we committed over and over again to continue to ensure that our blood services are fair and equitable, and I agree with the member that historically they have not been. Steps have been taken, and as we all know, there is a timeline going forward to ensure that blood donations can be made by everybody in Canada. That is the fairest way forward and the most equitable way forward, and I share a commitment with many members of the House who want to ensure that these changes are made ASAP.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, London's and Windsor's airports, which contribute enormously to their local economies, have remained closed to international travel, while other smaller airports in the region and across the country have been allowed to open. The transport minister has given no indication of when they will be allowed to reopen to international flights. They have lost significant revenue through this key winter season. Of course, there are public health recommendations against travel, but people need to know what to expect in the coming months.

Will the minister let people in London and Windsor know when they can expect their airports to reopen to international travel?

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are advising Canadians to avoid all non-essential international travel at this time. This is to add to our layered approach at the border, including predeparture PCR testing and on-arrival testing. These are measures that are based on public health advice, and we are constantly evaluating domestic and international COVID situations. We will not hesitate to adjust these measures as needed.

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GENDER EQUITY

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout the pandemic, there was a need in the LGBTQ2 community for support provided by LGBTQ organizations and partners, and it was a critical lifeline for many. These organizations provided critical mental health support, suicide prevention and gender-affirming care, as well as housing support and other valuable resources. In order to continue that essential work, they require sustainable financial assistance.

Can the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth update the House on the accomplishments of our government in helping the LGBTQ2 community?

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her advocacy. She is absolutely right. The LGBTQ2 organizations are a vital resource for Canadians, and they need our support to keep their doors open and continue to grow.

It is why this week I was so pleased to extend funding for the historic LGBTQ2 community capacity fund for another year. This funding is going to enable organizations to strengthen their infras-

Oral Questions

structure to advance LGBTQ2 equality across this country. The tireless work and advocacy of LGBTQ2 organizations have shaped the fight for equality here in Canada and around the world, and we must continue to support their efforts.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is now 420 days since Parliament passed a unanimous motion that referenced the “alarming rate of suicide in Canada”, called it a “national health crisis” and demanded the House take “immediate action” to institute a nationwide three-digit 988 suicide prevention hotline.

My question for the minister today is simple. What is the current number that Canadians should remember so that in their darkest moment they do not have to do a Google search to find the help that might save their life?

• (1150)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to implementing and fully funding a national three-digit mental health crisis and suicide prevention hotline. The CRTC is currently considering public input from consultations that have been extended, and replies will be accepted until March 2022 to accommodate additional interventions and formats more accessible to persons with disabilities, such as video. We understand the urgency of implementing this crisis line, and we will ensure we get it right, including that it has the capacity to connect people to the most appropriate support—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the government does not know the number, how can Canadians be expected to?

A Google search will eventually tell us that the 24-7 number for the Canada Suicide Prevention Service is 1-833-456-4566. Since the December 2020 vote, more than 4,500 Canadians have tragically lost their lives to suicide. We have so much work to do together on mental health in this country, but this is a relatively easy first step.

By what specific date will Canada finally have an operational three-digit 988 suicide prevention hotline?

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Oral Questions

We understand the urgency of implementing this crisis line, and we will ensure we get it right, including it having the capacity to connect people with the most appropriate service in the most appropriate way. We are investing \$25 million over five years to develop, implement, expand and sustain a fully operational pan-Canadian suicide prevention service that can also provide virtual services.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a growing frustration among Canadians about the Prime Minister's lack of leadership to end this pandemic. We want to see an end to the protests and lockdowns. We denounce all forms of hatred and violence. The comments they last heard from the Prime Minister were earlier last month. He said we need to “hunker down” over the winter and hope for a better spring.

Canadians are looking for a more detailed plan. They are looking for leadership. They are looking for unity to get us past this.

Will the Prime Minister and the government finally stop dividing Canadians and bring them together in hope and optimism to finally get us past this pandemic?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that all members recognize the leadership that has been shown by the Prime Minister and this government by following the evidence and science, which unequivocally demonstrate time and time again that the way we are going to get out of this pandemic is through vaccinations. That is why we have been working with all Canadians. We put this question on the ballot in the last election. Canadians had an opportunity to choose, and they chose to support a way forward through vaccinations.

I am very concerned about the demonstrations that we have seen and the lack of following the law in the streets. We need to be sure that we follow the law. No one is above the law and that applies to the convoy as well.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is ducking the question again. The most important question that my constituents and all Canadians want to know is this: When will the federal COVID-19 restrictions end? Canadians deserve transparency. They deserve to know what the Liberal plan is, if any, to end these restrictions.

What is the metric and what is the timeline for Canadians to expect to see an end to COVID-19 restrictions?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree with my colleague that we all want COVID-19 to be over. Perhaps one thing that we disagree on is how. We need to ensure that all of our communities are vaccinated, and we are encouraging everybody to get vaccinated so that we can get back to normal.

My colleague knows that many of the lockdowns are provincial in nature. We continue to work with our provinces and territories to ensure that our communities continue to be safe.

• (1155)

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am totally flabbergasted by the response that the Minister of Public Safety gave to the leader of the Bloc Québécois. He just confirmed, in front of everyone here, that the federal government has not even tried to talk to the various spokespeople for those responsible for the protest in Ottawa.

He just confirmed that he is putting all the responsibility for negotiations on the police, when it is the federal government that the occupiers came here to see. The minister's job is not to comment on the news. It is to protect public safety. When will he take the lead in managing this crisis?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

The government is known for having made many commitments during the pandemic. On this side of the House, we follow the evidence and science. Vaccines are the way to get out of this pandemic. We want to continue on that path.

On the ground, we need to respect the police's jurisdiction over operational decisions. That is how our democracy works.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what is happening in Ottawa is no longer a protest. It is the siege of a G7 country. However, we feel that the federal government is taking this lightly.

The federal government must create a crisis task force that includes members of all levels of government and all police services. The Minister of Public Safety must provide an update every day at a press conference, as any good government would do when managing a crisis. Will the Prime Minister finally take the crisis seriously and create a real crisis task force?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said a number of times, we must respect the role of the police, as they have the skills and jurisdiction to make operational decisions on the ground.

The government had a record of commitment to the public throughout the pandemic. We must follow the science and use vaccination, which is the best strategy for getting out of the pandemic.

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, veterans benefits should adjust with inflation, yet veterans benefits have increased only 2.7% when inflation has increased by 4.8%. This may not seem like a lot to Laurentian elites, but to veterans who are trying to feed their families, every single penny counts amid ballooning inflation.

Will the Minister of Veterans Affairs commit to ending this discriminatory policy so veterans can get what they deserve to feed their families?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for joining our veteran affairs committee. I would like to remind him that it is our government that invested \$11 billion in the last five years to support our veterans. I will also share with Canadians that it was the previous government that fired 1,000 workers and closed nine offices.

We have reopened those nine offices. We are investing in supporting our veterans, and we will continue to do so.

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THE ECONOMY

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the price of chicken is up 6.2%. Bacon is up 19.1%, and gas is up 33%. In Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, seniors, people with disabilities and families are telling me that they can no longer afford the basic necessities, and rural Canadians have no choice but to drive everywhere. With the government so disinterested in Canada's inflation crisis, people are feeling frustrated and losing hope.

What will it take for the government to admit that “Justinflation” is hitting Canadians hard, or does it not care?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand how important the issue of affordability is. We also understand that inflation is a global phenomenon.

Interestingly enough, Conservatives often accuse us of over-investing in Canadians. However, in the last election, Conservatives promised to spend more than what our government is currently investing. At the same time, their promised policies were assessed by experts, and it was noted they would under-deliver on housing, child care and on climate change.

I think Canadians made the right choice in the last election.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Speaker, AGT Foods, Federated Co-operatives, Viterra and Cargill have all announced the construction of new canola crushing plants in Regina and the surrounding area, which will create 400 full-time jobs. However, growing canola requires fertilizer, lots of fertilizer. The

Oral Questions

government has announced it will be making farmers ration fertilizer by 30%.

Why is the government putting Regina's new canola crushing plants in jeopardy?

• (1200)

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure my colleague.

My colleagues know how committed we are to tackling climate change. Farmers are the first to feel its effects.

We are working with industry representatives to find the best solutions. We are also making significant financial contributions to help our producers adopt best practices and have access to energy-efficient equipment.

Contrary to what the Conservatives may think, productivity does not preclude respect for the environment.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to a Leger survey, more than two-thirds of Canadians think that streaming platforms should contribute to Canadian culture. The same survey reported that young Canadians are the ones most likely to be in favour of having these companies contribute to our culture.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage recently introduced a bill regarding online streaming.

Can he tell us what, exactly, this bill means for young Canadians?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the wonderful question he just asked. He clearly cares about our artists and artisans, and I congratulate him for that.

This bill would require that streaming platforms contribute to our culture. This will promote the creation of more Canadian films, series and music. It is what we need to help build the next generation of Canadian artists and to support the next Denis Villeneuves, The Weeknds and Cœur de Pirates.

In practical terms, our bill will enable young Canadians to celebrate and participate in culture, our culture, today and in the future.

Oral Questions

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to be the last person to rise and ask a question about the price of all essential goods. The problem is that 60% of Canadians are saying that they are struggling to pay their monthly grocery bills. Today, the job numbers came out for January, and it is not good news. The unemployment rate is 6.5%. This means that more than 200,000 Canadians do not have jobs. In Canada, in 2022, this is a disgrace, and it lies squarely at the feet of the Prime Minister.

My question is this: With hundreds of thousands of Canadians out of work and prices skyrocketing, when will Canadians once again be able to afford food, fuel and heating their homes?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the data released today shows that Canadian workers and businesses were impacted by omicron. That is precisely why we have supports in place to support them, supports that, by the way, the Conservative Party voted against.

The fact remains that our economy has strong fundamentals and is recovering well from the COVID recession. Jobs have recovered 101% from pre-pandemic levels, while they have only recovered by 87% in the U.S. Statistics Canada has released data that shows that we had six consecutive months of GDP growth.

We are going to continue to focus on Canadians. We are going to continue to focus on affordability.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I contacted the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Employment and Workforce Development in November about an issue with the foreign temporary worker program that is affecting several businesses in my riding. I unfortunately have not heard a peep back from them.

I have to wonder whether these ministers communicate at all. Do they talk to each other?

Do they have a real plan to reduce processing times and to cut red tape so that the workers these businesses desperately need can be brought in?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the hon. member's question. He is right to point out that businesses need access to workers and they need access to them quickly. I would respond by pointing to the fact that last year we welcomed the greatest number of permanent residents, including those under economic migration streams, in Canada's history.

Just this Monday, I also had the opportunity to make an announcement that included \$85 million to reduce processing times, with a specific focus on work permits.

To respond to the member's question about whether I had the opportunity to meet with the minister responsible for ESDC, we will be chatting this afternoon, as we often do, to work on programs that will get workers into Canadian businesses more quickly, because we know the economy can flourish if we give it the opportunity to gain access to the labour that it needs.

* * *

● (1205)

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 28, it was reported that Rideau Hall paid out \$277,592 in confidential settlements, as well as running up legal bills of nearly \$170,000 in the same year. Former governor general Julie Payette had resigned for presiding over a “toxic workplace”.

How much more hush money has been paid to those who endured the intolerable workplace at Rideau Hall and, specifically, when was the Prime Minister made aware of it?

Hon. Bill Blair (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would advise my colleague, first of all, that all questions pertaining to legal matters of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General are best directed to that office.

However, I also want to advise the House that our government remains firmly committed to every Canadian having a safe and healthy workplace, and the Prime Minister has made a commitment to provide such a workplace to Canada's public service. We welcome Her Excellency the Right Hon. Mary Simon's commitment to foster a positive environment at Rideau Hall as she and her staff continue to undertake important work in the service of all Canadians.

* * *

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. George Chalal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the 26th anniversary of the designation of the month of February as Black History Month thanks to a motion moved by the Hon. Jean Augustine in this Parliament. This is a month to celebrate, remember and recognize the many contributions made by Black Canadians and their accomplishments.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Diversity and Inclusion) please update us on how the government will be supporting Black History Month?

Mr. Paul Chiang (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Diversity and Inclusion), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year the theme for Black History Month is “February and Forever: Celebrating Black History today and every day”.

Our government supports Black Canadians through investments in a number of areas, including building capacity in Black communities, supporting young Black Canadians, providing culturally focused mental health programs, and supporting entrepreneurship and anti-racism strategies.

During Black History Month, I invite everyone to join us in celebrating and recognizing the many contributions Black Canadians have made to our Canada.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has impacted transportation. Canadian communities are facing damaging cuts to public transit that impact thousands of seniors, workers and students who rely on it every day. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities are calling on the federal government to invest urgent funds to keep public transit running for people and to address the climate crisis. Last November, the NDP made the same call, and we have not yet heard back.

When will the Liberals act to ensure our public transit remains viable for the people who rely on it?

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that many Canadians, including those living in remote areas and indigenous people, depend on public transit for transportation. The minister sent a letter to my provincial counterparts earlier this year and the federal government is ready to support provinces where public transit is concerned.

I understand that the importance of this service for Canadians is top of mind. We will continue to advocate for them and work with provincial and industry partners to find a solution.

* * *

OPIOIDS

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (deputy House leader of the government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There have been discussions among the parties and, if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That a take-note debate on the opioid crisis in Canada, be held on Tuesday, February 8, 2022, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, and that, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House: (a) members rising to speak during the debate may indicate to the Chair that they will be dividing their time with another member; (b) the time provided for the debate be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 12 periods of 20 minutes each; and (c) no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

• (1210)

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

It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to)

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. The first report is entitled "Safe Haven in Canada: Special Immigration and Refugee Measures are Urgently Needed for the People of Hong Kong". The second report is entitled "Immigration in the time of COVID-19: Issues and Challenges".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these two reports.

LIAISON

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 107(3), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Liaison Committee, entitled "Committee Activities and Expenditures: April 1, 2021 - August 15, 2021".

This report highlights the work and accomplishments of each committee, as well as detailing the budgets that fund the activities approved by the committee.

* * *

PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE ACT

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-230, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (intimidation of health care professionals).

She said: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years, we have seen just how important our health care system is and how critical the medical professionals who work in that system are to Canadians. We need to create a work environment for medical professionals that protects them, supports them and encourages them to continue in the critical work they do.

I rise today to introduce a private member's bill entitled the "Protection of Freedom of Conscience Act". Medical professionals are facing increasing pressure to participate in assisted suicide, and this is causing many to question their ability to work here in Canada.

The bill proposes an amendment to the Criminal Code that would protect medical professionals from intimidation or coercion to participate in medically assisted suicide, in the same way that workers are protected from intimidation or coercion if they want to form or be part of a union.

Government Orders

I encourage all my colleagues to support this bill's speedy passage and thereby demonstrate their deep commitment both to our amazing medical professionals and to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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

* * *

COMPETITION ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-231, An Act to amend the Competition Act (vehicle repair).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a bill I think all members of Parliament will support, similar to what has happened in the past. I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for his help on this issue for the last number of years.

This bill would do three major things. The first is that it would amend the Competition Act to authorize the Competition Tribunal to make an order requiring vehicle manufacturers to provide independent repair shops access to diagnostic and repair information and to service parts on the same terms and manner as the manufacturers make that information and those parts available to their own authorized repair providers.

Second, it would update the voluntary agreement that is still in place since 2009 in my original legislation to include the rights of digital software that will cover future innovations and technologies as we move to zero-emission vehicle standards in electric vehicles.

Lastly, and most importantly, it would ensure consumers have the right to choose where they get their vehicles fixed, help the environment by making sure vehicles with emissions are stronger and also cleaner, and be good for public safety as vehicles on the road would be repaired, in order and in the best condition possible.

I look forward to this legislation hopefully having the same fate as my previous attempt, which resulted in Parliament acting on this important issue.

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

* * *

• (1215)

PARLIAMENTARY STAFF

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I hope that, if you seek it, you will find consent for the following motion. I move:

That the House express its gratitude to all parliamentary staff who continue to do the indispensable work needed for Parliament to function efficiently and safely through these difficult circumstances.

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

Hearing no dissenting voice, it is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say no.

(Motion agreed to)

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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed consideration of the motion 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.

The Deputy Speaker: We did have a few moments for questions and comments for the member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington, but I see we are moving on from that.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin today, I just want to take a moment to thank our former leader, the member for Durham. He worked hard for the Conservative caucus and for the country. He served in the military, and as an MP in cabinet and opposition leader. I thank him for his service and dedication to our party and country, and I thank Rebecca and his family for their sacrifices.

I am pleased to rise today to speak on Bill C-8.

Expectations were high after the unnecessary election that cost taxpayers over \$600 million, which was called during a pandemic in an attempt by the Prime Minister and his government to further their own self-interests. However, the results were clear. Canadians, 67% to be exact, voted against giving the Liberals more power and overwhelmingly against the corruption scandals and overreach by the Liberals by a 2:1 margin.

Government Orders

What have we seen since the election? The Prime Minister took a vacation during the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. He delayed the return of Parliament by 60 days and he broke his promise to deliver action in the first 100 days. Instead of rebuilding the country at a time of crisis, the Prime Minister has repeatedly alienated western and rural Canadians. He has played the worst kind of divisive politics and attempted to label those who disagree with him as being hateful. No responsible person, let alone the leader of our country, should ever throw around words like “misogynist” or “racist” so casually and recklessly.

No one knows how easily the Liberals will sacrifice good, hard-working people than Albertans. Almost every year, the Liberals have squeezed more and more of Alberta's jobs out of the province. They then killed four pipelines with their no more pipelines act. They have ignored the cries of indigenous communities who rely on resource development agreements. They have created political problems with key trading partners that hurt farmers in the west and have sought to fight Alberta's provincial government at their return. The irony is that their drive is to make a green, clean energy grid, but the likelihood is of that is delayed, even by a decade or more, as many energy companies who invested heavily in renewable energy and new technologies left the country or simply pushed their investments to another location.

While providing some money in the economic and fiscal update for COVID testing, for business loans and school ventilation was good, the update was silent on the top demand from provinces for the last two years. They needed new funding for health care. The pandemic has strained health care workers, hospitals and the overall system to the point of near breaking, with thousands if not tens of thousands of delayed surgeries and procedures. There is no doubt that there will be many more preventative measures that have been missed and undetected illnesses that will demand emergency action instead of early intervention. All of that will drive up health care costs, with health care costs all but guaranteed to increase.

Provinces are on even more shaky financial ground. For example, Newfoundland has already had a bailout of sorts while other provinces could even be headed towards economic crisis after the debt piled on during the pandemic. With the excessive spending before and during the pandemic, the federal government is not well positioned to help. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, one-third, or about \$177 billion, of pandemic spending was unrelated to the pandemic response plan, which is about six years of military spending, six years of health care in Alberta or more than double provincial and territorial transfers.

I come from a riding with a large rural economy where farmers have endured extreme hardships from a severe drought and the impacts of the pandemic. Our agricultural sector is critical to our trade, our international relations, our domestic economy and our rural economy for that matter.

• (1220)

Farmers and rural Canada were ignored in the throne speech, and we do not know why. For the last five years, they have paid enormous carbon tax bills, some in the tens of thousands of dollars. Their costs have been driven up, and the costs of food products in Canada are continuing to rise.

These costs hurt farmers who cannot compete with America or other countries in costs. The prices hurt Canadian food manufacturers who want to use Canadian farm products, but they also have to do with the high cost of buying from U.S. competitors. They hurt small business owners who face higher downstream costs, as well as continually higher costs from employment taxes, the GST, etc. Who do they pass those costs on to? It is to consumers: to families, with higher grocery bills.

The government made a promise to improve, and to help farmers and everyone who consumes Canadian farm products. Conservatives provided a clear policy option in Bill C-208 that would have eliminated carbon taxes for on-farm activities. That exemption would not have required new administration costs. It would not have increased costs for businesses to track and calculate those expenses.

The Minister of Finance, who is from downtown Toronto, had a better idea. Instead of a simple solution that was easy to understand, practical to implement and would cut costs, she would create a complex tax regulation that could change on a political whim. It would not reduce costs at all and would ultimately keep prices higher for consumers, while providing little to no relief for farmers.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, instead of tens of thousands of dollars less in taxes, farmers will get a rebate of between \$1.47 and \$1.73 per \$1,000 spent on eligible farm activities. The generosity of the government to the farming community is amazing. Who determined those eligible farming activities? It was the government. What is eligible? We do not know. It is entirely up to the minister and the government.

There are many serious issues facing Canada right now that need immediate action. We have a drug addiction crisis. We have a violent crime and criminal gang shooting crisis. Canada is increasingly alienated by our allies, while facing greater global pressures and hostility. Our military is lacking key trades, trained personnel and equipment, and plans to meet its increased mandate.

Inflation is quickly eating away at working-class and lower-income Canadians. Anger, resentment and division are increasing at an alarming rate across the country, spurred on by the indifference and rhetoric from even our Prime Minister. Small businesses are struggling to hang on, and are unable to find workers. Canadian shelves are emptier and have fewer options than ever before. Worker losses and capacities increase and decrease the supply of goods.

Government Orders

Private-sector investment has dropped massively since 2015 and has hit records lows, suggesting Canada could face significant competitive challenges in the years ahead. Our consumer energy prices are among the highest in developed countries, and our housing prices are some of the top in the world.

We need better from the government. We need the government to swallow its pride and stop slapping band-aid solutions onto its broken policies in an attempt to address the problem. Crime is up, and the witch hunt on law-abiding firearms owners, while ignoring gangs and gun smuggling, needs to end before we can actually address crime. Inflation is up, due in large part to unchecked, uncontrolled and wasteful spending by the Liberals. We need a plan to get back to balance and to manage spending properly.

If we fix the policies that created these issues, we can begin to solve the problem. However, without acknowledging their mistakes and their failures, the Liberals will never be able to govern Canada to better days. They will be forever stuck trying to distract Canadians with social media campaigns, hashtags and undelivered commitments.

Better is possible. The people of my riding, and all Canadians, deserve to be heard and respected by their government. They deserve a clear economic recovery plan for their communities and our country. They deserve a plan to manage inflation, reduce crime, reduce everyday costs and deal with our national security. Canadians should not have to wait the better part of a decade for that to happen.

• (1225)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I followed my colleague's speech with interest. I have some questions for him. I heard him repeatedly say that we should spend less and do more. I also heard him say we should spend more, and in other cases do less. It was a meandering speech, one that did not really settle on any solutions except to urge the government to do more. The policies we have put forth over the last couple of years have saved innumerable lives and innumerable businesses. They have ensured that people can go back to work.

What are the savings the member is looking for? Where are we supposed to cut costs? Which program would he have cut in order to find austerity and a solution that, frankly, does not exist right now?

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that a meandering speech would deserve a meandering question.

I would suggest to the hon. member across the way that it is the waste. I talked about \$177 billion being spent by the government. The government said it was for pandemic spending, yet there is no accountability. The PBO said it does not know if that \$177 billion was spent on anything to do with the pandemic—

Mr. Adam van Koevorden: Which business would the member have me take the money away from in his riding?

Mr. Glen Motz: If the member asks the question, I will be happy to answer it.

At the end of the day, there is a lot of waste that the government has placed on the Canadian taxpayer over the last six years. There is significant waste. That is where we would start. Number one, get rid of the waste.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleagues spend a fair amount of time describing the impact inflation is having on the budgets of families and the middle class. However, it is important to note that inflation will also impact the provincial governments, particularly health care systems, which have to hire people and buy equipment and supplies.

Can my colleague tell me why he thinks that the Liberal government is refusing to increase health transfers unconditionally, as requested by Quebec and all of the provinces?

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, I cannot answer, and I will never try to figure out why the government does what it does.

Moving forward, we are approaching a \$1.4-trillion debt. The cost to service that debt, should interest rates climb even a quarter of a percent, would have a significant impact across all aspects of the government's ability to do all sorts of things, such as pay health transfers.

This pandemic has shown us one thing: that more attention needs to be paid by the government to health care and to health transfers. We, as a party, would certainly be willing to have a look at what that might be like moving forward.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner's colleague, the member for Yellowhead, I also called on businesses in Medicine Hat as part of my sales territory when I worked in the public sector.

The member spoke today on health care. Yesterday, I took a study request to HUMA about the care economy. I am hopeful that the Conservatives will support recommendations that come out of that study in the future. I anticipate that there will be an ask for new investments highlighted that we require for health care.

The NDP accept that taxation is not fair, and that large corporations and the ultrawealthy do not pay their fair share. Closing tax loopholes, ending tax havens, and fair taxation on the ultrawealthy are ways for us to invest more in health care transfers and to let us better support Canadians who are seeing rising costs of living.

Would the Conservatives agree that the ultrawealthy need to start paying their fair share of taxes?

Government Orders

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, I anticipate that when the member travelled around the country and Medicine Hat was part of her sales territory, she spent extra time there because it is an amazing city to be in. She probably did not want to go back to wherever her base was.

I was intrigued by her earlier comment about a care culture. It is important to see what we, as Conservatives, have been saying along. I think we agree with the NDP on a couple of things, and that mental health is a health issue. When we are talking about a care culture in this country, we could certainly start there.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House, especially today to speak on 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.

Canadians are worried and frustrated. They want a plan for the recovery. They want hope, and that is not what they got from the economic and fiscal update tabled by the government on December 14, 2021.

Canadians can feel the middle-class dream slipping away, and this economic statement and fiscal update did nothing to address what is causing them to feel that way. If anything, it exacerbated it. It did not help the young families moving from Toronto and Peel Region, predominantly, to Flamborough—Glanbrook, who are worried about the startling increase in the cost of living. It did not help the small business owners who were struggling to stay afloat, nor the farmers who are putting food on our tables, nor the seniors. There are many seniors' villages in my constituency. Many seniors built this country, and are living on fixed incomes.

Allow me to focus on four things this afternoon in this discussion of Bill C-8: one, the ballooning cost of living; two, the housing crisis; three, disrupted supply chains; and four, the lack of a coherent plan for the economy.

Let us talk about inflation. Canadians are feeling the pinch at the grocery store, at the gas station and on their home heating bill. Canadians have never felt more pessimistic about their financial futures. Take Gary from Stoney Creek Mountain, who is a senior living on a fixed income. He wrote to my office recently. He was gravely concerned because every month he sees more of his income being spent on food and fuel. Seniors such as Gary, who have worked their entire lives and who helped to build this country into what it is today, deserve to enjoy their retirement years. That is something that the reckless policies of the government are robbing them of.

Inflation is at its highest point in 30 years. Earlier this week, the Governor of the Bank of Canada suggested that inflation could remain as high as 5% for the first half of the year in 2022. That 5% does not actually tell the whole story, because the price of chicken is up 6%, beef is up almost 12% and natural gas is up 19%. As to gas for our cars, we saw the highest price ever in Hamilton and the GTA this past week. It is up 33%. Those are the things that families need and depend on every day.

What makes matters worse is that the government refuses to take any blame. At first it told Canadians that it actually was not really a

problem, then members of the government threw up their hands and said there was nothing they could do about it. Young families in my riding who are paying \$1,000 extra for groceries this year deserve a better answer that.

Talking of issues affecting young Canadians, which the government pretends to care a lot about, home prices across the country are up 25%. The Realtors Association of Hamilton-Burlington, in my area, announced yesterday that the average home price in Hamilton is now over \$1 million. Under the government, my constituents have seen the housing bubble grow to be the second-most-inflated in the world. It is up 85%. How much can young Canadians see these prices go up under the government? It is no wonder that so many people under 30 years old have completely given up on the dream of ever owning a home.

Another issue I would like to address is the impact of disrupted supply chains. That is having a great impact on our economy from coast to coast, and on our trade. It is not something that was sufficiently addressed, and there were no solutions sufficiently provided in the fall economic and fiscal update. We know there are complicating factors, such as port congestion and exploding container prices. Of course, there are labour shortages everywhere across the supply chain, as well as increased inputs for all facets of production.

On top of this, the government's dismissal of the truckers is exacerbating the problem. How can we make a dent in the supply chain backlog when a number of truckers are off the road? They are outside the walls here. They are frustrated and want to be heard, yet there is no dialogue. There is no olive branch from the government.

Here is what it means to farmers and producers in my riding who cannot get trucks to get their products to market. I will give two examples of the calls and conversations I have had in the last few weeks.

Government Orders

• (1235)

Ray, a farmer in Flamborough, grows organic grains. He grows organic corn and soybeans and mills them for feed that is provided to chicken farmers in Pennsylvania and upper New York state, who in turn sell their organic chickens to restaurants in New York City. It is a great opportunity for all because each of the participants along the supply chain earns a premium on the product, which the consumers of New York are willing to pay. It is good for everyone, but Ray is frustrated, as he cannot get trucks to get the grain out of his bins. If he cannot get the grain out of his bins, he cannot get the revenue to buy the seed he needs to plant the crop this spring for his crop this year, and he needs that cash flow.

Ray told me the whole process of trucks on his farm is contactless. The drivers are in their cabs, the process is all electronic and they do not even have to roll down their windows. It is another example of disruptions in the supply chain that are taking place across the country, which were not sufficiently addressed in the government's fiscal and economic update. The response really has been a shoulder shrug.

Another example is a large greenhouse operator in my riding, Jan. He also said he needs trucks to get his product to market, which is perishable. On top of the labour shortages that he is dealing with, the dramatic cost of freight has increased, the input costs have increased and the packaging costs have increased, and he cannot ship by truck. This economic and fiscal update offered no hope to Jan and the other producers across Canada. Urgent action is needed.

A glaring omission in the fiscal and economic update was any concrete plan for the economy. Where is the plan for economic growth? We can see the plan to spend another \$71 billion that we do not have, but where is the plan to grow the economy to pay for that, to create the prosperity this country needs so we can have more money to buy more goods and alleviate inflationary pressures and to have the resources we need to invest in health care and ICU capacity, which we know from the pandemic has been clearly lacking?

It should worry all of us that the OECD published a report the same week as the fiscal and economic update that said Canada would be the worst performing industrialized economy in the world in a decade from now, 2020 through to 2030. That is shocking. The OECD is saying that Canada will have the slowest growth of all the world's industrialized economies. That is worse than Italy and Greece. With all due respect to my Greek and Italian friends, they are perennial underperformers. That is not where Canada should be.

What is even more worrisome was a report that came out in January that said Canada has had the weakest private sector investment in our economy in years. Where is the business confidence? Where is that growth potential for the future that we need? It is private sector investment that is going to grow our economy, not government spending. The fact that the fiscal and economic update ignored that does not encourage us. It is yet another reason to vote against Bill C-8.

No one works harder than Canadians, none of our OECD competitors have smarter people or people with more ingenuity and we have a great country blessed with resources from coast to coast, so

the problem is not us. The problem is not Canadians. The economic headwinds we face are a problem of the government that is leading us. Bill C-8 does not offer any hope to change that. There is no plan to really unleash Canada's economic potential in this particular piece of legislation. We can do better.

• (1240)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about the supply chain, and I have some questions about that and the Conservative support for the blockades and convoys that we are seeing across the country.

The member will know that I am from Alberta. Today the Alberta Beef Producers, the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association and The Canadian Cattlemen's Association have called for a stop to the blockades in Coumts in southern Alberta. Also, time after time we are seeing racist symbols like Confederate flags and yellow stars being used by the protesters in Ottawa.

How can anyone stand with protesters and say the supply chain is at risk when the protesters are stopping the transport of goods in my province and are showing such disregard for our electoral positions and our democracy in Ottawa?

Mr. Dan Muys: Mr. Speaker, I lived in Alberta for nine years. In fact, my wife is from southern Alberta, so we certainly share that in common. I gave a couple of examples of farmers and farm groups in my riding that have been impacted by this, so I empathize with them.

In terms of some of the acts we have seen from the protests, I personally condemn those. I did that on Facebook over the weekend. My grandfather fought the Nazis as part of the Dutch resistance in the Netherlands, and certainly we abhor and condemn these actions and the acts that took place at the National War Memorial. A member of the military from Hamilton, my hometown, was there, Corporal Nathan Cirillo. He gave his life to the country during the shooting in 2014.

The point we are making is that the government needs to have a dialogue with the truckers, those who are legitimately there protesting peacefully. We should have that dialogue so we can end the protest, end the lockdowns and clear the backlog.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and neighbour for the intervention today. The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook is indeed in the riding just next to mine, and I have never addressed him in the House of Commons before. I welcome him to the House and welcome him as a neighbour. Perhaps we can find a good coffee shop on the border between our two ridings and meet, as I have done many times with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills in the past.

He spoke about progress, and I agree. We share other things, such as our Dutch heritage, our desire for a strong economy and the recognition that Canada has offered our families a great future and certainly a great last 70 years or so, if that is how long his family has been here, like mine has.

My question is very simple. Earlier last week, I made an announcement in his riding for an increase in broadband availability for some of his constituents. This is the fourth such announcement I have made for his riding in the last couple of years. I acknowledge he is new to the House.

I would like to know if he wants to work together on ensuring that more residents in Flamborough—Glanbrook get high-speed Internet delivered to their homes.

• (1245)

Mr. Dan Muys: Mr. Speaker, it is great to address my neighbour, and absolutely we will find a coffee shop. I am not sure there is one along Milborough Town Line, because there are really just fields there, but that is fine. I will make the trek to Milton. It is a great community.

I am always interested in working productively and collaboratively with all members of the House. In fact, one of the first meetings I had as a member of Parliament was with my neighbour and colleague, the hon. Filomena Tassi, who is the Minister of Procurement and is in the riding next to mine.

An hon. member: Uh-oh. Rookie.

Mr. Dan Muys: Sorry, I should rephrase. She is the hon. member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the hon. member for Milton.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Speaker, pardon me. My point of order is simple and in jest. We do not address members by their names in the House. Since my friend and colleague is new, I thought I would offer that.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook did correct himself, so I accept that he realized his mistake when he was speaking.

The hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook can give a quick answer, because I do have one more question I want to get in.

Mr. Dan Muys: Mr. Speaker, I work collaboratively with all other MPs in the Hamilton area. We do so on a regular basis when we work together.

Government Orders

I thank the member for the announcement of rural broadband in Flamborough—Glanbrook. There is a lot more work to do. I made that point yesterday in the House. While 47 is great, there are 8,000 rural homes, my own being one of them, where internet is insufficient. Let us work together and keep that going.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Flamborough—Glanbrook spoke a lot about what is missing from Bill C-8, namely, the labour and supply chain shortages. I would add to that funding for social and affordable housing.

The Bloc Québécois is a bit concerned about what Bill C-8 has too much of. I am talking about the fact that the government wants to meddle in property taxation. Once again, the government is infringing on other jurisdictions. What does my colleague think about the way the government is once again infringing on Quebec and municipal jurisdictions?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Muys: Mr. Speaker, I have lived in Alberta and Quebec, and I understand that Canada is a complex country. We need to respect our provinces and our federal government. I take that to heart.

To her question about housing, I raised in my comments that housing is something we need desperately in my part of the world. We are short 110,000 homes in the Hamilton area simply to catch up, so I certainly encourage all of the investment in housing that can happen and await the government's housing strategy.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in this place, particularly after such a great member. What a speech, and I congratulate him on it.

I believe few would dispute that we live in highly unusual times. Indeed, we are charting a path through a pandemic without a playbook. This is not the fault of the government. Every government in the world is in the same situation. We all know different governments have proposed different ways of moving forward. We must recognize this, and I say “we” because we, in large part, unanimously agreed upon most of the fiscal measures to this point. Canadians sent a minority Parliament to Ottawa, and aside from the Prime Minister's shameless attempt to stage a power grab in calling an expensive and unnecessary election, we are back again in a minority situation.

What I believe we must recognize is that, rightly or wrongly, our fiscal cupboards were literally spent dry responding to the pandemic. I am not here to debate the past; I am simply pointing out the obvious. A significant portion of Canada's fiscal capacity has been spent. It is gone. We must recognize that. Why? It is because in the event we run into another type of future emergency situation, we will have less fiscal room to respond.

Government Orders

Again, I do not rise and say this to point fingers of blame. I raise this because we must recognize that going forward we must be very careful on how we proceed fiscally. Let me give an example of this. If we have learned anything during this pandemic, it is that our health care system was ill-equipped to deal with stresses and demands placed on it, and more so now, when we see fully vaccinated Canadians who find themselves in our hospitals and ICUs. Every premier of every political stripe is clear that the current Canada health transfer is not enough to meet the needs of Canadians now or going forward.

Here is something I would like to share with every member of the House: The Canada health care transfer stands at just over \$45 billion a year. In this current fiscal update bill, spending is forecast to increase to over \$55 billion in the fiscal year 2026-27. In other words, there will be an increase of \$10 billion over that time frame. I am hopeful that my friends in the fourth party heard that clearly, as they also have a bad habit of referring to increases in health care spending as cuts.

Getting back to the increase in health spending, there will be \$10 billion in increased Canada health transfer spending between now and fiscal year 2026-27. However, here is the problem: Today, the interest we pay on servicing our debt is just over \$20 billion. Over that same time, it too will increase. The same budget bill forecasts that these debt-servicing costs will increase to almost \$41 billion by fiscal year end 2026-27.

I can already hear members of the governing party. “Debt-to-GDP ratio”, they will say. “A AAA credit rating”, they will say. However, here is the thing. Between now and fiscal year 2026-27, we know two things: that the Canada health transfer will increase by \$10 billion and servicing our debt will increase by over \$20 billion. There will be \$10 billion on health and \$20 billion on debt servicing. To be clear, our interest costs for servicing our debt are climbing at twice the rate of our increases in the Canada health transfer. Does anyone else in this chamber not see such a serious problem with this, aside from the finance minister? She made it very clear yesterday that she does not.

Let us keep in mind that the doubling of interest we are paying on our debt is based on today's interests rates, and we all know those interest rates will not stay low. If there is one thing I believe all Canadians are united on, it is how much we value our health care system, particularly now more than ever.

• (1250)

Everyone in this room knows health care spending is on the minds of all Canadians. Let us not forget that we have an aging population and there will be fewer working Canadians supporting an increasing number of retired Canadians. The demographics on this are clear. I raise this, aside from the reason I have already stated, because we know this bill proposes once again even more stimulus spending.

Before people start dismissing questions as a typical Conservative question, let us remember it is our very own Parliamentary Budget Officer who scrutinized these numbers. The PBO, as we know, has also come out saying that stimulus spending is not needed. Let us recognize why the Parliamentary Budget Office has said this. Unfortunately with today's job numbers, these are probably a

little out of date, but previously, as of last week, the PBO pointed out that Canada had recovered 106% of the jobs that were lost at the onset of the pandemic. This is a statistic I have heard often crowed by members of the government. Earlier this week, our finance minister, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, stated:

Today, Statistics Canada published new data showing that our GDP increased by 0.6% in November. That means that by the time omicron emerged, our economy had completely recovered from the COVID-19 recession.

To recap, by the government's own acknowledgement, both our employment rate and our GDP are fully recovered. Therefore, why borrow more money for more spending when the objective of the spending has largely been met? Again, this is not me pointing this out. The Parliamentary Budget Office has noted the same things. This is literally spending for the sake of spending. It is a government that claims it is all about science, data and facts. Well, the data and facts are clear here. In fact, we have heard the finance minister confirm them.

Let us change gears for a moment. We know inflation is at a 30-year high. We know that Canadian paycheques are getting smaller because Canada pension plan rates and EI deductions, which are planned to be unfrozen, are going to be getting bigger. No matter how they cut it, these two factors leave less money in Canadian households at the time when carbon taxes are going up, online streaming services are now taxed, wireless cellphone bills did not get magically cut by 25%, taxes on alcohol are increasing federally yet again, and back at the local level, property taxes are up and home insurance rates are going through the roof, especially for those in strata situations in condominiums. No matter how we look at it, Canadians are being hit hard and, it seems, from almost every angle.

Affordability is the single greatest concern now of many Canadian households. There is an elephant in the room that few want to discuss, and that is household debt. Household debt is at a record high. That matters because Canadians are living paycheque to paycheque as it is. The cost of living is basically out of control right now, and no matter how much we debate in this place who is responsible for that, that debate does not help those Canadians struggling to pay the bills.

Let me ask a question for everyone in this chamber. What happens when the interest rate increases? What happens when those rates start coming up again? That, in turn, means that payments on record household debt are also going to increase. What happens when Canadians can no longer make ends meet? What happens when their variable rate mortgage increases by \$500, \$400 or more a month, and they just cannot afford that?

Government Orders

When their fixed mortgage rate expires and they cannot afford the payments at a higher interest rate at renewal, what happens? There is certainly a growing number of citizens in my riding asking these questions, and I am sure all of the members have heard similar concerns and realities in their own ridings.

We cannot ignore that, but Bill C-8 completely does. If anything, it would only make that situation worse, and that is why I cannot and will not support this bill. Canadians need a solid economic plan for affordability in the path of increasing inflation and interest rates. Bill C-8, unfortunately, is not it. I thank all members for listening to my speech today.

• (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative right has spoken in the last couple of days. They are not going to support Bill C-8. They are going to say it is because government needs to cut back and stop expenditures. The member just referenced that.

Bill C-8 provides over one billion dollars for purchasing rapid tests. Rapid tests are absolutely essential to continuing to support small businesses and Canadians.

If Ottawa does not purchase rapid tests for distribution to the provinces and territories, who does the Conservative Party believe should be purchasing them? Should it be the provincial governments, individuals, or businesses?

• (1300)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I will give the member opposite a direct answer. First of all, in British Columbia we do not have access to rapid tests. The province has not decided to use those, and out of respect for provincial jurisdiction, I would like to hear the answer as to why it has not included them. However, we do not have access to those for businesses, schools and whatnot in the capacity seen in other provinces.

The member politicized, I hope inadvertently in his comments, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who is a non-partisan officer of Parliament, here to serve everyone, including those who are not of a party status. It is not just me. If the member wants to call me some Conservative, right-wing, Attila the Hun or whatever, he can go ahead and do that, but for gosh sakes, let us bring some decorum and treat the Parliamentary Budget Officer with the respect that is deserved of that office and this place.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my compliments to the member, who is a colleague of mine on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. He made it clear that money does not grow on trees.

Last spring's federal budget contained a surprise: measures to end lenient treatment for tax evasion. I think that is a source of revenue that Canadian tax authorities need to tap so we can do things like increase health transfers. However, the anti-tax haven measures announced in the spring do not appear in Bill C-8. They seem to have fallen off the radar. What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question and for the work she does on the environment committee with me and other members. I certainly always appreciate her interventions.

Let me start by saying that anyone who evades their taxes, anyone who tries to work outside the system, should be brought in to pay their fair share. On the flip side, I do believe the Government of Canada, and we have seen this in continual Transparency International reports, which specifically cite the government's inaction on things like money laundering.

The province of British Columbia set up the Cohen Commission and has received a final report. One thing that did happen is that they took action dealing with things like casinos, but those activities moved to other provinces. Whether it is tax evasion or money laundering, the government has been lax, and it is at the expense of so many. Money laundering is a scourge and needs to be stopped.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that the member raises is inflation and that ties into the cost of housing. Along with inflation, there are many factors impacting the huge rise in the cost of housing. Part of that is the financialization of housing where people are treating housing as though it is a stock market. REITs are part of the problem, and the government has not taken any action with respect to that.

Would the member and the Conservatives support bringing in measures to address the financialization of housing and particularly putting a moratorium on REITs?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my fellow member from British Columbia and say that she has done more than her fair share to bring up the lack of action on housing, particularly in her riding, and the lack of federal monies, which the government continues to say are coming.

When it comes to financialization, I do have some concerns about how our economy under the government is going. The finance committee has recently been holding hearings on housing. We should be looking to it for what the recommendations are.

However, if an entrepreneur right now has \$100,000 and wonders if they should put that in their business, in a new factory, new equipment, hiring new people or purchasing a home, people will say that productive capital should go to a home. That does not hire people. That does not put more people to work. That does not make our economy more innovative.

Unfortunately, until the government actually starts addressing these problems, we are going to see real estate dominating our economy. It may not be good to have all our eggs in one basket.

Government Orders

• (1305)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say how happy I am to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-8 today.

I will start my comments today talking a bit about how much people in Canada and around the world have been struggling during this pandemic. The past two years have been extremely hard for so many people in Canada and around the world. None of us imagined in March 2020, when we all left this place, that we would still be in a pandemic situation two years later, so I get the frustration we are seeing. I get why people want to get their lives back to normal.

I want to travel. I want to do the things we used to be able to do before COVID. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is not over, and we still need the public health measures that are so important to keep people safe and our health care system intact.

One of the things I will start with, and nobody in this House will be surprised to hear me say this, is that I am very disappointed in where we are at in this situation, because I think we have not done a very good job globally of ensuring vaccines went out to everybody around the world. I think that during this pandemic, we would not be in the situation we are in, dealing with yet another variant, if we had done global vaccine equity more appropriately.

This is concerning to me because I look at some of the problems facing humanity that are global in scope, and I see the response to COVID-19 as a precursor, and it is a worrying indication of our inability to find global solutions to some of these global problems, such as the climate crisis and increasing inequality.

As somebody who is vaccinated, I am delighted I am vaccinated. I am delighted my elderly parents are vaccinated and that my children have been able to be vaccinated. However, I want members in the House to understand that only 2.6% of people in Nigeria and only 2.9% of people in Tanzania have had access to a vaccine.

We are dealing today with Bill C-8 and some things that are being put in place to help people as we continue to go through this pandemic. However, I think it would be a missed opportunity for me to not say in this House that I blame the global response, and the inability of our government to help get vaccines into the arms of people around the world, for this variant.

I am going to talk a bit about some of the things within Bill C-8 that I like. I like that there is a tax credit for teachers in there. I like that there is a tax for housing owned by non-Canadians that is not being lived in.

I like some of the changes to EI, but the New Democratic Party would have made different choices. We do not think this does enough to help Canadians considering where we are right now. The changes to EI will not help all of the folks we need to help. It will not do enough. I know the government has the opportunity to bring forward legislation that would do more, and I would encourage it to do that.

Another thing I like within this bill is the ventilation for SMEs, small and medium enterprises, and schools. In August of 2020, I stood in this House and brought forward a unanimous consent motion asking for \$2 billion to go out to the provinces to help with a

safer restart of schools, and the government did that. It sent \$2 billion to the provinces to make schools safer.

That was in 2020. That is when we needed to invest in ventilation for schools. That is when we needed to see that. We are going into two years now. There is no downside to increasing ventilation in our schools, as there is nothing better we could do to make our teachers and students safer when they are in school.

I will also say that, while I think it should have happened two years ago, I do not think this is enough. When I look at the amount of money there, it is going to provide less than \$5,000 per Alberta school. That might work in other provinces, but in the province of Alberta, our premier is cutting funding for schools right now.

• (1310)

We have 2,400 school-aged children who have COVID-19 right now in Alberta. That is just the number we know about, because like other parts of the country, there is no testing happening unless people are very ill. Some people estimate the number of school-aged children in my province who have COVID-19 at probably closer to 20,000, and we do not know the long-term impacts of COVID on children.

In Alberta, we also need strings attached to programs like this, because we have seen this before. We have seen this a lot of times. Last year, we learned that the Government of Alberta was sitting on millions in unspent federal COVID emergency funding, more than any other province. There needs to be strings attached to make sure that these dollars get to the schools and help the teachers, students and support staff who need them. While I do like the ventilation piece in the bill, I think there are some loopholes there that we need to close.

I will talk about one thing that I really dislike about the bill before us. I do not know how many times members of the New Democrats have stood in the House and talked to the government about the serious attack that is happening on seniors in this country with the guaranteed income supplement, GIS, that has been clawed back from them. We know that the cost of living has hit Canadians. We know that things have gotten more expensive, but the two million seniors who live at or below the poverty line are the most vulnerable, and they have been hit the hardest.

I will tell members about some of these seniors who applied for the CERB benefit, for COVID benefits, because their Prime Minister told them to. I will tell members about some of these seniors who were eligible for it and who are now unable to pay their rent, buy their medications or buy food in this country and in my community. There are seniors like Ben who, because of a learning disability, has spent his entire life struggling to support himself doing manual labour for minimum wage, which is what he was doing when COVID hit. Now the business he worked for is gone, a victim of Alberta's economic crisis in COVID-19, and without the guaranteed income supplement he relied on, Ben's total income from OAS and CPP is less than his monthly rent, and he is facing eviction. At 73, Ben is out in the Edmonton winter in the bitter cold, knocking on doors and trying to find work during a pandemic.

The Liberals will tell us that they get it, that they heard us and that they fixed the problem. They are going to give Ben help in May. They think it is okay for Ben to be on the streets unable to meet his basic needs until May. However, the solution is so easy. The Liberals could fix this tomorrow. They could fix this for seniors across this country tomorrow, yet they are going to make those seniors wait and suffer and potentially die, because they are going to delay until May. It breaks my heart.

I can tell members about other seniors, numerous seniors, across this country and in my riding of Edmonton Strathcona. I want to raise this because it did not have to be this way. All this government had to do was exempt CERB income from the calculation for the GIS. That is all it had to do. It was so easy. The fact that it did not tell us all we need to know about the priorities of the Liberal government.

There are other things that are missing in the bill. There is nothing on a just transition for workers. In Alberta, we really need to start thinking of a plan for how we are going to help our energy workers. There is no funding for public transportation operations. There is nothing for energy efficiency retrofits for low-income households. There is nothing for dental, mental or pharmacare coverage. There are no measures to eliminate tax havens, to eliminate tax evasion or to even have better law enforcement. There is no wealth tax.

While there are things in Bill C-8 that I support, things that would move us in the right direction, the government missed an opportunity. I really hope that the Liberals will reflect on that and think about how they can fix some of the gaps that Bill C-8 left behind.

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member will help me out and provide some advice in terms of what she would do.

A constituent of mine who was collecting GIS gave me a call indicating that her GIS was going to be cut back. When she explained the situation she said, "When I was collecting GIS, I was actually making some money on the side. I was collecting quite a bit in terms of babysitting." As a result of collecting the babysitting money, it caused some issues in terms of her having not claimed it.

Government Orders

In situations such as this, are there any circumstances at all from the NDP's perspective where someone who maybe should not have been collecting the CERB should be obligated, in any fashion, to pay it back?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed that the member is blaming at-risk seniors for the situation his government has put them in.

Let me put a question back to him. Perhaps the member could tell me if he thinks there are any examples where a corporation that used money for the wrong things should be asked to pay it back. The government appears to think corporations never have to pay it back, even they are using it to pay scab labour in my riding so they can lock out their workers.

Instead of attacking vulnerable seniors, let us look at making it more equitable for them, please.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona on her speech, which touched on many points. One item I was hoping she would talk about is the housing crisis. Right now, we basically have a housing economy. The economy is run by the real estate industry, which is very dangerous for seniors, health care transfers and education. Everything has been affected by this crisis.

Does she agree that the government is just sitting on the sidelines and watching what is happening in what I call the biggest economic massacre in Canada?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, my neighbour from Edmonton Manning and I share a beautiful city. I met with the mayor of Edmonton recently to talk about the housing crisis in Edmonton and the failure of the federal government to do what needs to be done, things like an indigenous housing strategy developed with the input of indigenous people.

Obviously, the housing crisis is desperate across the country, but one of the problems I see is the fact that we do not have a strong housing strategy for indigenous people in our country. That is something that has been promised and the government has absolutely sat on the sidelines and has not done anything to make that happen. We are well past the deadline.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona the same question I asked the member for Kitchener Centre earlier.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with the NDP and the Green Party that underused housing should be taxed. What rubs us the wrong way, though, is the federal government grabbing a piece of the property tax pie, the one remaining area of jurisdiction it has not yet encroached on.

Government Orders

I think it would be more appropriate for the federal government to work with municipalities, because they should be the ones collecting this tax and using it for their infrastructure. They could even target more people than Bill C-8, which currently sets out a lot of exceptions. What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

[*Translation*]

I am sorry, but I am going to answer in English.

[*English*]

I am learning. My French is a work-in-progress.

There needs to be intervention from all levels of government. It is important we have that. In the province of Alberta, it is particularly important that we are able to work with municipalities because our provincial government seems very unwilling to support some of these initiatives and has been a barrier to our being able to achieve the things we want to achieve at the federal, municipal and provincial levels. Absolutely, there is an opportunity for the federal government to work with municipal governments. If one has a government that is more open to that than maybe even provincial governments, but that is not the case in Alberta.

• (1320)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand in the House and speak on behalf of the wonderful citizens of Calgary Midnapore.

What a week this has been. First, I would like to thank the member for Durham for his leadership over the last 18 months. I am truly grateful for the leadership he provided our party and for all of the incredible opportunities he gave me. I wish him, his wife Rebecca and his beautiful children Molly and Jack, Jack who is of course the same age as my son Edward, nothing but the very best as they go forward into the future.

I would also like to welcome our incredible new leader, the fantastic individual from the riding of Portage—Lisgar. I have such incredible respect for her as a parliamentarian who has really trenched a path forward here in the House of Commons in so many roles, as a minister in the Harper administration, of course as our House leader, as our deputy leader and now as our leader. I cannot wait for her leadership to unify us as Conservatives over the coming days.

Finally, before I get to the meat of my speech, I also want to make a special recognition to a special individual in my riding. Tyler Turner, raised in the community of Sundance, who won gold for Canada, the first gold in the World Para Snow Sports Championships. I am so very proud of this individual who was born and raised in my riding of Calgary Midnapore. I also thank my constituent and supporter Dale Bradley. It is really a special moment for Calgary Midnapore.

I am now going to get into the reason I am here today, which is to respond to the fall economic statement. The story that comes to mind is a very embarrassing story for me. I was in kindergarten at

Sam Livingston School in my riding, about three blocks away from where my parents, who are now my constituents, still live. I was painting, I had on my paint smock, and I was so proud of the painting I had created. When it came time for me to remove my paint smock, unfortunately, I was wearing a dress that day that had an elastic around the shoulders. Upon removing my paint smock, my very good friend Kimberlee Crocker, who lived two blocks away from me, pointed to me and said, “Stephanie, you're in your underwear.”

I had never been more embarrassed in the first five years of my life than when, in that moment, I realized I had taken off my paint smock as well as my dress. I was standing there in my underwear. If I had something to say at that moment, and this phrase had not arrived yet in the world, I would have said, “There is nothing to see here.”

We could say that same thing about the fall economic statement. There is nothing to see here. We are coming up on 24 months of the pandemic. Unfortunately, Canadians had to retreat to their homes. In many cases, they were provided funding by the government, funding we supported, in fact funding we came back to the House time and time again to support as a result of the errors of the government. Nonetheless, we were good team players. We wanted to go along with what Canadians needed at that time, so we supported the measures that were taken.

Essentially what happened was that individuals had excess funds as a result of not being able to go out. Factory workers were not in the factories producing at the time because they were following government orders. As a result, we had too few goods and too many dollars resting among citizens. The result of that was too many dollars chasing too few goods. That got us into the situation we are in with this problem of inflation.

However, there were other problems, in addition to this fundamental problem. The government did not make it any easier for us to overcome this problem. First, there was the incredible overspending that we saw from the government, the overspending that continues to this very day. Certainly, as I stated, we were good team players. We went along with what Canadians required at the time. However, the government keeps bringing up, again and again, our refusal to go along with them on Bill C-2, another \$7 billion, and quite frankly, that is because we were very concerned about the amount the government had spent at that time, as well as its continued spending.

• (1325)

In addition, the government did not start to take immediate economic action to account for the lack of supply. I have said often that if I had been the Prime Minister, I would have begun an immediate national inventory of agriculture, minerals, energy—everything from coast to coast to coast to start to reconsider what we have and what we need.

Government Orders

I actually thought that the pandemic would bring us into incredible new trading patterns around the world, with less reliance on China, but nothing of that sort was done at the time. In fact, we did not even start to begin domestic production of many things, including vaccines, in a timely manner. I am sure members will remember that we shipped our personal protective equipment overseas to China. In fact, when I was in a meeting just last week, the member for Abbotsford indicated that the mask he was wearing, which had been distributed by the House of Commons, was made in China. My point is that the government did not take action to immediately address that. Again, nothing to see here.

What do we need to do now? Well, I will tell us all, and I would like to thank Mr. David Dodge and the fall economic outlook from Bennett Jones for this information.

First of all, we need to stop spending. We need to stop spending at our current rate and seriously reconsider where our dollars go and whether every dollar that is spent is necessary to spend.

In addition, only incredible productivity in our nation will save us from this rising inflation. It is one of the only things that will save us. We need to continue to incentivize production within our nation and we need to start thinking about how we are going to do that. In fact, if the government spends money at this time, it absolutely must be for some type of productivity increase in the future, not the willy-nilly spending that we have seen up to this point, and again I say that up to this point, there is nothing to see here.

I will take a moment to talk about the labour impacts. I know this aspect was brought up in question period today by my colleague from Regina—Lewvan.

There have been 200,000 jobs lost, which is nothing to sneeze at. Throughout the recent months, the government has done nothing but try to take credit for the one million jobs it says it has created. The government did not create these jobs. This has just been a natural recovery from the pandemic; it has nothing to do with the government's positive actions, not at all.

In addition to that, the government talked about 106% employment. This is also a fallacy. This number is also inflated. The workforce has been shrinking as individuals, be it through retirement or moving somewhere else, have removed themselves from the workforce. With fewer workers but the same population, there will be higher employment, so the 106% figure is also a fallacy. There is nothing to see here.

What is most shocking is that the real impacts of the Liberals' inaction are completely lost on them. We saw in the fall session that they cannot state how much a package of bacon costs. Even the non-vegetarians cannot state what they pay for a whole chicken. A year ago I paid \$10 for a whole chicken; I just paid \$18 at Safeway for a whole chicken.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: They are heckling me. That was coming from a Prime Minister who had two nannies and a Deputy Prime Minister who only knows that the GDP is increasing at 4.6%.

I have used the phrase “nothing to see here” in a double sense. The government is trying to hide what it has not done; as well, I am

indicating that no action has been taken. My point is that both are bad and neither is good, but it does not change the fact that there is nothing to see here.

● (1330)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was amused, as I think everybody in the House was, to hear the funny anecdote about kindergarten. I really do struggle to see what relevance the story had to the conversation around Bill C-8, which certainly does have quite a lot in it.

I am sure you have read the bill. You say there is just nothing to see here, so I will read a quote, because I have heard the member speak about the importance of the arts: “Nice to see \$60 million identified to support workers and the arts. The live performance industry has been struggling hard during COVID and we haven't seen nearly the same support that tourism and restaurants have, so they were really, really grateful for that support.”

Is the member opposite not happy to see some support for the arts and many, many other things, given that she must have read the bill before standing up today?

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind the member, though he did correct himself in the end, to direct questions through the Chair and not to address someone directly as “you”.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising at all that a Liberal member of the House would take a story that is so personal to me, where I felt so much pain and embarrassment in my life, and try to make fun of it. He did not even try to relate to it and say he had something similar in his life. He is even laughing at me now.

This is not surprising. I certainly would not expect these members to understand economics, much less be able to have the simple human relation of an embarrassing moment, which I am sure everyone in the House has faced.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things Canadians are contending with right now is massive increases in price in the housing market. In debate previously on Bill C-8, I heard a Conservative colleague of the member say that there really was not a need to see governments build more social housing units and that what was needed was to tackle the problem of money laundering. Certainly, we do need to tackle the problem of money laundering, but I think most Canadians expect that government will have to do substantially more and that the problems in the housing market are not simply a function of money laundering.

I am wondering if we could hear from the member some concrete proposals for what she believes government ought to be doing to tackle the issues in the housing market, which I would note predate the pandemic and the current government. Real estate prices have been having astronomical increases for some time now. What can government do in order to get a handle on the situation?

Government Orders

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I do have some concrete proposals, believe it or not.

First of all, the government can stop directing its benefits to those who money launder and those who buy arms with these funds. That would be a great start. If it could get some accountability within the benefits that it distributes, that would be a fantastic start.

Second, I think the best way to have a good housing economy is to have a good economy. When people have good jobs and are not overwhelmed by the price of groceries and gas, they can actually start to save money for homes. I think that is a fantastic thing. I will also add that we had a fantastic housing initiative put together by my colleague in our platform this last election. I really think the Liberal government should go back to our platform and review that housing strategy in an effort to move forward, because what they are doing is not working.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by congratulating my colleague from Calgary Midnapore on her excellent speech. I am pleased to hear that she enjoys painting, which I do as well. As we know, Quebec has produced some great painters, including Riopelle.

All kidding aside, we in the Bloc Québécois agree with my colleague on one thing, and that is the lack of concrete proposals for solving the problems with the scarcity and shortage of labour in Quebec.

In Quebec, there are currently one million job vacancies, which is double the number from before COVID-19. Of all the places in Canada, Quebec is the one where it is hardest for business owners to fill positions right now. More than 60% of businesses are struggling to find workers.

The Bloc Québécois has been making concrete proposals, such as boosting productivity through tax credits and stimulating research and development.

I would like my colleague from Calgary Midnapore to tell us what she thinks of the government's failure to come up with proposals to deal with the scarcity and shortage of labour.

• (1335)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague.

First, I believe that we can eliminate the EMC. Second, we have to look to automation. Finally, we must find incentives for Canadians to work.

I would like to mention that I now wear clothing when I paint.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to make a speech in this session of Parliament, and I want to thank the constituents of Provencher for once again giving me the privilege to be their voice in Parliament.

I also want to take this time to thank the member for Durham for his service to our country and the Conservative Party, and to welcome the member for Portage—Lisgar as the new interim leader of the opposition and leader of the Conservative Party.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to this bill. On this side of the House, we recognize that inflation is a crisis. We understand how hard it is for folks to put food on the table, and we recognize what the government does not: that it is the government's policies that are driving this inflation. It is the government's lack of fiscal responsibility that has led to more dollars chasing fewer goods. It is the Liberal vaccine mandate that has led to the fractures of our supply chains, our transportation industry and the divisions being created in this country, and it is the Liberals' arrogance that has led to tens of thousands of hard-working, freedom-loving Canadians to occupy the space in front of this House begging the government to hear their voices.

With that in mind, I would like to use my time today to address part 5 of this bill, which is the \$300 million to support proof of vaccination initiatives. Both Saskatchewan and Alberta have indicated they will be dropping restrictions, mandates and vaccine passports. Ontario is considering the same, and many premiers have been talking about transitioning to the endemic stage. This is no time to be tossing another \$300 million at proof of vaccination initiatives.

I have been clear from the beginning that I do not support vaccine mandates. I believe they are not charter compliant. I believe they are discriminatory and cause division. What we need right now in this country is not more name-calling or othering. What we need is unity. No one should lose their job, their business or the opportunities they would otherwise be entitled to for what ought to be a personal, private, medical choice, so today I want to take the rest of my time to read a letter from one of my constituents. His name is Terry. Terry is on the verge of losing of his business because of the Liberal government's policies, and I want the Liberal government to hear what he has to say.

This is a letter I received in the last few weeks unsolicited, and I have his permission to share it with the House, and indeed all Canadians, today. This is what Terry stated:

“ I've been running a small trucking business for the past nine years. I used to be just self-employed and running one truck. With the onset of COVID in 2020, I thought that this would disrupt my operations. Thankfully, that wasn't the case. Transportation was deemed an essential service that didn't warrant disruption. As a result, a year ago I was finally able to procure more customers and expand my operations to include additional owner-operators and company truck drivers.

Government Orders

“In the last couple of months I could see things shifting and potentially disrupting business operations and now it's upon me: a vaccination mandate at the Canada-U.S. border that prevents non-vaccinated individuals from crossing for business-related purposes. I am not vaccinated. I have no interest in being vaccinated. Why? Simply because none of what the government agency, federal or provincial, says is consistent or logical. The goalposts are constantly changing. What was compliant or acceptable yesterday is no longer the same today. This contradicts that rule and so on and so forth.

“These are my issues. We were once told that the vaccine will prevent you from getting COVID. That has proven to be false. Nobody knew that, but that didn't prevent the powers that be to spout “get vaccinated”. There is absolutely no shortage of stories all over the world in every sector, politicians, sporting athletes, media, news personalities and just plain old folks everywhere that are vaccinated, double vaccinated and boosted. So many injections to prevent, prevent, prevent and it has shown to prevent nothing that we were promised it would prevent. But, hey, guess what, get vaccinated anyway, it's your best protection. Protection to what?”

“I'm no longer able to attend any sporting events. I've been a hockey player for 36 years on many different levels and that has been taken away from me and I think of all others it's been taken away from. Our local rink in Grunthal, Manitoba didn't even open for activities this winter. Think about what that does to all sorts of kids and adults who use a facility like that for exercise and community interaction. I'm no longer allowed indoors to eat, but I can walk in and order for takeout. I am in the building. Shouldn't that constitute a threat to those who are in the dining area? Mask or no mask, if I had COVID, I'm sure people wouldn't want me nearby, but, for the sake of commerce, allow me in. My money is wanted, but not my presence.

“Here is the big one. It's now been proven that both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated can catch COVID and that both vaccinated and unvaccinated can spread COVID. We are all able to spread it, but vaccinated people are able to gather wherever, family gatherings, restaurants, movie theatres, sporting venues, etc. There was a time in the not so distant past that these would have been labelled super spreader events and frowned upon viciously, but now it's okay to let the people who can spread COVID to gather at will.

• (1340)

“They can spread it so easily but are without restriction, and somehow I'm labelled and tagged as the bad guy because I'm not vaccinated. I'm stuck in my house or inside my truck not interacting with the general public like the vaccinated are, but somehow this is my fault that COVID is spreading.

“All of that to say that I'm not sure what's going to happen to my business. I need vaccinated drivers now. It's getting tough to find them. People don't respond to being told what to do, and that's what this mandate is doing. There's resistance because there's a strong sense that governments are lying at every turn, while trying to force something on people that they constitutionally don't have the right to do. I made a choice to not get it based on the illogical and inconsistent messaging.

“I have absolutely no doubt that COVID has taken lives and that COVID has made the vulnerable very sick. I know people who have gotten sick and have passed away, and I am by no means denying that COVID has done these things. But I am saying that people have gotten it, dealt with and moved on from it, whether naturally or with treatment, and those people have an immunity that studies have shown to be 27 times better than anything that can be manufactured in the lab in the form of a vaccine. But that natural immunity is denied and not recognized. Why? Has anyone thought about where we'd be—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

We are listening to falsehoods, medical misinformation and medical lies. We need to do better in the House than to allow the House of Commons to be used for anti-vax falsehoods and disinformation. Is he going to start reading from QAnon next?

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for the intervention, but it is bordering on debate.

I will ask the member for Provencher to continue and listen to some of the comments then.

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, this is a letter sent by one of my constituents who is a young businessman trying to eke out a living and provide a living for his family and for the people he employs. This is his letter. This is not some abstract person who does not have an identity. This is a real constituent with real issues, and I am so disappointed that the member for Timmins—James Bay has been so disrespectful.

I am going to read a little further. The letter states:

“Surely you can see the incompetence of that kind of thinking. It's absolutely illogical in every sense of the term, and it's affecting hard-working, honest, productive individuals all over this country. People like me. People who are worried sick over where this is all going. People who are hoping the illogical spotlight of condemnation doesn't find them in their quiet corner of the world, where they just want to continue working and providing for their families.

“Well, that spotlight found me and every other person in the transportation industry that isn't vaccinated in an industry that is strained for workers already and could very well disrupt the strained supply chain that is struggling already. While I know that saying this isn't good for anyone on any level, maybe a severely disrupted supply chain is exactly what needs to happen to wake up the government and start thinking about the ramifications of their actions.

“I feel like people like me aren't being represented. There are no strong and audible voices being allowed to speak on my behalf. I'm dealing with the very real possibility of not being able to continue with my small business, and it feels like a blanket of defeat is starting to settle on me and I am fighting to keep from lying still and letting that happen.

Government Orders

“No wonder people are having depression, suicidal thoughts, a loss of purpose and feeling discriminated against. Every day is hard and all this sure doesn't help. If anyone cared about that, they'd listen and take action. I don't see that cavalry coming but it needs to. I wish I had a platform to voice all of this to politicians implementing all these mandates and rules and who could listen and understand where regular people like me are coming from, what our concerns are and take action to represent us, but I don't have that platform. Again, a blanket of defeat.

“Stop mandating and shutting everything down at every turn. Let people make their own choices. Aim to protect the truly vulnerable. Loosen the shackles on society and start opening up. Let people get back to some sense of normalcy and leave people alone who are driven to get to work and who have ambitions and provide labour and our services to others. People with pride and work ethic. People like me.”

That is a letter from one of my constituents who is just completely exasperated and feeling frustrated, feeling alone and feeling overwhelmed. We know that mental health has paid a huge toll for many folks during the last two years. His request to all politicians is that we would consider the plights of individuals like him who are being mandated to do something that they do not feel is good.

I am speaking directly to part 5 of Bill C-8, which would spend \$300 million on providing proof-of-vaccination initiatives. We are looking at ways we can start to trim back our spending. Bill C-8 would put another \$70-odd billion of money into the economy, which would further exacerbate the situation of inflation. It would continue to drive up prices.

We have heard, from many speakers throughout this past week, of the inflation that they are seeing at the grocery stores and at the gas pumps. At every corner, inflation is hitting them hard. This is \$300 million we do not need.

• (1345)

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Provencher for his speech, but I do not agree with much of what he said.

Members of my community have been stuck across the border because of the illegal blockades north of Coutts. The member spoke a lot about trucking and his concerns for the trucking industry, but what about the truckers who are trying to deliver goods and services? After working hard for days and weeks, they are trying to get home to their families.

Does the member support illegal blockades that prevent goods and services from entering our communities and prevent members of the trucking community from getting home to their loved ones?

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Calgary Skyview for his appreciation and concern for members in the trucking community.

We need to take a look at the whole picture here and see how our trucking industry is being so negatively affected by these mandates. Our statistics show that well over one-third of Canadians support these truckers, who are saying they need an end to these discrimina-

tory mandates. It was not that long ago that the Prime Minister was calling our truckers the heroes of the pandemic.

Everybody else had the luxury of working from home and did not have to drive to the office. They had the luxury of locking themselves up and staying in their own little social bubbles. However, our truckers were the ones who went out there. They went wherever they were told to go to pick up goods to bring them back and make sure that our grocery store shelves—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note that medical workers in Toronto are being told not to wear their medical clothes outside this weekend because of the threats they are facing. I hear the Conservatives calling this a “vaccine vendetta”. We have descended so far down that our medical teams, which are keeping people safe, have to listen to what the member is saying, the misinformation and the vaccine lies that have been spouted. He keeps quoting this mystical trucker who cannot go into a restaurant because of provincial legislation and who cannot cross the border because the Americans will not let him, yet the Conservatives stood by as people came here and desecrated the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They stood as upside down Canadian flags were waved with swastikas and they called them freedom fighters. This is the face of vaccine disinformation, and this is the face of the Conservative Party. Shame on them.

• (1350)

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the hon. member Edmonton Manning.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Speaker, the member must smarten up today. He is being unreasonable and that is not acceptable

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

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, it is really distressing to see the Conservatives waving their fists at us—

The Deputy Speaker: I think we are getting into debate. I would prefer it if the member for Provencher could answer the question before him.

The hon. member for Provencher.

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I do not really know what the question was from the member for Timmins—James Bay. I think he was trying to stand on his political soapbox again and make some kind of statement. However, I will say that as Conservatives, we have deep respect and admiration for all of our health—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I can stand here and wait. I would like a reasonable debate on the topic at hand, which is Bill C-8.

We have time for a quick comment from the member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was afraid I would not get my turn. I sense a bit of a lack of discipline on my right. I think having a leader would be good for them. Right now, it looks as though the Conservative Party has no clear position on the vaccine.

I sensed some unease in the House during my hon. colleague's speech. This unease did not come from the other parties, but rather from some members of the Conservative Party who were wondering what the hon. member was saying, when it is imperative to encourage people to get vaccinated.

I am not usually in the House on Fridays, but last night my wife called to tell me my 16-year-old daughter had contracted COVID-19. I found out last night. For that reason, I am staying here this weekend. I want to wish a speedy recovery to my daughter Jeanne, who is watching us right now because she is isolating at home.

My wife, Mylène, is taking care of Jeanne and Simone. They are required to isolate. My 18-year-old son, Émile, is at CEGEP out of town. He will not be able to see his sisters and mother this weekend because there are still people who are encouraging others not to get vaccinated. What is more, those people are in the House of Commons chamber. I think that is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I think what we have here with Bill C-8 is a bill that is going to, again, inject unnecessary money into the economy. It is going to further exacerbate the situation that we have with inflation, and make it very difficult for everyday Canadians to keep up with the cost of living.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to enter into debate in this place. There are many topics, including very important issues surrounding Bill C-8 and its implications on our economy and the pocketbooks of Canadians. It is the failed fiscal policy, I would suggest, of a Liberal government that is so out of touch with Canadians that it cannot even acknowledge its failures. When the jobs report came out today, the Liberals had to amend their tired old talking points. During question period today, they amended their talking points. We are down 7% on the jobs that they claim have been recovered over the course of the pandemic, when Canadians are truly hurting.

I would like to first spend a moment to talk about the circumstances that we are facing here in Ottawa with the protests, and some other protests, convoys and whatnot across the country. Unity should be the first priority of any leader of any country, but specifically for the Prime Minister of Canada, a country that is vast and diverse, with people from all around the world and indigenous peoples who have been here far longer than our European founders.

The objective of any leader should be to unite their country. We have a Prime Minister who has been more focused on his narrow, personal political gain than on anything else. I would suggest that we see a country that is more divided than ever before. With west versus east, there is a level of western alienation. I can tell story after story of folks who are giving up on the idea of Canada. These are not separatists. These are folks who feel left behind by a Liberal

Prime Minister who has divided Canadians for his own political gain.

There is urban versus rural. We see a greater level of that alienation. We do not hear that talked about as much, as about 90% of Canadians live in what we would consider major urban areas, yet the level of alienation that exists within rural Canada is very real. Policies such as the carbon tax may be great for somebody who can take public transit, yet the attitude of the government opposite is to simply suggest to my constituents, who live in a large rural area, as well as to indigenous folks who live in remote areas across the country and to other Canadians who are far away from urban centres, that they do not matter as much as their urban counterparts. It is absolutely shameful.

We see the demonization of rich versus poor. We see the Prime Minister take advantage of any opportunity he has to pit one group of Canadians against another and score cheap political points. We saw that at no time more than in the last election.

Only months before, the Liberal Prime Minister promised first that he would not mandate vaccines. The members opposite forget that. It seems they have very selective memories. He promised he would not mandate vaccines, and said it time and again in this place and in interviews. Over the course of a couple of months, that position changed. In fact, the Prime Minister actually thanked the Leader of the Opposition for encouraging Canadians to get vaccinated, and then went on to say he would never mandate vaccines.

Then, what did the Prime Minister do? He used divisive rhetoric, took Canadians down a path that he promised he would not, and he is now somehow surprised and blaming those Canadians for being frustrated with the fact that he changed his position, that he misled Canadians and that he put his political interests before those of our country. That is absolutely shameful, and I am hearing about it from constituents each and every day.

• (1355)

When it comes to the protesters outside, the Liberals opposite and other left-leaning partners in the Prime Minister's coalition are quick to dismiss their concerns, yet according to a poll there has been a massive shift in the last number of weeks of Canadians who want to see a path charted forward. They want a path out of COVID and the rinse, recycle, repeat of the lockdowns, job losses and economic devastation associated with the message that we had to flatten the curve. After two years of the pandemic, it is time for leadership to figure out a path forward for Canadians.

It is unbelievable for the Prime Minister to suggest what some polls say is a third of Canadians are the fringe minority with despicable views. There are those who would suggest that the many who are gathered out in the streets of Ottawa and across the country are somehow less Canadian than anyone else. The Conservatives have been quick to condemn the despicable actions of a few, but acknowledge that many Canadians simply want their voices to be heard.

Government Orders

We have seen folks on highways and overpasses waiting for hours on end in -30°C to simply cheer them on. I have a family member who drove across my constituency on Tuesday and called me to say she had never seen more Canadian flags flying than on that trip across my constituency. Canadians want to be listened to, and it is a failure of the government that it would rather divide, dismiss and use inflammatory rhetoric to somehow drive a political wedge instead of uniting the country and showing an ounce of humility and contrition, which could bring resolution to the fact that those folks outside and across the country simply do not feel heard. They want to be heard, and it is the responsibility of any democratically elected government to do that, to hear the concerns of its citizens.

I think the problem here is that the Prime Minister does not like the fact that he is actually accountable for his decisions. He does not like the fact that he is accountable to Canadians and would rather try to score cheap political points to try to divide and conquer, which is unacceptable.

Turning to the subject and content of Bill C-8, we see once again that the Liberals are, in some cases, simply recycling the same promises they made over the course of a number of years, so I want to talk about the housing situation in this country specifically.

There has been a lot of rhetoric and talking points thrown out by the members opposite with supposed solutions to the housing crisis. This bill includes some of that. Let us look at their record. They are in their seventh year in power. They created a mess and now they want to double down on some of those mistakes to somehow solve that problem.

I will sum it up quite simply. The Liberals brag about how much they spend and are quick to accuse the Conservatives of suggesting that we somehow like to make cuts. Here is the reality. On virtually every metric, the government and the Prime Minister, because of the unbelievable mismanagement they have presided over for the last close to seven years, are spending more but getting less. That is not good public policy.

When I first ran for nomination in 2019, and over the course of the last two elections, I talked about the need for good governance. We can virtually see that is the opposite of what the Liberal members do on a public policy basis and on an accountability basis. We can see how their failed policies are hurting the livelihoods of Canadians.

I know my time is coming to an end. I have much more to say and look forward to doing so in questions and comments, but simply let me say this. Once again, it is an honour to represent the good people of Battle River—Crowfoot to fight for them in this place to make sure their voices are heard within the halls of Canada's democratic institutions. I am excited to continue to do that in this sitting of Parliament.

● (1400)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while listening to the speech by the member opposite, I reflected on his comment about ordinary Canadians. The ordinary Canadians I know do not go to protests where there are swastikas

and Confederate flags. They do not go to events where people are calling for the hanging of elected officials.

I will leave aside all of that rhetoric and all of that anger for a moment, and leave aside the fact that those supporters called me a terrorist this morning, to ask the member opposite, who seems to be upset with vaccine mandates, how he reconciles the fact that in provinces across this country, children are required to have a vaccine to attend school, but he opposes vaccines that keep Canadians safe and keep them out of hospitals.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, at least from my perspective, I am not sure the member is properly attired in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: No, I see the tie. I thank the member for his intervention.

For an answer to the question, the member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I would simply point out that Alberta does not require mandates for children to go to school. It may be the case in the member's province, and that is fair, but the fact that he is suggesting an Ottawa-knows-best mentality is exactly the basis of many of the problems that exist within this country: governments in Ottawa telling Canadians how they should or should not think.

Now, I am deeply sorry that the member experienced what he experienced, but let me be perfectly clear: The vast majority of those protesting, including some constituents, are vaccinated. However, the Liberals do not like to talk about that. Many of the folks who are protesting are in fact vaccinated. In fact, the majority of those against mandates are vaccinated.

The Liberals refuse to condemn their Prime Minister's racist actions, so I think they should be very careful about throwing accusations at members of the opposition when all we have suggested is that there are many Canadians, not the few on the fringe with extremist views, but rather—

● (1405)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the member for Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what is going on, but the Conservative Party seems to be all over the place these past few days.

This morning the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles called for the streets to be cleared so that residents could get their city back. It is one thing to express an opinion and to protest, but it is a whole other thing to blockade a public roadway, which is illegal.

I have a simple question and I would like it to be recorded in the Hansard. What does my colleague think about this? Is he condoning an illegal act?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member, I have been very clear that blockades, including the blockades that members opposite have supported, are not the right path. I have been clear about that. I am curious as to why she has not been.

Let me make this very clear. The reason the protest is happening outside is that we have a Liberal Prime Minister who refuses to respect the fact that many Canadians are frustrated, disappointed and losing their livelihoods because of a Prime Minister who has put his own narrow political interests ahead of the good of our country. That is an inconvenient truth that the left-leaning coalition in this country needs to figure out, because a third of Canadians, including many of their voters, agree. In fact some of the folks outside told me they voted for left-leaning parties in the past, but they are not going to again because they have been failed by the left-leaning—

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak as a mother right now. There have been some disturbing comments in the House today blaming senior babysitters who have had to come to the rescue of frontline workers to get them to work. There were some comments earlier about people who are restricted in their freedom, and I just want to remind people in the House that in my riding, indigenous girls who go to school are not allowed a bus pass. They get daily chits to get on the bus. Giving them a bus pass to use public transit is dangerous for them because of the sex trafficking that is going on in this country. Also, when we talk about restrictions on people, persons with disabilities who are in institutions and live in institutions are told how many times a week they can have a bowel movement. That is what is happening in our country right now.

To come back to Bill C-8 and the focus on getting help to Canadians, I want to ask the member about strengthening measures to get housing out of the investment portfolios in this country and outside of it and into the hands of Canadians. Could the member share with us something that he would like to add to Bill C-8 to ensure that housing becomes about homes and stops being about investments?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, the member touches on some very important points regarding human trafficking and the need to have an all-party perspective to ensure we address those important issues. She touched on a number of other important issues, such as seniors and housing, and we do need to have those conversations.

I suspect we would disagree on some of the solutions to things like housing, but let us have an honest conversation. The Liberals were quick to dismiss the Conservative plan in the last election regarding housing, yet it was a Canadian economist who suggested our plan would have helped alleviate some of those pressures.

I appreciate the opportunity to continue this dialogue on these important issues.

• (1410)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to rise in the House of Commons to speak on behalf of my constituents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Like some of my other colleagues, I want to again take this opportunity to thank the member for Durham for everything he has done, not only for the Conservative Party of Canada during his time as leader in the House, but also for all Canadians during his time in uniform. I consider him a long-time friend. I have likely known him longer than anybody in the House, going back 30 years to our time in Royal Military College. There are very few Canadians who care more about Canada than the hon. member for Durham.

I regularly conduct surveys and solicit open feedback from my constituents. I believe one of the best tools we can use as members of Parliament is to really listen to what the concerns of our constituents are. That feedback obviously differs across this great nation. One of the reasons I became involved in federal politics was because of the ever-increasing rural-urban divide.

I am not trying to be an alarmist. I am just saying I am tired of seeing policies come out of Ottawa with an Ottawa-knows-best approach. Those maybe work great for the people who live in major urban centres, but they do not work for my constituents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. They do not work for Canadians right across this great country.

Because of my military career, I spent time in the Maritimes, here in Ontario and travelled right across this great country. There is a divide, and that is one of the key things we need to recognize as parliamentarians and for the Liberal government to recognize. Liberals have to do a better job of listening to the concerns of Canadians, not just of those in the ridings that elected them.

There are three key things I received feedback on, among others, in the last number of months. Labour shortage is by far the biggest concern I have heard about in my riding across all sectors of our economy. Businesses just cannot find workers. There are multiple ways we can address that. When I look to Bill C-8, I do not see much in it that is going to address our labour shortage problems.

The second item is affordable housing. There is something in the bill about it, but I do not think it is going to accomplish what we need to do to address the problem. I will get into a bit of those details later. The other big concern I have heard a lot about is the national debt.

Government Orders

Let me put it in perspective. Even with our very low interest rates, with a national debt of over \$1.2 trillion, it is my understanding, and I might be off by a billion or two but hopefully not, we spent \$24 billion in interest on our national debt this past year. That is \$24 billion. I just spent 25-plus years in the military. Our military budget is less than that. It is ridiculous that we are spending that much money.

With the amount of interest we are paying, which will continue to increase as this national debt ever-increases, we are now approaching an amount comparable to the public health care transfers to the provinces and territories. To me, that is unacceptable.

I grew up on a modest family farm. I have four younger brothers. We did not have a lot, but we really did not want for anything. Dad had good jobs at different times. He ran his own business for years. We grew up with a dad who did lots of work as a contractor and was paid using the barter system. He would take half a cow. I raised 700 ducks, a couple hundred chickens, a couple of hundred turkeys and 50 geese every year. Dad's idea of how to make ends meet was to get mom a Jersey cow for her birthday. Mom would get to milk that cow twice a day for the next decade. We never wanted for anything.

That is where I come from. It is where I get my true fiscal Conservative roots. I grew up in a way that, if we did not have the money in the bank, we were not getting it.

● (1415)

What is even more disturbing and concerning to me is that this excess Liberal spending is going to put us in a position where, down the road, all these great social programs and these great things that make Canada the great nation that it is will be put at risk. I am concerned that my eight-year-old daughter, by the time she is having kids or is a taxpayer, will be paying exorbitant amounts on income tax, free public education and universal health care. All of these will be potentially compromised if we keep going down this path of spending money we do not have.

As the PBO report stated, with respect to the economic fall update, and there is nothing new in Bill C-8, this stimulus spending is not required and it is not necessary.

I hate always being the negative person. I am going to address a couple of things I think are possible. I am saying this with the caveat that, when the bill gets to committee, amendments can be made and maybe there are aspects that should stay and aspects that should be removed.

The first piece I would like to address is the introduction of the new refundable tax credit for eligible businesses for qualifying ventilation expenses needed to improve air quality. I think this is a potentially good credit, especially in light of COVID. However, what I have a question on is that this credit has been brought in and is attributable to air quality improvements in qualifying locations between September 1, 2021, and December 31, 2022.

The challenge I have with that is that many businesses, including some in my riding, have already made these necessary changes. One business made this change almost immediately because they were stood up as a potential field hospital to deal with COVID.

That business would fail to qualify for this credit. These businesses, on their own, being proactive, recognized early the health and safety advantages that were needed to take care of not only their employees but the greater community. Despite the financial stresses they were facing, they wanted to get ahead of the curve.

My question to the government is this: What was the rationale for picking the start date of September 1, 2021? Why was that date chosen? I would be interested to know if somebody on the government side could answer that or at least if I could get an answer during the committee as it reviews the bill. Can there be some flexibility on these start dates so that businesses that have been helping Canadians during this pandemic are not penalized?

The next piece I would argue, and it is always great coming from a big farming community, is this idea of a refundable tax credit for our farmers on the fuel charges. My push-back on this is that it is a solution, but it is not the one I think the government should be imposing. Why not just get rid of the Liberal carbon tax for our farmers? We successfully passed a bill last Parliament through the House that would have taken care of part of it. I am looking forward to that bill being reintroduced in this Parliament. Hopefully this time it will get unanimous consent and not just from the Liberal MPs who happen to represent rural communities and who could actually recognize the benefit of doing this.

The next and maybe final point I will try to get to is about housing and affordable housing. This 1% tax, if I have my numbers right, may, over five years, bring \$600 million back into the government coffers. That is not enough. We need to do more. There are multiple ways we can address the housing crisis, but ultimately it comes down to a simple question of supply and demand. We have to have a plan, and it is not necessarily just throwing out a 1% foreign ownership tax to solve it.

The bottom line is that Canadians are in a position where they no longer can afford to pay their grocery bills, put fuel in their gas tanks or heat their homes, and until this government starts making concrete solutions and putting forth proposals that will do this for all Canadians, I think we will fall short. We are well behind where we need to be.

● (1420)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are more businesses today than there were pre-pandemic. We have replenished the jobs or seen the jobs return that were there pre-pandemic also, in terms of those that were lost because of the pandemic. In good part, it meant that we had to borrow substantial amounts, billions of dollars, in order to provide such things as the wage subsidy program and supports for Canadians. By doing that, Canada has outperformed the United States, for example, on those two points. We are now in a much better position. Over a million jobs since the last election have come back. Those jobs create taxes.

I am wondering if my friend could provide his thoughts on why it is important for government to provide supports so that we can be in a position to create jobs, as we have clearly demonstrated over the last number of months.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party supported some of those measures right at the start of the pandemic. They were needed to get through that first period of the unknown. However, as the PBO has clearly laid out, this additional \$71.2 billion of stimulus spending is no longer required. What we are debating here today is Bill C-8 and this additional spending, not the money that was spent in the past.

On the job side, I believe the job numbers just came out today. We have lost 200,000 jobs in the last month or quarter. I am not 100% sure; I think it is in the last month. The United States that he used as a comparison actually gained 500,000 jobs.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that the member raised was centred around housing affordability. The Conservatives talk a lot about housing and the inflationary costs. However, it seems to me that the housing they are talking about, in terms of supply, is not necessarily housing that can be affordable to Canadians who are in need. I would argue that those who are in core need would not be able to access the type of housing the Conservatives are talking about.

Would the Conservatives support ensuring a full spectrum of housing that is affordable for Canadians, all the way from those who are unhoused through those who are renting to those who are living in co-op housing and those seeking to buy a home?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, I am going to go out on a limb, which is always risky, because this is not Conservative policy; this is one MP giving his opinion.

I have talked during the recent election on this issue, because I think that this is a legitimate challenge. I talked to multiple developers, construction companies and real estate companies about this issue and about how we ensure we have the right supply of affordable housing, because this is a huge issue in my riding.

One idea that was floated was to make it, as long as it is level to all the developers out there, so that 25% of what they build has to meet that affordability need. If we do that, there is an idea out there, working with all the different levels of government that need to be implicated, to say we can make sure we are producing enough supply to meet everybody's needs and not just building these multi-million-dollar houses.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my respected colleague for his speech, but I think it was actually the member for Winnipeg North who has really encapsulated the difference between what Conservatives are trying to put out and what the Liberal position has been.

It was a typical Liberal answer. When my colleague was saying that groceries are unaffordable for Canadians right now, the member for Winnipeg North said they should just go to a different store. Oh, that is what I am doing wrong: Instead of going to Sobeys, I should be going to Superstore. However, the place many Canadians are going now is the food bank. That is the store they are picking, because that is the only one they can afford.

Government Orders

What is the situation in my colleague's riding, and how dire is the affordability question because of "Justinflation"?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, I do not have enough time to get into all the challenges my riding is facing, but my hon. colleague from Foothills rightly addresses that difference between rural and urban Canada. If we have to drive 35 kilometres just to get to the next grocery store, we do not have those options. We need good economic policies here that keep inflation and deficit spending under control.

• (1425)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan has about five minutes, and he will have to pick up five minutes when we convene again.

The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand and talk about Bill C-8 this afternoon, as well as on Monday afternoon.

There has been a lot of divisiveness in the House over the last couple of days and a lot of torqued-up rhetoric. I would like to start off with a story about someone I believe we could all call a true Canadian hero.

In Pense, Saskatchewan, on Monday night, we had a terrible blizzard. My wife and kids went to hockey practice in Pense. We live in a small town called Grand Coulee. The storm came in. It was a terrible blizzard, and there was a whiteout. There were five, six or seven vehicles in a ditch. One of those people was Shannon St. Onge. She was stuck. She had no idea where she was going. She was coming back from Regina. She was in the vehicle for 14 hours.

Through the power of social media, she went on a chat line with local Pense people, and Andre Bouvier answered the call. It was -30°C that night. He went out to start his tractor. He is farmer out by Pense. The tractor would not start. This 80-year-old man got dressed, got a flashlight and walked, in zero visibility, a mile and found four or five vehicles in the ditch. He took these scared people, walked them back home to his farmyard and let them spend the night. They spent that night telling stories and laughing, instead of being scared in their vehicles.

I think we could all agree that Andre Bouvier represents the best of Canada. When asked why he would risk his life for someone he did not even know, he said, "When there is something to be done, you just have to go out and do it, if you can." Andre Bouvier, that was very well done, and we applaud you.

I was so happy to see my wife and kids, because that night after hockey practice the weather was very bad. They jumped into a vehicle with my friend, and they hit a ditch. They spent eight and a half hours in a truck in the middle of a whiteout because they were also unable to get home. A good friend of mine, Dan, and his partner, Amy, drove 45 minutes, when the drive usually takes two minutes, to pull them out of the ditch and make sure they got home. I thank Dan and Amy very much for that.

Government Orders

One of the things about this job is that when we are away from our families, we sometimes feel pretty useless when we cannot help our families in certain situations. The appreciation I have for my friends and family back home when situations like this come up cannot be overstated. That is why we are able to do this job in those very difficult situations.

To bring this decorum back to the House, I think we all can see what it means to be Canadian. I am very happy that we still have people who are willing to go out of their way to help those in need. That is something we can all learn from. When I have time to put comments on the record about Bill C-8, I will be talking about the fuel tax surcharge and some of the carbon tax issues that the Saskatchewan economy will face when it comes to agriculture and mining. Also, there is the fact that the government just picked the

number of a 30% reduction in fertilizer emissions out of a hat. I will talk about how much that is going to affect some of the agriculture industries in Saskatchewan.

Everyone, please go home, have a good weekend and hug your families. I look forward to seeing everyone back here on Monday.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, and the same thing. I offer everybody a good weekend. Travel safe. For those not travelling, be careful. Hopefully, we will see everyone here on Monday when we get back to business.

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

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

CONTENTS

Friday, February 4, 2022

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Economic and Fiscal Update Implementation Act, 2021	
Bill C-8. Second reading	1649
Mr. Morrice	1649
Mr. McLean	1650
Ms. Normandin	1650
Mr. Blaikie	1651
Mr. Simard	1651
Mr. Lamoureux	1652
Mr. Lehoux	1653
Mr. Angus	1653
Mrs. Wagantall	1653
Mr. Lamoureux	1655
Mr. Kurek	1655
Mr. Blaikie	1656
Mr. Epp	1656
Mr. Noormohamed	1657
Ms. Kwan	1657

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ukraine	
Mr. Kusmierczyk	1658
World Cancer Day	
Mrs. Roberts	1658
Black History Month	
Ms. Diab	1658
Opioids	
Mr. Desjarlais	1658
Vaccination Clinic	
Mrs. Lalonde	1659
Community Spirit	
Ms. Rood	1659
2022 Olympic Winter Games	
Ms. Thompson	1659
Demonstrations in Ottawa	
Mr. Naqvi	1659
Tributes	
Mr. Ruff	1659
Teachers	
Mr. Lamoureux	1660
Health	
Ms. Rempel Garner	1660
Myles Lynch	
Mr. Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	1660

74th Independence Day in Sri Lanka	
Mr. El-Khoury	1660
Salmon Fishery	
Mr. Bachrach	1660
Winter Olympic Games	
Mr. Lemire	1661
John Hopkins	
Mr. Steinley	1661
The Queen's Platinum Jubilee	
Mr. Van Bynen	1661

ORAL QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Protests	
Mr. Berthold	1661
Mr. Mendicino	1662
Health	
Mr. Berthold	1662
Mr. van Koeverden	1662
Mr. Berthold	1662
Mr. van Koeverden	1662
Mrs. Kramp-Neuman	1662
Mr. van Koeverden	1662
Mrs. Kramp-Neuman	1662
Mr. van Koeverden	1663
COVID-19 Protests	
Mr. Blanchet	1663
Mr. Mendicino	1663
Mr. Blanchet	1663
Mr. Mendicino	1663
Veterans Affairs	
Ms. Blaney	1663
Mr. Samson	1663
Mr. Angus	1663
Mr. Badawey	1664
Disaster Assistance	
Mr. Albas	1664
Mr. Blair	1664
Mr. Albas	1664
Mr. Blair	1664
The Economy	
Mr. Rayes	1664
Mr. Beech	1664
Mr. Rayes	1664
Ms. Bendayan	1665
Canadian Heritage	
Mr. Nater	1665
Mr. Rodriguez	1665

Mr. Nater	1665
Mr. Rodriguez	1665
COVID-19 Protests	
Mr. Blanchet	1665
Mr. Mendicino	1665
Mr. Blanchet	1665
Mr. Mendicino	1665
COVID-19 Economic Measures	
Mrs. Kusie	1666
Mr. Beech	1666
Mrs. Kusie	1666
Mr. Beech	1666
Public Safety	
Mr. McCauley	1666
Mr. Champagne	1666
Mr. McCauley	1666
Mr. Champagne	1666
Health	
Mr. Desjarlais	1666
Mr. van Koeverden	1667
Air Transportation	
Ms. Mathysen	1667
Ms. Koutrakis	1667
Gender Equity	
Ms. Sgro	1667
Ms. Ien	1667
Health	
Mr. Lake	1667
Mrs. Brière	1667
Mr. Lake	1667
Mrs. Brière	1667
Health	
Mr. Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	1668
Mr. Mendicino	1668
Mr. Lloyd	1668
Mr. van Koeverden	1668
COVID-19 Protests	
Ms. Michaud	1668
Mr. Mendicino	1668
Ms. Michaud	1668
Mr. Mendicino	1668
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Caputo	1669
Mr. Samson	1669
The Economy	
Ms. Rood	1669
Mr. Beech	1669
Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Mr. Kram	1669
Ms. Bibeau	1669

Canadian Heritage	
Mr. Schiefke	1669
Mr. Rodriguez	1669
The Economy	
Mr. Steinley	1670
Mr. Beech	1670
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Mr. Lehoux	1670
Mr. Fraser	1670
Government Appointments	
Mr. Kurek	1670
Mr. Blair	1670
Diversity and Inclusion	
Mr. Chahal	1670
Mr. Chiang	1670
Transportation	
Ms. Zarrillo	1671
Ms. Koutrakis	1671
Opioids	
Mrs. Romanado	1671
Motion	1671
(Motion agreed to)	1671

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House	
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mrs. Zahid	1671
Liaison	
Ms. Sgro	1671
Protection of Freedom of Conscience Act	
Mrs. Block	1671
Bill C-230. Introduction and first reading	1671
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1672
Competition Act	
Mr. Masse	1672
Bill C-231. Introduction and first reading	1672
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1672
Parliamentary Staff	
Ms. Blaney	1672
Motion	1672
(Motion agreed to)	1672
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lamoureux	1672

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Economic and Fiscal Update Implementation Act, 2021	
Bill C-8. Second reading	1672

Mr. Motz.....	1672	Mr. van Koeverden	1683
Mr. van Koeverden	1674	Mr. Blaikie.....	1683
Mr. Garon.....	1674	Mr. Blanchette-Joncas	1684
Ms. Zarrillo.....	1674	Mr. Falk (Provencher).....	1684
Mr. Muys	1675	Mr. Chahal.....	1686
Ms. McPherson.....	1676	Mr. Angus	1686
Mr. van Koeverden	1677	Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe	1687
Ms. Pauzé.....	1677	Mr. Kurek.....	1687
Mr. Albas.....	1677	Mr. Noormohamed	1688
Mr. Lamoureux	1679	Ms. Normandin.....	1688
Ms. Pauzé.....	1679	Ms. Zarrillo.....	1689
Ms. Kwan.....	1679	Mr. Ruff.....	1689
Ms. McPherson.....	1680	Mr. Lamoureux	1690
Mr. Lamoureux	1681	Ms. Kwan.....	1691
Mr. Aboultaif.....	1681	Mr. Barlow.....	1691
Ms. Normandin.....	1681	Mr. Steinley.....	1691
Mrs. Kusie.....	1682		

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