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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, April 1, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

AN ACT FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY OF CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.) moved that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House to share my time with the President of the Treasury Board.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The minister does not need unanimous consent of the House.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise today to begin the second reading debate on Bill C-13, an act for the substantive equality of Canada's official languages.

I would first like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe.

Our two official languages and 70 indigenous languages are central to our identity. They are a core part of our lives and integral to our interactions in our families, at school, at work and in the community. They are the focal point of our diversity and the face we proudly show to the rest of the world.

As an Acadian, I understand the importance of being able to grow up, work and live in one's own language. I also understand the fragility of our official language minority communities. It is therefore with a deep sense of purpose that I carry out my responsibilities as Minister of Official Languages, and I am proud to rise in the House today to talk more about Bill C-13.

Since its enactment in 1969, the Official Languages Act has helped shape a state where English and French play a central role not only in the public affairs of our country, but also in our lives. It has also provided francophone minority communities and anglophone minority communities in Quebec a powerful development tool. It has helped ensure that francophones can access federal government services in their language and given federal public servants the opportunity to work in the official language of their choice. It has helped francophone minority communities and anglophone communities in Quebec build strong institutions.

[*English*]

However, Canada and the world have changed over the past 50 years, and we understand that the Official Languages Act must be modernized and changes must be made to it. With Bill C-13, we are ensuring that the act responds to current linguistic realities and that it promotes substantive equality between English and French while contributing to the vitality of official language minority communities.

[*Translation*]

This bill is the fruit of several years of consultations with community stakeholders, provinces and territories, the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages and, of course, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, whose members are here with us today. Throughout these consultations, we had a specific goal in mind, which was to ensure that the modernized bill reflected the reality of francophones living in Quebec, anglophones across the country, francophones living in minority communities, Acadians and even English-speaking Quebeckers. Thanks to a major team effort, we now have a bill with teeth.

However, one thing remained clear throughout our work on modernizing the act. The situation of French is worrisome. Whether we are talking about the predominance of English as an international language or about the fact that digital technologies, social media and streaming platforms far too often favour the use of English over French, one thing is becoming apparent. With eight million francophones in Canada in a sea of more than 360 million anglophones in North America, the protection of French is an issue that deserves close and immediate attention. At the same time, we must recognize the critical role that the federal government can and must play with respect to protecting official language minority communities. It is a duty that is especially important to me.

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Bill C-13 responds to the challenges that the French language is facing in North America and the challenges that official language minority communities are facing. It solidifies the vision proposed in the reform document and in Bill C-32, which was introduced last June. Today I am very proud to introduce at second reading a stronger bill that rises to the challenges we are facing. It is a bill that, as I just said, has teeth.

● (1005)

[*English*]

First, the bill recognizes the linguistic realities of each province and territory. Our government collaborates with provincial and territorial governments that provide services in the minority language and promote the vitality of the official language minority communities. However, as a government, we must also make it a priority to work together with indigenous communities across the country to ensure that indigenous languages are preserved and protected. The modernized legislation would therefore explicitly state that it does not affect the strengthening and revitalization of indigenous languages.

[*Translation*]

We are the first government to recognize that French is in significant decline in the country and that we must make a concerted effort to reverse this trend. This is why we are proposing additional measures to protect and promote French across Canada, including in Quebec.

We will establish new rights to ensure that francophones can live in French and that they can work and be served in French in private-sector businesses under federal jurisdiction.

These new rights will be enshrined in a new act, the use of French in federally regulated private businesses act. These rights will apply in Quebec as well as in regions with a strong francophone presence, because our government recognizes that the private sector has a role to play in promoting our official languages and enhancing the vitality of official language minority communities.

We are going even further. We introduced a new bilingualism requirement for the Supreme Court of Canada to improve access to justice in both official languages.

We will strengthen the Treasury Board's role as a central agency to coordinate and enforce the Official Languages Act. In other words, we will replace the discretionary aspect of its monitoring, auditing and evaluating powers and make these powers mandatory.

We will also strengthen the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages to provide him with more tools to do his job. He will be able to impose administrative monetary penalties on certain privatized entities and Crown corporations operating in the area of transportation serving the travelling public.

Our bill also includes important clarifications regarding part VII and federal institutions taking positive measures that will benefit official language minority communities. It will be mandatory to take into account potentially negative impacts that decisions could have on the vitality of the communities and on the promotion of both official languages.

In addition, we will also strengthen Canada's francophone immigration policy, which will include objectives, targets and indicators with the aim of increasing francophone immigration outside Quebec.

We are also increasing supports for official language minority communities in order to protect the institutions they have built.

● (1010)

[*English*]

I want to take a moment to reassure English-speaking Quebecers that nothing in this bill takes away from the rights and protections they have. We will always continue to support the development of the English-speaking minority in Quebec.

[*Translation*]

In short, this modernized legislation will result in numerous benefits for communities across the country. The bill we are presenting today ensures that the Official Languages Act reflects the challenges of the 21st century.

In other words, more francophones will be able to work and live in French.

[*English*]

More anglophone parents would be able to send their children to immersion. More official language minority communities would be able to thrive. All Canadians would recognize themselves in this legislation, which would give our children and grandchildren a world of opportunity.

Our history has taught us that we could never take our linguistic duality for granted. With this bill, we are adapting to a world that is constantly changing. We are preparing for the challenges of today and preparing for the challenges of tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

We are embarking on a historic legislative process that will significantly advance Canada's linguistic framework. The implications for everyone in Canada are huge.

I know parliamentarians will examine Bill C-13 very closely. That is excellent news. As parliamentarians, we all have a duty to ensure this country has the best possible bill and that it will have a positive impact on all Canadians.

I want to assure all of my colleagues on both sides of the House that I will be here to work with them throughout this process and when it comes time to implement this bill that will soon, I hope, become law.

Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the Minister of Official Languages. I appreciate her openness, her intention and her drive.

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Lately, situations have come up where we have felt that the federal government did not show official languages, especially French, the proper respect, and I got the impression that the minister was isolated and alone.

Can she confirm that she will be able to persuade her cabinet colleagues to move Bill C-13 forward and give the Official Languages Act more teeth than its definition suggests? I think this bill is pretty wimpy. I would like it to pack much more of a punch.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his question and for his work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I want to be perfectly clear. Bill C-13 does have real teeth. Last year, the former minister of official languages introduced Bill C-32. In my conversations with stakeholders and colleagues, I heard suggestions on how certain aspects of the bill could be improved, and that is exactly what we have done.

The bill we have introduced, Bill C-13, does have real teeth. The Commissioner of Official Languages will have more tools to do his job. Francophones will be given the choice to work and be served in French in businesses under federal jurisdiction.

I look forward to working with my counterparts to ensure that the bill ultimately receives royal assent.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the minister talked a lot about the importance of protecting French in minority situations, in other words, outside Quebec.

I would like to hear her opinion on whether French is also in jeopardy in Quebec. Can she point to even a single measure in Bill C-13 that improves the status of French specifically in Quebec?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. One thing we observed during our discussions and consultations was that French is in decline not only in Canada, but also in Quebec. That is why the government is moving forward with an ambitious bill that will help us protect and promote French in Quebec and across Canada.

Bill C-13 specifically states that Quebecers have the right to work in their language in federally regulated businesses. We want to ensure that Quebecers and francophones in regions outside of Quebec with a strong francophone presence have the opportunity to work in French.

• (1015)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, our message today is that we all want to adopt a modernized act, but it must be as good as possible. We look forward to working with all parliamentarians on the committee to improve Bill C-13.

The Commissioner of Official Languages released report after report highlighting the failures within the public service and the lack of compliance with the Official Languages Act.

As a central agency, the Treasury Board must be fully responsible for implementing and coordinating matters relating to official languages. Why did the government not give all of the powers to the Treasury Board instead of Canadian Heritage?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, the idea of having a central agency is absolutely key to ensuring compliance with the Official Languages Act.

In Bill C-13, we have established the Treasury Board as the central agency with monitoring, auditing and evaluating powers. We want to ensure that it will have more tools and resources to do its job.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize to the hon. minister. She was right in thinking that she needed the unanimous consent of the House to share her speaking time.

As I saw no one oppose her request, however, we will resume debate. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am truly pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-13 on modernizing the Official Languages Act and, especially, its importance to Canadians.

[*English*]

Canada's official languages are a defining characteristic of who we are as a country. They contribute to our diversity and inclusion, our social cohesion and our resilience.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker, as a proud Franco-Ontarian, I can assure the House that our two official languages and standing up for the interests of minority francophone and anglophone communities are very important to me.

This bill is possible because Canadians shared their passion and their ideas. Whether we are talking about community leaders, parliamentarians, experts or citizens, I am grateful to Canadians across the country for their comments and their important contributions to this bill. Canadians want us to do more to ensure the ongoing vitality of official language minority communities and enhance French across the country.

In the federal public service, we have seen major improvements in bilingualism. Since 2000, the number of bilingual positions and bilingualism rates among employees have increased, especially among those who provide services to the public in both official languages. What is more, the capacity of the public service to provide services in French and English has increased year after year. There are more bilingual supervisors, more employees who meet the linguistic requirements of their position and more positions that require a higher level of bilingualism.

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The federal government continues to be a key partner in supporting the development and success of official language minority communities. A prime example of this is Canada's new official languages regulations for communications with, and services to, the public. These regulations will ensure that anyone who uses a minority official language at home will be considered when calculating the demand for services. This means that, for the first time, bilingual families and immigrants are included in our calculation. Equally important, federal offices in the vicinity of 900 minority schools across the country will have to offer their services in both French and English. We expect that, in the coming years, around 700 offices that are currently unilingual will become bilingual.

Canada's Official Languages Act became law more than 50 years ago, before digital technology, and it has been more than 30 years since its last major reform. The act needs to be modernized to ensure it continues to serve Canadians well. That is why the government introduced Bill C-13, an act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the use of French in federally regulated private businesses act and to make related amendments to other acts. This bill would make improvements that would address challenges facing the French language in Canada and the challenges faced by official language minority communities.

In addition to including the key measures in the previous bill, Bill C-32, Bill C-13 would significantly improve the Official Languages Act to clarify and strengthen the part of the act concerning the promotion of official languages and support for official language minority communities, and it would further improve compliance by federal institutions concerning official languages through more robust monitoring and new tools for the Commissioner of Official Languages. With respect to the role of the Treasury Board Secretariat, we share responsibility for the implementation of the Official Languages Act with other federal institutions.

- (1020)

[Translation]

Under this act, the Treasury Board is responsible for the general direction and coordination of policies and programs relating to the part IV of the act on communications with and services to the public, part V on the language of work in federal institutions, and part VI on the participation of anglophones and francophones in the federal public service.

As we know, these powers are exercised by the Treasury Board Secretariat, which establishes and interprets official languages policies, directives and regulations and monitors federal institutions for compliance.

Modernizing the Official Languages Act will enable the Treasury Board to reaffirm its role as a central agency by strengthening and expanding its powers to monitor federal institutions for compliance. That will improve our ability to support communities and serve Canadians in the official language of their choice.

More specifically, the new bill requires the Treasury Board to issue policies and regulations to help federal institutions meet their obligations under parts IV, V and VI of the act and to hold them accountable. This is now a mandatory requirement rather than a dis-

cretionary one, as it was in the past. For the first time, in consultation with Canadian Heritage, the Treasury Board will verify whether federal institutions are taking positive measures to enhance the vitality of these communities and promote English and French in Canadian society.

The Treasury Board Secretariat, as a central agency, is better positioned to monitor, audit and evaluate the act, and to develop and publish appropriate policy instruments designed to provide guidance to federal institutions.

Furthermore, under the new legislation, the rights surrounding language of work for employees in regions designated as bilingual for language of work purposes will continue to be protected.

What is more, Treasury Board policies will continue to ensure that public service jobs are designated bilingual where necessary and that they reflect the appropriate level of second-language proficiency.

More specifically, we are currently examining the need to increase the minimum second-language proficiency requirements for supervisors in bilingual regions so that those employees are able to work in the official language of their choice.

The new bill also shows how important bilingual communications are in emergency situations.

Treasury Board is working closely with the departments that play a key role in the health and safety of Canadians in order to ensure that communications are always of equal quality in both official languages in emergency or crisis situations.

In my mandate letter, the Prime Minister tasked me with continuing to ensure that Canadians across the country can receive services from federal institutions in both official languages. He also asked me to support the Minister of Official Languages in fully implementing the measures related to the public service that are outlined in the document "English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada".

For example, one of the measures proposed in this document is a new second-language training framework for the public service adapted to the needs of employment equity groups and, more specifically, indigenous employees.

This framework will guide the departments so that they are able to provide training that responds to the diverse needs of employees and makes bilingualism attainable for them.

By increasing the level of bilingualism in the public service, we will be better able to meet the growing need for bilingual services.

The beginning of this decade was very difficult, but the time has come to build a stronger, more dynamic and more inclusive country for everyone.

• (1025)

[*English*]

Our official languages and their vitality unite us, and we must continue to defend and promote them. At this time in our country's history, it is more important than ever to protect and promote our official languages in federal workplaces and throughout Canada, and that is what this bill would do.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I am ready to answer questions.

[*Translation*]

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

Another bill was introduced in the last Parliament, specifically Bill C-32.

What is the difference between that bill and Bill C-13?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Speaker, I am happy to answer this question.

The process that took place over the last few years, which included consultations and engagement with parliamentarians to strengthen the bill, led to the introduction of Bill C-32 last June. Following the election, we came back with an even better bill, Bill C-13. The fact that the Treasury Board will act as a central agency and play a compliance monitoring role is an example of something that has been strengthened in the new legislation, Bill C-13.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech, but I do have a question for her.

The bill states that the first portion of subsection 10(3) of the act, a provision on the language and translation of agreements, shall be replaced by the following:

The Governor in Council may make regulations prescribing the circumstances in which any class, specified in the regulations, of agreements that are made between Canada and one or more other states or between Canada and one or more provinces or territories

Can the minister explain whether it will be strictly unilingual or bilingual?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question.

Today we are talking about a bill. We are talking about the terms we want to improve within the Official Languages Act, which we have had for 50 years. One of the services we provide is the translation of documents in French and English, as well as interpretation.

When we put the rules in place, we want to be sure that the provinces and territories receive the necessary documents in both

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official languages. We want to be sure we can represent both our official languages in our agreements.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

As the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski and official languages critic said earlier, we will work to improve the bill.

There is a big difference between words and actions with this government. Just look at the underfunding of francophone organizations from one end of the country to the other. As a result of underfunding, these organizations often have to fight to survive, especially with the rate of inflation.

Will the government put its money where its mouth is and increase funding, as francophone organizations across the country have been asking for?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Speaker, since 2015, the government has made significant investments, particularly in the action plan for official languages, which was implemented in 2017. An additional \$500 million in funding was allocated to provide civil society with the resources it needs to serve communities across the country, whether in the areas of immigration, health or post-secondary education.

I think that we are already doing our part. We know that COVID-19 has been very difficult for the organizations, and we will continue to invest in our official languages communities.

• (1030)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the president of the Treasury Board for her intervention today and for her answer to my colleague for Sarnia—Lambton.

One of the things I noticed is that one of the changes appears to be that there might be a fine instigated here. It seems we are seeing a lot of ministers now giving their press conferences in only one language. Will that mean that ministers will now be fined for basically not responding in both languages?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Speaker, when government members do their presentations and communications to Canadians, they are always offered in both official languages. We will continue to do that with announcements and with all of the communications on the measures that the government is bringing forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, today is April 1, but I hope the government will not be playing any April Fool's jokes on francophones and anglophones with the Official Languages Act.

Hon. colleagues, I rise today to speak to Bill C-13, an act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the use of French in federally regulated private businesses act and to make related amendments to other acts.

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I address this House as the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier but also as a proud Canadian who cherishes French. It is the language of my forebears, who arrived in Canada in the 17th century. I want to pass on to my children and their descendants a precious inheritance, the language that my ancestors protected and passed on to me.

Over the past few months, I consulted with many organizations and experts on the status of French and the Official Languages Act, and what I learned is worrisome. There are many challenges, including the demographic decline of French, the many violations of the Official Languages Act, the dispersion of power and responsibility within departments, and the shortcomings of parts IV and VII of the Official Languages Act. All of these issues have been repeatedly raised by francophone organizations. Francophone minority communities are worried that we are approaching the point of no return.

With regard to Quebec specifically, anyone who visits Montreal will soon see that we urgently need to take specific, concrete and measurable action to stop the decline of French.

Furthermore, experts are telling us that the language of Molière is increasingly under threat, even within government and government offices.

When the Attorney General of Canada calls on the machinery of government to take francophones to the Supreme Court of Canada, as we recently saw with the case involving the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, it sends a clear message that the government is no longer making decisions in accordance with the Official Languages Act.

This example shows that the powers and responsibilities are scattered and are contradicting each other. The government talks out of both sides of its mouth all the time, but today it is about Bill C-13.

I remind members that the Attorney General has requested a stay in court to suspend the effects of this decision, which restored part VII of the act to full force. The Attorney General acted contrary to the interests of francophones.

These facts show that not only is French being given short shrift in Canada, but it is also not even respected within the government.

Given how amateurish and inconsistent the government is, it is clear that bilingualism is not a priority for the Liberals. It is not in their DNA. We recently saw the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship do a press conference only in English. This week, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, a francophone, presented a briefing on his environmental plan in one language, and it was English.

As I mentioned, a week ago, the Attorney General waited until the stroke of midnight on the deadline set by the court to request a stay. The chief justice of the Federal Court of Appeal delivered his ruling from the bench, which is rare, and denied the request.

• (1035)

In particular, I would like to highlight for my colleagues his comment that this request was an abuse of process. It is a declaration of war against the French language.

There is more. On Monday, the Minister of Official Languages did not even answer a single question from reporters on this subject. I myself have asked her questions directly on many occasions in the House, through the Speaker of course, but she was not the one who got up and answered me. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada did. Was it to stay on message? Was it to muzzle the Minister of Official Languages? I think she is acting in good faith, but I have my doubts about her government.

Francophones have been on tenterhooks since last Friday knowing that the Minister of Official Languages and the Attorney General were preparing to take them before the Supreme Court. The Attorney General mentioned it in the House last Friday. The minister and the Attorney General left these people, honest people who get up every day to stand up for francophones, on tenterhooks while they waited until the last minute to announce that they would not appeal the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique ruling before the Supreme Court after all. That is disrespectful. If they did not intend to appeal and if they felt this was a priority, they would not have waited until the last minute.

The government also chose to put the second reading debate of Bill C-13 on the agenda today, Friday, April 1, not because it is April Fool's Day, but because there is a lot less time for debate on Fridays. To be honest, issues that are debated on Fridays also get a lot less media coverage, and yet the government chose today to debate this bill at second reading. The second day of debate is planned for next Thursday, April 7. Do members know what is happening on Thursday, April 7? It is budget day. Once again, the government is cutting into the time for debate. This way, the debate will go unnoticed by the media and Canadians. That is no small matter. It is a very big deal.

As I mentioned, these actions confirm this government's lack of will, sensitivity and respect for our official languages. I would even go so far as to use the word contempt. The government is showing contempt for both official languages, particularly French, which is the more fragile of the two.

In addition to the government's lack of will, it is clear that the mechanisms that are supposed to protect and promote French are not working. Powers and responsibilities are split between the Minister of Official Languages and the President of the Treasury Board, who was just talking about a part of the Official Languages Act that is within her purview, but the act should put her in charge of the whole thing. Organizations agree on that. She has that power, unlike the Minister of Official Languages. The Treasury Board is one of three entities that have binding authority, but few people know that. The other two are the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Justice and their respective departments. There are lots of people at the table on this issue.

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Another thing is the lack of accountability within federal institutions. Institutions must honour their responsibilities. They need a mechanism by which to measure their effectiveness and an obligation to deliver results. All this talk is well and good, but we need to see results.

Immigration is another issue. For example, the number of complaints against Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has skyrocketed. Francophone immigration targets are not being met.

Bill C-13 does not address the problems I just touched on. This bill was supposed to be a reform, but it is just smoke and mirrors. The government tabled a white paper last January, then it introduced Bill C-32, which was supposed to have been inspired by the white paper. Most recently, the government introduced Bill C-13, which contains only amendments. It is not a reform.

● (1040)

The word “reform” comes up several times in the white book entitled “English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada”. However, only a few parts of the Official Languages Act have been changed, although I use the word “changed” loosely, and the proposed changes make me think of patchwork. This shows once again a lack of will and respect from this government.

Canadian Heritage would be given a leadership role with respect to implementing the bill, but this role is poorly defined. That department is not structured for effectively supervising other departments and agencies. What is more, it does not have the authority to enforce the act. Only the Treasury Board Secretariat can do that. I will quote the president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, Liane Roy:

There needs to be someone in charge who can look at the other departments and give orders and be proactive instead of reactive all the time.... That is the difference between Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board, which can delegate powers to other departments.

It is like the Tower of Babel. Here is another quotation:

Some language issues would benefit from further discussion, such as governance and horizontal coordination of official languages.

Who said that? Not us. It was not the Conservatives or the other opposition parties. It was the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Théberge.

The future of part IV of the act remains uncertain, because the government refuses to recognize the importance of language clauses and would rather fight in court than amend part IV, as called for by the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique. Part IV regarding French-language services is currently before the courts, when Bill C-13 could fix the problem by proposing language clauses.

Let me quote another stakeholder:

These language clauses are conspicuously absent from Bill C-13.

That quote is not from an association or a political party; it was from a law professor at the University of Ottawa. Independent organizations and stakeholders are the ones saying these things. They know a thing or two about this.

Some other aspects need to be revised. Bill C-13 gives the Commissioner of Official Languages powers that are quite elastic. For instance, the power to issue orders does not affect part VII. Let me quote the Société de la francophonie manitobaine:

We wanted the Commissioner of Official Languages to have the power to sanction, but we wanted that power to cover more than just travel companies. It's a step in the right direction, but we will be watching for an amendment.

It is one step in the right direction, but there are many more steps that need to be taken. The government needs to take larger steps instead of too many small ones. I commend the government for introducing this bill, but it seems almost hesitant. I would like to see a bill with more teeth.

Here is another quote:

I think there is some clarity, in that it applies much more to private entities than to public ones. However, the word “transportation” is a bit vague. This could also refer to other types of agencies in the transportation and travel sectors. It is not clear at this point...

Who said that? It was Raymond Théberge, the Commissioner of Official Languages and the main person in charge of enforcing this rule. Here is another quote:

...we were expecting the Commissioner of Official Languages' power to make orders to be expanded to include Part VII.

That quote was from the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

This bill also raises issues regarding federally regulated businesses. It would enact a law that is not part of the Official Languages Act. The legislation regarding these businesses would be separate from the Official Languages Act, and, once again, the terminology is vague. The government is leaving too much open to regulation and does not clearly specify how the new act would be enforced.

We will always advocate for federally regulated businesses in Quebec to be subject to the Charter of the French Language.

● (1045)

Part 2 of Bill C-13 gives these businesses the choice between one or the other. They can be subject to the Charter of the French Language or to the provisions of Bill C-13. However, we know that Bill C-13 is much weaker.

Which will these businesses choose? Does the government want to protect French? I am asking the question. We believe that these businesses must be subject to the laws of Quebec, and I would remind the House that this is something that the Quebec National Assembly has unanimously called for.

When it comes to immigration, one also has to wonder what the actual legal consequences of clause 44.1 will be, since, like many other clauses of this bill, it does not include any obligation to deliver. It indicates that the policy will include “objectives, targets and indicators”. That is not what we need. We know that we are behind when it comes to immigration. We simply need to act and require the departments and agencies to implement measures to meet and exceed our target of 4.4% francophone immigration. Any talk of objectives, indicators and targets is smoke and mirrors. We are wasting our time. We already know that we are behind.

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The federal government is responsible for protecting Canada's official languages. If the Canadian government does not take steps to protect the French language, who will?

It is not up to the provinces or territories, or municipal governments. It is up to the federal government. The federal government is responsible for the act that makes our country bilingual, so the federal government should assume its responsibilities.

This bill will need to be amended if it is to achieve its goals. We are reaching out the minister to halt the decline of the French language and to protect and promote both our official languages.

I have a lot of respect for the Minister of Official Languages, but she seems to be isolated lately. Cabinet appears to be working against her. She is like David against Goliath. I hope that, like David, she wins, but I have my doubts. In any case, I will support her. We are acting in good faith. We will see what happens. Canadians can decide after that. I want to work with her to make certain corrections to the bill.

In conclusion, I say this to my dear colleagues: Some of us inherit our ancestors' possessions, but all of us inherit our parents' language. It is a precious heritage that needs to be cherished, defended and protected. That is why we need to debate this bill. I am asking the members and senators who will study it to take the time they need to make sure that the next Official Languages Act is sufficiently stringent to remain effective for decades to come.

This historic exercise must be taken seriously. We must give ourselves the resources we will need to continue protecting Canada's two official languages.

As I said earlier, this is a historic opportunity to guarantee the vitality of our official languages, to enable future generations to grow up speaking the language of their ancestors, and to keep Canada united, proud and bilingual, which is what the vast majority of Canadians want.

• (1050)

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his remarks. I would also like to thank him for his work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I would first like to point out that we have heard a lot of people across Canada say that the work done on official languages is non-partisan, and I also want to say that I appreciate my colleague's comments. Today is an important debate for our government. We will have another next Thursday when the budget is presented.

We are talking about measures to improve the bill, and I would like to know if my colleague would support a motion for a pre-study by the Standing Committee on Official Languages. It is important to invite community organizations and witnesses to discuss the issue and find ways of improving Bill C-13.

Will my colleague support a motion proposing a pre-study of Bill C-13 by the Standing Committee on Official Languages?

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, who represents the people of Nickel Belt. It is a pleasure

for me to work with him on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I do not know whether my colleague listened carefully to my speech, but I clearly said that we need to take our time. We are at second reading. I do not think that doing a pre-study during a debate is either strategic or effective. We must follow the usual steps with Bill C-13, and I think that we are three or four days apart. Even if we reject the idea of a pre-study, the committee can still hear witnesses.

My colleague already proposed this motion, we voted on it, and his motion was rejected. This is not bad faith, it is in the interest of the French language.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, we all know the old adage that history repeats itself.

I would like to refresh the memory of my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, who today is praising the Conservative Party for its defence of bilingualism and its efforts to protect French in Canada.

The first thing the Harper government did when it came to power in 2006 was to make cuts to the court challenges program. That was the first thing.

Next, it appointed unilingual anglophone justices to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Conservative Party never wanted to appoint bilingual justices to the Supreme Court. Today, in 2022, these great defenders of the French language are still doing nothing in this regard.

Let us also consider the former minister of foreign affairs, the Hon. Rob Nicholson. Imagine a great big country, Canada, with two official languages, whose minister of foreign affairs conducts diplomatic business in English only. That is unacceptable.

I would like my colleague to tell me, truthfully, what the Conservative Party has done to defend the French language.

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that the update to the Official Languages Act drafted in 1968 was done under a Conservative government. Also, in November 2020, an emergency debate was held at the request of the Conservatives. Perhaps my colleague should look up what happened in the history books.

There are reasons why we have to manage public funds wisely. We were in an economic crisis at the time, and I totally agree with the decisions made by the then prime minister, decisions that were temporary in nature.

With respect to money for institutions, it is important to understand that the money is there.

Why did the Minister of Official Languages wait until March 30 to tell organizations that they were entitled to \$134 million when that amount was earmarked in the budget a year ago?

• (1055)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. I hope to work with him at the Standing Committee on Official Languages to improve Bill C-13.

We have heard extensively about problems with francophone immigration and the fact that the government's failure to meet the targets is contributing to the decline of the French language and the demographic weight of francophones. These targets were set in 2003, and they have never been met, because the Liberal and Conservative governments did not make it a priority.

Does my colleague agree that these clear principles should be enshrined in law so that future governments work harder to allow francophones to catch up demographically?

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, with whom I am privileged to sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

This week, the committee was told that the francophone immigration target should be increased, because it is now only 4.4%. This is therefore a very important measure to include in Bill C-13. Instead of having a short paragraph on immigration, we need to define it more precisely.

I have said this to my colleague, and I am repeating it to the House of Commons: I am reaching out, and I want to work with her, the Bloc Québécois and the party in power to improve this bill and make it a historic act that will be effective for the next 50 years.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague pointed out that this bill really needs to be scrutinized from top to bottom in order to ensure that it promotes the French language.

There are francophones outside Quebec, living in every part of Canada, including my riding of Fort McMurray—Cold Lake. Could my colleague give examples of improvements to the bill that would help promote French outside Quebec?

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I commend and congratulate my colleague for her impressive French. Moreover, she is a Conservative member. We are all working together for all of the provinces.

I think that is important. We need to implement measures for the entire country. There are minority francophones in British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario and all of the Maritime provinces. Quebec's situation is obviously special, because it is the only province with a francophone majority.

I would like to remind my colleague that it is important that the bill contain some recognition of the fact that, of the two official languages, French is the only minority language across the country. This was a request made by the Quebec minister responsible for Canadian relations. Beyond this necessary recognition, we need to implement the appropriate measures.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am going to quickly piggyback on my colleague's question about a clause that would allow the Governor in Council to decide whether agreements with provinces, territories and even other states will be translated, into French or any other language.

Statements by Members

We know that these agreements are typically written in English, with the exception of agreements with Quebec. Otherwise, the translation can be provided on request. Moreover, in the English version of the bill, there is a major error as the sentence is actually incomplete.

My question is this: How can we talk about equality when not everything is automatically translated into both languages?

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the Bloc Québécois recognizes that this bill is poorly written and that it contains a number of flaws.

There is a problem with translation. Both official languages merit respect throughout Canada. I am reaching out to the Bloc Québécois as well, because we need to work together to improve this bill so that it becomes an effective law that is capable of stopping the decline of French and protecting and promoting this language.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[English]

ALICK SIU

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am deeply saddened to announce the passing of Mr. Alick Siu. Alick was a long-time resident and proud ambassador for Markham—Unionville. He worked tirelessly and passionately on my federal campaign last year and was a policy chair for the Markham—Unionville Federal Liberal Association.

Alick served on the board of directors for various community groups, such as the York Region Parent Association, the Markham Arts Council, the Markham Public Library Board and the Unionville Residents Association.

Alick had a career as an IT professional and co-founded the Chinese Canadian Information Processing Professionals 30 years ago. He was a co-host and commentator on Fairchild Radio and 105.9 The Region.

Alick Siu was highly respected and recognized as a model citizen and community leader by our residents and IT professionals.

On behalf of the Markham—Unionville riding, I offer my sincere condolences to the family of Mr. Alick Siu. Alick will be greatly missed.

* * *

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week I met Cayle. He is from B.C. and made a road trip to Ottawa to speak up for his rights. He cannot fly here because Canada is the only country in the world that bans unvaccinated citizens from travel.

Statements by Members

The Liberal ban on unvaccinated travel is especially egregious given that Canada is one of the largest countries in the world and Canadians rely on air travel far more for family, health and work reasons than any other people around the world. Conservatives have been urging the Liberals to follow the science on air travel, which has shown that airplane filtration systems and other measures make transmission extremely low.

Further, the new variants show that vaccinated people seem to transmit COVID similarly to unvaccinated people, and the government's rationale for banning air travel is fundamentally flawed. There is no justification for this serious infringement on the charter rights of Canadians.

Cayle and many other Canadians feel like second-class citizens in their own country. When will Cayle be able to fly again?

* * *

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this Sikh Heritage Month let us all recognize and appreciate the important contributions the Sikh community has made and continues to make to Canada's socio-economic, political and cultural heritage.

Sikhism's core principles include equality, generosity, openness and compassion. I would like to recognize Gurdev Bal, Manjit Sandhu, Sanyogta Bhandari, Dr. Inderjit Singh Sambi, Harbhajan Sekhon and Dalip Singh Parwana, who have worked hard both inside and outside of the Ottawa Sikh Society.

I would also like to appreciate leaders like Kanwar Hazrah, Narinder Sra, Guralp Grewal and Tejprit Dulat, who have worked hard for the Sikh community and beyond in Ottawa.

These leaders represent the true spirit of the Sikh community by being there for their communities through *seva*, which is selfless service.

* * *

RAYMOND MASON

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, our country has lost a champion. Elder Raymond Mason passed away peacefully on March 20.

Dr. Mason was a member of Peguis First Nation. He was a residential school survivor. Raymond spent three decades fighting for justice for residential school survivors and launched a class action lawsuit that resulted in a historic settlement in 2009.

His work remains unfinished. Elder Mason lamented how the original settlement left communities behind and, until the end of his life, continued to fight for survivors to be recognized and compensated.

He is survived by his wife Rhoda, his children, stepchildren, grandkids, step-grandkids and every life he touched and fought for.

Over the last number of years we have lost many survivors. Their children and grandchildren are carrying on their calls for justice and so must we. We must support communities seeking to search the grounds of the residential schools imposed on them to bring their

children home. We must ensure communities have the resources they need to accomplish this work. There must be truth for there to be reconciliation.

* * *

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

AUTISM MONTH

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as Autism Month begins, I would like to share the story of Emmanuel and his parents.

Emmanuel will soon be 20 years old. His autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, has always been challenging for his parents and the people who love him. When he was three, nobody knew if he would ever learn to talk. Through weekly adaptive intervention sessions, he learned to interact with others and become a little more independent, but he will never be able to live alone.

Emmanuel is charming, kind and intelligent in his own way. He works hard to adapt to the world around him. He lives with his parents. Their lives revolve around him. They would never have survived all these challenges without the help of dozens of people: their loved ones, devoted caregivers and specialized educators.

His parents truly need respite from time to time. Autisme Estrie looks after Emmanuel for 24 hours every two months. That allows his parents to continue taking good care of him and to love him just the way he is.

Thank you for thinking of all the silent voices of children and adults with ASD and of the people who love them.

* * *

[*English*]

WITCHEKAN LAKE FIRST NATION

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, March 29, Witchekan Lake First Nation and the FSIN held an honouring ceremony. It was to recognize the work that seven members of the Spiritwood RCMP did to make their community safer. Earlier this month, the Spiritwood RCMP found firearms and prohibited weapons along with more than 150 grams of illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia and cash when searching a home.

Chief Annie Thomas of Witchekan Lake spoke at the ceremony. She talked about how drug activity has impacted her community. She said, "We've seen the hurt in our communities and we're burying more loved ones because of alcohol and drugs instead of natural causes like old age".

It is fostering positive relationships like these that will help build a better path forward. I ask all members in the House today to join me in recognizing the work of both the RCMP members in Spiritwood and the leadership of the Witcheekan Lake First Nation for working together to protect the people of their communities.

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[Translation]

ÉRIC NOËL-DE-TILLY

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on February 20, a pillar of the student community at Polyvalente Le Carrefour passed away. Éric Noël-de-Tilly was a devoted history teacher who treated his students with unwavering respect and love.

Over the years, he passed on his passion for civic engagement to his students in order to teach them the meaning of democracy. Because of him, several hundred students participated in the 30-hour famine. Today is the 30th edition of this event, and I will be there to honour the memory of this dedicated teacher.

Mr. Noël-de-Tilly is a citizen, a teacher, a role model and a colleague we will never forget. My thoughts are with his family, especially his four children. I offer them my deepest condolences, and I thank the entire Polyvalente Le Carrefour community for keeping his spirit alive.

Thank you for everything, Éric.

* * *

[English]

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day, an opportunity to support, listen to and learn from those on the autism spectrum like Aiden Lee from my riding, their families and caregivers.

This year's theme is inclusive, quality education for all and calls to ensure that everyone has equal, accessible opportunities to learn. Our government created the Accessible Canada Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada that allows everyone to participate fully in their community, school and workplace and have an equal chance at success.

ErinoakKids in my riding of Oakville North—Burlington is Ontario's largest children's treatment centre dedicated to ensuring inclusive health and learning for children and youth with disabilities and their families, including autism. I am so proud of the work that it does in our community.

On World Autism Awareness Day and every day, let us commit to ensuring equity and inclusion in all aspects of society for everyone.

* * *

DIABETES

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, as a change of pace, I am excited to rise today and highlight a young man in my riding who is working to make a difference.

Statements by Members

Brayden Morrison was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at four years of age. Fifteen years later, he has taken it upon himself to climb for a cure. While finishing up his two-year power line technician program, Brayden will be dedicating each of his remaining hydro pole climbs towards raising money to help fight diabetes.

Brayden, whose family has been chosen as one of the 100 ambassadors of history families by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, said, "I dream of the day where I will be able to just wake up and live a normal, healthy life without needles, daily monitoring or insulin to survive".

Thanks to young Canadians like Brayden, that day will come soon.

* * *

● (1110)

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, the Prime Minister flew all the way to Vancouver to make a speech on his new climate plan. As is often the case with this Prime Minister, promises were made.

However, here is the thing. It is now five months since communities like Princeton in British Columbia were hit hard by devastating floods, and as we all know, this Prime Minister told the good people of Princeton that he had their backs and that he would be there for them. Well, the supports the Prime Minister promised rural communities for rebuilding have not been delivered. There is nothing. In another month, it will be half a year.

Why is this considered acceptable? How is it that, in a country like Canada, when a prime minister makes a promise to a small rural community, literally nothing happens for months on end?

The Prime Minister once said better is always possible. The people of Princeton and other British Columbian communities need to see better from this Prime Minister. What will it take to see that the promises he has made are kept?

* * *

CARBON TAX

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again, the Liberal government's hubris has been on full display. After heartlessly increasing the carbon tax today, the government's refusal to listen to hard-working Canadians, agriculture producers and small business shop creators shows just how out of touch the NDP-Liberal government truly is. This tax disproportionately affects Canadians in rural and remote areas and is a callous cash grab.

Statements by Members

Plowing through with this carbon tax increase only puts more strain on already squeezed budgets in businesses throughout the country. While the government spins its tax increase, I have heard directly from families who have indicated that this increase on top of already soaring prices is unsustainable.

It is my constituents from Regina—Lewvan who are feeling the tightening of their budgets, and they are unsure what they can do about it. These are people who cannot get a third job because there are not enough hours in the day to do more work. That is a problem most Liberals have never seen. It is time for the government to finally do the right thing and scrap its carbon tax.

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[Translation]

CASAVOGUE

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government has always supported and promoted the important role that our SMEs play in developing our local economies.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the 50th anniversary of a family-owned business located in the heart of Saint-Michel. Founded in 1972, Casavogue specializes in the sale of high-quality Italian furniture. Its 50 years of service have been characterized by the love of high-quality products that has been passed down from father to son.

The Territo family is truly passionate about home furnishings and their profession. They are always on the lookout for new products to offer, in unique collections at affordable prices. The furniture's refined design and their outstanding customer service have earned Casavogue the consumer choice award for several years running. The Territo family also believes in doing its part to support social causes, such as foundations that fight cancer.

I want to congratulate the Territo family and wish continued success to Casavogue.

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[English]

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I hosted many constituents in my riding at a round table to discuss how we could support Ukrainians seeking safety.

I want to thank all those who participated, especially Rob and Stefan from the Comox Valley Stands with Ukraine, Eugene from the Ukrainian Canadian Cultural Society, Dave from the Comox Valley Ukrainian Cultural Society, Susan from Christ the King church, and Thuy and Zeny from the Immigrant Welcome Centre, for coming and sharing all the work that they are currently doing.

I am so proud that the people of North Island—Powell River have come together to make a difference. I have been moved by the many fundraising events that we have seen across the region to support Ukraine. In these uncertain times, it is only the strength of our convictions that helps the world become a little safer. I heard very clearly from my constituents that a coordinated approach is needed.

Canadians want to be matched with Ukrainians who need help. If it is a room, a home or other resources, Canadians are ready. I encourage the government to take their leadership.

* * *

● (1115)

[Translation]

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, on April 2, the entire blue planet observes World Autism Awareness Day. These days, we speak more broadly about autism spectrum disorders, or ASDs. Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that primarily affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is not an illness. It is a condition.

This year, the 38th anniversary, the Fédération québécoise de l'autisme is encouraging us to support autism in all its diversity, not just on April 2, but for the entire month of April, to advocate for a world that is increasingly open to people with autism.

I would like to acknowledge the parents, families and friends of people with autism, as well as my children, Charlotte and Loïc, sister and brother to my little Ulysse, and my ex-partner Xavier, and to let them know that I understand what they are going through and I appreciate them.

Our children shine so brightly because of them and because of this day. They shine not because they are different but because they are unique. They are as unique as the love we have for them is strong. Let us shine together.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hypocrisy of the Liberal government knows no boundaries. Liberals have spent the last seven years destroying our natural resources sector, resulting in lost jobs, lost homes, loss of life and broken families. The outcome is a nation torn apart, with Canadians pitted against Canadians.

Now, as fuel costs surge and the world cries for energy, the government continues to put its foot on the throats of men and women, men and women who not only have spent years supplying our nation with clean, ethically sourced fuel, but who have also funded billions in programs over the decades in their will to contribute to a country they love so much.

Instead, the government will sit on the sidelines as Canada and the world continue to suffer, buying into an ideology that leaves our citizens distraught and discouraged and the world running on empty. There is no just transition.

GENEROSITY IN SURREY CENTRE

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very fortunate to rise in the House often to acknowledge the incredible acts of generosity of individuals and organizations in my constituency of Surrey Centre. Today is no different.

Today I would like to acknowledge Paul and Ruby Arora of Gagan Foods for their generous donations to the Surrey Food Bank, shelters and free kitchens. Their donation included four skids to the Lookout Society, four skids to the Muslim Food Bank and three skids to the Surrey Food Bank. It added up to 23 skids delivered to six local food banks and kitchens to support the people of Surrey. In addition, they sent a full truckload of juice and cookies to the Guru Nanak Food Bank in both Abbotsford and Surrey and a full truck to Guru Nanak's Free Kitchen in Vancouver.

I thank Paul and Ruby for their generosity and support for these important establishments in Surrey.

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[Translation]

NEW BUSINESSES IN ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on March 26, I had the pleasure of participating in the official openings of some new businesses in my riding of Orléans.

I want to congratulate Louise and André Chouinard, the new owners of a terra20 franchise, which sells sustainable products to promote a healthy lifestyle. Their new store on Tenth Line Road features an exclusive ecobar, where customers can purchase refillable bottles of cleaning and personal care products. This is an environmentally sound and sustainable solution.

The Natural Food Pantry also recently opened in Orléans. I want to thank manager Jennie Brousseau for her warm welcome.

The opening of that store was also an opportunity to participate in the launch of a new leading-edge green technology called TAG-Pod, the very first waste-free bulk food dispenser pilot project in the world. The Aggressive Good's TAGPod system, which was designed to reduce single use plastics, will revolutionize grocery shipping and make it more sustainable and easier for customers, while producing zero waste.

I congratulate them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1120)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it may be April Fool's Day, but the tax hikes that went into effect less than 12 hours ago are no joke. This morning, Canadians woke up to higher taxes on everything from gas to groceries to home heating because of the 25% increase in the carbon tax. Everything moved by a truck will go up as producers and wholesales inevitably

Oral Questions

pass those costs on to the families and seniors who can least afford them.

Why is punishing Canadians financially at a time when they can least afford it acceptable to the NDP-Liberal government?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, while the opposition has been fixated on April 1, on this side of the House we have been fixated on July 15. Do members know why? That is the date Canadian families will receive their climate action rebate cheques, and they will keep receiving them month after month after month. As we know, eight out of 10 families will benefit. We are fighting climate change and delivering on affordability.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is not according to the PBO.

A new Ipsos poll confirms how out of touch the NDP-Liberal government is with hard-working Canadians, and they applaud. We have an affordability crisis and, according to Ipsos, Canadians want a budget that addresses the cost-of-living crisis, not a radical, ideologically driven, activist, Leap Manifesto NDP-type budget that punishes families and seniors with higher costs just for eating, driving and heating their homes.

There was a time in this country when a Liberal Party led by Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin governed in a fiscally responsible way. What happened to that Liberal Party?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the saddest April Fool's joke on Canadians today is the inability of the Conservatives to simply pick a lane. On Mondays it is "do more for seniors". On Tuesdays it is "cut CPP". On Wednesdays it is "do more for small businesses". On Thursdays it is "block Bill C-8".

While the Conservatives struggle to pick a lane, we are focused on investing in Canadians and managing the nation's finances responsibly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Speaker, it may be before noon, and that is no joke because on the other side, whatever they say now will change in an hour. That is no joke.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sure the hon. members want to hear the answers so they can pose another question, so I ask members to please hold on to their thoughts.

The hon. official opposition House leader.

Oral Questions

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, no one ever imagined a time when a family or seniors would be punished financially for simply driving their car to earn a living or to visit their grandchildren, yet gas prices are up again today because of the 25% hike in the carbon tax. The Liberals have a choice in the budget next week. They can be fiscally responsible like the Chrétien–Martin Liberals were or they can continue to take their marching orders from their radical NDP partners and be completely out of touch with Canadians, according to Ipsos.

What will it be: a Chrétien–Martin Liberal budget or an NDP–Liberal party budget?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as economists and the Parliamentary Budget Officer will tell us, our price on pollution is progressive and efficient. Eight out of 10 families will receive more than they pay. If the hon. member has forgotten the numbers, let me remind him. This year, a family of four will receive up to \$745 in Ontario, \$830 in my home province of Manitoba and \$1,100 in Saskatchewan and Alberta. We are fighting climate change and delivering on affordability.

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[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, it might be April 1, but the tax increases taking effect today are no joke.

This morning, Canadians woke up to higher taxes on their gas, groceries and heating as the result of a 25% increase in the carbon tax. Everything that gets delivered by truck is going to go up. It is inevitable, and the consumers are the ones who will pay.

Why does the Liberal–NDP government think it is acceptable to punish Canadians at the worst possible time, when they cannot afford it?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the saddest April Fool's joke on Canadians today is the Conservatives' inability to pick a lane.

On Mondays it is “do more for seniors”. On Tuesdays it is “cut CPP”. On Wednesdays it is “do more for small businesses”. On Thursdays it is “block Bill C-8”.

While the Conservatives struggle to pick a lane, we are focused on investing in Canadians and on sound fiscal management. While we are investing in Canadians on this side, they are simply making jokes on that side.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Once again, I would like to remind members that it is difficult for people at home to hear the answers. I hope members will take note of this; otherwise, I will have to ask the member to repeat the question and someone at the end will not have time to ask theirs.

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

• (1125)

FINANCE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, a new Ipsos poll confirms how out of touch the NDP–Liberal government is with the reality of Canadian workers.

We are in an affordability crisis. Canadians want a budget that addresses the high cost of living, not an ideological platform with higher taxes on basic necessities like food, transportation and heating.

There was a time when Liberals like Jean Charest—oops, I meant to say Jean Chrétien—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That is the first time his name has been mentioned in the House, Madam Speaker. I was talking about Jean Chrétien.

We have known Liberals like Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin who governed responsibly.

What happened to the Liberal Party?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to hear the members opposite acknowledge that they have a Liberal in their party's leadership race, and that the Liberals of the good old days focused on affordability, just like we do.

We know that the affordability and inflation problems are real. That is why we are working every day to make life more affordable, through improvements to the Canada child benefit, investments for seniors and the national housing strategy, for example.

On this side, we are taking action. On that side, it is nothing but nonsense.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister decided not to purchase F-35s because they did not meet Canada's needs. However, seven years later, he is prepared to spend \$19 billion on them, which makes us wonder what has changed since then.

The Bloc Québécois demanded a committee study to look at the various models and strategic needs, but that never happened. Today, the F-35s still have 871 technical problems, seven of them critical.

Again, what has changed?

Will the government buy F-35s for the right reasons or to please the United States?

[English]

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are ensuring that our Canadian Armed Forces have the equipment they need to protect Canadians. On Monday, we announced that we will enter into the finalization phase with the top-ranked bidder for the F-35 fighter jet, bringing us one step closer to delivering on a new fleet of 88 state-of-the-art fighter jets for our Royal Canadian Air Force. This will help ensure that our pilots have the most advanced equipment available to protect Canadians' territorial integrity, including our Arctic, to meet our commitments to NATO and NORAD and to deal with unforeseen threats.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the future fighter jet agreement is a losing proposition for Quebec's aerospace industry.

If the government buys F-35s, there is no guarantee that our businesses will be doing maintenance and upgrades. Even so, Quebecers will pick up a quarter of the \$19-billion tab.

The Department of National Defence will have to compensate Quebec, and one way to do that will be through the new drone program, an area in which Quebec excels.

Given that choosing F-35s could weaken our industry, will the federal government finally implement the national aerospace policy that the industry has been demanding for ages?

[English]

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said, we are ensuring that our Canadian Armed Forces have the equipment they need to protect Canadians. Although this process is long, we are focused on getting it right.

Again, on Monday, we announced that we will enter into the finalization phase with the top-ranked bidder for the F-35 fighter jet, bringing us just one step closer to having those 88 fighter jets in service. This will help our pilots have the most advanced equipment available to protect Canadians' territorial integrity, including our Arctic, and meet our commitments to NORAD and NATO.

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PENSIONS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals have repeatedly promised to fix the bankruptcy and insolvency laws to protect Canadians' pensions. Right now, if a company is insolvent and must declare bankruptcy, the pensioners lose the money they are owed. Advocacy groups representing more than four million Canadians who rely on defined pension benefit plans wrote to the Prime Minister urging him to change the laws. Hard-working Canadians deserve answers from the government.

Will the minister take action and change Canada's bankruptcy and insolvency laws, yes or no?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we appreciate the

Oral Questions

challenges that pensioners are facing. It is why we have had reviews on the pension system.

As we anticipate what happens in the budget, we cannot comment about what will be in the budget, but we have stood steadfast with Canadians from day one of forming this government to make sure we have a stable, predictable pension system. We will take the hon. member's question under advisement.

* * *

● (1130)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, a new report shows that carbon capture is a fairy tale told by profitable oil and gas companies to justify more production and get more subsidies. As these companies rake in record profits, the Liberal government plans on giving them \$50 billion as a tax credit. That is \$50 billion that could be put toward renewable energy, a just transition for workers or toward real climate solutions, not big oil and gas.

When will the government stop throwing money at the very companies that are fuelling the climate crisis?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in our climate plan, our government committed to develop a comprehensive carbon capture, utilization and storage strategy, CCUS, and to ensure Canada is globally competitive in this growing industry. Developing carbon capture features in the mix of every credible path to net zero, and smart policies that incent the use of these technologies will help reduce our emissions and grow our economy.

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FINANCE

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, my constituents and many Canadians are expecting big words, huge costs and little improvement to their lives in the upcoming budget. Canadians do not want an NDP wish list budget; they want a responsible budget. Young Canadians struggling to get ahead should not be burdened with more debt because the government of today refuses to spend wisely.

How much will this ultra-left budget cost the next generation of taxpayers?

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this government invested in the lives and the livelihoods of Canadians at the darkest time in the last 70 years. We invested \$511 billion to make sure that we could get to where we are now with the second-fastest-growing economy in the G7, poised to be the fastest-growing economy in the G7 next year. We are on the track to fiscal prudence. We will make the right investments for Canadians, we will support Canadians and we will manage the nation's finances responsibly.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have been through a global pandemic and now we are living through a European conflict that has exacerbated the already irresponsible fiscal record of the government. The effects of the government's incompetence are continuing to bleed into the household budgets of people across the country as we see inflation levels reach new heights and everyday essentials become more and more unaffordable.

My question, and what Canadians want to know, is this: On April 7, will the budget return to the fiscally responsible ways of the classic Liberals like Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, or will this just be a budget of NDP wish lists?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was amused to learn earlier today that there is a Liberal among the ranks of the Conservative leadership race, but let us go on to the question at hand.

When it comes to something as serious as the nation's finances, it is important to separate partisan posturing from the facts. Here are the facts: Moody's and S&P have given us a AAA credit rating. We have the second-fastest-growing economy in the world, poised to be the fastest-growing next year. We made clear investments in the lives of Canadians so that we could rebound and have one of the best economies in the world. That is good for Canadians. That is good for everyone.

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CARBON PRICING

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians woke up to a more expensive country today. The carbon tax helps no one in rural Canada. It hurts seniors, families and the agricultural sector by increasing the costs of heat for their homes and their barns. It also increases the cost of fuel for their cars and for the trucks that deliver food to Canadians from coast to coast. According to a recent Ipsos poll, nearly half of Canadians want to see lower taxes in the upcoming budget.

Will the NDP-Liberal government listen to my constituents in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and cancel the carbon tax?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, agriculture and rural communities are vital in my home province of Manitoba. We recognize we are in a transition period, and that is why we introduced Bill C-8 to put more money in farmers' pockets. Bill C-8, currently before this House, contains a measure to return part of the proceeds of the price of pollution directly to farmers.

Unfortunately, the Conservative Party has tried to remove this measure and has delayed progress on this important legislation.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, death and ever-increasing Liberal taxes are the only certainties of life in Canada. Regardless of what Liberals spin, the true function of the carbon tax is to take more money out of Canadians' pockets. What I truly do not understand is why the Liberal ministers continue to stand up every day and try to spin Canadians. These ministers are trying to be contortionists with the facts on whether Canadians are getting all their money back on the Liberal carbon tax cash grab.

My question is quite simple. If the Liberals are giving all the money back to Canadians, why bother taking it in the first place?

● (1135)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, while the Conservatives are trying to determine whether climate change is real, our government is moving forward to cut pollution, create good jobs and make lives more affordable for Canadians.

When the Conservatives were in power, they did absolutely nothing for 10 long years on climate action. We simply cannot afford another 10 years of Harper Conservative inaction on climate change.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The tone is starting to come up again. I am sure that hon. members appreciated that they were not interrupted when they asked questions and I would ask them to do the same when someone is answering.

The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, today the carbon tax went up yet again. Out west we have long known it is nothing more than a callous and discriminatory tax that hurts rural Canada. According to the government's own regulations, it also disproportionately impacts seniors living on a fixed income, as well as single mothers.

The NDP-Liberal government will not let harsh reality get in the way of its blind ideology, so will the minister finally admit that this is not actually about lowering emissions, but only about holding back the progress of western Canada?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am a proud Manitoban from western Canada. The Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the majority of households will receive more in climate action rebates than they pay. That is eight out of 10 families.

I will repeat those numbers, which are valid from coast to coast to coast. This year a family of four will receive \$1,100 in Saskatchewan and Alberta and \$830 in my home province of Manitoba. Those rebate cheques will start to arrive on July 15 and they will arrive each and every month.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, today the carbon tax increases to 11¢ per litre on fuel. Prices in northwestern Ontario and across the country are skyrocketing. Housing prices have doubled, groceries are up across the board and six in 10 Canadian families with kids are now worried they will no longer be able to put food on the table. Inflation is at record highs and families cannot afford to wait for a rebate. They are struggling to get by week by week, day by day.

Will the government do the right thing and cancel the carbon tax hike?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can tell the members opposite that there is one thing that this government has always in our minds, and that is the well-being of families. Since being elected in 2015, we have introduced the Canada child benefit, which saw nine out of 10 Canadian families receive more money than previously. As of today, right here in this province and the member's riding, families with kids in day care will receive a 25% reduction in day care fees.

We are making life more affordable for families and we will keep doing that.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, since 1988, Canada has released 11 plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. They have all failed, and the one announced this week will also fail.

Why? This is what the plan has to say about capping emissions from the oil and gas industries: "The intent of the cap is not to bring reductions in production that are not driven by declines in global demand."

In other words, as long someone is willing to buy Canadian oil, then "drill, baby, drill". When will there be a clear exit plan to get off fossil fuels?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that Canada is committed to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies in the coming two years. This is two years ahead of schedule. We have already phased out eight tax breaks for the fossil fuel sector and, as outlined in the emissions reduction plan that was tabled this week, we are working on a plan to cap oil and gas emissions and ensure the sector makes an ambitious contribution to meeting the country's 2030 emission goals.

Oral Questions

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives are applauding the government's plan. That says it all.

On Monday, the IPCC, the group of UN environmental experts, will be tabling a new report. In a report released last month, the UN said that the biggest polluters are guilty of arson on our only home. The UN warned all governments that this abdication of leadership is criminal.

On Monday, when we read the IPCC reports and compare them to the plan Ottawa announced this week, will we be able to believe that Canada is doing enough?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Tuesday we introduced our emissions reduction plan, which is a practical road map to fight climate change, create good jobs and build the clean economy.

As just a few highlights, we are going to make it easier and more affordable for Canadians to switch to electric vehicles. We are going to invest in energy retrofits for greener homes and buildings, establish a greener electricity grid, reduce oil and gas emissions and very, very importantly, support our farmers as they move to more sustainable agriculture.

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TAXATION

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week we have two leaders doing two different things for Canadians at the gas pumps. On one hand, President Biden launched the largest release ever from the U.S. emergency oil reserve and challenged oil companies to increase their oil production by 10%, while on the other hand, our Prime Minister caused even more pain at the pumps by hiking the carbon tax.

President Biden's actions cause oil prices to decrease 7%, meaning he is reducing gas prices for Canadians. Why is the American president doing more for Canadians at the gas pumps than their own Prime Minister?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak a little bit about what our American counterparts are doing with respect to energy transformation. In fact, the U.S. Secretary of Energy, Secretary Granholm, specifically said in reaction to the heightened gas prices from Putin's invasion of Russia that they are accelerating "our clean energy transition, which will make our country more energy independent and much less vulnerable to the whims of dictators." That is what the U.S. is doing.

Frankly, we are also working to transition toward renewables, and that is an important thing to do.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, beer, wine, cider and spirit producers are waking up this morning in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country to an unfair increase in their excise escalator tax. Worse yet, this tax is tied to the consumer price index, meaning the government's failure to tackle our inflation crisis will see it soaring even higher next year. April Fool's Day pranks are only supposed to last until noon, so will the NDP-Liberal government give us some good news after this bad joke today and reverse this unfair increase?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I understand the member's question and value the role that the wine, beer and spirit sector play in our economy as well as in tourism attraction and retention.

Like other taxes and benefits, the alcohol excise duty rate is calculated automatically every year to account for inflation. This is the right approach. It provides stability and predictability for the industry, which is what they asked of us when we formed government. The increase is less than one-fifth of one penny per can of beer, and other specific measures are in place for wine and spirits.

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CHILD CARE

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Madam Speaker, happy Friday, although for a family in my riding it is not a happy Friday. A family in my riding has two teenaged disabled children who require full-time assistance and are not eligible for the \$10-a-day child care. This family is struggling to make ends meet. To support his family with the necessities, the father must work two jobs.

How will this NDP-Liberal government assist families who are facing rising costs in order to provide the basic needs to their children?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I understand what the constituent that she was talking about is going through. I have spoken to many constituents who have children with disabilities, and that is specifically why we have made sure that all of our child care agreements are inclusive, that they reach the broad needs of every single child across this country, particularly those with disabilities, because we know that there are higher costs for families who have children with disabilities.

I thank the member opposite for her advocacy. She can count on this government continuing to work for families in need.

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• (1145)

TAXATION

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, as fuel costs rise to unprecedented levels, the people of northern Saskatchewan are outraged that this NDP-Liberal coalition will raise their taxes again. Fact: Driving is not optional in my riding. Fact: Trips for groceries and medical appointments are often long distances. Fact: There is no public transit and there are no electric vehicle charging stations. Fact: Today my constituents are worse off because of the increase in the carbon tax.

When will the government realize that raising taxes is the last thing my constituents need?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad our families minister stood just a little while ago, and I love the references to the Chrétien government because they remind me of when the Harper government came to power in 2006. What was the first thing it did? It cancelled our national child care program. The other thing it did was deep-six the Kyoto climate accord.

The Conservatives have done absolutely nothing on climate change in the last 15 years. We now have a national child care program, thanks the families minister, our Prime Minister and those on this side of the House, and we have an emissions reduction plan.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, people across the country are facing the rising costs of gas, groceries and housing, and one way to help them is by eliminating taxes that do not make sense. Low-alcohol beer is a healthy and increasingly popular choice, yet it is charged the alcohol excise tax while low-alcohol wine and spirits are not. Yesterday, I introduced Bill C-267 to provide a simple fix for this anomaly.

Will the government support this fix, put it in the budget and provide some relief for both craft brewers and consumers?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay for his private member's bill. We cannot comment on what will be revealed in the budget next week, but I do hear the member's appeal.

I personally enjoy non-alcoholic beer, and I am thrilled to see the rise of craft breweries across the country. They are a tourism draw. We have heard the member opposite, and we will take his suggestions under advisement.

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FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canada's rising food prices are hurting families that were already struggling. Two million children are now at risk of going to school hungry. In a country as wealthy as Canada, no child should have to get through the day on an empty stomach.

For many years, New Democrats have called for a national school nutrition program to give every student access to healthy food. In the last election, both the NDP and the Liberals pledged \$1 billion toward this urgent priority. Will this critical investment be delivered in budget 2022?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by acknowledging my colleague and the several members in the House who have been advocating for a national school food policy. I am looking forward to working with them to deliver this for children across the country.

We share with them the concern that no child in this country should go to school hungry. We know these programs improve learning outcomes, and we know they do what needs to be done to make sure they are healthy, so I look forward to working with him to deliver this for Canadians.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in 2017, the Prime Minister met His Holiness Pope Francis and invited him to Canada to deliver a public apology to indigenous people. For decades, first nations, Inuit and Métis families, survivors and communities have been calling for a papal apology, recognizing the harm done and the ongoing impacts of residential schools.

Today, after meetings with indigenous delegations, Pope Francis apologized to indigenous people in Canada from the Vatican. Could the parliamentary secretary inform the House about this?

• (1150)

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to start off by thanking the member for Northwest Territories for his wisdom and guidance in our caucus and for his hard work on this.

The Government of Canada acknowledges the apology from Pope Francis to the delegation in Rome. We know it is an important step toward rebuilding trust and addressing the historical wrongs committed by the Catholic church against indigenous people. We welcome an apology from Pope Francis on Canadian soil. It would be symbolic for indigenous people across the country as we continue on our journey of healing in this country.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada's export-dependent sectors have said that the WTO's upcoming ministerial conference must secure ambitious outcomes across the board. This includes removing pandemic related restrictions, fixing the appellate body and improving transparency. In addition, the global trading community must ensure Russia is condemned in all international institutions.

What is the government's plan to ensure this WTO ministerial conference is used to further isolate Putin and his aggression?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada was the first country to revoke Russia's and Belarus's most favoured nation status as trading partners under Canadian law. Canada then worked with our allies to lead a WTO statement condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine that called on WTO members to suspend Russia's most favoured nation status and to suspend Russia's ascension to the WTO.

As we have said from the very beginning of Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine, we will do everything we can to ensure that President Putin and his enablers—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, agricultural producers in Elgin—Middlesex—London and across Canada are experiencing challenges from global fertilizer shortages, the increase in the costs of inputs and production, and the increase of the carbon tax today. These factors are threatening Canada's food supply and the security of the supply chains.

What is the government's plan to support Canadian agriculture and agribusinesses to prevent the supply chain disruption and the food shortages?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with regard to fertilizer availability, this is something that our government takes very seriously. It is working with our partners and industry leaders to ensure that we have fertilizer available in Canada. I know some farmers were able to book early in December and January, but there are some impacts on farmers today, and we will be continuing to work with the industry to ensure that we have a solution.

The other thing the hon. member can do is pass Bill C-8 right away, because that would give a rebate to farmers today, if Conservatives would work with us on Bill C-8.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals' failure to take the crisis facing our food supply seriously hurts Canadian farmers and families. The Ontario Agri Business Association and farmers in my riding support sanctions against Russia. However, they have asked, along with Conservatives, if tariffs will apply to fertilizer purchased before March 2 and if orders will be allowed to be offloaded here in Canada.

Oral Questions

With the cost of food rising daily, the last thing we need is additional pressure on our agricultural sector. Will the minister, for once, actually respond to the concerns of Canadian farmers?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, fertilizer availability is important in Canada. At the same time, this has been caused by Putin's illegal war, and we have to take serious action against that. We are working with the industry to ensure that fertilizer remains available in Canada and that it remains at a reasonable price.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are still deeply concerned that the government has no plan to address skyrocketing food and gas prices. An inflation crisis, coupled with supply chain shortages, is forcing many businesses to raise prices anywhere from 25% to 40% just to stay afloat. Higher energy, fertilizer, wheat and corn prices are all impacting the cost of food here in Canada.

When will the Prime Minister finally table a plan so that Canadians can feed their families?

• (1155)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives continue to ignore basic economic facts. Canada's GDP rose again in January, making eight consecutive months of growth. We have recovered over 3.4 million jobs lost during the pandemic, 2021 saw Canada's largest annual trade surplus since 2008, totalling \$6.6 billion. We also retained S&P and Moody's AAA credit ratings.

That is delivering for Canadians. That is delivering for small business. That is real leadership.

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[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, services for francophone veterans are getting worse instead of better.

An anglophone's application for disability benefits is processed in 20 weeks, but francophones are currently waiting 76 weeks. The wait time is six months longer now than it was in 2018.

The minister claims that all is well, however. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs wrote to ask him to explain why independent analysts paint a less rosy picture of the situation. We are still awaiting a response.

When will the minister be accountable to francophone veterans?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we recognize that we need to do more to ensure that francophone veterans get a response in a timely manner—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I must interrupt the parliamentary secretary. He will have to start over because the interpretation is not working.

An hon. member: He is not wearing his headset.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary is not wearing his headset. While we wait for him to put it on, I remind all members, ministers and parliamentary secretaries that they must wear their headsets or they may lose their chance to ask a question or give an answer.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, we recognize that we need to do much more for francophone veterans when it comes to the wait times for a response to their application.

We have created a dedicated francophone unit to improve the situation for francophones on the ground. We have also hired many francophone and bilingual employees to process these applications. Our \$340-million investment is helping us make significant progress on this issue.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, services for francophone veterans are deteriorating. An expert confirmed this at committee. She has helped more than 1,200 veterans with their valiant struggle to access services.

She confirmed that officials are recommending that francophone veterans apply in English. They are told that things will move more quickly if they apply in English. In other words, if they have issues getting service in French in Canada, they have to speak English.

Is that how we should be thanking francophones who have served Canada?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. That is absolutely not what we should be doing. We can serve people in French. That is why we have a francophone unit dedicated to doing just that, as I mentioned earlier.

We are hiring more bilingual people. Plus, let us not forget that our government has invested more than \$11 million to help serve and support veterans across Canada.

We have been there for veterans, and we will be continue to be there for them, francophones included.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadian are proud of both official languages, English and French. They must be protected and integrated into federal-provincial agreements. If the federal government does not enforce the Official Languages Act, who will?

Furthermore, the decline of French in Canada must stop now. Will the Minister of Official Languages commit to amending Bill C-13 to include language clauses, among other things?

• (1200)

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question and for his work on official languages.

Our government understands the importance of the substantive equality of both official languages. This means strengthening the positive measures in the bill as well as co-operation with our partners and the provinces.

We will consider all the implications related to official languages. We will study the amendments and work with the opposition and with communities across the country on the bill.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am issuing a heartfelt plea to the government to help Laurence Couture Gagnon, a young Canadian mother who had to flee the war in Ukraine with her newborn, Léo. They are in Poland.

She desperately wants to return to Canada, but the embassy in Warsaw is taking a long time to issue a citizenship certificate for her baby, who is also Canadian. Once they have the certificate, they can get a passport and come back to Canada. How is the government going to help me help her?

Ms. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Since day one, Canada has been there to help Ukrainians fleeing Putin's war. We will continue to work with them. More than 12,000 Ukrainians arrived this week alone.

My colleague is well aware that we cannot talk about specific cases. I strongly encourage him to come to see me, and we will work together.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is the 17th time in two years that I am rising in the House to talk about the labour shortage in my constituency and endless immigration delays.

According to a March 18 Radio-Canada article, immigration lawyers are suing Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for the outrageous delays in Quebec. Businesses that need workers and potential citizens are discouraged and out of patience.

When will the minister finally buckle down and cut wait times?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again I thank my colleague for his question.

I just want to make one thing clear to the House. Since the beginning, we have received and processed over half a million permanent residence applications. In fact, we set a record. We welcomed 143,000 permanent residents to Canada over the last three months.

We need to do more, and that is exactly what we will continue to do.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are strong ties between Canada and the Caribbean.

It is by working together with our partners that we can meet the challenges we face, particularly those related to regional stability, COVID-19 and climate change.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs inform the House how this joint organization between Canada and the Caribbean Community, or CARICOM, is helping us to meet these challenges and strengthen these essential ties?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bourassa for his important work.

This morning, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and her counterpart from Belize co-chaired a meeting of the foreign ministers of CARICOM. They talked about security and stability in Haiti and Nicaragua, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the steps being taken to address climate change and COVID-19.

These meetings are essential for Canada and the world.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the NDP-Liberal government continues to try to destroy the oil and gas industry in Canada. First it had the carbon tax, then the clean fuel standards and now a call for a 42% emissions reduction.

My riding of Sarnia—Lambton, which produces a third of the petrochemicals in the country, will be hard pressed to remain competitive under these punishing rules that do not apply to foreign oil. The carbon footprint would not be leaving the planet; it would just be leaving Canadian jobs.

Oral Questions

Why are the Liberals trying to destroy thousands of jobs in this country in order to give them to foreign producers with higher emissions?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is really important, and I would like to highlight, that in fact the industry actually made the commitment to move to reduce emissions and to have a pathway to net zero by 2050. We took them up on their offer.

When it comes to speaking to the emissions reductions plan, the Oil Sands Pathways alliance, which represents oil sands producers, actually spoke in support of this plan. This is a plan that is working to reduce emissions and make sure we have a clean economy for the future, while creating sustainable jobs.

* * *

• (1205)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, U.S. representatives on the Great Lakes Fishery Commission have delayed the passage of their 2022 budget because of Canada's long-standing appropriations shortfall in meeting its treaty obligations.

In the fisheries committee, the minister agreed with my colleague for South Shore—St. Margarets that the best decision for Canada would be to pay its bills and not allow invasive species to contaminate our Great Lakes.

When will the NDP-Liberal government pay the remaining \$9 million on our obligation?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as always, the government has had the backs of workers and people in the industry. We will continue to work in the best way possible to achieve outcomes that are shared, that are direct, and that stand by the principles of this government. That is unwavering, and that is what we are committed to do.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday, the Minister of Justice denied that Bill C-5 would allow human traffickers to serve their sentences at home. It is crazy. The minister does not even know his own bill. Human trafficking is a vicious crime and traffickers prey on the most vulnerable. In Canada, a lot of them are indigenous women and girls.

Can the minister explain how giving sex traffickers house arrest will protect trafficking victims, and why does he think that this is okay?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is committed to criminal justice system reform. It is a promise we made to Canadians and we intend to keep it. This is about criminal justice policy that actually keeps our communities safe. A justice system that unfairly targets indige-

nous people and Black and marginalized communities is not effective. It does not keep us safe, and it must be changed.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the fight against climate change should be a top priority. The impacts of climate change are having a greater and more direct impact on developing countries, and are disproportionately affecting women and girls. With the increasing frequency and severity of floods and droughts and the loss of biodiversity, women and girls are the ones most impacted by natural disasters and are the first to go without food when crops fail.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development tell us what Canada is doing to do its part in the fight against climate change?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for Richmond Centre for his advocacy. Our government recognizes that more support is needed for women and girls who are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and biodiversity loss. That is why we announced \$67.5 million in international assistance funding that will provide support to eight projects.

These projects will support women's leadership in climate change adaptation and mitigation and natural resource management.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, 2030 is quickly approaching, and the Liberals still do not get it when it comes to climate change. They refuse to meet the urgency of this moment. They are still handing out billions to big oil, and it is no surprise that emissions continue to go up. We cannot wait any longer. We need infrastructure investments for indigenous and northern communities that are already paying the price for climate change.

Canada's infrastructure bank is just sitting there, literally, because it has yet to complete one project. That is why we in the NDP want to put it to work with my bill, Bill C-245.

Will the Liberals stand with indigenous and northern communities by voting for this bill?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Tuesday was a very exciting day: It was the day the emissions reduction plan was announced. It is a road map for Canada to reach our ambitious climate targets, sector by sector. It is getting great reviews from environmental groups, banks and the resource sector.

Let me cite a few for the hon. member. Andrew Weaver, former leader of the Green Party, has praised it, as well as the World Wildlife Fund. There is also a very important one from David Suzuki, who says, “For the first time, Canada charts a credible path to 40% emissions reduction by 2030.”

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1210)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to four petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

[Translation]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows: Ms. Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle) for Mr. Therrien (La Prairie).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

AGE VERIFICATION SOFTWARE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions to present today.

The first petition is from Canadians from across the country. The petitioners are concerned about the accessibility and impacts of violent and degrading sexually explicit material online and the impacts on public health, especially the well-being of women and girls. The petitioners recognize that we cannot say that we believe in preventing sexual violence against women while allowing pornography companies to freely expose our children to violent, explicit sexual imagery day after day, which is a form of child abuse.

The petitioners note that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires Canada to develop means to protect children from the forms of media that are injurious to their well-being. As such, these petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to adopt legislation that would require websites to have meaningful age verification on all adult websites.

• (1215)

NORTHERN RESIDENTS TAX DEDUCTION

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I have to present is from constituents from the towns of Fox Creek and Swan Hills. These two towns are in northern Alberta. The petitioners say that rising heat costs and other expenses make life more expensive in northern Alberta. They also have to travel great distances to access grocery stores and shopping centres. The petitioners state that there is an arbitrary line that runs across Alberta preventing Fox Creek and Swan Hills residents from accessing the northern residents deduction.

The petitioners are calling on the government to include Fox Creek and Swan Hills communities within the prescribed intermediate zone, allowing the people who live in these two communities to be able to receive the northern residential deduction for living in northern Alberta.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I have to present is on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about charities that could be targeted based on their views and forced into a values test. The petitioners note that the Liberals have promised to deny charitable status to groups that they view as dishonest. The petitioners say that this could jeopardize the charitable status of hospitals, houses of worship, schools, homeless shelters and other organizations. The petitioners also note that the Liberals previously used the values test to discriminate against groups that were applying for the Canada summer jobs grant.

The petitioners are asking the House of Commons to protect and preserve the application of charitable status rules on a politically and ideologically neutral basis, without discrimination on the basis of political or religious views, and without the imposition of another values test. They are asking for an affirmation of their freedom of expression as Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): The final petition I am presenting today, Mr. Speaker, is from Canadians from across the country who are opposed to and want an end to the COVID-19 mandates. The petitioners state that throughout the pandemic, truckers have served Canadians and are heroes but now are subject to vaccine mandates that are impacting the supply chain. The petitioners say the Prime Minister has politicized the vaccines and insulted Canadians who disagree with him. Moreover, the petitioners comment that it is the sacred duty of the government to guard against discrimination and guarantee the freedoms of all Canadians.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to immediately end all COVID vaccine mandates implemented and controlled by the federal government, which includes federal employees, truckers and travellers. They are also calling for the end of all mandates and restrictions.

FISH HATCHERIES

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to table this petition for residents largely from the Powell River region who have a lot of concerns about DFO and the fact that funding has not been increased for community economic development program hatcheries since 1982. My constituents are very passionate and want the government to increase the annual contribution to the Powell River Salmon Society hatchery, to allocate any increase to the conservation stamp funds to the CEDP program and, of course, to ensure proper representation of coastal communities by DFO staff members, which continues to be of major concern in the region that I serve.

UKRAINE

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The petitioners note that Canada is home to 1.4 million citizens of Ukrainian descent and that Canada was the first country to recognize Ukrainian independence in 1991.

The petitioners are calling on the government to provide further lethal defence weapons and supplies to the Ukrainian people. They are also calling on the Government of Canada to immediately urge NATO allies and Ukraine-friendly nations to close the airspace over Ukraine and deploy peacekeeping troops to the country.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith. The petitioners call on the federal government to take bolder action to address the climate crisis, including a transition to a more sustainable economy, investments in green jobs for Canadians, respect for indigenous rights and expansion of the social safety net so no one is left behind.

I want to thank For Our Kids for its advocacy and work to build a more sustainable future for generations to come.

UKRAINE

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions today, both related to Canada's

military contribution to the war in Ukraine and both signed by the Ukrainian community in Regina and southern Saskatchewan.

The first petition calls on the Government of Canada to resume providing RADARSAT image intelligence to the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian military. This is something that the Ukrainians have been calling for for some time and is something that Canada can and should be doing to help Ukraine win the war.

The second petition calls on the Government of Canada to expedite the approval of any export permits of arms sales to Ukraine. This one is pretty much self-explanatory. When President Zelenskyy addressed this chamber just a couple of weeks ago, he was very clear that Ukraine needs military equipment to help win the war. This petition says that any military equipment that is provided should be given in a timely manner.

I am pleased to present these petitions today on behalf of the Ukrainian community in Regina and southern Saskatchewan.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 333 to 336 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): Is it the pleasure of the House that the foregoing questions be made orders for returns and that they be tabled immediately?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 333—**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:**

With regard to the federal government's actions to increase hospital and intensive care unit (ICU) capacity across Canada since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic or March 2020: (a) what is the total amount of all federal government funding provided to provinces or territories meant to increase the permanent hospital and ICU capacity; (b) broken down by province or territory and by month, how much did each receive to permanently increase hospital and ICU capacity; (c) what was the total hospital and ICU capacity in Canada as of March 1, 2020; (d) what is the total hospital and ICU capacity as of February 14, 2022; and (e) what is the breakdown of (c) and (d) by province or territory?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders***Question No. 334—Mr. John Williamson:**

With regard to government funding provided to BC Ferries and to East Coast Ferries, since January 1, 2019, and broken down by year: (a) what is the total amount provided to BC Ferries; (b) what is the total amount provided to BC Ferries through (i) the Safe Restart Agreement, (ii) other programs, broken down by program; (c) what is the total amount provided to East Coast Ferries for their service between Deer Island and Campobello; and (d) what is the total amount provided to East Coast Ferries, through (i) the Safe Restart Agreement, (ii) other programs, broken down by program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 335—Mr. Jamie Schmale:

With regard to asylum seekers who entered Canada at the unauthorized border point at Roxham Road since the government lifted the crossing ban on November 1, 2021: (a) how many asylum seekers have crossed the border at Roxham Road; (b) how many of the individuals in (a) were (i) fully vaccinated, (ii) not fully vaccinated; (c) were asylum seekers who were not fully vaccinated returned to the United States; and (d) were the individuals who entered through the unauthorized border at Roxham Road subjected to the same public health requirements related to COVID-19, including the requirement to present a negative PCR or molecular test result taken within 72 hours prior to entering Canada, and, if so, how many (i) presented the required negative test, (ii) did not present the required negative test?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 336—Mr. Tony Baldinelli:

With regard to polling data obtained by the Privy Council Office since January 1, 2016, concerning Canada Post: what are the details of all such polling including, for each poll, (i) who conducted the poll, (ii) the start and end dates of when the poll was conducted, (iii) the number of participants, (iv) the complete results of the poll, including the questions asked and the responses received, (v) the value of the contract related to the poll, (vi) the date the polling data was shared with Canada Post, if applicable?

(Return tabled)

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

AN ACT FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY OF CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-13 seeks to amend the Official Languages Act, which was enacted by Pierre Elliott Trudeau's Liberal government in 1969 and then amended once by Brian Mulroney's Conservatives in 1998 based on the same principles.

Before that, for almost a century, the so-called equality of languages established by the Constitution of 1867 never really existed, except in theory.

It was nothing new when Gilles Duceppe said that there are two languages and that bilingualism in the federal government means English and translated English. In fact, French has remained the translated language, and in the past, francophone members who wanted to make themselves understood had to speak English because there was no simultaneous interpretation.

Anglophones were responsible for the important economic portfolios and held the vast majority of management positions in the public service. That too has not changed very much, but until the 1970s there were almost no francophones at all working in the federal public service.

For nearly a century, there were laws that banned French in all the provinces that are now predominantly English-speaking. Ontario's Regulation 17 is just one example. Unfortunately, it was not an exception, and it caused nearly 70% of Canada's francophones to become anglicized. These are the figures from the last time this was measured.

However, objectively speaking, I have to admit that there has been some progress, such as the adoption of bilingual stamps in 1927, bilingual bank bills in 1936 and bilingual federal cheques in 1962. Of course, with such dizzying progress, many people were not happy in Quebec, where things were moving and shaking. The Quiet Revolution was under way, Jean Lesage's "maîtres chez nous" was on everyone's lips, and the modern independence movement was gaining traction. I am not suggesting things were better outside Quebec. Speaking French outside Quebec remains a daily struggle. It is an act of resistance.

Getting back to the Official Languages Act, people say it is the result of the work of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Laurendeau-Dunton commission. That is not quite true. The Laurendeau-Dunton commission was set up at the urging of André Laurendeau, who wrote an editorial calling for a commission of inquiry rather than debates about bilingual cheques and other trivial concessions to French Canadians.

André Laurendeau was a federalist. He thought the French-Canadian nation could co-exist with English Canada. He would have wanted Quebec to be given special status as the heart of French-Canadian society. He wanted to create an egalitarian partnership between French Canada and English Canada. To him, bilingualism was a secondary tool. He wanted a new division of powers between the central government and the francophone province.

Prime Minister Pearson made the commission of inquiry an electoral issue. He was elected. He said he wanted "to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races", but it did not happen that way because André Laurendeau died in the meantime and a new Liberal leader arrived. He was a fiercely anti-nationalist Quebecker. His name was Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

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Contrary to what is often written, the key recommendations of the Laurendeau-Dunton commission were cast aside by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who rejected the idea of two peoples and two national cultures and kept only the idea of having two languages associated with individual rights and multiculturalism, rather than biculturalism, which reduced Quebec culture to one culture among many.

It is important to consider the historical context because the fundamental principles of the Official Languages Act have not really changed, despite the fine declarations offered up in Bill C-13 and in the Speech from the Throne.

In the study of language planning around the world, language policies are grouped into two major categories based on whether they are founded on the principle of territoriality or the principle of personality.

• (1225)

Virtually all experts agree that only an approach based on territoriality and collective rights can ensure the survival and development of a minority language.

It is also interesting to note that André Laurendeau talked about the Belgian and Swiss models, which are examples of how effective the territoriality principle can be in defending minority languages.

In Flanders, in Belgium, everything is done in Dutch. The entire public service and education system, from kindergarten to university, operate in Dutch. This does not prevent people there from learning five or six second languages, often very capably.

The same thing goes for French in Wallonia, but the central government in Brussels is bilingual, and that is where most of the problems have been, but that is not the subject of today's debate.

The Quebec model is based on the principle of territoriality, with the Charter of the French Language, which aims to make French the only official and common language in Quebec, while respecting the historic anglophone community and recognizing the right of first nations to maintain and develop their original language and culture.

In fact, Quebec treats the anglophone community eminently better than the Canadian provinces treat the francophone and Acadian communities.

In response to the rhetoric I hear from the Liberals, I would say that the principle of territoriality could very well apply outside Quebec, in territories that have a large concentration of francophones or Acadians, as we heard from an expert who recently testified before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

This does not mean that we could not maintain some form of institutional bilingualism, as already exists in regions in which there are fewer francophones and they are more spread out. This would be a nominal gesture towards righting all of the wrongs done by the Canadian government's assimilation policies.

The Canadian model, with the Official Languages Act, is based on the principle of personality. It establishes individual language rights that can be transported across the Canadian territory. It

claims to guarantee equal access to federal government services for people who belong to either of the two big linguistic groups, yet it limits such access to areas where numbers warrant.

This personality-based approach ultimately ends up creating a situation in which the strongest of several official languages develops at the expense of the other, more vulnerable ones. All over the world, models like Canada's non-territorial institutional bilingualism result in minority languages being assimilated.

This is what we have seen over the past 52 years with the Official Languages Act. The assimilation rate of francophones outside Quebec has steadily increased. It was 40% in 2016, which means that 40% of francophones outside Quebec now speak English at home. As for language of use, it went from 4.3% in 1971 to 2.3%. This drop in the use of French is a result of the Official Languages Act.

The Office québécois de la langue française is predicting a drop in the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec from 78.9% in 2011 to 69% in 2036. That prediction was made based on a high rate of immigration, but there has been a lot less immigration under the Liberal government.

Federal bilingualism is also territorial to some extent, because, as I was saying earlier, it is limited to regions where the numbers warrant it or there is sufficient demand. That does not make any sense at all. When French declines, the government cuts services in French. That is a bit like having a law to support employment that provides for cuts to employment services when there is a high rate of unemployment. People would be inclined to inflate the numbers to hide the real unemployment rate so that employment services would not be cut. That is more or less what is happening here.

• (1230)

Francophones outside Quebec have an incentive to inflate the numbers, to seem more numerous because they do not want their French services taken away. This is good for Ottawa, which makes it look like all is well. However, the consequence is that the federal government has, until very recently, denied the decline of French despite all the obvious signs. It has found all sorts of ways, all manner of indicators to send the message that French was doing just fine and, ostensibly, to help Francophone and Acadian communities.

This adversely affects Quebec because organizations like the QCGN and Canadian Heritage use indicators such as FOLS, first official language spoken, which they manipulate somewhat to inflate the figures. As a result, the QCGN advocates for the rights of anglophones who are defined in this way, many of whom are newcomers whom Quebec should, in fact, integrate into the francophone community.

Our big problem is that, in order to maintain the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec, 90% of the language transfers must be to French. At the moment, it is a little more than 50%, and this is mainly because of an agreement that enabled the Quebec government, for a time, to select more francophone or francotropic immigrants. However, that is happening less and less because the federal government adopted a two-stage strategy whereby immigration is increasingly based on temporary study permits. As we have heard in the media, the main sources of francophone immigration are experiencing abnormally high rejection rates. At the same time, the federal government has, until very recently, always denied the decline of French.

Another principle underlying the Official Languages Act is the symmetry established between anglophones in Quebec and the francophone and Acadian minorities. This is another absurdity that has been criticized by the Bloc Québécois, in particular, but also by a number of authors and journalists in Quebec. It is very easy to demonstrate that this does not correspond to reality.

Even the Laurendeau-Dunton commission showed that in Quebec, not only did anglophones have considerable privileges, but there were fewer francophones graduating from university, and that is still the case today. Francophones also had lower incomes. They ranked 12th out of 14 linguistic groups. Although there has been some catching up, there is still a decline, and the average salary of francophones, for example, if we do not use the doctored Statistics Canada indicators, is still well below the average salary of anglophones in Quebec.

The very principle of official language minorities is highly questionable, since as long as Quebec is in Canada, it will unfortunately be subject to the will of the federal government, which is controlled by the English Canadian majority. We have seen the results. This government had no qualms about changing and imposing a Constitution in which the principles of the Official Languages Act were enshrined, against the will of Quebec. It never worked. No Quebec government has signed this. It is locked up, so to speak.

In 1993, even the UN Human Rights Committee stated that anglophone citizens of Canada could not be considered a linguistic minority in the Canadian context, where they are in the majority. Still today, the sociolinguistic reality is that English is used in Quebec as a majority language in Canada and not as a minority language in Quebec.

As in the rest of Canada, language transfers disproportionately favour English. This symmetry that is at the very foundation of the concept of official language minority communities has another adverse effect, in that it has divided Quebec from francophone and Acadian communities. As a result, the federal government has ignored French language advocacy groups, claiming that they represented a majority. A study was done on the status of French at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the first in 52 years.

• (1235)

Despite all these criticisms, the Official Languages Act has maintained this fictitious symmetry between the anglophone community and the francophone and Acadian communities. This has allowed the federal government to justify providing massive funding

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to anglophone institutions and lobby groups, thereby contributing, as several researchers have noted, to the anglicization of Quebec.

Let us come back to Bill C-13. After the Canadian government announced that it would modernize the Official Languages Act, the Government of Quebec stated its expectations. It asked that the Official Languages Act recognize that of the two official languages, French is the only minority language across Canada.

This seems to have resonated because the government mentioned it in the Speech from the Throne and in Bill C-13, while maintaining that the federal government has a responsibility to protect and promote the anglophone minority in Quebec. The federal government acceded to the Government of Quebec's request to some extent, but upheld the same principles.

There are no specific measures in Bill C-13 for defending the French language in Quebec. It is a little contradictory. We will see how things develop.

A month before the first bill to modernize the Official Languages Act was presented, the Quebec government detailed its position and presented five guiding principles.

The first was recognition of the minority status of French. As we saw, the bill offers some very ambiguous recognition and maintains the principle that the anglophone minority in Quebec needs support. We understand this to mean that all of the money from the official languages programs will continue to be devoted to defending English in Quebec.

The second request was that an asymmetrical approach be adopted. However, no such approach can be found in Bill C-13, which maintains a symmetry between anglophones in Quebec and francophone minorities outside Quebec.

The third principle was that the Official Languages Act should recognize that Quebec is the sole architect of language policy on its territory and that the Charter of the French Language must take precedence. The bill does not incorporate this at all. In fact, it does the contrary, with measures that will have an impact on French as the common language and that will hamper the Quebec government's efforts.

There is a strong consensus in Quebec. All of the political parties unanimously adopted a motion in the National Assembly. The mayors of all of the big cities and the former premiers, including the very liberal Jean Charest, want Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses.

The previous bill, Bill C-32, prevented Quebec from doing this by including a clause that made the application of Bill 101 optional. The present bill, Bill C-13, goes so far as to raise the prospect of a separate bill that will prevent Quebec from applying Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses by allowing these businesses to choose which law will apply to them. We saw how this will play out when the question was put to the CEO of Air Canada, Michael Rousseau. Naturally, he said that he would prefer the Official Languages Act.

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In conclusion, the Bloc Québécois recognizes the progress made in terms of promoting and protecting the French language in francophone communities outside Quebec. That said, we feel that we could go much farther, and we will support the demands of the francophone and Acadian communities. There again, we see the value of a differentiated approach.

However, the demands of the Quebec government and the Bloc Québécois were completely ignored, both in the previous bill and in this one.

At the time of the Laurendeau-Dunton commission, it was said that Quebeckers had two choices. They could either choose an extensive amendment to Confederation and the Constitution, or they could choose independence for Quebec. We are now in the same place 52 years later, just worse off because we are gradually losing our language and at risk of losing our political weight.

• (1240)

Quebeckers need to be well aware of this.

In conclusion, long live a free, French Quebec.

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for his work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages to protect the French language.

As a Franco-Ontarian, I sometimes have a hard time understanding the Bloc Québécois when it talks about promoting and protecting French outside of Quebec.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask my fellow francophone if he can clearly explain to me what his party is doing to support people in minority communities across the country.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois supports the demands of francophone and Acadian communities, in particular those calling for the Treasury Board to be made the true central agency for overseeing the enforcement of the Official Languages Act.

The Bloc Québécois supports all demands, as long as they do not interfere in Quebec's jurisdictions.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a real problem with the enforcement of the Official Languages Act in this country. We had the Commissioner of Official Languages come to committee. He said that although there was a huge increase in the number of complaints about people not complying with the act, there is not much he can do about it. He reports to Treasury Board but does not have to update the Minister of Official Languages.

Does the member believe this has been adequately fixed in the bill?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I would say no because, number one, that responsibility will still be shared between Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board, and number two, as Charles

Castonguay said, it is clear that the Official Languages Act is a real fiasco.

It has been reported that 40% of francophones at federal institutions say they are not comfortable working in French.

The Standing Committee on Official Languages heard from the vice-president of the federal public service union. He told us that he felt that there is systemic discrimination in favour of English, even in Quebec. English is always assumed to be the first language, while French is a language of translation.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île, and I hope we will be able to work together on improving Bill C-13 at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We agree that, when developing official languages policies, our first duty is to better protect the French language and slow its decline in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): I wish to inform the hon. member that we can no longer hear her. Perhaps she is on mute.

It is working now.

The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I will continue, Mr. Speaker.

Can we count on my colleague's collaboration to strengthen the bill in committee, in particular with the creation of a central agency responsible for implementing language policies and clauses to protect the rights of francophones in minority communities and ensure that francophone immigration targets are met to help slow the population decline in francophone communities?

• (1245)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes, of course, Mr. Speaker, as long as it does not involve any interference in Quebec's jurisdictions.

However, I do not think that is the case. We have had many interesting discussion with representatives from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, who also seem to agree that we need a differentiated approach.

In fact, the Bloc Québécois believes that the Official Languages Act should apply to Quebec as little as possible because Quebec should be in charge of its own language policy.

We know that 91% of francophones in Canada live in Quebec. If we continue to weaken French in Quebec, it will also become increasingly difficult for francophone and Acadian communities to keep French alive.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île for his speech.

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This morning, in her speech, the Minister of Official Languages talked a lot about the importance protecting francophones in minority situations. I asked her a two-part question. I asked her whether she thinks French is in jeopardy in Quebec and, if so, what new measures Bill C-13 brings in to protect it. She recognized that French is in jeopardy. Her answer to me was that the government was going to protect the right of francophones to work in their language.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Is that something new and is it enough to protect French in Quebec?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. In fact, the opposite is true.

Until recently, the Quebec government had not applied Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses because the case law went against it. There have been new rulings recently, so the situation has been reversed. One of the things the Quebec government wanted to see in the amendments to the Official Languages Act was that Bill 101 apply to federally regulated businesses. However, this bill will prevent that, since federal laws take precedence over Quebec laws, and this bill makes the application of Bill 101 optional. This allows federally regulated businesses to choose whether they want to be subject to Bill 101 or the Official Languages Act.

As I said earlier, we did a test. We heard from Michael Rousseau, from Air Canada, who is the best example of how the Official Languages Act does not work. The Charter of the French Language aims to make French the common language of the workplace, whereas the Official Languages Act only provides accommodations to allow individuals to work in French.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for his speech, which included lots of historical reminders and facts. I disagree with his conclusion, but I do think the facts he shared are relevant to understanding the reality of the French fact and bilingualism in Canada.

Let me just say that I am happy to see you in the chair, Mr. Speaker. This is the first time I have addressed you, the hon. member for Joliette, in this capacity. Welcome, thank you, and congratulations on your excellent work.

Getting back to my colleague's speech, he said French is in jeopardy. Everyone knows that. He said the bill we are debating today does not go far enough. My colleague from Portneuf-Jacques-Cartier rightly said as much.

Yes, French is in jeopardy, but laws can only go so far. There is an ever-present reality that is amplified by social media, which are constantly bombarding us with information, documentation and communications in English.

What does my colleague think of that?

What are his thoughts on that reality?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his question. I see this as a very important issue. Things are relatively quiet now, but I do not think that Quebecers will let their language disappear. Sooner or later a move-

ment will form. The Official Languages Act is currently one of the main factors behind the anglicization of Quebec.

As my colleague pointed out, Quebec is inundated with English. It is on TV, on the radio; we hear English stations playing English music. On top of that, the Official Languages Act only supports the English language in Quebec. This means that all of the so-called positive measures help only the English language and push for provincial and municipal services to be offered in English. English is used in unions, community organizations and in all kinds of areas that fall under Quebec's jurisdiction.

If we do not stop the anglicization of Quebec, it will become a crisis.

• (1250)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

Could he quickly talk about the differences between Bill C-32 and this one, Bill C-13?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-32 would have made the application of Bill 101 to federal institutions optional, but Bill C-13 is even worse because it creates a whole new act to that effect. I see the government's attempt to prevent Bill 101 from being enforced as a middle finger to Quebec. In response, the Quebec minister responsible for Canadian relations told the federal government to stay out of it and let Quebec enforce Bill 101.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House on behalf of the NDP to emphasize the importance of modernizing the Official Languages Act, the framework for protecting the language rights of Canadians.

I am a proud francophile. I was born and raised in Thompson, Manitoba, by two immigrant parents. My mother tongue is neither French nor English, but Greek.

My parents firmly believed that as citizens of Canada, my brother and I should have access to education in French. I managed to learn French not because of an innate gift, but as a result of the battle led by francophones, educators and their allies, who fought for their rights and for public investment, and who inspired a political will in Manitoban society.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our predecessors, at both the provincial and federal levels. I am grateful for the work of the NDP government in Manitoba, which my father was part of. In the 1980s, that government fought discrimination and extended the language rights of francophones, both in law and in services in Manitoba.

I am proud to be part of a generation of Canadians who were able to learn French, one of our official languages. Thanks to francophone teachers, I was able to discover Quebec, Acadia and the francophone communities in my own province. The system in place has opened many doors for people. It has given them many job opportunities and life experiences.

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The opportunities available to our generation cannot be taken for granted. We need to continue to be bold in our support for francophone communities and francophones' basic rights.

Unfortunately, it is all too clear that French is in decline in Canada and Quebec. The demographic weight of francophones continues to drop. It went from 25.5% in 1971 to 22.8% in 2016, even though our official languages and the diversity of our language regimes are what make us Canadian and are instrumental in holding our society together. That is why some of our main goals are to protect and revitalize our official language minority communities, guarantee their language rights, and promote and protect French throughout the country.

Another thing that is clear is that the Official Languages Act that is in effect today, and that was last overhauled in 1988, does not really ensure true equality between French and English in Canada. There is no shortage of examples. Some of these include a lack of francophone staff; the difficulty young people have completing their education in French, from early childhood to post-secondary education; the difficulty people have accessing justice in French; the government's inability to communicate in French in an emergency; and the unavailability of public health and safety information in French. That was a big problem during the COVID-19 pandemic, as public service unions and the Commissioner of Official Languages pointed out.

That is not to mention linguistic insecurity in the workplace. According to the Office québécois de la langue française, even in Montreal, two in three workers regularly use English at work because the use of French is not encouraged, so they are reluctant to speak French.

It is even worse in the federal public service. The commissioner tells us the government has not done enough. In his most recent annual report, he says:

...Canada's linguistic duality is not being expressed or advanced in the federal public service, which naturally has an impact on the quality of service it provides to the public. In my opinion, the root of the problem is the lack of official languages leadership in our federal institutions.

These are just a few examples, but they reflect a worrisome and tragic situation that has gone on for too long. We must do everything in our power to fight the decline of French and protect the language rights of 10 million French-speaking Canadians. That power is in our hands.

Over the years, Canadian society [*inaudible*] changed. Reform is long overdue, and the only reason we are finally studying this bill after all this time is that linguistic communities have exerted pressure and repeatedly called for new concrete, effective measures.

● (1255)

Ever since it came to power, the Liberal government has been ignoring the demands and needs of these communities, even though they sounded the alarm about the decline of French in this country. Minority language communities are sick of being overlooked and ignored by this government. They are sick of the indifference and lack of leadership shown by this government. I must say that I understand them and I share their feelings. How can the government ignore 10 million citizens? How can it turn its back on them?

The Commissioner of Official Languages himself has pointed to a systemic problem and an immaturity within the federal government with regard to respect for official languages. The federal public service is itself the sector that is most reluctant to enforce the Official Languages Act. The time for empty promises is over. It is time for real change.

I would like to emphasize that modernizing the Official Languages Act is an important first step. Among the notable advances, I support recognizing French as a minority language in Canada and North America, because of the predominant use of English. I am in favour of granting new powers to the commissioner and to the Treasury Board. I also support the clarification regarding positive measures, the introduction of bilingualism within the Supreme Court, and the requirement that IRCC adopt a francophone immigration policy.

Nevertheless, the NDP is aiming higher. For the OLA to really have more teeth, we want a more ambitious bill. We want legislation that is truly adapted to the realities of today and tomorrow.

I want to take the opportunity to remind the communities that the NDP has always supported them and will continue to offer them great support, support that they need, to ensure that the Official Languages Act meets their needs and expectations.

This is the first time in a generation that we have the opportunity to modernize the OLA. I want this to be done in the best way possible. We must make the most of this opportunity. Let us do the work that needs to be done.

I would now like to note several of our priorities for the OLA.

First, we want to ensure that the Treasury Board is the only body responsible for coordinating and implementing the entire OLA. It is the only one that can do it, and it must be in charge of the central agency responsible for enforcing the OLA. To fulfill its role effectively, the Treasury Board has to be able to require federal institutions to produce tangible results. What is more, it has to be able to issue principles and directives with respect to enforcing the entire OLA. Sharing responsibilities with Canadian Heritage, which does not have the necessary authority to fill this role, would lead to conflicts of interpretation and a lack of clarity. For that reason, I think it is essential to develop tools for measuring the impact of the positive measures and assessing the performance of senior officials in their departments.

I also support the proposal from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne to delete the clause authorizing the Treasury Board to delegate its responsibilities for coordinating the OLA to another federal institution. We want the division of responsibilities to be clear, coherent and effective. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past, which prevented successive governments from enforcing the Official Languages Act.

Second, we want to see language clauses introduced into federal-provincial agreements in order to meet the needs of each community, to ensure that they are not forgotten. Federal institutions must be required to negotiate these language clauses with the provinces and territories. This is essential. I also think that a provision should be included to allow the federal government to work directly with francophone minority communities if a provincial or territorial government refuses to commit to signing an agreement that includes a language clause.

The government missed a golden opportunity to advance the rights of francophone minority communities and provide opportunities for francophiles during the round of negotiations on funding child care spaces. Long waiting lists are still the norm for French-language child care.

• (1300)

A study conducted by the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité Canada in 2019 found that 9,500 francophone children were on waiting lists for 745 French-language day cares outside Quebec. A child who is on a waiting list is one who is at risk of losing their language and being assimilated into the English system.

It is not right that people have to fight to get a spot in a French-language day care, school or university. Language clauses could have shortened these waiting lists with dedicated funding. We cannot miss our opportunity during the upcoming health care negotiations.

Third, the francophone immigration policy that IRCC is supposed to put in place should clearly indicate that the main objective is to restore and increase the demographic weight of francophones.

The government has repeatedly failed to meet the 4.4% francophone immigration target since 2003. Given that the proportion of French-speaking immigrants who settle in francophone minority communities every year does not exceed 2%, there is reason to be upset.

Fewer than 50,000 francophone immigrants were admitted outside Quebec between 2008 and 2020. That is well below the 125,000 required to maintain the francophone population outside Quebec at 4.4%. We therefore need to be admitting 75,000 more francophone immigrants.

I do not see the point of setting a percentage that does not reflect reality. I think that we should look at the actual number of francophones needed in our communities. I call on the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to set meaningful, ambitious targets to get the numbers up to where they should be. A policy is needed to ensure the target is met. Some communities apparently need more than 16% francophone immigration to restore or increase their demographic weight. That is far from the 4.4% that the government keeps talking about. We need to change course.

Fourth, we want the Commissioner of Official Languages to have real power to deal with institutions that do not comply with the Official Languages Act. The commissioner's power to make orders applies only to parts IV and V of the act, but part VII is the part that promotes the equality of the two official languages and

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that supports the development of official language minority communities. The commissioner must be able to make orders regarding this part as well.

Furthermore, we will have to review the commissioner's power to impose administrative monetary penalties. This should not apply only to a few companies like Air Canada or Via Rail. We must expand the scope.

I agree with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne's position on the positive measures that federal institutions are required to take. It wants to see the wording changed from measures that are considered "appropriate" to "necessary" positive measures. I think this is an important change to clarify the obligation. We must also make sure that we clarify the ways in which official language minority communities will be consulted as part of the process for identifying positive measures. It is vital that we take these consultations into account, because they will provide crucial insights.

Lastly, I will play close attention to the criteria used to define the notion of regions with a strong francophone presence. Geographical realities vary across the country, so we need a clear, precise, meaningful definition. These essential changes are what will ensure this legislation is in line with what our communities need and is geared toward them.

The NDP has always stood with francophone communities calling for guarantees and certainty. We will continue to support them because we firmly believe that everyone has the right to live life to the fullest in French.

In conclusion, I would like to remind members that official languages are everyone's business. They are crucial to our society and social cohesion. We will fight for concrete results for francophones in Quebec and those in the rest of Canada.

At the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I will continue to champion and advocate for official language minority community rights. The NDP will continue to defend the Canadian linguistic duality we are proud of.

• (1305)

We still have a lot of work to do to make sure French is protected across Canada. Time to roll up our sleeves.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her incredible work on the official languages committee.

The member spoke about the importance of the Treasury Board being in charge. I am a bit concerned about that, because the Treasury Board has a lot of different priorities. I am concerned that maybe official languages will fall to the bottom of what it is doing.

Would it not be better for the Minister of Canadian Heritage to have the power to act?

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments and her question.

We think that should be Treasury Board's job because its primary responsibility is to ensure that measures applicable to the federal government are upheld by the entire public service and the federal government.

That is consistent with recommendations from the Commissioner of Official Languages and many other people who submitted comments on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her French and for the work she is doing as a francophile for francophone communities across Canada and in Manitoba.

My colleague and I have fathers with similar backgrounds. Her father was a member of the Manitoba legislature, and my father was here in the House when the Official Languages Act was enacted in 1969.

We are currently studying Bill C-13 at second reading, and we have heard several opposition members offer up suggestions. Would my colleague be in favour of a motion asking the Standing Committee on Official Languages to conduct a pre-study of the bill before it is passed at second reading and referred to the committee?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for sharing that personal story about the fight for language rights and protecting French. We are all proud to continue the work of our parents and those who came before us.

To circle back to my colleague's question, when a bill is debated in the House, I feel it is paramount that all members of each party have the opportunity to share their views. It appears, based on the schedule, that we will soon have time to discuss this further in committee. Clearly, we all want to move forward as quickly as possible with the express goal of improving this bill.

• (1310)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on her speech.

She said she agreed with the principle that French is a minority language in Canada. What does she think of the fact that all of the Quebec government's requests have been refused or else accepted but in a very ambiguous way? Does she understand that Quebec should be allowed to implement its own territoriality policies?

I see that as a condition for ensuring the future of French in Quebec and in North America.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has clearly described the situation in Quebec. I would also like to point out that he asked the committee to study the decline of French in Quebec, which gave us the opportunity to hear some troubling testimony on this reality.

The NDP supports Quebec's right to manage its own affairs. When it comes to the French language, clearly, Quebec is very familiar with its own reality and the need to respect the minority communities on its territory.

The federal government must respect Quebec's areas of jurisdiction and recognize that the decline of French exists not only outside Quebec, but also in Quebec itself.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for speaking so eloquently in support of this bill. I note how interesting and important it is to support minority languages across Canada, not just here in this place, but everywhere.

I come from Alberta and in Alberta we have a francophone community. Of course, in my city we have Campus Saint-Jean. We have seen significant attacks on Campus Saint-Jean over the last few months, particularly under the Conservative provincial government.

How does this bill help those minority communities to see that their language will be protected in other places, like Alberta?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. He and our colleague from Edmonton Strathcona have been champions for Campus Saint-Jean, defending it and the francophone community in Alberta against vicious attacks by the provincial government.

[*Translation*]

It is because of this reality that we in the NDP are recommending several measures for improving Bill C-13. One of them involves ensuring that federal-provincial agreements contain language clauses, investment requirements and specific protections for francophone communities outside Quebec. As we have said, we missed an opportunity to include such protections in the last federal-provincial agreement on child care.

In all areas where federal-provincial agreements are signed, such as post-secondary education and health, we must protect the rights of francophone communities outside Quebec and meet their needs.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague.

At the Standing Committee on Official Languages, she mentioned the importance of francophone immigration. I would like her comments on how we might improve Bill C-13 in that regard.

How can we help community organizations from coast to coast to coast support and increase francophone immigration?

• (1315)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for raising this important question.

We believe it was important for this bill to specifically address the need for an immigration policy, but it must go beyond that. The policy needs to include clear targets to get the numbers up to where they should be. As I said, the 4.4% target does not reflect the demographic weight of francophones, which is declining across the country. We need to get those numbers up and invest in community organizations, of course.

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This week I visited the Association des communautés francophones de l'Ontario, or ACFO, here in southeastern Ontario. Representatives from the association made it clear that in order to support immigrants, they need recurring investments, not investments renewed on an annual basis.

The policy about accepting francophone students also needs to be changed, and we need to look at the unacceptable rejection rate among students from Africa. We need to bring in the francophones that our country needs. They want to contribute, and we want to build stronger francophone communities together. We have a lot of work to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): The hon. member for Saint-Jean on a point of order.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, although this is an interesting debate, I have noticed that there are not many members in the House right now.

I was wondering if you could check if we have quorum, including the members participating virtually.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): All right. I would ask the members joining virtually to turn on their cameras so that we can count.

I confirm that we have quorum.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages.

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Kingston and the Islands.

As a proud francophone from Nickel Belt and Greater Sudbury, a region with deep francophone roots, I am very appreciative of the opportunity to give this speech today. The Franco-Ontarian flag, which was designed by Gaétan Gervais, a history professor at Laurentian University, and Michel Dupuis, a student there, was officially flown for the first time in Sudbury on September 25, 1975, at the University of Sudbury.

In 1958, my father, Gaétan Serré, the former member for Nickel Belt, also attended the University of Sudbury. As an MP in 1969, he voted in favour of the Official Languages Act. I am so proud to be here today.

Since 2019, our government has made it a priority to gather and analyze information about the linguistic situation in Canada and to monitor the evolution of official languages since the adoption of the first Official Languages Act over 50 years ago.

The linguistic landscape is constantly shifting. The world we are living in has also changed since 1969. It is time we look at the successes and issues in this act in order to propose a new, modernized vision of our linguistic duality and bilingualism. The conditions in which we are modernizing the Official Languages Act are unique. The entire planet is in the midst of a health crisis with COVID-19, and in Canada we have seen how the pressure and urgent need to act can affect whether the requirements to communicate and provide services to the public are enforced. We have a duty to act and we have taken that into consideration in our modernization bill.

For more than 50 years, the Official Languages Act has helped shape our country's linguistic landscape. It established institutional bilingualism and enabled francophones not only to have a career in the federal public service, but also to be served and educated in their mother tongue.

For 50 years, in addition to promoting our two official languages, the act has protected the rights of our official language minority communities, both francophone communities across Canada and English-speaking communities in Quebec. It has ensured their vitality.

In my riding, the federal government's support and commitment have translated into direct support for francophone projects, such as Place des arts du Grand Sudbury; the West Nipissing Arts Council; the Réseau de soutien à l'immigration francophone du Nord de l'Ontario; and, in the area of post-secondary education, institutions like Collège Boréal.

This is an undeniable Canadian reality and a uniquely Canadian distinction, but it also presents a challenge. This is a situation that requires a Canadian response. We have a duty and an obligation to support the vitality of these communities from coast to coast to coast, tomorrow and for generations to come. Our rich history recognizes the presence, perseverance and resilience of francophone minority communities across the country and of anglophone minority communities in Quebec.

Maintaining the demographic weight of these communities is important to us. The numbers speak for themselves. The demographic weight of the francophone population is plummeting. The proportion of people whose first language is French outside Quebec fell from 6.6% in 1971 to 3.9% in 2011. The statistical projections are not getting any better.

Despite efforts in the area of francophone immigration and the protection of the right to access federal services in the language of one's choice, our government needs to do more in terms of its responsibilities and its commitment to enhancing the vitality of official language minority communities.

● (1320)

We need strong institutions that serve as a beacon in their communities. We also need better data so we can fine-tune our interventions in these communities. In order to achieve that, federal institutions also need to listen to our communities. We know that minority communities, whether French or English, need institutions and services in their own language. These institutions are part of the public space that these communities need in order to live and grow in their language.

When we talk about services, we are talking about those offered by large public institutions, provincial and municipal governments and community organizations. That includes school boards, day cares, community health clinics and cultural organizations.

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Our government's bill seeks, among other things, to help these communities reach their full potential by supporting the vitality of institutions in key sectors. To do that, we want to amend part VII of the Official Languages Act by including practical examples of positive measures. These include providing support for key sectors of the official language minority community, such as education, employment, health, immigration, culture and justice; including an obligation for the Government of Canada to contribute to an estimate of the number of children who are entitled to an education in the language of the official minority; and affirming the Government of Canada's commitment to strengthening the education continuum from early childhood to post-secondary studies in the minority language.

These amendments will require the government to take more positive measures to support official language minority communities and will clarify the obligations of federal institutions, particularly when it comes to consulting these communities and protecting their key programs and services.

The bill we introduced presents solid and lasting solutions to protect the future of our official language minority communities and their institutions. The bill also proposes some innovative improvements. One example is the creation of the new rights to be served and to work in French in federally regulated private businesses.

Our government is deeply committed to both our official languages and to these communities across Canada. The introduction of the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act is a milestone for our identity as Canadians and for the defence of our language rights today and for generations to come.

Having spoken directly to francophone activists and passionate organizations in Nickel Belt and Greater Sudbury, such as the community health centre, the ACFO and post-secondary institutions, I know that they are proud of these initiatives.

They feel that the government understands the needs of francophones and is committed to building a region and services for francophones, by francophones, in addition to promoting the development of language and culture in minority settings.

We have known for a long time that our official language objectives can only improve the lives of Canadians through measures taken together with the targeted communities.

This bill sets the stage for a collaboration that will strengthen federal institutions and official language minority communities.

• (1325)

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for an excellent speech and for his work on official languages.

I would like to know whether he thinks the sanctions that are now able to be imposed on those who do not comply with the act are adequate to drive the right behaviour.

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the work we have done together on several committees in the past.

The Commissioner of Official Languages made several recommendations. Some of those recommendations were included previously in Bill C-32. We have listened to communities across the country and we have also listened to the commissioner during this time. Bill C-13 now has more teeth for the commissioner in looking at making public statements and looking at *les sanctions pécuniaires*. I am not sure of the English term.

We know that the commissioner now has more powers and is really pleased with the additional responsibilities the commissioner now has to officially look at the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, my question will be similar to the one I asked earlier. We have heard a lot about francophone minority communities, but I would like to speak more specifically about Quebec.

Can my colleague name a single positive measure that provides further protection for Quebec?

I want to forestall a potential answer and clarify that giving people the right to work in French in Quebec is not a positive measure and does not improve the situation of French in Quebec.

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

If we look at Bill C-13, as well as minority communities in Canada and in Quebec, there are some positive measures that are proposed. The bill talks about a central agency and about federally regulated private businesses.

We all agree that French is declining in Quebec and in Canada. We must come together to find ways to work with the communities, the provinces and the federal government to protect French in Quebec and across Canada.

• (1330)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been following today's debate with great interest.

Here is something that has long struck me as interesting: the number of MPs from all over the country with French names. This shows us how, throughout our history, French Canadians have travelled and settled all over.

Does the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages think that the bill before us today, Bill C-13, will support Francophone communities across our great land and help them thrive?

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, as my colleague said, we have francophones and francophiles here in the House who have travelled across the country.

Bilingualism is important from coast to coast to coast. We have to find ways to promote French and protect minority communities in Quebec, and we have to work together to find ways to support minority communities across the country. We will do that by working with the provinces, municipalities and organizations.

Bill C-13 is a step toward helping French flourish everywhere in Canada.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PENSION PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC) moved that Bill C-228, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985, be read a second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, today is April Fool's Day, so I could not start this speech without saying that one would have to be a fool not to support my private member's bill.

My private member's bill is centred on pension protection and working to prevent the loss of pensions for employees whose companies have declared bankruptcy. Canadians deserve to know that the contributions they have made over their whole lives will result in a secure financial future for themselves and for their families. However, the last few years have shown us that security can disappear in a moment. We need to do better for Canadians.

My bill would remedy this issue. It would do three things. First, it would require that an annual report on the solvency of pension funds be tabled here in the House of Commons for greater transparency and oversight.

Second, it would provide a mechanism to transfer funds into a pension fund to restore it to solvency or to ensure the insolvent portion until the funds could be restored.

Finally, in the case of bankruptcy, pensions would be paid out ahead of large creditors and executive bonuses.

[Translation]

To put things in context, I want to point out that there have been far too many cases of businesses that have declared bankruptcy to the great detriment of their own employees.

Nortel Networks declared bankruptcy in 2009, leaving 200,000 Canadians to fend for themselves when it came to their pensions. An article published in the Financial Post in 2016 entitled "The big lesson from Nortel Networks: Pension plans aren't a guarantee" gave a detailed account of the battle waged by these employees as they tried to recover even part of their share of Nortel's assets, which were estimated at \$7.3 billion. Legal and consulting fees totalled over \$1.9 billion, which further reduced the amount these former employees were seeking.

According to CBC, at the end of 2016, former Nortel employees were pleased with the agreement they reached under which they

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would get a payout of 40¢ on the dollar. That was an improvement over the 10¢ on the dollar they were initially offered.

However, in 2020, the employees lost out again when the Ontario pension benefits guarantee fund managed to reclaim some \$200 million from monies allocated to pensioners in Nortel's bankruptcy proceedings.

In all, the whole mess with Nortel turned into a more than 11-year battle for former employees who failed several times while simply trying to obtain the financial security to which they were entitled. That is just one example.

• (1335)

[English]

Sears Canada is another infamous case, perhaps one of the most well known. Between 2005 and 2013, Sears Canada paid more than \$3 billion in dividends to shareholders, even as it was operating at a loss and its pension plan was underfunded by about \$133 million.

In 2017, Sears Canada declared bankruptcy after attempting to restructure. During that restructuring, Sears Canada faced heavy criticism for giving retention bonuses to 43 executives and senior managers, when it did not plan to offer severance to laid-off employees. Allegedly, the bonuses were intended to maintain the morale of senior staff at the cost of providing the necessary funds to the company's pension plan, leaving more than 17,000 pensioners cheated of their full pensions.

Sears pensioners learned that their payments were going to be cut by 30%. Of Mount Pearl, Newfoundland, 72-year old Ron Husk told the CBC that the cut caused his monthly pension payment to drop by \$450. Many said they would have to go back to work in sales in their seventies. Pensioners in Ontario fared marginally better because of the provincial mechanism that protects the first \$1,500 of a pensioner's payments, but it made little difference overall and in today's era of extreme inflation it is helping even less.

Looking back further, when the Eaton company folded in 1999, the vast majority of its 24,500 employees were terminated without being paid termination pay, severance pay and other amounts owed to them. All employee and retiree health and other benefits were cancelled. In the end, the liquidator released payments to employees and retirees of just 53.7¢ on the dollar.

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There are several other noted cases in which courts have ruled in the favour of creditors and lenders over pensioners, including Indalex, Stelco and Grant Forest Products, among others. In the Indalex case, Indalex Limited obtained creditor protection under the Companies' Creditor Arrangement Act, known as the CCWA. The court authorized Indalex to obtain debtor in possession, or DIP, financing, which would provide the company with loans to allow it to continue operating its business during the restructuring period. These DIP lenders had superpriority over the existing debt equity and other claims.

At a hearing for the approval of this motion in 2008, two groups of pension claimants opposed the distribution, asserting that assets equal to the funding deficiencies in two defined benefit pension plans administered by Indalex were deemed to be held in trust and should be given to the pension plan in priority over the DIP lender. The CCWA court ruled in favour of the DIP lender, not the pensioners. This decision was upheld and became a precedent for the Grant Forest Products case.

Sadly, many other examples of workers who did not receive their full pensions exist.

[*Translation*]

There is no doubt that this has been a problem for a long time. The government needs to intervene by taking stringent measures to rectify this and protect Canadian workers. I want to acknowledge the contribution of some of my colleagues in the House. Many MPs from all parties came to see me to present bills on this same topic.

In 2018, my colleague, the member for Durham, introduced Bill C-405 on pension benefits standards in order to authorize the administrator of an underfunded pension plan, in certain situations, to amend the plan or to transfer or permit the transfer of any part of the assets or liabilities of the pension plan to another pension plan. This bill did not receive enough support, because changing the type of pension or the benefit amount means breaching the contract signed by employees who worked for a company for a certain number of years and thought they would receive a certain pension.

His bill also called for the tabling of an annual report in Parliament respecting the solvency of pension plans, which I thought was a useful and brilliant provision.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Currently, there is a requirement for an annual report on the solvency of a fund, but it goes to the superintendent of finance and what, if any, actions are taken is not clear. In fact, there is evidence, with companies like Air Canada, that pension fund insolvency has been allowed to continue for far too many years. My bill would require this report to be tabled here, for greater transparency and oversight.

In October 2017 and again in 2020, the Bloc member for Manicouagan introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-253, which would have amended the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the CCAA. The bill would have provided priority status for pensions in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. It ultimately made it to committee but died on the Order Paper when the Liberals called the

election. I have incorporated her bill here with some suggestions that were brought forward.

There was concern that implementing an immediate priority for pensions could have unintended consequences. The suggestion was to have the coming into force of the reporting on the insolvency of funds to happen immediately, along with the mechanism to top up the fund to restore it to solvency. It was recommended to have several years of time for companies to get their funds in order before implementing the priority part. Five years was suggested in the bill, but there are stakeholders who would prefer to see it at three years. I am flexible about this, and these are exactly the types of conversations that need to happen when the bill goes to committee.

Most recently, the NDP member for Elmwood—Transcona reintroduced work first put forward by former MP Scott Duvall. What was originally Bill C-259 in 2020 would amend the act to ensure that claims in respect of unfunded liabilities or solvency deficiencies of a pension plan are accorded priority in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. It would also provide that an employer had to maintain group insurance plans that provide benefits to or in respect of its employees or former employees. This was the part of the bill that was a sticking point. This bill would also amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act to empower the superintendent of financial institutions to determine that the funding of a pension plan is impaired or that the pension plan administrator is at risk, and to set out measures to be taken by the employer in respect of the funding of the plan in such cases.

What I did was cherry-pick from all of the ideas that were previously supported by the House and put them all together in Bill C-228. Learning from both the numerous cases of company collapse and the various pension protection bills that came before to improve pension protection in a way we can all agree on is my goal here today. I also want to acknowledge that the Liberal member for Whitby is sponsoring e-petition 3893 on pension protections, supporting this very issue.

My bill has been reviewed by a variety of stakeholders, including the Canadian Federation of Pensioners and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. Bill VanGorder, the chief operating officer of CARP, offered this quote:

Most older Canadians have fixed incomes but face rising costs, growing inflation, an unpredictable economy and retirement savings that suffer as a result. The Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) believes it is vital that the Federal Government protect pensioners by giving them 'priority' status and creates a pension insurance program that insures 100% of pension liabilities. This proposal would go a long way in making that happen.

[*Translation*]

Some banks and large financial institutions have expressed their reluctance. They are concerned that if pensioners are given priority, companies with insolvent funds will have to pay higher interest rates to obtain credit and will be less likely to apply for credit.

This is part of the reason why the timing of the implementation should allow time for companies with insolvent funds to get their finances in order.

I would like to point out that if a company cannot restore the solvency of its fund after a period of five years, it should indeed pay a higher interest rate to obtain credit, because it really does present a higher risk.

The Canadian Labour Congress would like unions to have a say in how priorities are set when it comes to pensions.

If we can agree on the priority status and include that in the legislation, so that it is not subject to whim or pressure, I think that would strengthen pension protection.

• (1345)

[*English*]

In summary, this is reporting to Parliament on the solvency of funds for greater transparency so that we can ensure actions are being taken to protect pensions; creating a mechanism to top up the funds to restore solvency; and, in the event of bankruptcy, ensuring that people who have worked their whole lives receive the pensions they were promised.

The Library of Parliament has created an excellent table from the three-inch-thick Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to show where I am suggesting pensions go in the priority of discussion. They would come after source deductions for CPP, QPP and EI and taxes due; after suppliers take back their goods delivered within a month of bankruptcy; after salaries up to \$2,000 and the associated contributions; and before secured claims, preferred claims and unsecured claims.

Many members of the House in all parties have indicated their support for getting this bill to committee. I am open to consideration of other suggestions on how we can work to improve this bill to provide a successful outcome for Canadians, and I look forward to the industry committee's review of the bill.

I want to thank my colleagues for all their support in drafting this bill, and the MPs for Durham, Manicouagan and Elmwood—Transcona for their efforts to enhance pension protection. I would also like to thank Mr. VanGorder for his support and Mr. Mike Powell, the president of the Canadian Federation of Pensioners, for his invaluable help on this bill.

Finally, I want to end with a call to action. For many years, the House and the Senate have tried to address this issue. We have the opportunity now, as members of Parliament in difficult times, to come together and ensure that Canadians no longer find their pensions and retirement in jeopardy. We can work together to ensure that Canadians are able to live in dignity in their golden years, able to support themselves and their families with their hard-earned pensions.

Let us show Canadians that we have their interests at heart and support Bill C-228.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to start by acknowledging the incredible work the member for Sarnia—Lambton has done. I applaud her approach in working with all

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parties and members of the House who are concerned with this important issue to put something forward that is a hybrid and includes the best of all possible solutions. I really applaud that approach. I think it is very constructive, and I appreciate her efforts.

I wondered if the member for Sarnia—Lambton could go a little further into contrasting her approach with the option that was previously proposed in the 43rd Parliament, which was the “super priority” status. Could she speak to that a little further?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Whitby for putting forward his e-petition, which I encourage all Canadians to sign. I think this is an issue that everyone in this chamber and all Canadians are concerned with.

In terms of the priority, there has been discussion about “super priority” and where it should go on the list. When we look at all of the things that need to be paid out from the beginning, we see that source deductions, the CPP, things that were owed already and taxes that were due all need to be paid. Then we think about suppliers, many of which are small businesses that need to be able to get back their goods that they have given and, arguably, are not going to be paid for. That is important. There are then a number of salaries that need to be paid to people who have worked their time. They need to receive those.

However, after that the argument is that large creditors could actually withstand the failure of a company much better than an individual who was counting on that pension for their whole financial security for their future. That is why we would put individual pensions ahead of secured and unsecured creditors: they would be further up in the list.

These are the discussions we are going to have at committee, and I look forward to that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton for introducing Bill C-228 and for being so open-minded in the House. I heard examples of this several times today.

She said that we are ready to adopt this type of bill, and I completely agree. I want her to know that she will have my support and that of the Bloc Québécois on her bill. I think it could be referred to committee very quickly.

I would like to revisit the June 2021 committee meeting, which I attended. Everyone was in agreement, even on the question of the three-year or five-year period given to companies to make the appropriate changes.

I would like to know whether she thinks this time limit could even be removed entirely, which was a proposal supported by the member for Carleton.

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• (1350)

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Manicouagan because she is the one who did the hard work of bringing the bill forward with the priority part in the first place and went through committee with it.

That said, in terms of the discussion of how long people should wait, there was concern that if there are situations in which pension funds are not solvent already, the priority thing may still not be a good answer. The person may still only receive cents on the dollar. It is better to get those pension funds in order before that happens. Those are discussions we can have. I am open to all of it, but let us get this done for Canadians.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for bringing this forward for debate. I am looking forward to providing more remarks on the bill later.

In respect to some of the provisions around the Pension Benefits Standards Act, some of the concerns that have been raised around those provisions have to do with the ability of an administrator. With just the permission of the superintendent and not the informed consent of plan members or their representatives, an administrator could drastically change the nature of the pension and the terms and conditions of that pension. When the member says she is open to amendments on the bill, I wonder if she is open to amendments with respect to that section.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, absolutely I am open to discussing this. I like the idea of the superintendent having some powers to actually act, but I also know that there are voices who want to have their input heard when this is discussed. Therefore, let us have those discussions at committee. I look forward to that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House virtually today to take part in this important debate. Pension protection is an important topic. It is one that my constituents have charged me with advocating for on their behalf. I want to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for her work on this important issue.

There is no doubt that we need to strengthen pension protection for defined benefit plans to prevent against the loss of retirement income that seniors face when their employers go through insolvency. It is a shame that this problem persists today after the stories we have heard about Sears, Nortel, Eaton's and many others that some Canadians are still suffering losses to their retirement income based on their defined benefit pensions being underfunded when the company files for bankruptcy. We must ensure that the pensions Canadians pay into, and that their employers commit to, remain available to them in full throughout the course of their retirement. Anything less, in my view, is unacceptable.

It is important for me to point out how the income security and the overall well-being of our seniors has been a top priority for our government since day one. Even before the challenges brought on by the global pandemic, our government took significant steps to support Canadian seniors. We focused on improving the quality of life for our seniors by helping support active and healthy lifestyles; improving access to home and community care; reducing loneliness

and isolation; increasing access to health care; committing to the re-development of the national standards for long-term care with substantial investments to improve the quality of care for our seniors; and, importantly, and the topic I will be focusing on, ensuring the financial security of our seniors. These are all priorities for our government and we have made important strides in all of these areas.

In terms of our agenda, seniors' financial security is something our government has remained steadfast in our commitment to since day one. We permanently increased old age security by 10%, and we restored the age of eligibility to 65 from 67, reversing the Conservative policy of delaying OAS payments for seniors. We increased the guaranteed income supplement by 10%, improving the financial security of more than 900,000 seniors in Canada. In April 2020, more than four million low and middle-income seniors received a GST credit top-up. This was worth, on average, about \$375 for individual seniors and \$510 for senior couples.

In July 2020, we provided a one-time tax-free payment of \$300 to 6.7 million OAS pensioners and a further \$200 to 2.2 million seniors eligible for the guaranteed income supplement. To assist with the cost of the pandemic, we provided a one-time payment of \$500 in August 2021 to OAS pensioners. I have heard from many of the seniors on fixed incomes in Whitby that this one-time payment made a big difference for them. Why is this relevant? It shows our commitment, but it also highlights the importance of income security for our seniors.

If MPs in this chamber can understand the importance of these one-time payments, imagine then pensioners having lost 20% of their pensions due to their employers going through bankruptcy, leaving their pensions underfunded, and all other creditors being paid out before the pensioners. That could easily amount to \$500 per month of pension income loss that seniors would face for the rest of their lives.

I would say that would be life-altering. Can members imagine people counting on that pension income for their pension retirement, making contributions for many years and then getting to the point in their lives where they need to rely on that income to survive, only to find out that they will only be getting a portion of it?

It is important to remember that these are deferred wages and that employers have an obligation to their pensioners. I can only imagine how seniors put in this situation would feel, but after hearing from individuals who have gone through this, I can say that it is devastating for them. Let us not forget that individuals left in a state of income insecurity would be more vulnerable and more likely to access publicly funded social support programs. This could and should be avoided, and we cannot let this persist any longer.

This is an issue I have been engaged in since being elected in 2019, and I have had conversations with my constituents, my caucus colleagues, members of other parties, ministers and stakeholder groups on this important issue.

● (1355)

Most recently I sponsored e-petition 3893, as was mentioned in the House, which calls on parliamentarians to work together with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry to establish stronger protections for the members of defined benefit pension plans. I am happy to say that petition already has over 8,000 signatures, so clearly this is an issue many Canadians care about.

With over 1.3 million private defined benefit pension beneficiaries in Canada, I believe all members of the House have likely heard from constituents or someone they know who have been negatively affected by this issue or who are concerned they may get shortchanged if there is no remedy found. I think it is very important that we take the time to consider just how much impact this will have on Canada's seniors. I have heard many stories and I think we need to heed the calls for a solution on this matter.

I believe it is more important than ever that we find ways to work together and address this issue. With the cost of living on the rise and significant repeated shocks to our global economy from the global pandemic, extreme weather due to climate change and now Putin's war on Ukraine, some companies will undoubtedly face financial challenges, and we will need to make sure our seniors and their retirement incomes are protected. Seniors should live their final years in comfort and with the dignity they deserve, especially after a lifetime of hard work.

Given the nature of what we do in the House, there are often disagreements around policies and the direction we take as a country on certain files, but when it comes to protecting pensioners and the pension plans that individuals have paid into and rely on, I do not see how we can let this important issue get caught up in the atrophy of partisanship. In the last session of Parliament I voted in favour of the Bloc Québécois private member's bill, Bill C-253, to provide further protection to defined benefit pension plans here in Canada. I did that in the hope we would find a way to work to resolve this issue for the benefit of our seniors.

I was happy to see that our government also took important steps in the 43rd Parliament to make insolvency proceedings fairer and more transparent, and made changes to federal corporate law to ensure better oversight of corporate behaviour, including making company directors liable for excessive and unreasonable payments made to executives in the lead-up to insolvency.

I am aware that the NDP member for Elmwood—Transcona introduced legislation in February of this year that seeks to protect the pension benefits of workers caught in corporate bankruptcy proceedings, so effectively we have support for pension protection in all four corners of the House. I believe that provides us with the opportunity to come together across party lines and deliver for Canadian pensioners and their families.

I believe there are multiple ways we could approach a solution to this issue. We have seen various proposals and potential solutions, and I think we should try to find a way forward. Personally, I am

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open-minded and even would describe myself as solution-agnostic as long as pensioners receive 100% of the pension to which their employer committed. Without employees, we should all acknowledge, there are no businesses. Employees are just as important as shareholders and the many other creditors, and they do not deserve to be the last consideration when their company goes through insolvency. Whichever approach the House decides to take, we must know what is at stake. A solution now can help 4.3 million Canadians who will depend on a defined benefit pension for their financial security in retirement.

I am generally supportive of the bill, as members can tell, and I think the proposed changes to the insolvency legislation are a positive advancement by providing near superpriority status. I am supportive of any solution that places pensioners much closer to the front of the line in the long list of creditors that need to get paid during insolvency.

With that said, I firmly believe there are always ways to strengthen and improve a piece of legislation, and I have specific suggestions on that. I think we heard a comment recently about getting informed consent from pensioners when there is a transfer made. I think that is a good suggestion.

Let me just end here. Seniors cannot afford to get less than they deserve and we cannot afford to let them down.

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-228, which was introduced by my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton. I want to officially thank her. I may also have done so during my comments. I have thanked her personally but wanted to do so in the House. This is the kind of collaboration that allows us as parliamentarians to go even further, and this was confirmed in all of the questions and comments we have heard.

I do not think anyone in the House will be surprised to hear that I took a serious look at this bill. Again, there is absolutely no partisanship here. As my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton pointed out, I have introduced two bills on similar topics: Bill C-372 in 2017, the same day that Sears declared bankruptcy, and Bill C-253, during the previous Parliament, which has become Bill C-264. It is an endorsement of everything going on in the House, because there is really a movement to get this bill passed.

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Before I get to the matter at hand, I want to thank the people who worked on this bill, and I am sure my colleague will agree with me on this. This bill really affects everyone, Quebecers and Canadians, in all types of businesses. We heard about Sears, but in my region this happened with a multinational mining company called Cliffs Natural Resources. I say “my region”, but there were also other areas affected.

Many people worked on this bill. Individuals, workers and retiree organizations all testified. My colleague mentioned some who have been supporting this bill since 2017. This bill is supported by approximately four million people across Canada, Quebec included, as well as by associations representing retirees and seniors. When we think about it, four million people out of approximately 40 million is a large proportion of the population that is asking the House of Commons to take action to protect pension funds.

I would particularly like to thank Gordon St-Gelais, Kathleen Bound, Mario Levac, Nicolas Lapierre, Dominique Lemieux, Sandra Lévesque, Manon, Claire, Pierre, Ghislain, Anthony and Serge. There are so many others. I do not have time to name them all, but they are the ones who breathed life into this bill.

I repeat, my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton's bill really affects everyone. That is clear because, in my case, the very idea for the bill came from Cliffs Natural Resources retirees. That is real proof. Sometimes there is cynicism in politics, but this bill takes some of that away, because the bill really comes from the people. It shows that institutions can work properly when the will is there. I wanted to point that out to show that an MP is nothing without their constituents. If we want to represent them properly, then we need to listen to them.

Let me get right into it. Bill C-228 should have no trouble getting to committee and then to the Senate. It should not even have any trouble getting through the upcoming vote. It has already gone through significant study in committee. For example, it was very important to me that there be protection for insurance. That was removed from Bill C-228, but other mechanisms were added, and we will have to take a close look at them because there are still a lot of unknowns despite all the studies. Even so, I think everyone who supported Bill C-253 will support Bill C-228. I say everyone because all four parties were on the committee, so I do not see how anyone could be against this bill.

Why not fast-track it?

We could move it all the way through to royal assent pretty quickly. A number of senators were interested in my bill, so they will also be interested in the bill introduced by my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton. I really think things will move along very quickly.

I have 10 pages of notes and I am only on the second one, but if I can at the very least convey my enthusiasm and my hope that everyone votes in favour of this bill, I will consider that a success.

I could get into the more technical aspects of the bill because people are always interested in the scope of a bill. The spirit of my colleague's bill is the same.

• (1405)

What we are really trying to do is save the retirement nest eggs of workers who have accumulated a salary for years, what we call deferred wages. I always feel compelled to remind people of this, because I sometimes hear surprising questions in the House. I think I even heard some answers today with references to CPP, which has absolutely nothing to do with this bill.

What we are talking about here is really a pension fund. Workers pay into a pension fund and agree to give up part of their salary for a certain period of time. Instead of receiving \$25 an hour, for example, they will receive \$22 an hour. The union and the employer negotiate this so they can build up a pension fund for the employees' retirement. In other words, this is something they have already paid for, but when a company files for protection under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act or the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, they could lose it.

For example, back home in my riding, the Cliffs pensioners lost roughly 25% of their pension fund. I should mention that pension funds are not indexed. If a retiree had \$1,000 in 1995, it no longer had the same value in 2005 or in 2015, and that value will be different in 2025 too. This is already a loss for those people, and it can become enormous in some situations.

Insurance is also very important to me because when these people lose their insurance, they are often older. At 65, 70, 75 or 80 years old, it is harder to get insured. They often need more care and drugs—such as life—but they cannot get the same care they used to get. By the way, this may be the part of the bill I agree with the least, because this issue is very important to me. I have talked to people who have experienced hardship, like people with cancer who cannot afford decent care because companies went bankrupt.

We are not talking about small businesses, but multinationals. These are companies with significant revenues that should have managed their pension fund better in order to hang on to it.

I have spoken with people who lived through these tragedies. I think of them every time we talk about these bills in the House and study them in committee. This is very much a human issue, and I think we can do something about it. This bill is not calling for huge changes. It is not calling for all of the money to be returned to retirees and for nothing to be given to the creditors. That is not what this is about. This is a reasonable bill.

As I said, everyone in the House is in agreement, but even in the different sectors, companies agree on the principle of placing retirees higher on the list of priorities, without making them the only priority. I point this out because that exaggeration is one common criticism of this type of bill.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for everyone, including my House of Commons colleagues, who is working or wants to work to advance a bill like this one. I want to applaud the strength of people in my riding and other ridings, particularly people from MABE, Sears, Nortel, Cliffs and Eaton, which we talked about earlier. I thank them for their ongoing work because they are the ones supporting what we are trying to get done here and they are the reason we here are so aware of this issue and on the verge of passing a bill. There are just a few steps to go.

I also want to highlight the level of solidarity people have shown. Our parties do not always see eye to eye, but we have found a way to rise above our differences, work together and come to a compromise. Being an MP means making compromises, not compromising who we are, but seeking compromise, and that is something we can do. For me, it is also about respect. We respect one another, just as we respect workers and our constituents. All that makes me very excited about the idea that we can get this bill passed.

I would once again like to express my support to my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton. I think she is doing amazing work. We will certainly get this legislation passed, whether it is this bill or any other bill along the same lines, such as mine. Why not?

* * *

● (1410)

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

BILL C-8—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the report stage and third reading stage of 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.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the respective stages of said bill.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. minister for the notice.

* * *

[English]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-228, because it is a bill that grapples with a very important and long-standing issue in Canada's bankruptcy laws.

For far too long, Canadian workers who have had the company either that they work at or used to work at go into bankruptcy have seen their retirement plans and their pensions up for grabs as part of insolvency proceedings. They are having to get in line behind some of the big banks and financial institutions, who are doing very well and get paid out before they do, the people who contributed in good

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faith over the course of years, in fact, decades in order to be able to safeguard a retirement plan for themselves and for their families.

It is an important issue and something that we have to deal with. I appreciate that the member for Sarnia—Lambton put forth this effort to deal with this issue.

[Translation]

I also thank the member for Manicouagan who has been working hard to resolve this major issue over the past several Parliaments.

[English]

I would remiss if I did not give a big thanks to Scott Duvall, a former member of Parliament for Hamilton Mountain and a proud steelworker out of Hamilton, who I think developed the gold standard on how to address this deficiency in our bankruptcy laws. It is something I have tried to honour by re-presenting his bill from the last Parliament as Bill C-225 in this Parliament.

Some of the features of Scott's bill that I think are important would not only amend the bankruptcy laws so that the unfunded liabilities of pension funds take precedence over secured and unsecured creditors, but also seek to ensure that companies cannot stop the payment of retirement benefits during bankruptcy proceedings. It would also require companies to pay any termination or severance pay owing before paying secured creditors.

I think Scott really put together a package on something that he knows well as a steelworker out of Hamilton. He worked for Stelco for many years, and he was an officer in the union that represented those workers. He saw first-hand the really brutal effects of this kind of game that companies sometimes choose to play in bankruptcy proceedings. The kicker, of course, is that sometimes it is the multinational parent company of the very company that is declaring bankruptcy that is a secured creditor and gets paid out before the workers they made the pension promise to and who contributed in good faith. That is one of the further perversions in the state of bankruptcy law in Canada that have to be addressed.

The member for Durham at one point in the last Parliament or the Parliament previous made an attempt to broach this issue in ways that, frankly, we found unsatisfactory and did not think really got to the point. However, I think it is a promising sign that the member for Sarnia—Lambton has addressed the question of so-called superpriority, where pensioners actually are in the line of creditors who have to be paid out in the case of bankruptcy. We welcome that development in this iteration of a Conservative private member's bill on this topic.

I think it is a promising sign to have Conservatives in the fold, to have the Bloc with a demonstrated history of good advocacy on this issue, to have the New Democrats who have cared a lot about this and to have a Liberal government that did commit, in 2015, to take action on this issue and has had some lines in subsequent budgets about trying to deal with it. However, the important fact to note is that, for as much as there has been some commitments on the part of the government, it has not happened yet.

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Unlike certain policies, particularly ones that require spending, the virtue of this issue is that it can be solved by legislators with or without the permission or support of government, particularly in the context of a minority Parliament. Where there is good faith, and we have heard some important and sincere signals of good faith from the member for Sarnia—Lambton to work through some of the issues in this particular bill, then we can make progress. As people know, New Democrats are very committed to working with people, whatever their party, if we think we can make progress on important issues that have a direct impact on people.

• (1415)

I do want to flag some of the issues that I think come out of this particular piece of legislation. I alluded to one of those issues earlier in my question to the member for Sarnia—Lambton. I think there is concern about the ability of fund administrators, consulting only with the superintendent, to be able to change the terms and conditions of pension plans.

Of course, we heard loud and clear from Canadians across the country when the government tabled Bill C-27, which would have allowed for a significant restructuring of pension plans without appropriate permission from members or some consent of members, but we know that unfortunately sometimes companies engage in fear campaigns with their membership about the consequences of not doing what the company wants. The company will say the fund will not be solvent and the members are going to lose all their benefits. Often times, there is a lot of misinformation and disinformation in those communication campaigns with members.

We heard loud and clear that people who have defined benefit pensions do not want the rug pulled out from under them. They want to make sure that continues to be the case. We think that it is important that, no matter who it is, whether the superintendent or plan administrator, that they not be able to make unilateral changes to the terms of conditions of a person's plan without their informed consent and without some further rules around what can be done, because sometimes members are told certain things that may or may not be true. If a clause like this is going to go ahead, there needs to be a lot more said about the direction that would be given to plan administrators and the superintendent on how they could try to restructure a plan before taking it to the membership. That is an important point to make.

I also would want to look more carefully at the ability of companies to buy insurance against their unfunded pension liabilities as opposed to simply having to fund them out of their own resources. Insurance sometimes can be used as a tool, but it can also create cracks that people fall through. If it ends up being that the terms and conditions of the insurance do not quite match the circumstances surrounding that particular insolvency, then we might see a company discharged of its obligation to its pensioners without the insurance actually coming through and providing the full support of people's full pension, which they should have a right to.

This point was made earlier but I want to make it again. It is really important to note that, when we talk about people's private pensions, which they have contributed to usually over the course of decades, this is not a handout, this is not a charity thing and this is

not a nice thing to have. It is part of the wage package. This is deferred wages.

I think Canadians would be outraged if, in a bankruptcy insolvency, the company could call up their former workers to say they had paid them a bunch of wages and now they want it back, and those people would have to pay their wages back from 1975 because the company got itself into trouble and expects the employees to bail it out.

It is no different when the company goes after the assets in the pension fund because those assets were never meant for the business of the company. They were always meant for the workers who showed up to work, did their part, held up their end of the bargain and made their contributions. They deserve to get the pension they were promised. When we, as legislators, fail to ensure that that pension promise is protected, we hurt not only the people who worked and contributed in good faith over all of those years and their families, but also the very idea of the pension promise at all.

I belong not only to a political party but to a political movement that wants to see more people have defined benefit pensions because it is future people can bank on. When we allow bankruptcy proceedings to undermine the pension promise, what we are saying to workers now is that they should be skeptical of a defined benefit pension plan, that they cannot trust it and maybe they should be investing elsewhere. However, we know that often that does not come to fruition. It is difficult as an individual investor in the market to be able to get the kind of pension security one needs, which is why defined benefit pensions have been such an important tool for working Canadians to carve out a meaningful retirement over the years.

It is why it is so important that we do that, and it is why New Democrats are committed to working with people in this place, as well as with retirees, workers and the organizations that represent them, to make sure that we can get a fix to this problem quickly and we can do it in the best possible way.

• (1420)

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-228, a bill brought forward by my good friend and colleague, the MP for Sarnia—Lambton.

The intent of this excellently drafted bill is to offer concrete pension protection for Canadian seniors, something that is seriously lacking in Canada's existing laws. In the context of rising inflation, the alarming increase in our national debt and climbing daily costs, this bill is never more needed than now. As the cost of living keeps going up, seniors will be left without enough to live on if their pensions are subject to insolvency.

A pension is the portion of a worker's wages that companies put aside for the worker's retirement. This is not only money that employees have earned; it is understood to be their reward for their years of hard work. It is heartbreaking to hear countless stories of employees who have had their pensions drastically cut and their plans for retirement dashed. One local example of the devastation that results in the absence of adequate pension protection is the former General Chemical plant, a company that was located in the town of Amherstburg in my riding. On the brink of bankruptcy, it pulled up stakes, leaving only hardship in its wake.

In an article in the *Windsor Star* in 2010, recently updated in 2020, we learned of Fran McLean and how she was impacted. Fran worked for 47 years at the Amherstburg plant. A significant portion of the money Fran had worked hard to set aside for her retirement during those 47 years was lost. She had worked all those years at the same company, sacrificing her time and energy and the better part of her life, only to have the bulk of her pension income taken from her.

Fran's pension income fell from \$2,500 to \$1,900, and then came a final cut to \$1,000 a month. Imagine the impact of an income cut of \$1,500 during retirement years. What does this kind of situation do to a person's mental health? What does it do to their family? What does it say about our nation and the value we put on the seniors who have built our communities?

One of the greatest days of my life was when my grandson, Levi, came into this world. He is a joy to be with. One thing I especially look forward to as he grows up is to be able to buy him hockey gear and take him out for fun activities together with his grammy, my beautiful wife Allison, when we retire, but for those who have lost a major part of their pension, this can be a huge challenge. Now, on top of all that, inflation is making it difficult to even pay for necessities, never mind the things that bring us joy.

Those who have worked hard to contribute to their pensions in the first place now live in fear that without the proper laws in place to protect those pensions, all can be lost. Workers are not even considered priority creditors, and sometimes, as was the case at General Chemical, they are not at the table at all. That is just not right.

I want Canada to lead the way in rewarding hard-working seniors in what are supposed to be their golden years. I just do not see that with the current laws regarding pensions. All Canadians should have a secure and dignified retirement, along with peace of mind when it comes to the contributions they have made to their retirement pensions.

As General Chemical and Sears have shown, the security of a pension can be lost in a moment. We must and can do better for our seniors.

Cody Cooper lives in my riding. He is president of the Chrysler Canada retirees organization. Mr. Cooper puts it like this: "We need to stop using pensions as piggy banks to solve liquidity problems. It doesn't cost taxpayers anything to ensure people get the pensions they worked their whole lives for."

That is exactly right. We are not asking the government to pay money to anyone it does not belong to. To be clear, prioritizing workers during bankruptcy does not cost the taxpayer anything. If a

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company signs a contract with an employee, that agreement should be kept to the end of their employment, and in the case of a pension, to the end of the person's life. A company should not be able to back out when it comes time to pay.

Bill C-228 brings together past bills of a similar nature and would add some new and significant changes to the existing legislation. The current legislation makes it optional for companies to act on insolvency. Meanwhile, courts can step in, but only voluntarily. This must change.

• (1425)

Bill C-228 answers the problem of pension insolvency in three main areas. First, it would require that an annual report on the solvency of pension funds be tabled here in the House of Commons for greater transparency and oversight. This is exactly the kind of issue that needs more transparency and oversight from the government. Second, it would provide a mechanism to transfer funds into a pension fund to restore it to solvency, to ensure the insolvent portion until the fund can be restored. These first two points will make sure there is scrutiny to ensure that pension funds are solvent, that they remain solvent or that they are fixed if they are starting to slip. Third, in the case of bankruptcy, pensions would be paid out ahead of large creditors and especially executive bonuses. With respect to the latter, companies have been giving out bonuses or paying off their debt to creditors before they pay their employees' pensions. This is a classic example of the rich getting richer.

My good friend and colleague, the MP for Sarnia—Lambton, has shared in her op-ed in *The Sarnia Observer* that one of her neighbours was let go amid Sears's bankruptcy. At the end of the day, she was only paid 70¢ on the dollar, yet "All the executives got big bonuses", she said, and "That is just not right."

In the case of the Sears bankruptcy, former employees had the pain of losing their jobs at Sears and a portion of their pensions from the \$270-million deficit in the pension plan. Bill McKinnon from Windsor, who started at Sears in 1975, said, "For us pensioners that were counting on that, we've lost our medical, we've lost our life insurance, we've lost our dental, we've lost our prescriptions, and by the looks of it, we're going to lose over 20 per cent of our pension."

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, CARP, did a survey of its members who had pensions, and almost 40% said they were afraid they were going to outlive their money. This is the reality of the current legislation. Seniors have no control of their own money and no control over their finances for their retirement years.

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Laura Tamblyn Watts is the chief executive of CanAge, a non-partisan national advocacy group for seniors, and a lawyer and seniors advocate. She said that “everyday Canadians” may not understand the technical terms in the law, but they understand the Sears Canada story. She notes, “For instance, if you tell somebody that the pensioners at Sears in the U.S. didn't lose any money or any benefits—but they lost 20 per cent (of their pension payments) in Canada and really all of their benefits—people are shocked to understand that the U.S. has better protection.”

Bill C-228 has taken into consideration the content of several previous bills, such as Bill C-405 from the Conservative MP for Durham, Bill C-253 from the Bloc member for Manicouagan and a bill from the NDP member for Elmwood—Transcona, who reintroduced the bill by former MP Scott Duvall. That was Bill C-259 in 2020 and is now Bill C-225. In drafting this bill, my hon. colleague has studied and researched the current laws, and has included the many organizations, experts and individuals needed to make this bill a success.

My colleague, the MP for Sarnia—Lambton, is open to amendments to this bill as debate and research continue at committee. Anything proposed that would improve pension protection for our

seniors would be on the table for review. That is why I am more than happy to support this excellent bill. I commend my colleague for bringing this issue before the House. Furthermore, in my new role as shadow minister for labour, I am thrilled that this long overdue legislation has been presented to the House. Let us act now before we have another General Chemical or Sears. It is always a good time to do the right thing.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. The order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

[*English*]

It being 2:32 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1). Have a great weekend everybody.

(The House adjourned at 2:32 p.m.)

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