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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, September 23, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*English*]

COST OF LIVING RELIEF ACT, NO. 2

The House resumed from September 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act respecting cost of living relief measures related to dental care and rental housing, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

This summer, I spoke with thousands of constituents from Kelowna—Lake Country in person, over the phone, on their doorsteps and at community events. I met with small businesses, farmers and not-for-profits. The struggles I heard from people and small businesses are real and extensive.

I heard about the unmanageable cost of living, which includes costs on housing, fuel and food, overall inflation, labour shortages, travel restrictions such as the ArriveCAN app, ongoing federal mandates, crushing debt for small business, supply chain issues, and delays in every federal government department, whether it be immigration and citizenship, CRA, benefits or passports.

It is evident that the legislation before us, Bill C-31, does nothing to address any of those issues and nothing to address the cost of 40-year-high inflation. For the Liberals to introduce this thrown-together legislation that will only boost inflation, and which will see its benefits evaporate with the ever-rising cost of food and gas, demonstrates the government's detachment from working families, small businesses and seniors.

I remember as a kid those tough times 40 years ago at the end of the last Trudeau government. History is repeating itself. I remember eating lots of wieners, white bread and Spam. What got us through were two sets of grandparents who had big gardens. Families are suffering today.

I mailed out a survey to residents of Kelowna—Lake Country to get their feedback about the cost of groceries and gas prices. I received thousands of responses. Food costs can vary regionally, and most people said their food bills had actually gone up more than 20%. To fill their vehicles was over \$50 more per fill than last year.

Many people gave specific examples of their personal situations. I will give just a small sampling. John, who needs his pickup truck for work and who says he has good mileage on his truck, will be paying \$513 a month more for gas than last year. Jeff in Lake Country wrote to me that he is getting close to having to choose between gas or food, saying that is “not a good spot to be in.”

Lea in Kelowna says she is forced to go to food banks for the first time in her life. Ken wrote that his family is presently helping a person who is living in his car because he cannot afford rent. This person works as a delivery driver, but gas prices may now prevent him from working entirely.

Paulette wrote to me and said, “I am a recently retired as a nurse. I am pretty tight with my budget. I have been able to keep my bank account at the same float number. Since March of this year, I have noticed incremental decline in my bank balance to the tune of \$400 a month. It doesn't take long on a fixed income to be alarmed in seeing consistent decline.”

How is a retiree like Paulette supposed to deal with a \$400 loss each month? How is a new family or a young worker supposed to deal with it? They will not if we maintain the government's high-spend, high-cost NDP-Liberal approach. We need to stop the money printing, stop the spending and stop increasing taxes, all of which are creating inflation.

Legislation like Bill C-31 will not reverse the ever-increasing costs of our basic necessities. While the government says this legislation will tackle the real issues of Canadians in need of relief, the value of these supports on people's budgets will rapidly proceed to nothing. They will evaporate quickly if the government does nothing to rein in its own costs.

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Conservatives have been talking about precisely where the government could reduce costs, which would directly help to reduce the inflation that is shredding the value of people's paycheques and household budgets. It could cancel its \$35-billion Canada Infrastructure Bank, which has yet to build a single road, bridge or rail line. It could drop the ArriveCAN app entirely today. It could save \$25 million right now and scrap what I call the "Arrive-CAN'T" app.

The government could use a one-for-one rule: For every dollar spent, find a dollar in savings. It could cancel all planned tax increases, including payroll tax hikes scheduled for January 1 and tax hikes on groceries, gas and home heating scheduled for April 1. It could cancel the escalator excise tax, which is also scheduled for April 1.

Leaving those scheduled increases on the books will be catastrophic to Canadian and small business bank accounts. Let us change course today. The NDP-Liberal bill would only raise Canadian costs, and this is obvious.

• (1005)

Economists are in agreement on this as well. Robert Kavcic, senior economist at the Bank of Montreal, was quoted recently on the government's proposal as saying, "We all know that sending out money as an inflation-support measure is inherently...inflationary."

Andrey Pavlov at Simon Fraser University's Beedie School of Business said, "If we have high inflation and that inflation continues, that assistance isn't going to do very much to help anyone, including the recipients of that assistance. It's just not going to be enough."

Derek Holt, vice president and head of capital markets economics at Scotiabank, could not have been clearer: "Any belief that the government's proposals will ease inflationary pressures must have studied different economics textbooks."

Let us not forget that this legislation is before us only because of the summer rush that the members of the costly NDP-Liberal coalition put on themselves, once again trying to make a parliamentary body of law-making into a short-order kitchen of quick fixes.

The legislation bears all the hallmarks of a bill not thoroughly thought through. If the government members even took the time to glance at most rental listings in British Columbia, they would know that a \$500 cheque would represent not much more than a single week's worth of rent.

According to rentals.ca, British Columbia had the highest average rental rate, at \$2,578 per month in August 2022. Even if the bill passes, six out of every 10 renters will not qualify for it. In Kelowna—Lake Country, the government's record on rent is clear. According to the CMHC, the average one-bedroom apartment was roughly \$900 a month in 2015, when this government was elected. Fast-forward to 2022 and the rental prices have increased 61%, to \$1,475.

Instead of a bill that would expand the rental market or offer my constituents an affordable path to home ownership, the government chooses to raise costs even further.

For the government to call the other half of this legislation a dental program is not quite accurate. A program would typically feature an application process. It might coordinate with many provincial, low-income dental care programs. It would actually be a program. Instead, what the government offers is an attestation.

We have seen this attestation process with no verification or cross-referencing before. We have not been told how the CRA will administer this program or what extra staff they will need to administer it. All the government has said is to remember to keep one's dental receipts.

Will people be subject to having the value of this benefit clawed back if the government or the CRA deems them not applicable? My constituency office was inundated with people being told they had to pay back CERB. The government just has not learned.

Once again, the Liberal-NDP coalition is clear on how it wants the government to run: Allow inflation to rise unchecked, take more from Canadians' pockets, circulate it through the government's bureaucracy, and then write cheques that will give only a fraction of it back. It is like a family's financial situation is a sinking boat, and the Liberals throw them a teacup to bail out the boat instead of patching the holes.

We need to put people first.

• (1010)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is most unfortunate that the Conservatives and the Bloc do not recognize that this legislation is going to enable children under the age of 12 to get the dental work that is absolutely necessary. Many children are not getting dental work because of the issue of affordability. Many of those children end up going into hospitals at great cost because they did not get the dental work that is required. Now, we have a government that is recognizing the importance of getting the job done in serving our young children in Canada.

We are talking about hundreds of thousands of children who are going to be eligible, in every region of our country, yet the Conservatives feel that the federal government plays no role.

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Why is the member not standing up for the children whom she represents who do not have dental insurance?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Speaker, I guess the better question is this: Why can people not afford to spend money on certain things? The reason is that their paycheques are evaporating. The reason is that we have 40-year high inflation, which means people cannot even afford to buy food, they cannot buy medicine, and they cannot put gas in their vehicles. It is the policies of the government that are leaving people short every month. I gave several examples in my statement today. People are hurting because of the policies of the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when our Conservative friends talk about the housing crisis, it seems as though they are always just opposing any measure the Liberal government proposes without bringing many solutions to the table.

I met an economist from the CMHC at a housing summit in Laval last week, and he said that, if we do not do something to change things, only 500,000 housing units will be built in Quebec over the next 10 years when, in fact, 1,100,000 units are needed to deal with the accessibility and affordability crisis. That is how many housing units we need to build in Quebec over the next 10 years to truly address this crisis.

What does the Conservative Party suggest we do to resolve this crisis?

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Speaker, we have given a number of suggestions. One suggestion is that we have a lot of federal buildings that are empty, and we could use those to build housing. We have a capacity problem. We have one of the lowest numbers of houses in the world when we look at it percentage-wise. We absolutely need to build more supply.

The other part is that costs are going up. When we have supply chain issues and when we have inflation the way it is, it makes it a lot more difficult for construction and for builders to build affordable housing. If we do not get this inflation crisis under control, it is not going to help with the affordability of building houses either.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine, Ted, is a senior. He lost his teeth. He cannot get dental care coverage. I raised this in the House and someone from the member's party suggested that Ted should go back to work. He is 77. He should not have to go back to work to get his teeth fixed, and he should not have to eat soup all the time.

The member talked about payroll taxes. CPP is not a tax. It is retirement income; it is deferred wages. It is critical. We are hearing from seniors who have not saved. They need help with dental care. They need to make sure they can retire with more income.

Conservative premiers, and premiers right across this country, worked out a deal with the government to increase CPP, and that is for both workers' contributions and those of their employers, so that seniors can have enough money to get the things they need.

Does my colleague not agree that investments in CPP are deferred wages and are meant for retirement income? They are not payroll taxes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Speaker, first, I will address the comments the member made about the senior in his riding. I hear stories like that as well. Seniors are among some of the hardest hit, because they are on fixed incomes. As this inflation continues to be at record levels, they, as I mentioned in my intervention with examples, are some of the hardest hit, because they are not able to have more income. That is the first thing.

The second thing, regarding people's paycheques, is that what the CPP and EI increases will do is reduce the paycheques they are taking home. It is also going to be more costly for businesses. A time like this, when we have record-breaking inflation, is not the time to be increasing any costs on people.

• (1015)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her eloquent speech and articulate thoughts in the House this morning. She is exactly right.

The government is proposing to be the solution, but it is actually the problem. The problem can never be the solution. We are witnessing, coming out of COVID, the massive inflation-induced problems that Canadians are facing, making their paycheques shorter. There is more month now left than there is money on those paycheques. Canadians are struggling.

I am not talking about Canadians who have always or have typically struggled. I am talking about Canadians who just a few short years ago did not need the government to do anything at all for them. They were business owners. They were working in the private sector. They had the ability to earn a living and make their paycheques cover their cost of living, pay for their homes, pay for their energy, pay for their food, raise their children, put them through school and even save enough for their retirements.

These are Canadians who just want their government to provide them with the services only it can provide and get out of their way. This is the mentality of the people I represent in the constituency of Red Deer—Lacombe. This is why Alberta, my home province, is one of the lowest-taxed jurisdictions and one of the provinces in this Confederation that creates wealth in abundance, or at least it used to create wealth in abundance, for everybody to share in.

The problem is the philosophy of the current government. In its rush to make everybody equal, it is making everybody equally miserable. This is the problem with the philosophy of the socialist-bent NDP-Liberal coalition. It does not work. History has shown us throughout time that this kind of thinking only leads to everybody being worse off.

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This bill specifically talks about rent and the dental program. The reason the government believes it needs to bring these things forward at this time is that my constituents who used to be able to pay for these things on their own, who used to have jobs where their employer made those payments or had a dental care plan, no longer find themselves in that calibre of employment anymore. That is because of the ideology of the current government across the way and its ideological attack on energy.

I want Canadians at home to realize that, if they take a look around their home, everything they have was either made from, brought to them by or manufactured with energy. When we attack that energy with things like a carbon tax, it underpins everything we do in our economy. The government's hell-bent position from the very first press release it issued was to rework the northern gateway and energy east pipelines and basically cancel those projects. The short-sightedness for cheap political gain of critical energy supplies, not only within Canada but around the world, is showing itself today.

The Chancellor of Germany was just here and our government was too dim-witted to even know that he came here asking for help in the way he could without embarrassing himself in front of his own people. What did our government say in response to our friend, our NATO ally and our economic trading partner? It basically gave him the bum's rush out of town and said we would have some renewables for him in three to five years. Meanwhile, the good people, our friends, our western liberal democracy philosophical allies are going to be left in the dark by the current government, which cannot see past the end of its nose in its ideological crusade against oil and natural gas. I think 14 to 18 LNG proposals were cancelled, shelved or tabled because of the current government. That is the legacy we have.

I want to get back to how that is relevant to the citizens of my province and the citizens I represent in the constituency of Red Deer—Lacombe. Central Alberta is a hub of the service industry of the oil and gas sector in Alberta. We have numerous pipeline companies, service rig companies, drilling rig companies. We even have, hopefully, a formerly Russian oligarch-owned steel pipe company that was providing services to the oil and gas sector. These were good-paying jobs.

● (1020)

I have good friends who have had multi-million dollar businesses. The way to get rid of a \$10-million trucking company in Alberta is to vote Liberal and just wait a couple years. There is nothing left at the end of it. That is exactly the story, sadly, of some good friends of mine back in central Alberta. That is the misery that has been inflicted on the tens, if not hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are victims of this policy.

Now the good people of Germany and the rest of the free world are being held hostage by dictator energy in places like Germany, Ukraine and Poland. These are our friends, and they are being held hostage by the ruinous imperialism of Vladimir Putin right now. They are being held economically hostage. Putin has used energy as a weapon.

We could be energy independent. We do not need to import a single drop of gas or oil into this country. As a matter of fact, we have

the third-largest proven reserves of oil in the world, and we have trillions of cubic feet of natural gas under every province and territory in this country. We could be supplying our friends, neighbours, allies and like-minded citizens in liberal democracies. That is small-l liberal democracies, because today's Liberals are not liberals. We could be providing that energy, relief and security to our friends.

The reason my constituents do not have the buying power they used to have, the reason my constituents are now in the same boat that many other Canadians find themselves in is that they do not have the security of that job they used to have, that well-paying energy sector job, a job with a company that actually could provide a benefits plan for them. I watched it happen. It has been absolutely disastrous and absolutely ruinous.

The problem I go back to is the philosophical bent of the government, which cannot see past the end of its nose. We can look at the pipeline policies and the unfair application of these things. For example, the upstream and downstream emissions on oil and gas that is produced in Canada are not applied to oil that is imported into Canada. Why the double standard?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, this is a bill about dental care for children under the age of 12. The member has spoken about just about everything under the sun except dental care. I am wondering if he could be encouraged to get back to the topic of discussion.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the point of order. I would ask the member to maybe try to tie it in because there is two minutes and 35 seconds left.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, my next-door neighbour back home is a dentist, and he noticed a sharp decline in his business shortly after the Liberal government took office, because nobody had the money they used to have in their pockets because of the policies of the government. That is the whole point. I know the members are cheering for that loudly over there—

An hon. member: That is from your side.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: —because Liberals actually do not care about Canadians who do not vote for them. That is the issue.

I would be happy to bring in all of my friends who happen to be dentists to talk about the decline in business once the oil and gas sector workers no longer had any disposable income. This is the problem, and I will get to it.

When a family is spending all of its money and the people who used to be able to easily provide for their families no longer have the resources they need, that is what puts them into this situation, that is what makes them desperate and dependent on government. That is actually what the Liberal government wants. I will go back to a great quote from Ronald Reagan, the former president of the United States, who once famously said, “Government does not solve problems. It subsidizes them.”

That is exactly what is happening with this piece of legislation. What is a \$500 rent cheque going to do for somebody in Toronto or Vancouver who is now paying \$2,300 to \$2,600 a month for rent? The government is proposing to solve their housing problem by giving them one week's worth of rent while adding billions of dollars of debt onto our already massive national debt. This is not going to work. Economists are almost unanimous across this country in suggesting that any more spending by the government is surely to cause upward pressure on inflation and exacerbate the problem that we currently have.

The current government is not a solution-provider. The current government is problem-maker. There are more people in trouble in this country today than there have been in the entire time I have been here. They are in more trouble than they have been in 40 years with the inflationary pressure that we have. Interest rates are going up. Now people who borrowed money and the businesses that borrowed money during the pandemic have upward pressure on the loans they need to pay back. The pinch and squeeze is terrible for the people of this country. The problem is the government. It is not the solution.

• (1025)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess I will ask the member a question about his speech because he did not talk about dental care. I do want to make it relevant to his speech.

The member talked about a price on pollution. The reality of the situation is that 14 out of the 31 OECD countries have some form of price on pollution. I understand that Conservatives are against it now, but I would remind the member that when he ran in the 2021 election under the leader from Durham, he was in favour of pricing pollution. However, I guess now the Conservatives are not.

Could the member inform the House how the Conservatives plan, if they are elected, to tackle the rising carbon emissions and properly bring in measures to fight pollution, as we should as a society. I am assuming that he would agree with that. What is the Conservatives' plan today? I know what it was in 2021 when he ran in the last election, but what is it today?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague across the way who asked that question that Conservatives have always been environmental stewards. Former prime minister Brian Mulroney is one of the greatest environmental stewards we have ever had sitting in the Prime Minister's chair. He has been awarded for this and Conservatives have always put forward a plan on the environment.

However, the issue right now, and where the current government is an outlier, is that virtually every other country that the member

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just listed in the OECD is reducing taxes and cutting spending to get this inflation under control. These guys are always late to the game. Just look at the border measures. Just look at everything the Liberals are doing when it comes to getting past the COVID restrictions. These guys would not know a good idea if it bit them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe for his speech. He and the speaker before him talked about the importance of cutting spending to fight inflation. If we want to cut spending, then I would suggest that we cut the subsidies being given to oil companies that are making record profits in the current crisis.

The Conservatives would never dream of cutting oil subsidies, but they do not want to provide rental assistance.

I would simply like to know why oil companies, which are already rich and making profits, deserve help more than someone who cannot afford to pay their rent.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, that is spoken like a member of Parliament from an area that does not have energy workers in it. I represent a part of the country that actually has a large number, or at least used to have a large number, of energy workers. I know, for example, that the GDP alone of Fort McMurray is almost 6% of the national GDP. All of the businesses that operate there, the subcontractors that operate there and the employees who work for those companies all pay taxes into the general revenue of this country, which is distributed across the country, particularly to places like the Province of Quebec. I would appreciate a thanks instead of the rhetoric I just heard.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since COVID, our 25-member NDP caucus has pushed hard to increase the CERB and the wage subsidy from 10% to 75%. We pushed for a commercial rent assistance program and for paid sick leave, which are all things that protected jobs and saved businesses through COVID. Now we are proposing the doubling of the GST credit, increasing the housing benefit, dental care for children and seniors who cannot afford it and an excess profit tax on banks.

With respect to the member's caucus, the Conservative caucus of 118 members, I cannot think of a single thing it has brought forward to help people through these most difficult times. Does the member support any of these new ideas that we are bringing forward to help Canadians in these difficult times?

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• (1030)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, another quote that I would like to leave with this House comes from Winston Churchill. He said, “Socialism is the philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy”, and that its inherent virtue is “the equal sharing of misery.”

Canadians do not need a rent subsidy; they need a place to rent. Our plan is to actually convert government buildings that are underutilized right now into accommodations so that people have a home. That is the approach they need to take. They need to cut taxes and put people back in charge of their lives so that they can take care of themselves and not be dependent on a government program or a government plan. Most Canadians have the ability to work for themselves and pay their own bills. All that Canadians are asking is that the government get out of their way. The NDP, by propping up the tired Liberal government, is the problem. It is not the solution.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the next speaker, I want to ask, on my behalf, anyone who knows somebody from Nova Scotia, because of the storm that is coming up in the next couple of days, to give them a call, see how they are doing and make sure everything is okay. Please do reach out to friends in Nova Scotia, P.E.I., New Brunswick, Newfoundland and a bit of Quebec who might be feeling the effects of Fiona over the next few days.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Whitby.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-31. Before I begin, I want to let members know I will be sharing my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

I must say that I was entertained by the previous speaker, the member for Red Deer—Lacombe. I think he brought some great rhetoric to the House that was quite entertaining, although there was not much substance. If we search for a grain of truth in what he was saying, I think we would be hard pressed to find much.

I talk to my constituents every week and really try to connect with them and listen to what their concerns are. Certainly, there is a segment of our population, a growing segment, that I think is struggling with the cost of housing, specifically renters. Our government—

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to tell you your job, but I believe that our hon. colleague in his opening statement just called our colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe a liar, and you and I know, as our hon. colleague knows, we should not do that, whether indirectly or directly.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for the intervention. Unfortunately I was still talking about the hurricane, so I did not pay attention. We will go back and look at Hansard to see if that happened and maybe give the opportunity to the member, if he did say that, to retract it. If not, he can continue along.

The hon. member for Whitby.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite. I said the member's rhetorical speech was quite entertaining.

Our government understands that times have been tough in many households across Canada, which is exactly why our government has been introducing new measures to lessen the financial burdens that Canadians are facing due to the effects of global inflation impacting our country. We know that we are faring quite a bit better in many respects than many of our peer countries around the world, but nonetheless, global inflation is impacting Canadians and we are seeing it have an effect on the rising cost of living. I have been hearing in my own riding of Whitby that many are worried about paying their rent and being able to put food on the table for their families.

Making life more affordable for Canadians has indeed been a top priority of this government since day one. I am so very pleased that we are tabling new legislation to help families pay their rent, to make sure they can afford the dental care they need and to put hundreds of dollars back into the pockets of Canadians, just as we have done with the 50% reduction in child care fees, the Canada child benefit, the price on pollution moving to direct quarterly payments, which is giving Ontario families \$745 on average this year, the 10% OAS increase and the doubling of the GST tax credit. There are so many aspects of our government's efforts and measures that are targeted to help the people who need it most and who are feeling the crunch of the cost-of-living pressures.

Housing affordability is absolutely crucial, and as a government we remain committed to helping Canadians at this difficult time with immediate relief, putting us on a path to a better and brighter future with many of the medium- and longer-term strategies that we have been implementing for several years. It is why we have tabled new legislation to help families pay their rent, to make sure they can afford the dental care they need and to put hundreds of dollars back in their pockets.

This bill would provide a one-time top-up to the housing benefit. It would deliver \$500 to 1.8 million Canadian renters who are struggling with the cost of housing. This is intended for families making below \$35,000 a year or individuals with an adjusted net income below \$20,000 a year who pay at least 30% of their income on rent. This benefit is in addition to the Canada housing benefit, which is provided and delivered with the provinces and territories. It provides, on average, \$2,500 to help with rental costs so that many families across the country can continue to pay their rent. The top-up payment meets an immediate need and will help families pay their rent now, which is why I encourage my colleagues across the aisle to help pass this legislation.

Housing affordability must be our long-term goal, which is exactly why our government's plan includes measures to put Canada on the path to double housing construction over the next decade. Our proposed first home savings account will help first-time homebuyers save and purchase their first home. This is in addition to a whole host of other measures in budget 2022 that have been added to the national housing strategy, which include cutting mortgage insurance by 25%, doubling the tax credit and adding flexibility to the first-time homebuyer program. In addition, we are banning foreign ownership and curbing speculation, both of which make housing more expensive for Canadians.

To achieve our long-term goal, we are extending and enhancing the national housing strategy, which is an ambitious 10-year plan backed by more than \$72 billion in investments. It prioritizes working individuals and working families and especially includes our most vulnerable population.

Let us remember that for decades prior, specifically within the Stephen Harper era, there was no federal government funding going to housing. It is very rich for the Conservatives to criticize a government that has made long-term commitments to addressing housing affordability by investing \$72 billion over 10 years and then continually updating its plan to address the challenges that Canadians continue to face across the housing market.

Just look at our government's rapid housing initiative. It is an excellent example of the national housing strategy in action. Launched in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, its goal was to address the urgent housing needs in Canada. Through two rounds, it has consistently exceeded its targets.

● (1035)

We are now building on this success, last month having announced the third round of the program. We anticipate that in total, we will create at least 14,500 permanent affordable homes just with that program alone. Of those units, significant portions are set aside specifically for indigenous people, for seniors and for women and children, in particular those fleeing domestic violence. The rapid housing initiative is just one of a suite of programs to create a more affordable rental supply, programs that are making a difference to families from coast to coast to coast.

In the past month alone, we have announced a project in Saint John, New Brunswick, that will create transitional housing for women experiencing homelessness; urgent repairs that will stabilize the river bank of the Red River from encroaching on a seniors' co-operative housing unit in Winnipeg; a project that will create more affordable student housing in the area around Université Laval in Quebec City; and a project to help build nearly 100 homes for families, individuals and seniors living in Stouffville outside of Toronto. That is not to mention the four projects in my region and two in my riding specifically that are addressing this need through the rapid housing initiative. We have the Otter Creek co-operative that is expanding. Our government supported that project. There is also the Muslim Welfare Centre, which has purchased an old hotel on Dundas Street in Whitby and is turning it into affordable housing units for those who are at risk of homelessness.

This program is really, truly working, and it is remarkable that it is overachieving the performance targets that it set out in advance.

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Those are just a few of the hundreds of stories of the national housing strategy's impact and its success in creating affordable rental housing.

However, we also know how important the dream of home ownership is for so many Canadians. That is why we recently announced a five-year stream under the affordable housing innovation fund to help housing providers develop and test rent-to-own models and projects and help renters get on the path to home ownership.

We have seen significant progress but we know that we must do more. With budget 2022, we committed to a suite of measures that represent \$6.3 billion in funding over seven years. The majority of this will go to improving and expanding housing in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities. We know that many indigenous people live in the north, where housing needs are extremely dire. That makes this an important consideration for all of our housing initiatives moving forward.

This government is committed to making life more affordable for workers, families and the most vulnerable. A major part of that priority means making housing more affordable. Our plan recognizes that everyone deserves a place where they can thrive and be part of a resilient economy that leaves no one behind. We must support workers, families and the most vulnerable who really need the help.

I urge members on all sides of the House to support the legislation to provide a one-time top-up to the Canada housing benefit. This is a necessary step in putting money in the pockets of Canadians who need it now, and will help us take one more step toward ensuring everyone has a safe and affordable place to call home.

I reflected on this, and how could anyone who is empathetic to the cost-of-living pressures that families are facing today not support a top-up payment of \$500 to help renters afford their rents? That is 1.8 million Canadians who will be thanking us for the House's work to get that money out the door. I urge everyone to step up and support this important legislation.

● (1040)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend our hon. colleague for reading that speech.

Government Orders

It is not a plan; it is a stimulus cheque. It will help Canadians for one month. That is great, but what do they do for the other 11 months? What do they do for each and every day? Canadians are paying more in taxes than they do for the necessities of life, and the government is now planning to tax their paycheques further.

What that Conservatives are saying is to come up with a real plan and help Canadians each and every day, rather than just give a stimulus cheque. What is the plan to really put Canadians ahead and get off Canadians' backs?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, as usual there seems to be a real confusion on the other side that somehow CPP contributions and EI contributions are a tax, which is utterly preposterous for anyone to suggest.

What our government is doing to help Canadians who are struggling with the cost of living is the following. We are reducing child care fees by 50%. We are increasing the Canada child benefit. We are doubling the GST tax credit. We are helping renters with a \$500 payment. The list goes on and on and includes dental care support. How many more things can a government do to support the average Canadian family?

I believe we are reaching out with targeted supports and helping people who need it the most. I firmly believe that is the right thing to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if he agrees that the government took a really bone-headed approach to writing Bill C-31. We agree with the principles, but it is written all wrong.

Allow me to provide some examples. Rent relief will be provided via the Canada housing benefit, but no one in Quebec receives that. Quebec has its own program with the right to opt out with compensation. There is not a single line about that in Bill C-31, and there is no plan for harmonization.

It is the same with dental care. It is for children under the age of 11. Quebec has a program for children under the age of nine. There is no mention of that and no plan for harmonization.

Does my colleague think that the government realizes that Quebec exists, or should this bill actually be called “how to turn good principles into bad law”?

• (1045)

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that this would be direct support from the federal government. It would not go through the Canada housing benefit, which is partnered with provinces and territories. It would be a direct benefit that Canadians could apply for.

The terms of eligibility are very succinct and clearly laid out in the bill, so I cannot understand why the member opposite would have trouble understanding how that would work for Quebec. If the member has a specific concern, I would be happy to hear it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, members can see, as I extend my hand, that I can nearly hold hands

with the member for Whitby. He is in a different party. I sit here because I am assigned to sit here, but he is a friend.

I wanted to say that the chance to support this bill is important for me as a member of the Green Party because we were the first party in this place to call for dental care to be included in our public health system, specifically to start with low-income children, because it is an expensive package. We had it costed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We know it is not something anyone can put in the first budget, so I thank my friends in the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party for getting this in front of us.

In the context of the health care crisis, yes, we definitely need to understand that dental care is health care, and when people cannot afford dental care, it causes larger problems throughout the body. By the way, I do not have a family doctor, and I am 68. My husband is 74 and he does not have a family doctor either. We have not been able to get checkups. I am a little worried about the state of health writ large in this country, and I am worried about the threat of privatization.

I wonder if the hon. member for Whitby has thoughts on what we should be doing to ensure the wheels do not fall off the bus with health care across Canada.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, who I get to sit very close to in the House every day. I have shared many good conversations with her over the last few years, mostly about climate change.

I am happy to hear of her advocacy work on dental care, and we could not be more supportive of that. I also acknowledge the NDP's advocacy on that topic. It is good to see this piece of legislation come forward and include support for those in need of dental care.

With regard to health care in general, as my time is up, I would be happy to speak about that at a later date.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in politics a long time. It may not look like it, because I try to look younger than I am, but I have been in it a long time. My mother is entirely to blame for this. She started to be involved when I was around 10 or 11, and she was fighting for the people in my community. She was working with other New Democrats to create programs and infrastructure that people could rely on.

Government Orders

I have talked about my mother quite a bit this week in the House. She had such an incredible impact on me. She allowed me to grow up with incredible people from the CCF and the New Democratic Party, who truly believed in the institutions that a government can create. Often times, certainly now, we get away from that ability of a government to create something much bigger than a simple tax break or something short term. These are the easy solutions that people think will help them.

Ultimately, it is those long-term investments, the long-term solutions and social programs, that help people. I believe that is what we are talking about today. It is fighting for social justice and pushing for the federal government to ensure that people are treated fairly, treated well, treated with respect and treated equitably.

When my mom was about to retire, she talked to me about running in London—Fanshawe. We spoke about the need for leaders to fight every day for the social programs that lift people up equitably. I know Canadians are hurting. We all know this. Inflation is taking a huge hit on people's pocket books.

One in five Canadians are forced to skip dental visits because they simply cannot afford them. One in three Canadians have zero dental insurance at all. Many Canadians have inadequate coverage, but knowing how many Canadians are hurting is simply not enough. We cannot just talk about it. We have to do something about it.

We have known that dental care belongs in our public health care system for decades. It has been 58 years since the Royal Commission on Health Services called for dental care to be included in our public system. In fact, New Democrats have been fighting for that ever since Tommy Douglas brought forward our universal health care system. We have been talking about pharmacare as well, which is something New Democrats are also pushing for.

I know the huge responsibility it is to fight for the people in London—Fanshawe. That is why I chose to run. My mother made me promise that I would do everything possible to make life better, and I truly believe that we are all here in this place because we want to make that positive difference in our communities and for our constituents.

We certainly do not necessarily agree on what the best path is, but I believe in the power and equity of social programs delivered by government and the power of people who work together to lift each other up. That is why I was so proud to jointly second my former colleague's motion, M-62, which was Jack Harris' private member's motion in the last Parliament. It called for a federal dental care plan.

That is why I am proud to also stand up for housing in the House today through supporting Bill C-31. Is this bill going to fix everything? No. I wish that one bill could. I wish that we would come together as a House and as members of Parliament to truly provide people what they need with those longer-term solutions.

New Democrats are doing that, and we are using every ounce of influence we have in this minority government to actually deliver on the promises that we campaigned on, that I spoke about when I went door to door in London—Fanshawe. We are working on the solutions that we truly believe will help people.

Bill C-31 is a part of that promise. It has dental care, housing supports and more money in people's pockets to deal with the increased cost of living. The dental care benefit for children without insurance under the age of 12 would help parents with an income of less than \$90,000 purchase much-needed dental care for their kids.

The dental care benefit would provide direct payments to eligible applicants, totalling up to \$650 per child per year for dental services. It would also provide \$390 for those with a family income of \$70,000 to \$79,999. Canadians will be able to apply for and receive the benefit up front, before accessing dental care. They will not have to receive it afterwards, which is incredible.

The benefit would also be flexible, as it can be used for any dental care provided by a regulated oral health professional licensed to practise in the applicant's province or territory. This is a key point. This flexibility will position parents to have discussions with their oral care providers to determine the most appropriate dental care treatment for their kids.

● (1050)

To have children start early on the right health path will not only help them now, it will also help the entire health system overall well into the future. We all know how good oral health is also linked to whole body health. For example, if an infection is present in one's mouth, one's bloodstream can carry the bacteria to other areas of the body, leading to other health concerns such as heart disease and stroke.

Keeping our teeth and gums healthy is an important part of our long-lasting overall health. Lack of access to dental health is precisely why our health care system spends \$155 million a year for emergency dental visits in Canadian hospitals.

Bill C-31 also works to put money in people's pockets with its \$500 top-up to the Canada housing benefit to help pay their rents and a \$467 top-up to the GST rebate to help pay their bills.

On Wednesday, Statistics Canada revealed that the number of households that rent has grown twice as fast as the number of those that own. The number of Canadians who rent their homes has grown by 21% in the last decade. Meanwhile, the average cost of rent has grown by 17.6% in the last five years, and we know it has grown even faster in so many other parts of Canada. My constituents of London—Fanshawe have seen some of the highest increases in rent, with increases of up to 26.5%.

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With rising inflation, Canadian renters are struggling to make ends meet. The Canadian housing benefit top-up and the GST rebate top-up are first steps in providing real supports for Canadians.

It is clear that, left to its own devices, the Liberal government was not going to act, and the Conservatives think people should fend for themselves. These three life-changing measures for families are here only because of the efforts of the NDP.

We are not going to stop there. We are going to keep fighting to make sure all Canadians have access to comprehensive dental care as part of our health care system and have better access to truly affordable housing.

As inflation hits an almost 40-year high, workers and their families are struggling to keep up. Hard-working people are playing by the rules and doing everything right, but they are falling further behind. Let us be clear, workers did not cause inflation. They should not be the ones paying for it.

Excessive corporate profits and greed are jacking up costs, and wages are not keeping up. Big grocery chains, big oil companies and big box stores are making a fortune off hard-working families. When times are tough, it should not be hard-working people who pay the price. The top 1% have rigged the system to take wealth from working people. While Liberals and Conservatives like to say they support workers, when push comes to shove, they always take the side of CEOs.

This extreme divide between the ultrarich and the rest of us is out of control. One only needs to look at the ultrawealthy who go on joy rides to space because they feel like it. Jeff Bezos spent \$5.5 billion to spend 11 minutes as far above the rest of us as he possibly could. Meanwhile, his workers, who do the actual labour that produces that enormous profit, face some of the harshest and inhumane working conditions.

Of course we know the story of Galen Weston, the owner of Loblaws, who was at the centre of the bread price-fixing scandal. He is using the time of inflation to further increase his profits. He raked in the largest amount of excess profits during the pandemic and then argued to cut off workers in his grocery stores from their additional pandemic pay. A man who is worth almost \$10 billion U.S. argued that he could not pay more than minimum wage and workers should not get an extra \$2 an hour, even though they were on the front lines.

While it is easy to blame and point at the richest people on earth and say they are bad, it is governments that allow them to get away with it, and we need to look at ourselves in this chamber to take responsibility for that.

There are more stories about this wealth inequality. It is something I see in my hometown. The food bank in London has record numbers of people coming in. There are over 20,000 per month. People are going through hard times.

This is a bill that could help them. It is just a start. We need to continue to put more into those major social programs, those long-term solutions, and I am proud the New Democrats are doing that today with Bill C-31.

• (1055)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate many of the comments that the member has made.

One of the aspects of the legislation that is, ultimately, the most important from my perspective, which I know the member shares, is the area of dental care for children under the age of 12.

This is something that I and many believe is going to be able to assist so many families in all regions of the country, assisting, for the first time, many children who would never have received the type of dental care they require, the lack of which often leads children to be put into hospital situations.

I am wondering if my colleague could provide her thoughts in regard to children who are not getting the dental work today and who end up in hospitals because of the affordability issue.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, and I talked about this in my speech: There are long-term consequences and an impact that this will have on future generations and on our health care system overall. There will be savings for our health care system, so that we can put them into other services that people need.

I am grateful that the hon. member has seen the light, because I remember that about a year ago he actually voted against this. I am so grateful that now they agree with New Democrats, who have been talking about this for a long time. They have seen the light, and they will do a lot more that New Democrats are asking for.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[English]

FALL FAIRS IN KITCHENER—CONESTOGA

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to share that in Kitchener—Conestoga this year, our fall fairs are back.

Our community has welcomed back the Wellesley Township Fall Fair, the New Hamburg Fall Fair and the Wellesley Apple Butter and Cheese Festival. Events like these are not only entertaining and fun for everyone; they also showcase the important role of farmers and our agriculture sector and the effect they have in our rural communities.

I thank the Wilmot Agricultural Society, the Wellesley–North Easthope Agricultural Society and the Wellesley Apple Butter and Cheese Festival for their dedication and perseverance, and we appreciate the volunteers who make these events happen.

I will be joining friends and flipping pancakes tomorrow morning in Wellesley at the Apple Butter and Cheese Festival. Everyone is welcome to attend all of our great events in Kitchener—Conestoga. I hope to see them there.

* * *

ZHINA MAHSA AMINI

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember the life of Zhina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman from Saqqez who was murdered by Iran's morality police, kick-starting mass protests and demonstrations across Rojhelat and Iran.

Her only crime was not wearing a hijab the right way and, of course, being a Kurd. Kurds in Iran are banned from giving kids Kurdish first names. Their language is banned, as is their culture. Zhina could have been any of our daughters or friends. We all have a Zhina in our life.

The Government of Canada must stand in solidarity with Kurds and Iranians calling for justice for Zhina. Canada needs to get tough with Tehran and list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization.

Her name was Zhina Mahsa Amini. Let us say her name in solidarity with Kurds and Iranians fighting their oppressors in Tehran.

* * *

GENDER EQUALITY WEEK

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is Gender Equality Week, a week to celebrate equal rights and equal opportunities for all Canadians.

Despite historic progress, women and gender-diverse Canadians continue to face barriers to their success and inclusion. From introducing equal pay legislation to building a national early learning and child care system and implementing Canada's first-ever 2SLGBTQI+ action plan, we are working to create a more inclusive society for all.

As we celebrate the contributions made to advance gender equality this week, we must continue to work year-round, both at home and abroad. This has become even more evident with the recent events in Iran and the death of Zhina Mahsa Amini. Our government stands in solidarity with Iranians and women around the world who are rightfully denouncing the death of Mahsa and exercising their right to peacefully protest.

* * *

GRAMMY AWARD WINNER

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Grammy Award for best Latin pop album of 2022 did not go to an artist from New York or Los Angeles. It did not go to an album on a big corporate label like EMI or Sony.

This year's Grammy for best Latin pop album went to none other than the great Canadian recording artist Alex Cuba, the pride of Smithers, British Columbia. Alex recorded his winning album in

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his home studio in Smithers during the pandemic, on a label he and his wife Sarah founded.

Of course, all of us Smithereens were bursting with pride, and last week over 1,000 of us joined on Main Street for a tribute concert to celebrate Alex's success. Alex Cuba's music is a gift to Canada and indeed the world. I hope all of my colleagues will join me in congratulating Alex Cuba on his Grammy win.

Te felicito, mi amigo.

* * *

[Translation]

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to mark the 50th anniversary of an important Hochelaga institution, the Pavillon d'Éducation Communautaire Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, known to most as the PEC.

Since 1972, the PEC has been a community education centre whose mission is to help local people identify, understand and act on the factors affecting their lives. The PEC is a pioneering organization that, in the 1970s, supported its members' independence and their social activism. The PEC hosts social and cultural activities that bring together hundreds of families.

Today, the PEC has over 90 volunteers and about 20 dedicated employees who work closely with families and individuals every day. Over 1,000 people use the PEC's services every week.

On a personal note, my family and I took our first French classes at the PEC, so I want to thank it for welcoming and engaging us.

* * *

● (1105)

[English]

COREY MOOD

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with deep sadness that I rise to pay tribute to Corey Mood from my riding, who passed away suddenly this summer, just 23 days after his wonderful mother Kay's passing.

Corey Mood was a stalwart in the Nova Scotia seafood industry. Corey ran one of our most important businesses, James L. Mood Fisheries, selling lobster, halibut, swordfish, haddock and tuna throughout North America and Asia. He grew a small family business into a powerhouse.

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Fishermen and friends knew that Corey's word was gold and his support unconditional. He did business on a handshake. Life was a remarkable adventure for Corey. Corey was a gentle giant, showing kindness and support to everyone he met. He loved hunting, hockey and the Red Sox.

Corey's loss is most felt by his wife Wanda, daughter Natasha, father James and siblings Debbie, Almond, Andrea and Dougie.

From Barrington to Brussels and Beijing and from Boston to Brier Island, his friends cherish the memories of Corey and mourn his loss. The legacy of Corey Mood is a blessing for our community.

* * *

WINDSOR PIZZA

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, canned mushrooms, Galati cheese, cornmeal crust and shredded pepperoni is the way Windsor has been making the best-tasting pizza in the world for over 70 years, and now it is in the record of Parliament. The word is getting out.

Last week, the CBC aired an award-winning documentary called "*The Pizza City You've Never Heard Of*", which is available for streaming on CBC Gem. Forget New York, Chicago or Detroit, George Kalivas tells the story of Windsor pizza and the proud, hard-working families passing down the same recipe for generations: Volcano, Capri, Antonino's, Armando's, Koolini, Arcata, Sarducci's, Naples and Franco's.

This past May, a BC Transit worker shipped Windsor pizza 4,000 kilometres to Vancouver Island. It is that good.

Watch the documentary on CBC. Come to Windsor; we will have a slice ready for you, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

OTTAWA'S DOWNTOWN CORE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, following the last two years of pandemic hardship, downtown Ottawa has changed significantly. Downtown office workers from communities across the region have changed their commuting habits. A business community that once relied on daily foot traffic of tens of thousands is struggling to get by. Ottawa's transit system, once envisioned to bring workers from the suburbs to downtown, has yet to regain its prepandemic ridership.

Recognizing this, as the local member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre I have brought together community and business representatives to propose creative ideas for Ottawa's downtown core post-pandemic.

[*Translation*]

The hybrid work model is here to stay, and workers in our beautiful city have stopped commuting daily in search of a better work-life balance.

[*English*]

We are working hard to come up with creative ideas to bring people back to downtown Ottawa to live, to work and to visit. I

look forward to working with our incredible community partners to find creative solutions that will revitalize downtown Ottawa and make it the envy as our nation's capital.

* * *

ROSH HASHANAH

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Sunday night marks the beginning of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. It is a time for new beginnings. It is one of the most sacred days in the Jewish calendar, the first of the high holy days and the 10-day period of repentance in which Jewish people around the world reflect on our faith. It is a time for our families to come together and celebrate the gifts of the past year, reset, refocus and look forward with anticipation and hope to the year ahead. It is also a time for our country to recommit to fighting the alarming rise in pernicious hatred against a Jewish minority.

To all of those celebrating Rosh Hashanah in Thornhill and across the country, *shana tovah* to them and their families. On behalf of Canada's Conservatives, we wish them a healthy, peaceful, prosperous and sweet new year.

* * *

● (1110)

ROSH HASHANAH

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sunday evening at sundown will mark Rosh Hashanah, which is the Jewish new year. It is a time of celebration and renewal as families and loved ones come together around the world to rejoice in the year ahead.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are asked as a community to prepare to build a new year. The 10 days leading to Yom Kippur allow us to reflect on how we will instill the coming year with life and goodness, and to fashion a new and different year with kindness and compassion, a year that allows us to stand up for one another and to protect those who are most vulnerable among us.

As we start this new season in Parliament, the spirit of Rosh Hashanah is one we can all reflect on, as members of the House, to shape a year and a country that looks out for all Canadians. From me and my family to our community in York Centre and Jewish families from coast to coast to coast, *shana tovah umetukah*: a sweet year to all.

* * *

FERTILIZER EMISSIONS

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new Conservative leader will put people first: their retirements, their paycheques, their homes and their country.

During harvest season, farmers are working hard to feed Canadian families and the world. This task is especially important at a time when there are real concerns about a global food shortage. Unfortunately, the current government seems determined to stand in the way. From a relentless carbon tax to a severe target for reducing fertilizer emissions, its actions are impacting our farmers. With rising food costs, it is clear that this hurts everyone. Another new industry report shows how the Liberals will once again fail to deliver because their fertilizer target is too unrealistic.

Will the Liberals restrict fertilizer use after all, like other countries around the world are trying to do? When I have raised the issue many times in the House, they stop short from ruling it out, yet they also cannot explain what else they are going to do.

One of Saskatchewan's producers said this week, "We need to feed the world". Another one said that its biggest threat to its operations is government policy.

The government needs to leave farmers alone and let them do their jobs.

* * *

IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new Conservative leader will put people first: their retirements, their paycheques, their homes and their country.

This summer, a nurse went public at Kelowna General Hospital to say that she has never seen morale and conditions at KGH as bad as they are now. Hospitals have been at overcapacity for years. People do not have a family doctor. One in four new Canadians have named their international education not being recognized as the top barrier to employment.

Conservatives will bring hope to those who are blocked from working in their professions for no reason other than that they come from another country. We will team up with provinces to guarantee that, within 60 days, immigrants applying to work in their profession will get a yes or no based on their tested abilities and get help should they need additional training. We will back up 30,000 small study loans for those needing time off work to study up to the Canadian standard.

Canadians deserve better. Our health care workers need help. Enough talking. Remove the gatekeepers to get more doctors, nurses and engineers, and more inflation-proof paycheques for our brilliant and valuable immigrants.

* * *

[Translation]

FRANCO-ONTARIAN DAY

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on September 25, the residents of Nickel Belt, in greater Sudbury, will celebrate Franco-Ontarian Day. This is a very important day, as it gives us the opportunity to celebrate and be proud of our Franco-Ontarian identity, including, for example, the fact that the Franco-Ontarian flag was raised for the first time in 1975 at the University of Sudbury. To mark the event, many students, parents and school board staff will take part in activities to highlight the importance of this

Statements by Members

day and pay tribute to the vitality of francophone culture. This is very important to us. These activities will take place at École Alliance St-Joseph in Chelmsford and at École secondaire Hanmer.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, I would like to thank all the volunteers who developed the programming and who support and promote francophone culture.

● (1115)

[English]

Through Bill C-13 our government is working to strengthen official-language minority communities.

* * *

HOUSING FOR SENIORS

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has become almost impossible for many in my riding to keep up with rising costs. Right now in Nanaimo—Ladysmith, the demand for urgent assistance for seniors at risk of homelessness is increasing at an alarming rate.

The SHINE program at the Nanaimo Family Life Association sees approximately five referrals for seniors who are homeless or at immediate risk. This is per week. These referrals are only a glimpse into the hardships. Stigmatization, blame and barriers make it difficult to access help.

Seniors contribute to our communities in endless ways, but instead of being treated with the respect they deserve, they are being left without the most basic necessities such as a place to call home.

When will the Liberals stop propping up wealthy investors and CEOs who treat housing as a commodity? Housing is a basic human right and needs to be treated as such. Seniors deserve better.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

DOMINIQUE MICHEL

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have to interrupt the order of business because tomorrow, September 24, is Dodo's birthday. Yes, Dominique Michel is celebrating her 90th birthday tomorrow. I know that it is impolite to discuss a woman's age, but we are talking about Dodo, she is part of the family. It is an opportunity to tell her that we love and miss her. We have spent quite a bit of time with Dominique Michel, from music to *Moi et l'autre*, Denys Arcand films to *Bye bye*, then her final *Bye bye*, her final *Bye bye*, and her final *Bye bye*. Dominique Michel is simply an honorary member of every Quebec family.

It is not often that the Bloc Québécois promotes TV shows in the House, but every Quebecker has a rare opportunity to celebrate with Dodo tomorrow because she will be the guest of honour on *En direct de l'univers*. I bet there will be quite the crowd at her party.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, on behalf of all Quebeckers and on behalf of the House, happy birthday, Dodo. We thank you for your work and we wish you good health and a happy retirement even though we miss you.

Happy 90th birthday to Dominique Michel.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new Conservative leader will put people first: their retirements, their paycheques, their homes and their country. We need to restore the hope of home ownership in this country. Right now, young people and newcomers cannot get a home because local government gatekeepers block housing with heavy fees and long delays for building permits, leaving us with the fewest houses per capita of any country in the G7, even though we have the most land to build on.

A Conservative government will require big cities that want federal infrastructure dollars to speed up and lower the cost of permits and to approve affordable housing near all new transit stations so that our young people do not even need to afford to buy a car.

We will also sell off 15% of 37,000 underutilized federal buildings to turn them into affordable housing and use the proceeds of the sales to reduce our deficit. In other words, we will stop printing money and start building homes for our people.

* * *

IRAN

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the last week, Iran has descended into mourning following the death of Mahsa Amini, an innocent 22-year-old murdered while she was detained by the Iranian morality police for simply not having displayed a proper head covering. Since her death, thousands upon thousands have taken to the streets in over 25 cities scattered throughout Iran. They are demanding that women not be discriminated against and harassed, and for the fundamental rights of all cit-

izens to be respected. In each instance, they have faced the iron fist of the Iranian government.

Far too many protesters have been beaten and scores more have lost their lives, and now the Iranian government has throttled social media so it can commit more unconscionable atrocities. That is why Iranian Canadians across our country are heartbroken. Having spoken to many of them, I can say that, given that PS752 is fresh in their memories and they are now watching the savagery that is unfolding in Iran, they want action and they want that action now to demonstrate we are holding the Government of Iran to account.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1120)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Fraser Institute published a report showing that Canadians are spending more on taxes than on shelter, food and clothing combined. The government wants to increase taxes again even though house prices have doubled and the inflation rate for food is at a 40-year high.

Will the government cancel its tax hikes on paycheques, gas, heat and food?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to answer the question from the new leader of the Conservative Party.

However, I would like to begin by saying that our thoughts are with Atlantic Canadians as they face Hurricane Fiona.

Our government is there for them and ready to help. Our message to our fellow Canadians in Atlantic Canada is to be safe and follow the advice of local authorities. We stand with you.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we, as the official opposition, join the government in offering our thoughts and prayers to anyone affected by this crisis, and we offer our full collaboration with the government to help in any way we can to serve the people who are affected.

This week, the Fraser Institute published a report showing that Canadians are spending more on taxes than on food, clothing and shelter combined. Now, with 40-year highs in inflation and house prices having doubled, Canadians cannot afford to pay any more. Will the government cancel its planned tax increases on paycheques, gas, heat and groceries?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our hearts are with Atlantic Canadians today as Hurricane Fiona is about to make landfall. To those on the ground: Stay safe, listen to first responders and follow the advice of local authorities.

I think I speak for all members of the House when I say that our government will be here to support them with whatever resources or assistance they require.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with Canadians now spending more on taxes than on food, clothing and shelter combined, and with this coinciding with 40-year highs in inflation and 40-year highs in food price increases, with reports of students in Toronto forced to live in homeless shelters, the government's plan is to raise taxes on paycheques, gas, heat and other essentials. In fact, it wants to triple the carbon tax.

Now is not the time for a tax hike. Will the government cancel these planned tax increases?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is incredibly unfortunate that the leader of the Conservative Party has tried to tackle inflation and tackle affordability by giving investment advice on highly speculative assets.

For those Canadians who did follow the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, I am truly sorry that they lost their life savings. However, as long as he is giving that investment advice, I think Canadians should ask this: If we cannot trust him to be our stockbroker, why would we want him to be our Prime Minister?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing that everyone can agree on, it is that food is a basic necessity.

Unfortunately, though, inflation is having a direct impact on food prices, which have risen by more than 11%. We must do something.

The Conservatives have been calling on the Liberals to lower taxes for months now, which all of the other G7 countries have done, but the Liberals have unfortunately chosen not to.

At the very least, and this really is the bare minimum, will the Liberals commit to scrap their plan to hike taxes in the coming months?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree. Canadians need us now. Global inflation is behind these economic uncertainties, and we need to be there to support Canadians. That is precisely why we want to double the goods and services tax credit.

Oral Questions

Will the Conservatives support this measure that will put money directly into the pockets of Canadians?

• (1125)

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the riding I represent stretches from the St. Lawrence River to the American border. A very large part of it is rural.

With the high cost of gas, it is very expensive for my constituents who have to drive to work, do errands or access health care.

To help these people, the Prime Minister needs to do just one thing: Cancel the planned tax hike on gas and paycheques. Does he have the guts to do that?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we heard the new deputy leader of the Conservatives say that she was going to support our GST credit. Another day, another flip-flop from the Conservatives, as the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes said that he might support it as well.

Perhaps these two members can try to convince the new leader of the Conservative Party to put money directly into the pockets of Canadians.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is taking action against climate change: 145,000 people voted in favour of striking all across Quebec to put an end to fossil fuels.

Thousands of people are expected in front of Parliament this afternoon. It is the best place to protest because the federal government is the chief culprit when it comes to climate inaction. Not only is this government refusing to stop consuming fossil fuels, it is encouraging their consumption.

Will the Minister of Environment and Climate Change go meet with the protesters and explain why he voted in favour of Bay du Nord?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

I am so happy to see these demonstrations all across the country. I actually organized many such events when I was a little younger.

I would like to remind my colleague that, since we came to power, fossil fuel subsidies have decreased by over \$4 billion a year. We are committed to eliminating those subsidies by next year, 2023, which is two years earlier than our G20 partners. We are taking action on climate change. We are taking action on affordability.

Oral Questions

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers are worried about the future. Hundreds of thousands of people across Quebec are marching on the streets to remind the government about the principles of the former minister of the environment and climate change, who at the time wanted to divest from fossil fuels.

This government continues to support the oil industry, however. Over the past year, it approved the new Bay du Nord development project and it continues to subsidize oil companies every chance it gets. The government set aside \$2.5 billion for this industry in the last budget.

When will the government finally learn that we need to hit the breaks on fossil fuels, not step on the gas?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind my hon. colleague that our climate action plan provides for a \$109-billion investment in clean energy, in the electrification of transportation and in green electricity generation. That is three times more per capita than what the United States is investing.

There are other measures on top of that. We will reduce emissions of methane, a very powerful greenhouse gas, by 40% to 50%, not by 2030 or 2035, but within the next three years, at no cost to businesses. Our plan to control pollution is a plan that works and that will help Canadians.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, through no fault of their own, Syncreon auto workers are going to lose their jobs. The Liberals have known this for months. They knew it was coming but they refused to reform the Employment Insurance Act, leaving them out in the cold.

Shockingly, instead of making things better, tomorrow the Liberals are changing the EI rules to make things tougher for people just trying to feed their families. The government seems to forget that this money belongs to the workers, not them, and to the families they are responsible to. They have been paying into EI for years and now the Syncreon auto workers are going to be robbed.

Why are the Liberals being so cruel when they could fix this today? It is not too late. Justice should be served for these workers. They are due this respect.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that EI benefits need to be more fair, more responsive and more adaptable to the needs of the Canadian workforce. That is why we are committed to delivering a full-scale modernization of the EI system. Although some temporary pandemic benefit programs are winding down, regular EI benefits will continue to be available to workers, just as they were before the pandemic. We look forward to launching our long-term plan to improve Canada's EI system.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Canadian Labour Congress met with the Bank of Canada this week, the CLC warned them that with rapidly rising interest rates, everyday people pay the real cost of inflation, with job losses and mortgages and personal loan payments jumping hundreds of dollars overnight.

What was the Bank of Canada's response? With the economy on the brink of a recession, it continues attacking workers by encouraging companies to drive their wages down. It is disgusting.

Does the Liberal government agree with the Bank of Canada's call to drive up unemployment while pushing down people's wages, or will they join the New Democrats and the CLC by actually standing up for workers in Canada?

• (1130)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Bank of Canada is an independent institution. It has operated that way for more than a generation. We also know that it is a tough time for Canadians, which is why we have created a comprehensive affordability plan.

Members of the House will have a real opportunity this fall to make life more affordable for Canadians by doubling the GST benefit for 11 million households, by providing a housing benefit for renters who need it the most and by providing dental care to young children so they can get their teeth fixed.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rising cost of living is the number one concern of workers, families, students and businesses.

While the NDP and the Liberals bicker about who is spending more, Canadians are unable to make ends meet. All G7 countries have cut taxes to help their citizens pay for groceries every week. In Canada, there have been no tax cuts and, even worse, taxes will increase on January 1.

Will this government do the right thing and cancel the tax cuts planned for 2023?

Oral Questions

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are proposing a plan to help Canadians deal with the rising cost of living. We are going to double the GST credit. We are going to put money in the pockets of Canadians who are struggling to pay their rent and we are going to pay for young children's dental care.

I worry when the Conservatives say they are listening to their constituents who are having trouble making ends meet but then do not want to support Canadians by putting money in their pockets. That is unfortunate.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to share Mike's story.

Mike makes \$22 an hour, and governments take 30% of his salary from every paycheque. He wrote to me saying that he could not afford to feed himself properly and that his local food bank made him feel like he should not need their help. That is the reality for many folks today, with food prices up by more than 10%.

Instead of making things worse for Mike by taking even more from his paycheque, will the Prime Minister cancel next year's tax hikes, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, my heart goes out to Mike, my hon. colleague's constituent.

I would also like to assure Mike that he can have a decent retirement. That is why we want to ensure a good retirement for our seniors and for all Canadians.

I would like to understand why the Conservatives want to attack our Canada pension plan.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, rising home prices and rising interest rates mean that the income necessary to qualify to buy a tiny, entry-level apartment in Calgary has nearly doubled in the past year. Young Canadians across Canada are giving up on home ownership and they cannot afford ever-increasing rents.

The last thing these cash-strapped Canadians need is another bite taken out of their paycheques. Will the government cancel its planned tax increases on paycheques?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing we can agree on with my colleague it is that Canadians across the country are having a hard time buying a home. We agree on that.

Where we disagree is that from the start, the Conservatives across the way have voted against every government measure to provide access to home ownership and give money directly to people so they can pay their rent.

When it comes to affordability, it is our government who is concerned about people across the country.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the government, the price of taxes has become 43% of all Canadians pay for. That has happened under the Liberal government.

The price of everything is going up, and the government is making things worse by raising the carbon tax on top of increasing the payroll tax. All these tax increases make life less affordable for Canadians who cannot afford higher costs with smaller paycheques.

At the very least, will the government commit today to stop making things worse and cancel these planned tax increases?

• (1135)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our plan is designed so that the majority of households in Canada receive more from the climate action incentive payments than they pay, at a time when Canadians need more money and we need to fight climate change.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about a crisis earlier. We are giving families in Ontario \$745. It is \$830 in Manitoba, \$1,100 in Saskatchewan and almost \$1,100 in Alberta. The Conservative Party wants to take this money away from Canadians.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the PBO knows this is not true. Families and small businesses in Hastings—Lennox and Addington have been decimated by the continual rising costs of living. The main street businesses that drive our economy are shuttering, and the farmers who feed our cities are taking on massive losses with no end in sight. What is the government's plan? Is it to take more of their hard-earned money?

Canadians should not have to be bailing out the government's poor economic planning. Will the government show empathy for struggling working-class Canadians and commit to cancelling this callous paycheque tax hike?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working hard to strengthen the Canadian pension plan. The Conservatives are trying to argue that we can make life more affordable by raiding the pension benefits of seniors in the future. It is basically the same playbook they used when they tried to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67.

Why the opposition wants to deprive Canadians of their retirement security when they need it most is beyond me, but I can say that it is very troubling public policy.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these government announcements are nothing more than poorly coordinated manoeuvring of the apostles, and our farmers, tradespeople, working seniors and single parents are left in the lurch. Drawing blood from a stone was never wise economic policy before our historic inflation and it certainly is not now. Canada is a G7 nation. Surely, after seven years in government, the cabinet could find substantive ways to combat inflation that do not include taxing hard-working Canadians.

Will the government cancel its planned paycheque tax increase, yes or no?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are not friends of the Canadian taxpayer. When they were in government, they raised taxes on Canadians more than 50 times. When we lowered taxes for the middle class twice, they voted against it. When we lowered taxes for small businesses, they voted against it. They can say whatever they want about lowering taxes, but their actions speak louder than their words.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are less than 48 hours left. On Sunday, the temporary employment insurance measures come to an end. On Sunday, unless the federal government does something, it is back to the spring gap, back to the nightmare for seasonal workers everywhere, especially in eastern Quebec.

In less than 48 hours, we will be back to an employment insurance system that 60% of workers do not have access to, despite having contributed to it their entire life. An overhaul is needed, but there is less than 48 hours left to do something about it.

Will the government extend the temporary measures?

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that EI benefits need to be more fair, more responsive and more adaptable to the needs of Canada's evolving workforce. That is why we are committed to delivering a full-scale modernization of Canada's EI system. Although some temporary pandemic benefit programs are winding down, regular EI benefits will continue to be available to workers, just as they were before the pandemic. We look forward to launching our long-term plan to improve Canada's EI system.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government obviously does not understand. By raising the number of hours required to qualify for benefits from 420 to 700, it is putting entire families at risk.

The government does not understand the sacrifices that come with the spring gap. Depriving seasonal workers of benefits at a time of year when they do not have work is just going to push them to leave the industry or even their region. The government is plung-

ing families into poverty. It is jeopardizing our seasonal industries, which are already experiencing a labour shortage, and it is contributing to the decline of the regions.

When will the government understand that?

● (1140)

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been there for workers throughout the pandemic and we will continue to be there for workers. Although some temporary pandemic benefit programs are winding down, as I mentioned, regular EI benefits will continue to be available to workers. We look forward to launching our long-term plan to improve Canada's EI system long term.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of the government continues to drive up the cost of living for my constituents. Canadians living in rural and remote communities are already disproportionately impacted by higher gas prices and higher food prices. Now the government is hitting them again with a tax increase on their paycheques. From Vanderhoof to Prince George and Quesnel to Williams Lake, my constituents have told me loud and clear that they cannot afford any new taxes.

Will the Liberal government show some compassion, listen to our new Conservative leader and cancel the planned tax increase on Canadians' paycheques?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer we presented a comprehensive plan to make life more affordable for Canadians. This fall, our legislative agenda is full of fresh ideas on how to make life more affordable for Canadians.

The Conservative plan presented all this week is really two parts: Stop fighting climate change and raid the pension benefits of our seniors. I am sorry, but this is not what responsible leadership looks like.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of living in British Columbia is higher than anywhere else in Canada and is led by the high cost of housing. Gasoline is close to two dollars a litre and going higher still with the government's plan to triple the carbon tax. Adding to all this inflationary pressure, the government is now planning an increase in payroll taxes. This is the last thing hard-working Canadians need.

Will the government commit to cancelling its plans to increase paycheque taxes?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I note the hon. member is from my home province of British Columbia, where we have actually had a price on pollution since 2008. In fact, we have had that price on pollution while having the fastest-growing economy in the entire country.

In fact, if the Conservatives get their way and cancel our fight against climate change, in British Columbia it will mean a savings of exactly zero dollars and zero cents. It is important Canadians hear the facts.

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SENIORS

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Roy, a senior who lives close to Drayton Valley, is worried about the high cost of living. He told me it is difficult for him to have a dollar left at the end of the month. Increases for gas, groceries and even his prescriptions went up. Roy is now wondering how he will heat his home this winter.

Will the Liberal government cancel its planned tax increases on gas, home heating and groceries to help not only Roy but all Canadians already?

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize the challenges seniors are facing, and our government has been there for them.

Now, to help seniors who are struggling, we are doubling the GST tax credit. That means seniors will receive \$700 back in their pockets. Nearly two million low-income renters who are struggling with their rent will receive \$500. We also increased the old age security for seniors aged 75 by 10%. For seniors, for a full pensioner, that means \$800 in their pocket.

While the Conservatives oppose every affordability measure, we will remain focused on delivering for seniors.

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TAXATION

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewanians are suffering from the government's lack of action on inflation and the skyrocketing cost of living. Winter is on its way, and with temperatures ranging between -10°C and -30°C, we have no choice but to heat our homes. Food prices have increased by 10% since last year and the carbon tax will be tripling, yet the government rebates do not even come close to covering those increased costs.

Will the government stop hurting Canadians and cancel its planned tax hikes on gas, heating and groceries?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, carbon pricing is widely recognized by nearly everyone including those in this House, except for the Conservative Party, as the most economically efficient way to reduce emissions while driving clean innovation and creating jobs.

Do not take it from me. Do not take it from the Bloc Québécois, the NDP or the Greens. Take it from some members of the Conser-

vative Party who have asked that our system be applied in their province because it gives more money back into people's pockets and fights climate change at the same time.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government paid Mr. Zourdoumis, a veteran, incorrectly and is now demanding that money back. Not only is Veterans Affairs Canada trying to make Mr. Zourdoumis pay for its mistake, it is putting the onus on him to navigate the bureaucracy of CRA. When he reached out for help from VAC, it would not even return his calls.

Will the minister apologize and take steps to ensure this never happens again?

● (1145)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who has walked in parades of World War II and World War I veterans, and who understands the true commitment of our veterans and the commitment of the minister responsible for veterans to seniors, I can assure the member that this is a file that is in fact being reviewed and looked at. We are not in a position where we will talk about individual cases on the floor of the House of Commons.

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SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, it is clear Nunavut communities are the last priority for the federal government, as they tell me they struggle to access Service Canada. When Nunavummiut attempt to call Service Canada, they are expected to wait or to speak a different language, or they have their phone calls dropped. It is unacceptable that 22 of my communities have to fly out to access a Service Canada office.

When will the federal government finally ensure Nunavut communities have any access to the basic services they deserve?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her continued advocacy for the territory of Nunavut.

Just this summer, I and the minister took a deep look into the territories and understanding the needs of rural and remote communities when it comes to Service Canada. We know there is much work to be done in making sure we meet Canadians where they are every single day. That is why pilot programs like the "Reaching All Canadians" project are doing exactly that to meet Canadians' needs and to make sure they get the services and benefits they deserve.

*Oral Questions***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the world reopening after the pandemic we have seen more people are travelling to Canada to visit, to work and to study, and some are starting their new lives here. We know immigration is critically important to Canada's economic recovery and future prosperity. In my riding of Don Valley North, there are newcomers contributing so much to our local economy and local community.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship update the House? What is the government doing to welcome more visitors to Canada?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are making every effort to reduce wait times and return to service standards. We have hired 600 staff this year, but we know that more needs to be done. That is why we are adding 650 more staff. We are making progress. We have processed 394,000 work permits between January and August of this year, more than doubling the number processed in the same period last year.

Modernizing our immigration system is about more than putting things online. It is about putting people at the heart of everything we do.

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HEALTH

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are happy that the government has backed down from requiring people to use the disastrous ArriveCAN app or follow the unscientific vaccine mandates just to cross the border, but the inconsistency remains. The government now admits that it is safe for an unvaccinated person to get on an airplane or work in a government office, but unsafe for that same person to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. This is obviously unscientific and contradictory.

Will the government follow scientific consistency and give our brave men and women their jobs back?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear the member talk about science; 200,000 is the number of deaths of people who unnecessarily died in the United States because of the relatively lower vaccination rate they had compared to Canada. In the U.S., 200,000 people died unnecessarily. That is an outcome we did not see in Canada, which we can be very proud of.

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TAXATION

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because of the current government's actions, the workers in my riding have been left suffering with an affordability crisis. If three years of COVID were not bad enough, Liberal policies have only added to their pain: from the disastrous ArriveCAN app driving down tourism visits to new taxes and higher spending driving up inflation. The hard-working residents of Niagara are now earning less when they deserve so much more.

When will the government finally realize the error of its ways and end its planned tax increases on Canadians' hard-earned pay-cheques?

● (1150)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we continue to be incredibly focused on making life more affordable for Canadians and really building an economy that works for everyone. That is why we introduced the Canada child benefit. We stopped sending cheques to millionaires, as the Conservatives proposed and did for so long, and we gave them to the families who needed them the most. We have increased support for OAS and GIS and, combined, these measures have helped lift hundreds of thousands of children and seniors out of poverty. That is good public policy.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently I learned about the struggles of three brothers trying to earn a living in Calgary. Everything is going up: food, gasoline and the very basics of living. Now their landlord has told them that next month he needs to raise the rent from \$1,900 to \$2,600 just to keep up with the interest rate hikes.

When will the government give these three brothers a chance and cancel these planned tax increases on gas, home heating and groceries, so they can make ends meet?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said often today, our government is focused on making life more affordable.

There are plenty of measures we have taken on to do just that. We have implemented an early learning and child care program. By the end of this year, families are going to see a 50% reduction in their child care costs, and it is going to go to \$10 a day by 2025. We are providing more money for eight out of 10 Canadians families through the climate action incentive, and we have lowered taxes on the middle class twice by raising taxes on the wealthiest 1%.

We are going to keep making sure life is more affordable for Canadians.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this made-in-Canada, Liberal inflationary crisis that is crushing Canadians is costing the average Canadian family more than \$1,200 per year more in groceries than they paid last year. Food inflation, at nearly 11%, is higher than it has been in more than my entire life.

Canadians are struggling, and what is the response that we are hearing from these Liberals? They are going to raise taxes on their paycheques and they are going to raise taxes on their ability to heat their homes in one of the world's harshest climates. Will these Liberals finally give Canadians a break and cut their planned tax hikes?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have outlined a number of measures that our government has taken on to make life more affordable. I think the member knows that inflation is a global phenomenon. While it is 7% in Canada, it is higher, at 8.3%, in America and it is 9.1% in the euro area.

One thing we know for certain is that we cannot fight inflation by investing in speculative assets. For any Canadian who took the Leader of the Opposition's advice and lost their life savings, we are very sorry. It is not responsible policy.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable but true. The Phoenix pay system fiasco is still ongoing. For the past two years, 60,000 more workers have been having problems with the system. The fiasco is still not over, but what is over is the program to compensate victims, which ended in 2020. Not only is Ottawa not paying its employees, but it is also not compensating them for its mistakes. The Phoenix fiasco needs to end.

Since there are still problems with Phoenix, will the minister at least compensate everyone who has been harmed by the system since 2020?

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all understand that Canada's public servants deserve to be paid properly and on time for the important work they do. We recognize that these pay problems create stress and hardship for employees and their families, and we are committed to fixing it. We are prioritizing cases that could have a significant impact on an employee's pay. We will continue to work to improve the system.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is unable to pay its own employees properly. That is not normal. Why are we surprised that they cannot manage Roxham Road, issue passports and process immigration applications? Everything this government touches is turning into a disaster. We need to reboot. Time for "Ctrl+Alt+Del".

Let us start with the basics. When will Ottawa start paying its employees properly and on time and compensate all the new victims of the Phoenix system since 2020?

• (1155)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, workers absolutely deserve to be paid properly and on time. We have hired more people. Our team has been working on Phoenix 24/7. I am well aware that we have to fix this. We also have a plan to implement the *NextGen* system, which will definitely improve the system.

Oral Questions

At this point, all I can say is that we are aware of the issues and we are working on them.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that this Prime Minister is out of touch. Recent records show that he spent \$12,000 in a single month for groceries, so how could he possibly know what ordinary Canadians are facing?

With taxes up and consumer confidence down, Canadians know that making ends meet is almost impossible. Not only are Canadians cutting back on groceries, they worry about heating their homes this winter, if they can afford a house in the first place.

Do the bohemians across the way know that theirs is a rhapsody of tax misery, and will they cut their planned tax increases on gas, home heating and groceries?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just two weeks ago I announced a program, a \$250-million program, to help tens of thousands of Canadians get off home heating oil and get access to cheaper, cleaner electricity to heat their homes and use in their houses. This is yet another example of how we can tackle the crisis of climate change and help Canadians with affordability. Unfortunately, on these two fronts, the Conservatives have nothing to offer Canadians.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is an out-of-touch answer.

According to a recent survey of my constituents, 94% of families are feeling the pain associated with the increases to the carbon tax. Food prices are at 40-year highs, and these Liberals are making the problem worse by tripling the carbon tax, a policy that increases costs for farmers, the entire supply chain and ultimately drives up the price of food. It is basic economics.

My question is simple. Will the Liberals abandon their massive planned tax hikes on farmers and all Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about carbon pricing for a second. In 2007, the Harper government proposed a \$15 carbon tax. In 2008, the same government pledged to introduce a cap-and-trade system. In 2011, it was no longer pursuing any of these systems, yet last year the opposition proposed in their election campaign that they supporting carbon pricing again.

Canadians want real, serious climate actions to ensure a healthier environment and a cleaner economy, not Conservative flip-flops.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inflation is affecting Canadians every day. Home heating costs more, housing costs more, and groceries cost more.

The government is trying to pull the wool over our eyes. It gives us a dollar and takes two back. The way I see it, that means family budgets come up short. Canada is the only G7 country not to have lowered taxes.

Will the government listen to reason? Will it cancel the tax hikes?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the global economic context is very difficult. We know full well that Canadians are having trouble making ends meet. The Canadian economy is also very resilient.

My colleague referred to where we are compared to other G7 countries. We should keep in mind that Canada has the lowest deficit and the strongest economic growth in the G7.

On this side of the House, we know how to manage the economy, and we will continue to support Canadians who need it most while being fiscally responsible.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, across Canada and around the world today, young people are taking to the streets to demand climate justice. These leaders of tomorrow are clearly expressing their hopes for the future, a future in which we all take responsibility for the damage we have done to our natural world and the climate costs we have imposed on future generations.

Can the minister talk about what our government is doing to tackle climate change?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Sudbury for her question. In my younger days, I would have been on the front lines of today's climate protests, carrying a banner or a megaphone. I actually organized many such protests myself.

I can assure the House today that my department and this government are fully committed to taking action on all fronts in the fight against climate change. This includes \$109 billion in investments and over 100 initiatives in electrification, climate change

adaptation and conservation led by indigenous peoples across the country.

Yes, pollution is decreasing in Canada, contrary to what the Conservative Party would have us believe. We are taking action on climate change, and we will continue to do so for the good of all Canadians.

* * *

● (1200)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, are members surprised that the cost of living in northern Saskatchewan is skyrocketing? Record high gas prices and an ever-increasing carbon tax have led to unprecedented freight costs. Everything, and I mean everything, costs more under this coalition government. In some communities, four litres of milk is nearly \$14, a dozen eggs is nine dollars and a kilogram of apples is \$12.

The people in northern communities cannot afford more taxes. Will the government cancel today its planned increases on northerners' gas, groceries and heating fuel?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate that the cost of living has become an issue for many Canadians, especially in the north of our country. Yesterday, we learned that the newly appointed deputy leader of the Conservatives, the member for Thornhill, is going to support GST tax relief for 11 million Canadian households. It is another day and another Conservative who supports our plan to make life more affordable. Perhaps, since the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes may support the bill, they can get together and convince the Conservative leader to support the bill as well.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's ineffective carbon tax is increasing the cost of everything. Canadians are paying more to drive to work, feed their families and heat their homes, but the Prime Minister does not care because he is actually planning to triple the carbon tax.

Canadians should not have to choose between eating and heating, so when will the government cancel its planned tax hikes on Canadians?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with climate change, the cost of inaction is enormous. In fact, it is in the billions of dollars, and we have a practical and affordable way to lower pollution.

Let us look at the facts. The revenue from pricing pollution in Canada will go back to the provinces where the money was raised, with 90% for families directly and 10% for businesses, municipalities, schools, hospitals and indigenous communities to help them become more energy efficient and save money.

Under our plan, eight out of 10 families will have more money in their pockets, and all the revenue from pricing pollution will stay in the province where it came from.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's tax-and-spend policies have created an affordability crisis in our country. According to recent inflation numbers, food is increasing by the unbelievable amount of over 10%, which will leave many Canadians deciding this winter whether it will be eating or heating each month.

When will the government stop fuelling inflation and start helping Canadians by reversing its planned tax increases on gas, groceries, home heating and paycheques?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are helping Canadians by making life more affordable. We are doing that in many ways. It is why we have increased the Canada workers benefit, which now helps three million Canadians. We have reduced the retirement age from 67 to 65, putting thousands of dollars back into the pockets of our seniors. We have saved students \$3,000 by getting rid of interest rates on student loans.

We will continue to build an economy that works for everyone, and I look forward to working with the member to do the same.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Russia has announced plans for sham referendums in the Ukrainian territories it has invaded. It is clear that Russia's war is only about Vladimir Putin's desire to redraw the map using force. This is also an admission of Russia's failure, as Ukrainians are bravely retaking territory with the help of the aid provided by Canada and our allies. Ukraine's territory must remain Ukraine's.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs inform this House of the government's position on these latest Russian escalations?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Whitby for his continued support and commitment to the people of Ukraine, like every member of this House.

Canada strongly condemns the sham so-called referendums that Russia has planned in the occupied regions of Ukraine. They are completely illegitimate. Canada will never recognize them, and we are urging other countries to join with us in rejecting Russia's attempts to steal Ukrainian territory through deceit, violence and terror.

Canada has always stood with Ukraine, and this House has always stood with Ukraine. We will continue to do that and do it well and passionately.

Oral Questions

• (1205)

HEALTH

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day 10 Canadians die by suicide and 21 more to overdose. Canada was already facing a mental health crisis. Now, with rising costs, everyday Canadians cannot afford to pay out-of-pocket for the help they need. Wait-lists for public services are months or years long. The Liberals promised to spend \$4.5 billion over five years to expand mental health services, yet this funding was not even in this year's budget.

When will the government deliver on its promise to help Canadians who are struggling?

[Translation]

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

I was pleased yesterday to be able to answer his question with more details during the adjournment debate. We are well aware of the complexity of the current crisis and the importance of taking action. That is why we remain committed to investing this \$4.5 billion over five years by way of the new transfer. This is in addition to the historic investments we have made so far in mental health.

* * *

[English]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in 2021, the Liberals campaigned on the promise to eliminate interest on Canada student loans. Today, the government is poised to increase interest rates in April, adding an average of \$600 to student loan payments.

Is this just another example of the government's smoke and mirrors and failure to honour its promises to Canadians, just like its inability to combat rampant inflation, high interest rates and soaring food costs?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, young Canadians and students are the future of Canada. With budget 2022, we are investing \$26 million over four years to increase the amount of forgivable Canada student loans by 50% for health care workers in rural and remote communities.

Routine Proceedings

We have had students' backs every step of the way. Through budget 2021, we made federal student loans interest-free until March 2023. We also doubled Canada student grants and extended the skills boost top-up to help young Canadians afford education during the pandemic.

We remain committed to permanently eliminating the federal interest on Canada student loans and Canada apprentice loans. We will help young Canadians transition into the workforce.

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

I want to wish everyone a good weekend, and again I remind folks, if they know somebody from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I., Newfoundland, Labrador or eastern Quebec, to give them a call and find out how they are doing with the storm happening over the weekend.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-298, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (economic substance).

He said: Mr. Speaker, at the moment, companies can put money into a Canadian-based investment corporation then legally create a subsidiary corporation in a tax haven, such as the Cayman Islands, and transfer their money into that corporation. They then pay tax in the other jurisdiction. The official line is that this is supposed to prevent double taxation, but it in fact prevents taxation altogether, because these tax havens have an effective tax rate of 0%. Then that money can be brought back into Canada without the company ever having paid any tax at all.

Canada is losing in the neighbourhood of \$25 billion of legitimate tax revenue every year, which could be used to fund public service. It is part of a culture of avarice that includes the low capital gains exemption and a corporate tax rate that has been slashed in half. This is something that calls for action.

This bill would require those shell companies to actually have some real economic substance, to have offices and to employ real people, instead of just being post office boxes in tax havens that allows Canadian companies to avoid paying their legitimate fair share here in Canada. This is why I am proud to be presenting this legislation today and grateful to the member for Courtenay—Alberni for having seconded it.

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

* * *

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.) moved that Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of

Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other Acts (COVID-19 response and other measures), be read the first time.

(Motion deemed adopted, bill read the first time)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

FARMERS' MARKETS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a huge honour and privilege to rise to deliver this petition, signed by constituents from Courtenay, Parksville, Port Alberni and Qualicum Beach in my riding.

They cite that farmers' markets are a key tool for COVID-19 recovery, as they are small business incubators and builders of domestic systems, food security, local economies and communities. They say that farmers' market coupon programs are a key support for new market development that provides support for existing markets and their provincial associations. Farmers' market nutrition programs help create food security and resiliency by giving vulnerable people access to healthy, locally grown foods and dietary education, while positively impacting the physical and mental health of participants by increasing the amount and diversity of the fruits and vegetables they consume.

They are calling on the Government of Canada to initiate a national matching program for all provincial farmers' market nutrition coupon programs across Canada that would match provinces that already contribute to their farmers' market nutrition coupon programs and encourage provinces that do not have one to implement one by offering such a program.

[*Translation*]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present a petition to the House of Commons that has been signed by people in my riding and across Canada regarding the climate crisis.

The petitioners express concerns about our government's commitment. The government signed the Paris Agreement, but it does not appear to be sufficiently committed to meeting the Paris targets of limiting warming to 1.5°C or 2°C. A temperature increase of 1.5°C or 2°C will no doubt spell disaster for our children and grandchildren.

Government Orders

[English]

The petitioners specifically ask that the government meet its commitments to ban the export of thermal coal and that they work more aggressively to ensure an end to growth in the oilsands in order to ensure that emissions peak before 2025. We can hold to 1.5°C or 2°C while there is still time.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is, as always, an honour to stand in this place to present a petition, in this case, on behalf of 112 Canadians who have shared their significant concern about the promise the Liberals made in their 2021 election platform to weaponize charitable status for ideological purposes.

These citizens therefore call upon the House of Commons to, one, 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 values and without the imposition of another “values test”; and, two, affirm the right of Canadians' freedom of expression.

It is an honour to table this petition in the people's House of Commons here today.

* * *

• (1215)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

COST OF LIVING RELIEF ACT, NO. 1

The House resumed from September 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (temporary enhancement to the Goods and Services Tax/Harmonized Sales Tax credit), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to stand in the people's House to talk about the important issues Canadians are facing. I will note that I will be splitting my time with my hon. friend and colleague for South Shore—St. Margarets.

Before I get into the substance of my speech on Bill C-30, I would simply note an observation. As I was reading through the orders of the day, I was having to get used to things such as the bill before us being introduced in the King's name. It is certainly something that will take us some time to get used to, as we acknowledged earlier this week Her Majesty had an incredible 70-year rule on the throne, and now King Charles III is taking the helm as monarch and King of Canada.

It has certainly been interesting to observe the Liberals governing this week. They have seemingly participated in a massive pivot, a change of direction, or a change of course, however one wants to define it, but they have finally taken the advice, or I suppose they have heeded the warnings, of the new Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition, both prior to and pretty consistently since I got to know him after first being elected in 2019, has talked a lot about the economy, the impacts of government policy on the economy and ultimately how that affects Canadians. Over the last eight or nine months during which the Leader of the Opposition was running to be leader of the Conservative Party, he talked a lot with Canadians about how economic policy has a direct impact on their lives. However, all of a sudden, once the Leader of the Opposition was elected leader of the Conservative Party, the Liberals decided that they needed to do something about it.

I am sure Liberals heard from their constituents, because I have certainly heard from mine, and in fact, I have heard from quite a few constituents from Liberal ridings who have shared with me how their Liberal MPs are simply not listening. It is interesting that now, all of a sudden, the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister, who has noted quite publicly that he does not spend too much time thinking about monetary policy, would focus their policy agenda on making sure that, at least when it comes to talking points, they are seen to be doing something.

Let us build a foundation of the current circumstances we face. The average Canadian family is facing the devastating consequences of inflation. I recently sent out a householder survey, which I referenced in question period earlier. It asked a number of questions, and one was on the carbon tax. Of those who responded, 94% of constituents said that they are facing challenges related to the increased costs related to the carbon tax. Further, 96% of respondents are facing challenges and struggles.

On my householder surveys, I always give an opportunity for constituents to share stories, leave comments and give me feedback as their representative. From the 96% who said that inflation and increases associated with the cost of living are having negative impacts on their lives, I heard stories of people having to choose between heating their homes and purchasing groceries, of families having to change their grocery-buying habits and of the dramatic increase in food bank usage. It was heartbreaking.

Government Orders

I represent an area of the country, thankfully, that has two of what I call our “legacy” industries, and I am very proud of them both. One of them is agriculture and the other is energy. The prices of oil and, generally, of natural gas, although there are some distribution challenges right now with natural gas, have been up, yet families are still struggling. When it comes to agriculture, although it was fairly spotty, generally my constituency got some rain, unlike much of the country, and agriculture is doing okay, yet those families are still facing challenges related to the cost of living.

• (1220)

Economic policy truly has an impact, and that is why it matters that we talk about these issues. I would just note how a recent Fraser Institute report outlined how a massive change has taken place over the last number of years, so that the most expensive part of a Canadian's life is generally now paying taxes to government.

I am going to highlight a fundamental difference that exists between the left and the right when it comes to public policy in Canada. That is certainly my perspective not only on Bill C-30, but also on much else of what the government does. The Liberals and the left want control. They would rather take Canadians' money and then decide how much they deserve to get back. We see this with the carbon tax. In fact, I found it really ironic when the Deputy Prime Minister talked, I believe it was yesterday, about how outraged she was, and the indignation she had, about how Conservatives were not willing to embrace the carbon tax because of its being an economic mechanism.

It certainly is an economic mechanism. I would suggest that it is bad public policy and certainly misguided. What we see here fundamentally is the ideology of how the Liberals approach things, and I hope Canadians are listening. Liberals and the left, whether that is the Liberals themselves or their coalition partners in the NDP, although they seem to maybe be getting cold feet in that regard and have finally been a little critical of their coalition partners, as well as the Bloc when it comes to much of their economic policy, all want more control. They will take money from Canadians and then decide how much they should give back.

Conservatives have a fundamentally different philosophy. We believe in empowering Canadians. We believe in ensuring that it is Canadians who have the responsibility to deal with the dollars they worked so hard to earn. Before the Liberals jump up and say, somehow, we are heartless and whatnot, Conservatives believe that we need a strong social safety net. We believe in an efficient, compassionate social safety net.

However, that fundamental difference defines much of the debate that we are having. The fact is that the Liberals will more or less, although it is a bit of a strong word, bribe Canadians with their own money and claim it as a solution to the challenges associated with the rise in costs. Fundamentally, that is a short-term solution that economists generally agree will exacerbate the challenge. It is also not going to help in the long term.

Conservatives this past week made it very clear that we are happy to work with the government, but we have some guidelines that I have heard from constituents and I know my colleagues from across the country have as well. We have to put a hard line and stop

the massive increases in taxes, the eating away of Canadians' paycheques. These economic principles and philosophies matter.

While Bill C-30 would give some relief to Canadians who are facing the challenges associated with inflation, it is temporary and it is a continuation of a trend of damaging economic policies that ultimately are making our economy weaker and causing Canadians great pain.

Action needs to be taken. I would conclude with this: The Liberals like to stand on their high horse and talk about how they somehow have this massive mandate from Canadians. In the last election, the Conservatives won the popular vote. We did not win the most seats in the House of Commons, but I would encourage Liberal members to take pause and think of the Conservatives not as their enemies but rather as members of the House representing people who have fundamentally different views on how we should approach the challenges facing our country. I would encourage them not to demonize those who would suggest that maybe their misguided policies are leading our country in the wrong direction.

• (1225)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly would not regard my Conservative colleagues as enemies of the state. They are possibly a bit misguided, but they are not in any way or sense an enemy.

I just wondered whether the member regards Bill C-30 as bribing Canadians with their own money.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member and, certainly, for some of the work that we have done on issues of shared concern related to human trafficking and other things.

Again, this is one of the fundamental differences between the way, generally, that Liberals and Conservatives approach the issues.

While the Liberals are going to double the GST tax credit that will go back to Canadians, Conservatives made it very, very clear over the last number of months, and, in fact, we brought forward a number of initiatives in the House that the Liberals voted against that would have helped address the massive increases that Canadians were facing. These were things like cutting the GST on fuel, gasoline, diesel and propane, which Conservatives proposed as a practical, common-sense solution, and the Liberals voted against. There is a fundamental difference in philosophy, I would suggest, in how Conservatives approach the government purse and the way that tax policy impacts Canadians.

This is giving dollars back to Canadians who did pay the GST, no question. However, we need to fundamentally understand that these are Canadians' dollars. I would certainly suggest that it is Canadians who know best how to spend their dollars, so we should be thinking more seriously about leaving those dollars in their pockets.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

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

We do not always agree with the Conservatives on certain topics, like inflation, for example. We do not agree that the government is entirely responsible for inflation. There is the global situation, but there is also a labour shortage that is contributing to lower demand and higher prices.

One of the Bloc Québécois's proposed solutions to the labour shortage is to create incentives for experienced workers.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on one of our proposals, which is to offer a tax credit for experienced workers. We are not talking about giving them money after having taken some away. We are talking about having them pay less tax in order to encourage them to come back to the labour market. I am looking for a consensus and would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this Bloc Québécois proposal.

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, certainly, to the labour shortage that our country is facing, that is something that demands public policy solutions. I would note that, over the course of this first week back after the summer break, Conservatives have been talking about making sure that we are empowering new Canadians, removing the barriers they face, the gatekeepers, which come to many new Canadians when they come to Canada, many of whom are experienced and have significant amounts of education and training and whatnot, so that they can be employed in the professions they are trained in.

That is good public policy. That is compassionate. That is supporting new Canadians who want to contribute to Canadian society. What has been really, really troubling, and I hope that we can come together with the Bloc, and maybe the NDP can be convinced of this as well, to figure out a path forward, as the opposition controls the balance of power in the House.

What has been really disappointing is that when Conservatives talk about this, the Liberals seem to roll their eyes and laugh. It is very, very disappointing.

• (1230)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting, in terms of the lesson that the hon. colleague wanted to give about the left and the right. He mentioned the word “control”, saying that the left wants to control people's money, yet, ultimately, I would argue that with that money we want to support people. That is the difference between building larger institutions, building social programs and ensuring that there is equality within those social programs that goes to everybody.

Ultimately, with these corporate tax cuts that they are talking about, that goes to a very specific group of people. With respect to that corporate greed and not sharing that money, for it to go into offshore accounts and into their own pockets, how does the hon. member expect a government to govern and provide social programs if it does not have a fair tax policy?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, to respond to the question from the member for the NDP, the best way to make sure we have strong social programs is a prosperous economy, because when Canadians prosper, they are able to pay the taxes. When businesses prosper, they are able to pay taxes. When our nation prospers, that is the best way to ensure that we have a strong social safety net to protect those who need supports. I find it so unfortunate that the policies of the NDP specifically were devastating in my province of Alberta, and we are seeing the devastation that left-leaning policies are having on the economy and our nation. That needs to change.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by taking this opportunity to share my concern for my constituents and all Atlantic Canadians who are preparing for Hurricane Fiona's landfall this weekend. Reports are suggesting that Hurricane Fiona could be Canada's strongest storm ever, and the peak winds and rain may arrive early Saturday morning at high tide.

The arrival of this generational storm at high tide poses a strong risk for coastal communities throughout my riding and the province. I encourage everyone to take the advice of public safety officials, stay indoors and wait out the storm. Please monitor emergency service websites and social media pages, along with traditional media, for the latest updates on the storm.

This historic storm has the potential to cause massive destruction, and I am in constant contact with local municipal, provincial and federal government officials to ensure that all the support that my constituents may need is in place.

Today, I rise to speak to Bill C-30 on behalf of my community. This bill provides a doubling of the GST rebate in the next payment cycle, and then the rebate will go back to its current levels. The one-time payment will vaporize with Liberal inflation, which will cost more than the benefit.

This bill is one that we should not even have to have a discussion on, and it should not even be before the House. The government is finally coming to grips with the fact that Canadians are struggling right now, but it is its endless spending and money printing that got us here. The half-trillion dollars of Liberal spending means all the money chasing limited goods pushes prices up.

This 40-year record inflation, not seen since Pierre Trudeau days, and for the same reasons, means life has become more expensive for Canadians trying to pay rent and buy food. Wages are not going up to match inflation, causing even more hardship, at least for now. We should not be in a place where one-time relief is needed.

Government Orders

The Liberals should never have caused this record-breaking inflation. While Liberal MPs enjoy their benefits and jet around the world having \$3,000 meals on private jets, inflation is having real-world impacts on everyday Canadians. Surveys show that 24% of Canadians have reduced the groceries they buy, and food banks are reporting a 170% rise in customers.

Let us take Nancy, from the South Shore in my riding. She lives on disability and receives \$895 a month. Due to the skyrocketing cost of home heating, her oil bill in the winter is \$700 a month. If we add on the bare necessities, like food, Internet, phone, and gas for her car, it does not really leave anything at the end of the month, if she can even pay for those.

Nancy has to drive to Halifax from her home in rural Nova Scotia every three months for treatment because of her disability. However, ever since the price of gas shot up, it has become more difficult to afford to go into the city for her treatments.

Thanks to Liberal inflation, people like Nancy need to decide if they should be using the fuel in their car to pick up groceries or receive medical treatment. Nancy worked hard and faced an unfortunate setback. Like so many, she simply cannot keep up with inflation.

We can also talk about Cameron from my riding. His mother lives a mere 35 kilometres away, in rural Nova Scotia. Cameron needs to get to work, feed his family and put clothes on his kids' backs. However, because of the high cost of fuel, Cameron cannot afford to visit his own mother, who is only 35 kilometres away.

It is stories like this that I and many of us in this place have heard over the past year. Regular, hard-working Canadians are facing impossible financial decisions simply due to government spending that has caused the price of everything to skyrocket.

The government's proposals do little to solve the problem. The GST rebate will provide welcome relief that Conservatives support, but it will not address the real problem, which is that inflationary deficits and taxes are driving up costs at the fastest rate in 40 years.

Here is what Robert Kavcic, senior economist at the Bank of Montreal, had to say on this. He said:

We're not going to deny that there are households seriously in need of help right now in this inflationary environment. But, from a policy perspective, we all know that sending out money as an inflation-support measure is inherently inflationary.

● (1235)

There we have it. As the Liberals continue to spend, Canadians will continue to suffer.

While Conservatives welcome this much-needed support, the one-time cheque of \$467, for a family of four that is eligible for this benefit, covers less than 40% of the Liberal inflation at the grocery store and does not begin to cover the rising costs of heat, gasoline or rent. The average family of four is now spending over \$1,200 more each year to put food on the table. Grocery prices are up almost 11%. More than 70% of families with children will not receive support. Liberal inflation is hitting these families hard while the Liberals ignore the issues.

The Conservatives have called for the Liberals to scour government spending to find savings to pay for these proposals to avoid

adding to the costs. Let us start with axing the \$25-million Arrive-CAN app altogether, scrapping the \$35-billion Infrastructure Bank and reducing the bloated bureaucracy. Departments like DFO have doubled their HR department in the last three years. There are more than 800 HR people in DFO alone now. I guess it needs this because the department has grown by 4,300 employees in only three years. While Canadians lost their jobs, DFO went on a job-hiring binge. That is why the new Conservative leader promises to introduce a pay-as-you-go law for the federal government. The plan will make sure that, if it wants to spend a dollar more, it has to find a dollar in savings.

If the Liberals were serious about making life more affordable for workers, families and seniors, another thing they would do is cancel the tripling of the carbon tax immediately. It is not just groceries, gas and home heating the government has raised taxes on. In fact, it is difficult to find anything that the current government has not raised taxes on.

During the pandemic, the Liberal government raised payroll taxes and alcohol taxes three times. On top of that, it removed key tax credits that families depended on, like the fitness and arts credits, along with public transit credits. Now it is raising the payroll taxes of EI and CPP. This means every Canadian will be taking home less money at the end of each month. These taxes are coming at the worst possible time for Canadian families who are struggling with rising costs.

Instead of freezing taxes, or better yet reducing them, the Liberal government is raising taxes on people who are struggling to make ends meet. This is causing structural inflation. High spending and increased taxes can only be fixed with structural changes to government spending, not with one-off measures.

The bill will provide a one-time temporary relief, but it does not have to be this way. It does not have to be this type of relief. The best solution is a permanent one, not a temporary one. It is to restrain government spending, which causes inflation, lower taxes and eliminate the tripling of the carbon tax.

The hurt inflicted on Canadians by the government must stop. Canadians cannot simply afford the current government anymore.

Government Orders

• (1240)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I ask my question, I would like to send my best wishes to my colleague across the way and his constituency in advance of Hurricane Fiona. I hope his community is spared, that everyone stays safe and that they are able to avoid the worst of this very dangerous storm.

I would like to ask my colleague across the way this. He mentioned the supports the people in his riding have been asking for. With global inflation, which is a phenomenon around the world, will he be supporting Bill C-30?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciate the member's kind and caring words about the situation the people in my community and province face. As I am sure we all do in the House, I hope it is not as bad as it is projected to be.

With respect to this bill, absolutely I am supporting it. I support the idea. As I said, I wish it was not that we have to provide a one-time relief payment of \$500 to people because of high inflation, and instead got at the root problem of the issue, which is higher inflation caused by excessive government spending and the printing of money by the Bank of Canada. Putting all of that money into the system means more money chasing fewer goods, which causes the price of everything to go up. That is what we should be dealing with. If we had dealt with that in the first place, there would be no need for this bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. Our thoughts are with the people in his large riding who may be affected by the hurricane.

My question is about Bill C-30. We are well aware that inflation is still rising. It is affecting families, seniors and citizens. We know that, since July, the cost of goods and services in Canada has gone up by a shocking 7.6% compared to last year.

What will happen to our families who are living day to day? Usually people try to plan a few months ahead. These families are suffering as a result of inflation.

I would like to know what solutions you are proposing to make this more regulated and for things to move faster. We have been waiting a long time for these long-overdue measures from the current government.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the member for her thoughts on the hurricane that is approaching my province.

I think that is a great question. We have expressed, quite consistently, since the election last year in 2021, that one of the big things that we have to do in this chamber, in this House, to reduce the inflationary pressures on Canadians, is to deal with the taxes on fuel. The taxes on fuel come in the form of the HST and the carbon tax. In fact, the HST is a tax on top of the carbon tax, or one way or the other. I cannot keep straight which level of taxes the Liberals put on to tax other levels of Liberal taxes.

In this case, those massive taxes on fuel mean that everything we eat or buy has to be transported by truck. That forces the cost of transportation up, which forces the cost of everything up. The structural issue we need to deal with is to reduce taxes on fuel, eliminate the carbon tax on fuel and eliminate the carbon tax on home heating oil. We have to heat with oil from Saudi Arabia in my province, which will cost the average household \$600 to \$700 more a year. If those taxes are reduced that will deal with the permanent structural problem we have with inflation.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am always a little bit amazed that when the Conservatives are talking about inflationary pressures they neglect to talk about the profiteering that is going on with wealthy corporations, the war that is happening in Ukraine and the supply chain issues that have happened over the last two years. I suppose that if we use that same logic of making it attributable to one political party, in the U.K. we could call it Conservative inflation.

I am glad to hear that the member is supporting Bill C-30. As to Bill C-31, however, he talked about Liberal benefits. Why does he feel that Conservative MPs should have dental benefits but their constituents should not?

• (1245)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Speaker, the quick answer to that is that eight out of 10 provinces already have a dental program for low-income people. In Ontario, they have one. In Nova Scotia, they have one for children under 15. The Liberals are duplicating provincial efforts and wasting taxpayer dollars.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-30 and add my voice to this. I hope I am bringing a bit more light than heat, because I have been listening here for a while and there seems to be a lot of heat but I am not sure how much light there is in it.

I am splitting my time with my favourite colleague from Toronto—Danforth. I look forward to what she has to say and possibly look forward more to what she has to say than to what I have to say.

I also want to extend my concerns to our colleagues and the people of Nova Scotia and the Maritimes generally for what they are facing this weekend.

I cannot help but make the observation of dissonance between what this chamber, particularly on the Conservative side of things, says and the realities of climate change. How many once-in-a-lifetime events do we have to have every year before we realize that climate change is among us? We have been watching the floods in Pakistan. We have been watching the fires out in western Canada and watching California literally burn down. We express sympathy for that. We rush in as best we can to repair the damage after the fact. However, we fail to deal with the fundamental issue that is before us, which is the reality of climate change.

Government Orders

Therefore, the most practical solution is to apply a cost to the carbon that we all put in the air. We all put it into the air, yet we are extremely resistant to doing anything about it. I just want to make that as an observation. There is a dissonance between the way we talk about climate change and the climate emergency, and the willingness to actually make the sacrifices that are necessary in the form of some form of taxation or costing, in order to be able to mitigate the costs.

However, this is a discussion about Bill C-30. It is a bill that, it looks like, enjoys virtually unanimous support in the House. It is one of a suite of measures that the government is taking to fight inflation. I am kind of amused by that language: fighting inflation. I am sure inflation is just scared that the Government of Canada, the governments of the provinces or any government is fighting it, because inflation is what inflation is.

I have found that the members opposite are really quite elegant and eloquent in describing the problem, which is the high cost of groceries, the high cost of fuel, the high cost of rent, etc., and are very able to do that. I have heard it in my own riding. I have found that the answers that I give in my own riding do not resonate. When I say that it is partly due to Putin's war, the response of my constituents is "we do not care". When I say it is difficulties with supply chains, my constituents say, "we do not care". When it is having to do with various other causes, my constituents just do not care. The reality is that they want me, us, the government, to do something.

The government actually has a limited array of things that it can do to fight inflation. The first one, of course, is monetary policy. This is generally where everyone nods off who is not already asleep because monetary policy is possibly the most boring thing ever. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your getting an extra coffee before I rose to speak.

• (1250)

Monetary policy is essentially run by the Government of Canada. Years ago, the government made a very wise decision to take monetary policy out of this chamber, out of the political vicissitudes of the day, according to whatever the government or the Parliament of the day thought should be done with monetary policy, so that is run independently.

Some of us can criticize the Bank of Canada, and some members of the opposition in particular seem to be very enthusiastic about criticizing the operation of monetary policy. I could even make the argument that it started to raise interest rates a little slowly. However, it certainly has done what it can do to raise interest rates and restrict the supply of money.

Doing that, however, has consequences. The consequence is that it slows economic activity, and when we slow economic activity, we create unemployment. That is not a very good outcome for any of us, really. That is the consequence of monetary policy, and it needs to be moved forward.

The previous member talked about the government of Mr. Trudeau in the seventies. I was around in the seventies and remember stagflation. Stagflation meant having the worst of both worlds: inflation plus a high unemployment rate. Fortunately, we are not

there, and possibly we have learned something about the application of monetary policy.

That is the first instrument any government has for dealing with this. It is being executed as well as it can be executed, and there has been some impact in cooling the real estate market.

The second array of the government's abilities is fiscal policy. Notwithstanding what some might say, this government is in relatively good shape with regard to debt-to-GDP ratio. I know we ran the debt-to-GDP ratio up during the COVID era, but there are no free lunches in this world and it will need to be dealt with.

At this point, a couple of things have been done well, one of which is buying long-term debt at low interest rates, so the cost of debt, at this point at least, is limited. We also have a reasonable unemployment rate at this point, so there is full employment and a government that has its fiscal house under control, although I would not say in order. There are challenges in managing that, but still, the fiscal situation is not bad for this country.

The third element of any government's approach to inflation is programs. That is part of what we are talking about with Bill C-30 and the temporary increase in the amount of HST refund for those who qualify, which is primarily people with an income of under \$40,000 a year.

In my riding, the Canada child benefit is a huge benefit. It is \$100 million a year going into my riding, affecting something in the order of 8,000 of families. The money goes to the people who actually need it the most. Economists can make the argument that we are putting money into the economy and are therefore creating our own level of inflationary pressures. There is some truth to that, but if it is a choice between rent and eating, I am sure my constituents appreciate the Canada child benefit, just as they appreciate the rent subsidy, the carbon rebate and the child care program that is going forward.

These are all programs that a government can put forward. It is a reasoned response to a very difficult situation largely caused from outside the country on a relatively small economy.

• (1255)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding the inflation we are currently facing and this particular bill, Bill C-30, "We're not going to deny that there are households seriously in need of help right now in this inflationary environment. But, from a policy perspective, we all know that sending out money as an inflation-support measure is inherently...inflationary." That is from a senior economist at the Bank of Montreal.

Government Orders

In budget 2022, the government identified that it had a policy review of billions of dollars of potential savings it could find and indicated it could pare that back. Would the member say that it would have been far more ideal for the Minister of Finance to have done the hard work over the summer to find savings within the Government of Canada's policy review and then bring this bill forward so that we are not actually increasing inflation? Does he agree with that, yes or no?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, as members know, I have been here for a long time, some might say too long, and every government that has ever been here in that time has always said there are savings to be found over here, over there, etc. What the hon. member is describing is very difficult work. It is an ongoing process, and I do anticipate that the Minister of Finance has been doing it.

On the first part of his question, I will quote an economist, an Atkinson fellow. I better not pronounce the name or I will mess it up. She wrote, "In truth the measures are so modest, [at] only \$3.2 billion". The impact on the economy is very modest.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are really glad to see the Liberals finally get on board with doubling the GST tax credit to help 11 million Canadians, something the NDP has been pushing hard for, but one thing we believe is that we need to go much further. We have seen oil and gas companies with record profits. Banks have record profits. Grocery store chains have record profits. Telecom and wireless companies have record profits. Fees on consumers are going up in all of those sectors.

We saw the Conservatives in Great Britain create an excess profit tax of 25% on big oil. We would never see that from the Conservatives here, because they are the lobbyists for the oil and gas companies.

Does my colleague believe we need to do more? I see the 1.5% increase on big banks and excess profit, but the Liberals are letting oil and gas off the hook. They are letting the big grocery store chains off the hook. They are letting wireless operators off the hook. Greedflation is taking over. Does my colleague agree that more needs to be done here?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the benefit of being here a long time is that this seems to be a go-to position of my friends on the left.

There is an excess profits tax. All of these companies the member is complaining about, if they fall within the band of excess profits, will be taxed directly for that. I take note, as he did, of the excess profits tax for banks and insurance companies. There will be a gathering of revenues. I also take note that lately, primarily because of the low unemployment rate, the government's revenues have been quite robust, again speaking to the point that the government's management of its finances has been quite exemplary.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I have not been a member of the House for very long, but I am sure that if I had been, I would have been happy to have the member around for a long time with me.

I have a question about the timing of the introduction of Bill C-30. It is a relatively simple bill that is quite easy to implement. We already knew when the budget was tabled in the spring that inflation was going to be an issue.

Could this bill have been introduced earlier and provided help sooner to people who are struggling right now because of inflation?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, of course it could have been tabled earlier. Whether that would have been a wise tabling, I do not really know.

This is part of an array of initiatives on the part of the Government of Canada to mitigate the complaints we are all hearing. There is not a member in this House who has not heard about the inflationary pressures on our constituents, so as part of an entire array, I think this bill is a worthy initiative. The fiscal policy is being handled as well as it can be handled, with maybe a slow start on monetary policy. I still think the Bank of Canada is moving forward on that front as well.

When taken together, the array of measures and initiatives on the part of the government writ large is an appropriate response to a worldwide phenomenon on a relatively small economy, and hopefully—

The Deputy Speaker: I hate to cut off the hon. member but we are out of time.

Continuing debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to join the debate on Bill C-30, the cost of living relief act.

I have to say this is something that I know people in my community want to see. After a summer of having conversations with people back home in the community about what their needs are and what they are seeing, this is a chance to show that we are here and that we are responding to what their needs are in a very real way.

Inflation is a global phenomenon. We have heard this said a few times today. It is driven in large part by the lasting impacts of the pandemic. It has been amplified by China's COVID zero policies. It has also been amplified by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We can say all that, but I also agree with what the member for Scarborough—Guildwood said, that those may be the causes, but people want to see action. This is where we get to say that we are taking that action to provide people with support.

Government Orders

Just so we have the backdrop, inflation at the moment is at about 7%. It is less than that of many of our peers, such as the United States, which is at 8.3%, the United Kingdom at 9.9% and Germany at 7.9%, but it still has a bite. Those are the numbers. It is still having a bite.

That is why our government now has the affordability plan, which is a suite of measures. It is new support here for 2022. It includes doubling the GST credit for six months. That is just one measure that is going to be able to make life more affordable for millions of Canadians. I will talk a little bit more about it as we go forward, but I want to also talk a bit about some of the backdrop to the work that we are doing generally. That is really important.

When I was first elected, one of the big pieces that I said I wanted to tackle was income inequality. I said it was something that was very important. I heard that. People in my community were raising it. We were talking about the additional measures that are happening today because of inflation. It builds on a suite of measures that we have been putting in place to build a stronger safety net. That is really important.

Among some of the things we talk about is the Canada child benefit. Originally, the same size of cheque went to anyone who had children. It had very limited impact. There were people who were really wealthy who were receiving it. People in need were not receiving the extra help that they needed.

I talk with people in my community about the Canada child benefit all the time. They tell me that it had an impact, because now it is means-tested, which means that people who have a greater need receive more money and the people who do not need that help do not receive it. That is okay, though, because they know that other people who are in great need in our community are getting that extra support. It puts thousands of dollars in the pockets of people to help feed their families.

In fact, studies in Toronto showed that it had a very real impact on food insecurity in families, that it was reducing food insecurity by significant numbers. It also had an impact, by Statistics Canada standards, on reducing poverty for children.

One of the other things that I was really excited about and wanted to accomplish when we were here was child care. Let us talk about raising a family. My kids are older teens now, but I had to put their names on a wait-list for day care before they were even born to get a spot in Toronto. By the way, that is still very much the case in Toronto. The cost was tremendous. People have to make a real decision about whether they can afford to have a child, whether they can afford to work. It has a disproportionate impact on women.

The newest pieces that we have heard over the past year from our government, with the agreements we have reached with all of the provinces and territories for a national child care plan, are part of that safety network. This means that more people are able to work, which is part of the issue when we are talking about inflation and the like. We are also talking about labour shortages being another challenge in there. Allowing more people to have access to work helps with the labour shortages.

I will go back to the bill a little more here. We know that no single country can solve all of the global problems that we have been talking about that are driving higher prices, but we are taking tangible steps to get inflation under control here in Canada, to make life more affordable for Canadians.

• (1305)

I want to recognize the central role of the Bank of Canada in addressing inflation. For more than three decades, it has been the bank's responsibility to tackle inflation here in Canada. Our government reaffirmed that central mandate last December. The bank has begun its work to bring inflation back to the target and we have seen that with the monetary decisions that have been made.

The Bank of Canada and private sector economists now expect inflation to ease toward 2%, which is the target over the next two years. That is where we are going, but we have this piece we are in right now. This bill is about where we are right now.

I want to talk about the affordability plans, like doubling the GST credit, which will support Canadians with the rising cost of living. This is a plan that is still very targeted. It is a fiscally responsible financial support for the Canadians who need it most. There is a particular emphasis on addressing the needs of Canadians with low incomes who are most exposed to inflation. It is also a way of making sure it has fiscal responsibility to it. This is not a blank cheque. This is a targeted means of supporting people who have the greatest needs.

What does this plan mean for Canadians this year? It means the doubling of the GST credit for six months. This would provide about \$2.5 billion in additional targeted support this year to the roughly 11 million individuals and families who already receive the tax credit, including about half of Canadian families with children and more than half of Canadian seniors.

It also means enhancing the Canada workers benefit to put up to an additional \$2,400 into the pockets of families with low income starting this year. It means a 10% increase to old age security for seniors over 75 that began in July, which is providing up to \$766 more for more than three million seniors this year.

It also means a \$500 payment this year to 1.8 million Canadian renters who are struggling with the cost of housing through a one-time top-up through the Canada housing benefit. That is particularly important in a place like Toronto, where I live. Rent is tremendously expensive and having that extra support to put toward rent will have real tangible outcomes for people in my community.

I talked a bit about the child care fees and the child care plan. This is of personal interest to me. The long-term plan is to get to \$10-a-day day care. This year, Canadians are going to see their child care fees reduced by 50% by the end of this year. That is a huge help for people living in communities like mine.

Additionally, the affordability plan includes dental care for Canadians earning less than \$90,000 starting this year with hundreds of thousands of children under the age of 12. We know that dental care is a really important part of health care. I am really proud that we are going to be able to deliver that.

There is also the indexation to inflation of benefits like the Canada child benefit, which I talked about earlier. The fact that it is indexed means that each July, people will see an increase to their Canada child benefit. When I talked with anti-poverty advocates, that is one of the things they asked for. They wanted to make sure it was indexed so it would take into account the rising cost of living. That is something else that will help.

There are also increases to the guaranteed income supplement. Another thing that was requested in my community, and we are really excited to be able to deliver on it, is a federal minimum wage of \$15 indexed to inflation, which makes it now \$15.55 an hour.

I want to make sure that the message is out there that we recognize this is a difficult time and we are taking effective measures to support Canadians. More than that, this is not the only time we have done this. We have been there throughout and we are going to keep working to make sure there is a secure safety net that supports Canadians through all times.

• (1310)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the government's revenues have been inflated by this inflationary environment and now the government is saying it will be returning some of the excess government revenues to taxpayers through these measures. However, I am very concerned that the underlying problem is not being dealt with here, the underlying problem being high inflation rates.

Can the member tell this House what exactly the government intends to do to help the Bank of Canada achieve its 2% inflation rate, or is it just hoping that the Bank of Canada can keep hiking interest rates and solve this problem all on its own?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let us not underplay the role of the Bank of Canada in all of this. It has an important role in what it is doing, but I recognize that is not the only thing. We are working on other measures. For example, I mentioned at one point in my speech that we are working on things like helping to address labour shortages, which can be part of the challenge with supply chains. We see that with the supports that we have in skills development, but also in immigration.

There are definitely places where government plays a role in tandem with the work that is being done independently by the Bank of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say hello to the parliamentary secretary and thank her for her speech.

Her speech focused on inflation. In fact, Bill C-30 is a response to inflation. How will her government support developing countries that are dealing with serious inflation problems?

Government Orders

They are facing a food shortage and an energy crisis. International institutions encouraged these countries to take on massive debt to get through the pandemic. Their loans are for the most part in U.S. dollars, and the dollar's value is soaring at present because it serves as a safe haven. The same goes for imports, including food imports, which are negotiated in U.S. dollars. These countries are facing a real catastrophe, and there could be a cascade of bankruptcies.

What does her government plan to do to support them?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for this question, which touches on an important subject.

Today I talked about what we are doing in Canada, because this is a bill for Canadians. That is why I focused on that in my speech, but we certainly have a role to play internationally.

For example, during the pandemic, we helped other countries get access to vaccines. We continue to help other countries that need it. We come together when we work together, and we are stronger when we work together. We certainly have a role to play in that. Today I really wanted to talk about this bill and what we are doing here in Canada, but it is indeed another issue that we need to focus on as well.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are excited that we are finally getting relief to Canadians. For a long time we have been calling for the doubling of the GST credit and for a dental program so that children, seniors and families earning less than \$90,000 get the help they need. People are having a difficult time paying their rent.

We hear the Conservatives constantly say that these programs are going to drive up inflation. In fact, economists are saying that this is going to have a very negligible impact actually when it comes to inflation and that these are the right measures to bring forward to help Canadians, something that New Democrats have been bringing forward.

I find it really ironic that it sounds like the Conservatives support the doubling of the GST credit now and somehow they believe that it would not now impact inflation. Does my colleague not find it quite bizarre that the Conservatives pick and choose when programs that help Canadians impact inflation?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting way to frame the question. I will say that we have been very much focused on the people in our communities and across the country on how to provide them with support. That is why it can be extremely disappointing when we see Conservatives vote quite regularly against measures that do help Canadians, like cutting taxes for the middle class, like the Canada child benefit which I mentioned.

Government Orders

I will take this as an olive branch moment. It is wonderful that the Conservatives seem to be supportive of what we are doing right now with the GST credit. I am hopeful they will be convinced that this is the right path for many more things that we are taking on.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure and an honour to rise in this House on behalf of my constituents in Calgary Midnapore.

Before I begin my remarks on Bill C-30, I would like to send my dearest regards to our good friends and fellow Canadians across Atlantic Canada and eastern Quebec. Now is the moment to prepare as the storm approaches. My thoughts and prayers are with our fellow Canadians in Atlantic Canada and in eastern Quebec.

No doubt, the GST rebate will provide some welcome relief, which Conservatives will support, but ultimately, fundamentally, this will not address the real problem. Inflationary deficits and taxes are driving up costs at the fastest rates in nearly 40 years. My goodness, that is almost as long as I have been on earth, and I will not give my age here, but it is certainly a long time.

I would say that, for longer than two years, Conservatives and our new leader, the member for Carleton, have tried as best as they could to warn the Prime Minister about the consequences of his actions and how much they hurt Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and the coasts are important to remember as we remark upon the events of today. Conservatives have called on the government to cancel all planned tax increases, including the payroll tax hikes planned for January 1, and as the shadow minister for employment, this piece is particularly important to me, along with the tax hikes on gas, groceries and home heating scheduled for April 1.

Another tax that has been an incredible burden on Canadians has been the carbon tax. If the Prime Minister was, in fact, serious about making life more affordable for workers, families and seniors, he would cancel the carbon tax immediately. These taxes are coming at the worst possible time for Canadian families who are already struggling with rising costs due to the Prime Minister's inflation. Instead of freezing taxes, the Prime Minister is raising them on people who are already struggling to make ends meet.

This credit will be a one-time help of \$467, which, as I said, we welcome as a small piece of relief for families, but we must contrast that with the fact that the average family of four is now spending over \$1,200 more a year to put food on the table, not to mention the rising costs of heat, gasoline and rent.

Grocery prices are up by 10.8%, rising at the fastest pace in 40 years. Fish is up by 10.4%, and perhaps it will be more after the dreadful weekend ahead of us. Butter is up 16.9%. Eggs are up 10.9%, and margarine is up by 37.5%. Bread, rolls and buns are up by 17.6%. Dry or fresh pasta is up by 32.4%. Fresh fruit is up by 13.2%. Oranges are up by 18.5%, and apples are up by 11.8%. Coffee is up by 14.2%. Soup is up by 19.6%. Lettuce is up by 12.4%, and potatoes, which will perhaps increase more after this weekend, are up by 10.9%.

Individuals without children who earn more than \$49,200 and a family of four or a couple with two children who earn more than \$58,500 will receive no benefits, yet these food prices will not

change for them. The amount of the inflationary increases they will have to pay on their items will remain the same.

• (1320)

This will impact small businesses. I come from a small business family, so this issue is especially dear to me. Small business insolvencies, I am sure members know, are on the rise, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that owners of one in six businesses are considering closing their doors, with 62% of small businesses still carrying debt from the pandemic. The Liberals have created a risky environment for small business, and small businesses cannot afford to do business with these upcoming tax hikes, rising debt costs and staggering inflation numbers. Again, if the government is serious about small businesses surviving, recovering and growing in Canada, then it should immediately cancel all of the tax hikes that impact small businesses.

Members should not take my word for it. Many economists are talking about the Prime Minister's inflation bill. I will add that these are individuals from very credible institutions. I know that the government across the way certainly likes to turn up its nose at some Conservative-friendly institutes, such as the Fraser Institute. I heard snickering today. However, the Liberals cannot argue with these sources. One individual said:

It's always good to help people in need.

The problem is, what does that do for everyone else and does it really help [those on low incomes] to begin with? If we have high inflation and that high inflation continues, that assistance is not going to do very much to help anyone, including the recipients of that assistance. It is just not going to be enough, and while the Bank of Canada is doing quite a bit to bring down inflation [through increasing interest rates], the government really has not done much of anything.

I am sure the government would like to think it was the Fraser Institute that said that, but it was Professor Pavlov of Simon Fraser University, a very well-known university, known to not always have Conservative opinions. Therefore, we are certainly not alone in our criticism of how little, or how "much of anything", to quote Professor Pavlov, the government has done in an effort to fight inflation.

Another professor from Simon Fraser University, Professor Herrenbrueck, said, "If you're asking will this put further pressure on inflation, I would say probably yes, it would have to". That is again not a glowing recommendation of the government's action on inflation from professors from a very well-known university, which does not necessarily have a Conservative point of view.

I have another quote:

While there are times where fiscal largesse is just what the economy needs, these aren't such times. In a period of high inflation and excess demand, cutting taxes or handing out cheques can add fuel to the inflationary fire, and make the job of a central bank that's raising rates to cool demand all that more troublesome.

That quote was from the chief economist at CIBC. How can we argue against the chief economist of the CIBC? It would be almost impossible.

Here is another quote and, I would say, our support of this part of the bill follows in suit with this comment: “We’re not going to deny that there are households seriously in need of help right now in this inflationary environment. But, from a policy perspective, we all know that sending out money as an inflation-support measure is inherently ... inflationary.”

This is once again something our leader, the member for Carleton, has attempted to point out to the government on numerous occasions. That quote is from Robert Kavcic, the senior economist at the Bank of Montreal.

I have one final quote, which says, “it seems sensible to assume that this will add to pressures on measures of core inflation.... Any belief that it will ease inflationary pressures must have studied different economics textbooks.”

I would certainly say we are not all singing from the same songbook here when it comes to addressing the Canadian economy and inflation. That quote, to round out my quotes, is from Derek Holt, the vice-president and head of capital markets economics at Scotiabank.

• (1325)

We have three major banks here, CIBC, Bank of Montreal and Scotiabank, all indicating that the government has not done enough to stop inflationary measures for Canadians, which I outlined extensively with my food list and the way this is impacting people.

The average family of four is now spending over \$1,200 more each year just to put food on the table. I am a mom. I go grocery shopping. I see the prices in the grocery stores. I am even hesitant to think about how my family will budget for them. I am a very fortunate mother in a very fortunate family, so I worry for my constituents and I worry for Canadians.

Grocery prices are up by 10.8%, the highest rate since 1981. Across the board, food prices are up by 9.8%. As I said, while Conservatives welcome this much-needed support, this one-time cheque of \$467 for families of four eligible for the benefit covers less than 40% of Trudeau's inflation at the grocery store alone and does not begin to cover the rising cost of heat, just as winter is coming, gasoline and rent.

More than 70% of families with children would not receive this support. Again, individuals without children earning more than \$49,200, families of four earning more than \$58,500 or couples with two children would receive no benefits.

In closing, we have had enough of the band-aids. This economy, this country, is on life support. We need solutions. Right now, all we have is this sad bill and “Justinflation”.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make a link between the high prices we see in the grocery store and the climate crisis.

Moms noticed this summer that ice cream went up, and one of the reasons was that vanilla beans come from Madagascar, which

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was hit with six cyclones this year. Hurricane Fiona is on its way to the Maritimes, which we have mentioned multiple times, and we are all thinking of people in the Maritimes.

I am originally a Cape Bretoner. We never had hurricanes in Nova Scotia until climate change. In 2003, for the first time, hurricane Juan made landfall as a full-force hurricane because the water had warmed up south of Nova Scotia. We had had hurricanes in the past, but they had cooled down before they hit Nova Scotia because the water was cooler.

There is a connection to what we are doing in burning fossil fuels. It is driving up prices in our grocery store and making us less safe in our homes.

• (1330)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I, like my leader and my Conservative colleagues, have a concern for the environment, without question. However, in this moment, we must think of our priorities. If people cannot eat, they cannot recycle.

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[English]

RIGHT TO VOTE AT 16 ACT

The House resumed from May 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-210, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (voting age), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to be able to stand today and speak in favour of Bill S-210, which would lower the voting age to 16. I think it is a really important thing for us to be talking about today and giving support.

I thought that a good place to start would be to hand over the mike to some members of my youth council. I have a youth council. They are young people in the community who give me advice and talk with me about the issues that are important to them in the community. I asked them how they felt about this issue of reducing the voting age. We had a great discussion about it. I thought we should hear from them because we are talking about their voting rights.

Jessica said, “Adolescents at the age of 16 are at the point in their lives where they are most engaged in their communities as they are starting to get jobs, a driver's licence, and in general getting involved in society. Getting adolescents involved with voting can lead to more long-lasting participation in democratic activities throughout their life.”

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Another member in my youth council, Safik, talked about it also in favour. He said, "Age isn't always a factor when you have mature teens and adults. On the flip, you have immature teens and adults who get to vote. We also have to find a way to have teens' voices respected by adults so that they can take their opinions seriously before voting."

Finally, the other member of my youth council who I would like to give a voice is Jona, who said, "Giving youth the vote strengthens our democracy—youth may not have the same experiences or emotional maturity as adults, but that's why our vote would be beneficial. Giving the youth a vote will offer an additional perspective, and will make voting results more well rounded. Youth have very different eyes when looking at the world, and so giving the older youth the vote will make our system a better democracy. Because after all, the point of a democracy is that everyone gets a say, but it's not everyone if we are excluding an entire demographic."

I would like to thank the members of my youth council, because I think it was really important that they took the time to help me get ready for this debate and to share their thoughts. I believe very much, whenever I hear from them, that they have some very strong and great ideas. It would be so wonderful to have them engaged in the voting process.

I wanted to give some facts because this is not the first time that we have talked about expanding the voting age or who may vote. In fact, over time it has evolved in Canada. It has not been this static thing that the people who can vote today were the people who could vote at Confederation. Just to put it in context, this is not the first time that this kind of thing has happened. For example, in 1867, upon Confederation, only property-owning men, 20 years or older, could vote. I would say that it was not even all of the men who were eligible to vote at that point. The vote was only extended to some women in 1918. For a whole portion of our history, I would not have been able to vote, just to put that in context as we talk about the voting age and voting in general. The voting age was revised in 1970 as well.

Therefore, it is not without precedent to talk about this. As our democracy evolves, as we have different conversations that evolve, there are different measures to consider about what we can do to make sure that people are engaged and that we are hearing the voices we need to hear when making decisions as to who should be here in this place.

I think we are also, perhaps, at a turning point where it is even more important than ever to think about that. How do we engage more people in wanting to vote? There has been a downward trend in people actually showing up to vote. Certainly, in my home province of Ontario in the last election, we saw a drastic reduction in the number of people who showed up to vote.

How can we make sure that people are engaged from an early time and continue to be throughout their lives? I think in a place like my home community, a lot of the times the polling stations are actually in schools, the same place that these young people who are 16 years old are learning about civics. We walk right by them to go into their school gyms and libraries to vote. They might be having a class just down the hall about civics, but there is a bit of a disconnect. Sometimes what I hear from some young people who are just

about to vote is that they actually do not know enough about the process. It is new. That might be something that holds some people back.

● (1335)

If it was at 16, when many of them are in school and the polling stations might be close by, that might engage a whole bunch more people to say that it is something they have seen and can relate to and as they are talking about these issues right now in class they are going to walk across and vote.

The other part I would say is that we see today, with climate strikes across our country, young people are at the centre and the lead of many of the movements we have in our country. They have strong ideas about the future, and the future is what we are going to be handing to them. When we talk about the things we are doing here in this place now, that relates to their future as well, so it is important to make sure they have the opportunity to get engaged and to be the leaders they are, and that translates into their being able to vote.

One thing I have found interesting is that political parties often reduce the age from 18 for people to be able to get involved in the party and become members. There is a bit of a distinction between the people who might be able to vote to nominate the person who will be the candidate in an election for a certain party and those who might actually be able to vote in the election itself. There is a bit of a funny mix there. As political parties, we often recognize that people under the age of 18 have something to contribute to the choices we make.

I know I do not have much more time, so I want to focus on mentioning that we are talking about the voting age today, which I think is very important, but we have also taken actions as a government over the past years to try to assist young people to be able to vote more. For example, the Government of Canada established the register of future electors in 2019 so that young Canadians can pre-register to vote, to remove one of the barriers to people who are going to be voting for the first time.

There are definitely a lot of community-led groups that work to try to engage more people to understand the democratic process, how to vote and those pieces. We have been supporting youth-led projects that promote civic engagement in youth services through programs like Canadian Heritage's youth take charge program.

As a government, we have recognized the importance of engaging young people and making sure they understand how the voting process works. Why not take that next step and recognize that they have so much to contribute and reduce the voting age to 16?

On that note, I want to say I am supportive of this bill. I think it is a wonderful thing that we are considering doing it. I consider it an evolution in the way we address voting in our country. I am so proud that so many young people have taken a moment to become engaged and have their voices heard, like the young people on my youth council, and to show that they are ready. They are ready to vote and to take hold of the reins of their future.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will not be asking questions, but I will share my comments, which I hope members will find very interesting.

[*English*]

First and foremost, let me pay my respects to those people who have to get ready for Hurricane Fiona, which is coming to their area, especially members such as you, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if I can personalize it, but you warned us very clearly today that this is a very serious issue. I would say to all the people who are in the path of the storm to please get ready and for others to not be afraid to make phone calls outside of the area to help those people if they need it. We are very pleased to hear that the official opposition leader and the government are working hand in hand to address this issue.

[*Translation*]

Hurricane Fiona is of course bearing down on eastern Canada, and chances are the impact on the Magdalen Islands and the Lower North Shore on Quebec's north shore will be brutal. We would like to remind everyone likely to be directly affected to plan accordingly. Anyone who knows people in the area should call them to offer support.

I also want to point out that Quebeckers will be going to the polls in just a week and a half. Advance polling starts Sunday. The storm may have consequences for advance polling on the Magdalen Islands and the Lower North Shore. We certainly hope voting can proceed as it should.

That is my segue to Quebec elections and the bill before the House today, which would lower the federal voting age from 18 to 16.

We do not support this position. We will always proudly defend the rights of all adolescents, all young Canadians. It is not because we think that 16-year-olds are not ready to vote, quite the contrary. I myself became interested in politics at a very young age and have been a member of the Conservative Party since 1981. At that time, I had a mop of black hair that was wider than my shoulders, but that is another subject. There are pictures, but they will never be made public, my colleagues can be sure of that. I could show my membership card from 1981, but I am not allowed to use props, which is a shame, so maybe that is also for another time.

That being said, I want to assure all 16- and 17-year-olds that it is very good to get involved in political advocacy. However, a limit needs to be set. Why is the limit set at 18? Why not at 17, or 20 or 21? It is simply because we have to set a limit.

There will always be good arguments for increasing or lowering that limit, even by a few days, but there needs to be a limit. Along the same lines, there needs to be a limit for very technical issues such as creating time zones. In some places, the time can be different in two towns five kilometres apart. Is that the end of the world? No. At some point there needs to be a limit.

Mr. Speaker, I look at you and I am reminded that in New Brunswick and in the Atlantic provinces, when a television show is

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broadcast, it is always an hour later in the Maritimes. Sometimes I get the impression that it is an hour ahead of us, but that is another issue, and we will have a chance to debate it.

We therefore need to set an age limit. Of course, we know that the minimum age is not 18 for some civilian activities. For example, people can become an army reservist at age 16, and they can enlist in the army at age 17.

Some will say that, if a person can be ready to give their life for their country at age 17, then they should have the right to vote at age 17. However I would like to add a rather important point: those individuals need their parents' consent to enlist. If we apply the same principle to the right to vote at age 17 or 18, then those individuals would need their parents' consent to vote. If the parents do not think the same way as their child does, then would they give their child permission to vote? That could cause problems and arguments, and we do not need that.

That is why the age limit can be lower than 18 for certain civilian activities, but in those cases, parental consent is required, and that would not really work in the democratic process.

The same is true for driver's licences. When I was young, people could get a full driver's licence at age 16. With time and experience, Quebec increased the age for getting a full driver's licence to 19. This sort of thing can be assessed and we should be grateful for that. This is not the first time that the House has been asked to vote on a bill like this.

● (1345)

The people who did research for this bill drew my attention to the fact that, when he was a young MP back in 2005, which is not to say that he is an old MP now, the current government House leader, my former counterpart with whom I always greatly enjoyed working, introduced Bill C-261. I remind members that this bill was defeated at second reading, which indicates that the current governing party might not have supported its current government leader. We shall see.

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I had the privilege of sitting on a committee that was reviewing election legislation to allow for a casting vote. The Hon. Rona Ambrose, interim leader of our party, assigned me the responsibility of sitting on this committee. The committee made 13 recommendations, none of which had to do specifically with age. People were, however, quite open to honouring the election promise made by the government, which swore that the previous election would be the last under first-past-the-post, a system that ensures that members represent their ridings without any outside compensation. The Liberal Party made a promise, hand on heart, to change the electoral system, but that recommendation fell by the wayside because the Liberal government and the Prime Minister decided to abandon that promise midstream.

If by any chance the Liberals start lecturing or preaching about political commitments on voting ages, let us not forget that one of their top election promises in 2015 was to scrap the electoral system we have been using since 1867. However, they ended up scrapping their commitment, rather than scrapping the system.

I would also like to remind you that in 2015, since we are talking about it and, objectively speaking, it needs to be acknowledged, there were many young people who voted, which is wonderful. They may not have voted for us, but the important thing is that they voted.

Some have pointed out that over the last few months, during our party's leadership race, a lot of young people got involved and invested in supporting the candidacy of the member for Carleton. That is very good for democracy. The more young people who participate, the better. Some people will say that we should allow 16-year-olds to vote because that will give them even more of a taste for getting involved in politics, and thus increase voter turnout. That is a good thing.

There are precedents. Similar legislation was passed in Austria. There was an uptick in voter turnout at first, but it tumbled in the following three elections. Essentially, age is not the main factor that gets young people to the polls; it has more to do with their level of interest in election issues. I cannot stress this enough: we should all take an interest in politics no matter how old we are. When people cast their first ballot at 18, that is a deeply meaningful moment because it is the first time they mark that "X" and make that effort to get out there and vote for someone. We have said it before, and we will say it again: people have to vote to participate in the process.

Although the Conservative Party is not in favour of Bill C-210, there is absolutely no reason young people should not get politically motivated, engaged and involved when they are 16, 17 or 18. I have been told that some of our fellow members were very young when they first got involved in politics, such as my friend from St. Albert—Edmonton, who was 14 when he got his start. That is never a bad thing.

In closing, I want to say that, as we speak, the electoral map is being redrawn. That occurs every 10 years. In my riding, there may be major changes, namely that the indigenous community of Wendake and the northern section of Loretteville, which we call Château-d'Eau, will be in a different riding. I will leave that to the experts. Personally, I am always uncomfortable having an elected member vote for or against a change in the electoral map, because

we are judging something we have a stake in. I can say one thing: If it turns out that I no longer have the honour of representing the people of Wendake and the people of Château-d'Eau, the place where I was born and raised and where my parents settled in 1962, that will certainly break my heart. However, electoral maps are not drawn with the incumbent member's emotions in mind.

• (1350)

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House, especially since I am asked these kinds of questions at home. I have two children, a 17-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl, who may have been exposed to politics from a young age. I just want to address a number of points that are fairly nuanced.

I first want to speak about the studies. Let us look at the issue purely from an academic perspective for now. It was mentioned earlier that some countries have lowered the voting age to 16, and that is true. It happened not that long ago, so it is difficult to obtain sound evidence on this issue. Generally speaking, we can agree that there is a scientific consensus: Early exposure to the electoral process establishes a habit of taking an interest in politics and voting. Perhaps they would not call it "early" exposure if people already had the right to vote at 16. Anyway, young voters would develop this habit specifically because they are young when they start voting. There are also all the civic skills that are developed, such as civic engagement and respect for institutions. Boosting confidence in institutions would be one of the positive aspects, according to the studies. When we ourselves participate in institutions, we feel more like they represent us and also our ideas and what we want. Those are some of the positive arguments found in the academic literature regarding voting at 16. At the same time, as I already mentioned, the literature on the subject is scant so far. Consequently, we hear opinions on each side of the argument. I am talking about opinions and not ideas.

I would also like to talk about voter turnout, which was mentioned earlier. Voter turnout, whether for municipal, provincial or federal elections, keeps dropping. I have seen it in my own riding. If the premise of the studies is true, then we can expect this change to increase voter turnout over the years because young people will get into the habit of voting. Obviously, five, 10 or 15 years down the road, we should have a certain level of voter turnout. This is all theoretical, but let us be optimistic. It should raise voter turnout.

That is how things look from a scientific perspective, but that is not the only perspective we need to consider. Given all of the uncertainty, as I thought about this issue, I wondered what we are afraid of. I get the impression that there is a lot of fear. That is true of any change. It is human nature to fear change. I asked myself, in good faith, what stereotypes there might be about 16-year-olds. Some members talked about immaturity and inexperience. Some may also be worried about their ideology. Often, younger generations do not necessarily share our ideologies. These young people will question us, challenge us and talk about what is important to them. Of course, this might test our mettle. I find this to also be true in my personal life sometimes.

I started to wonder. I obviously do not have the answer to all the questions it raises. However, my daughter said to me that some people may say that 15-year-olds are not mature, but she knows adults who are not particularly mature either. That is probably not the case for the majority, but at the same time, how do we measure maturity? On a more serious note, I would say that young people, like adults, have different life experiences. They have different backgrounds, meaning that they will all make different choices when they put their ballot in the box, whether they are 20, 30, 15 or 70 years old.

• (1355)

I talked about life experiences, but knowledge also matters. Some would argue that young people do not have enough knowledge. It is a bit of a chicken and egg situation. Would having the right to vote at 16 increase how much young people know, because they would take an interest earlier, or do they need to have some degree of knowledge beforehand?

As we can all agree, education falls under Quebec and provincial jurisdiction, but it seems to me that this could have a ripple effect if we decide, as a society, to give young people the right to vote. If they are given the tools, which can be done, that may alleviate our concerns that they are not knowledgeable enough. I fear that that is more of a worry for our generation, rather than for the 16-year-olds themselves.

I did not think I would be talking about this, but young people do have access to a lot of information that was not available to me. I was born in 1977, so I am not all that young, but neither am I 90. The fact remains that, for me, sources of information were rather limited, but that is not the case today. I think we need to bear that in mind, as well. Maybe young people are more switched on. We cannot underestimate all the information they can access, or their capacity for critical thinking.

I do not know how I am doing on time and do not want to go over. I will conclude by talking about young people.

This may sound trite or cliché, but as I heard earlier, the future belongs to them. The decisions we make today about the right to vote at 16 will have an impact on their immediate future. Take the environment, for example, and climate change, which we talked about today. These are important issues for young people.

There is also the whole issue of representation. We want to be as democratic as possible. Earlier I mentioned voter turnout, but another factor is ideological representation. Young people do not all

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have the same opinions on things. Although some young people do share some of our opinions, they can contribute new ideas. We could breathe new life into our democracy by bringing in a new age group and a diversity of ideological views.

Earlier I mentioned that my children got into politics when they were young, much like Obelix fell into the magic potion. I will leave the last word to my son Loïc. He is 17. He recently received a card saying that soon he will be able to vote. He was quite proud of that.

We talk about more than just politics at home. We have a lot of other things to discuss, but I asked him what he thought about voting at 16. He sent me a text saying, “for”. Then I asked why. He responded, “Why 18?” I think that simply shows the arbitrary nature of this. He added, “Mom, as soon as you can make an important decision that has an impact on yourself and others, then you can vote.”

Now it is up to us to make that choice.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to speak in favour of the bill put forward by my NDP colleague and member of Parliament for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, which proposes a lowering of the voting age to 16. I want to also acknowledge my NDP colleague and member of Parliament for Vancouver Kingsway, who has brought forward the same bill multiple times on this exact topic stretching across the last five Parliaments. Additionally, I know other parties in the House today have brought forward bills on this exact subject.

I am happy to speak today to this important bill that has once again been brought forward in Parliament. However, it is clear that it is time to go beyond debate and vote in favour of sending this bill to committee so the work can finally be done and the changes put in place to ensure the voices of young people are heard.

I am hearing loud and clear from many young people in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith that they want their vote to count in the decisions that impact their futures. When I hear the argument from some that an individual is not mature enough at the age of 16 to be given the responsibility of voting, I immediately think of Nanaimo—Ladysmith constituent, Ava.

At not quite 16 years of age, Ava has already shown maturity beyond her years. Five years ago, she travelled to China to participate in the World Youth Model United Nations, where she researched the issues before arguing passionately for the rights of those living with disabilities, as well as the rights of indigenous people. Two years ago, at 14, Ava was elected student council president at her secondary school. She served two one-year terms as president and still maintains a role on council today.

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When we talked about lowering the voting age, Ava spoke eloquently about the concerns she and her classmates have. She spoke about the realities she and her peers will face as adults in just a few short years. She talked about how having the right to vote when she turned 16 would allow her to have a say in who is making the decisions for her future. Ava also talked about how important the work being done by politicians now is and how much it will impact what her life will look like in a couple of years when she is leaving for college or entering the workforce. Like most young people, Ava is very aware that the decisions made in Parliament today by those not facing the same uncertainties will greatly impact her tomorrow.

Increasingly, young people in our country are thinking and worrying about the problems they will face as they enter adulthood, but they are not just thinking about it. They are taking action. Our young leaders are stepping up and effecting change. In British Columbia alone, young people are seeing the impacts of climate change right before their eyes: heat domes, forest fires that wipe out entire communities, and droughts followed by flooding, destroying farms, crops, livestock and homes. The damages continue to build and the number of lives impacted increases.

We know the impacts of climate change are not isolated to B.C., and that these repercussions stretch the length of Canada and around the world. Hurricane Fiona, which is about to hit the east coast, is another frightening example.

It is clear that the decisions made by previous generations impact individuals today, just as the decisions we make today will impact future generations to come. Young people are seeing the dream of home ownership being pulled out from under their feet. They are losing loved ones at a tragic rate to the toxic substance supply crisis. All the while their student debts are becoming higher than ever before.

At the same time, in British Columbia, 16-year-olds have the responsibility of driving vehicles and making medical decisions around their own bodies. Many of these young people are also working and paying taxes on their earnings. Like everyone else, they work hard to earn their wages. They send taxes from their earnings to the government to support federal services, but unlike those 18 years of age and over, they have no say about who makes up government, sets tax rates and spends the taxes they pay. They have taxation with no representation, a situation that is inherently unjust and unfair.

Despite this, young people continue to be told they are not mature enough to vote. The dismissal of young people, claiming they lack capacity or maturity to take on the responsibility of voting, is a false dichotomy. It is an argument that has been used over and over throughout history in attempts to prevent women, indigenous people and other racialized individuals from gaining the right to vote. It is a false narrative made not out of concern for protecting vulnerable groups, but out of the desire to maintain the status quo.

● (1400)

These types of arguments reinforce an unnecessary, paternalistic system that reflects a flawed understanding of the cognitive capacity of young people. Psychological research has shown that by age 16, individuals are completely able to make informed decisions that require complex thinking, and the world is taking note.

Several countries, including Austria, Scotland, Wales, Brazil, Argentina and several states in Germany have already taken the step of lowering the voting age, with profound results. Voter turnout statistics from these countries show that 16- and 17-year-olds voted at a higher rate than their 18- and 19-year-old counterparts. Further, there is evidence to suggest that these turnout rates increase over time for all young people.

Like many young people around the world, Canada's youth are no longer content to sit, seen but not heard, while the adults make decisions around their future. Instead, they are demanding loud and clear to be heard and to have a seat at the political table. I am hearing from engaged, passionate young people in my riding who want their voices and votes to count.

Thirteen-year-old Franklin, also a constituent from my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, shared with me a speech he wrote when he was just 12 years old. In his powerful speech, he says that young people “should be given the right to vote, because they would be voting for the future as well as for the present. Voting would give new, fresh ideas and more learning opportunities.” He goes on to say that young people “play an important role in society and not having their voices heard as much will delay important matters.”

Sixteen-year-old Marina, also a constituent in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, shared with me, “What sense does it make to let another generation decide our future? Youth like us have the most at stake with political decisions being made right now, and experts say we might lose it all. Climate change is threatening to destroy our communities, while economists are warning of a pandemic recession to affect us for decades. When will we get to decide how to fix these downfalls, rather than consulting the generation who created them? I really hope to be able to decide my future, rather than being stuck in one with an irreversibly damaged world.”

Canada's very own Youth Advisory Council agrees. Its first-ever state of the youth report from 2021 says this:

[Y]outh want to participate in the decisions that affect them and want those in the government and others to acknowledge and recognize their agency and autonomy. To give youth greater agency and participation, it is important that the voting age in Canada be lowered from 18 to 16.

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The desire Canadian youth have to engage in the political process is nowhere more evident than in programs such as student vote Canada. This program, which is now more popular than ever, collaborates with schools to give students the opportunity to experience the voting process first-hand and to begin practising the habits of active and informed citizenship. In 2021, more than 800,000 young people and 5,900 schools in every riding across the country participated in this school-based version of the federal election.

It has been shown that good habits built in an individual's youth are more likely to continue into adulthood. By working to ensure young people understand our democracy, the election process and how to gather information to make informed decisions, high school teachers and passionate civics educators across the country, including in Nanaimo—Ladysmith's School District No. 68, are ensuring that our youth are ready to come to the ballot box.

There is ample evidence of the benefits of lowering the voting age. We know that when a young person is still in school and living at home when voting for the first time, they are better equipped and supported to get registered and to vote. They are more likely to have the time to become informed on the issues and to make decisions about how to vote. Once established, these habits then carry with these young adults as they move forward in life. However, the opposite is seen when voting begins at 18. Lowering the voting age would allow many young people to become engaged and register to vote with the supports of their home community in place.

Our democracy is at its best when it reflects the Canadian values of equity, diversity and inclusion, and it is time those values were more truly ingrained within our electoral processes. We have passed the point where electoral reform as a catchy sound bite is enough. Young people feel frustrated and disenfranchised by a democratic system that fails to represent them.

• (1405)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying it is a privilege to be speaking here on behalf of the constituents of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan. Our thoughts and prayers are with those in eastern Canada as they brace for the storm that is about to hit the shores of Canada. We want to let them know we are with them in our thoughts and prayers.

It is a pleasure today to join the debate on Bill C-210. This bill, put forward by the NDP member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, would lower the voting age in Canada from 18 to 16. I have some concerns with this bill, but first it is important to give some important background on it.

The last time the voting age in Canada was lowered was back in 1970, the year I was born. We lowered it from 21 to what it is today, 18 years of age. In the 1972 election, right after the voting age was lowered, voter turnout increased just 1%, up to 76.7%. Let us think about that number for a minute. Most of us would be surprised if the voter turnout in the next election was even that high. For the sake of comparison, the turnout in the last election, in 2021, was 62.5%. Turnout in Canadian elections has been hovering around that number for at least the last 15 years.

Today's debate is about the youth's vote, so let us look at that information and the data, according to Statistics Canada, on those aged 18 to 24. Just 66% of that age bracket voted in the last election. That compares with 80% of those aged 55 to 64 and 83% of those aged 65 to 74. One must wonder if lowering the voting age to 16 would do much to increase voter turnout in our country. In fact, a 2004 study from Cambridge University concluded there was no evidence such a change would do anything to increase voter turnout here.

This ties in well with what we have been debating all week in the House: the cost of living and the challenges the next generation is facing. The 18-to-24 demographic has been one of the hardest hit by the skyrocketing costs of living. Someone of that age used to be able to find a decent paying job, save money and maybe buy a nice starter house. Today, that is a fantasy; it is unattainable. Young people are having trouble affording rent while also paying for groceries, gas and other necessities.

However, do not worry; the government is here to help. It is sending renters \$500 to put toward a year's worth of rent. Let us hold off on that for just a moment and analyze it. Only one in five renters will qualify for that \$500 cheque. Seriously, the government thinks \$40 per month will help someone whose rent is well over \$2,000 in some markets, and not everybody will qualify. Even in Moose Jaw, the average rent is around \$1,000 a month.

The fact is, life for young Canadians has become harder and more expensive under the Liberal government. While this bill would lower the voting age, we know there are several other demographics that historically have had lower voting rates than average: first nations, those with disabilities and many more. We have many well-thought-out ideas and recommendations on how to encourage these groups to vote.

• (1410)

I know that, prior to the last election, my colleagues on the procedure and House affairs committee did tremendous work on a study on how to safely hold an election during the pandemic. I would like to thank my friends from Perth—Wellington and Elgin—Middlesex—London for their work on that committee. They heard from advocates for all these groups about lower voter turnouts. They heard several ideas on how to get more people to vote. Ultimately, this study and all its recommendations were ignored. The first goal of this place should be to encourage those who are currently eligible to vote to go out and vote.

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My colleague, the member for Calgary Shepard, spoke of this bill earlier. He spoke about the responsibilities of citizenship and that is something that I would like to talk about. Canadians can join the military reserves at the age of 16 with parental consent. In Saskatchewan, someone can get a learner's driver's licence at the age of 16, but they must drive with an adult. In other areas, it is about earning the responsibility and earning the respect. The purchase of alcohol and cannabis in Saskatchewan is limited to those who are age 19. The fact is that we place limits on young people in Canada. People get the full benefits of citizenship as they get older.

Democracy is important to me. My grandfather fought alongside Canadians in World War II. Canadians were kind and generous. They went overseas. My mother, who was growing up in Scotland, met lots of Canadian soldiers. These Canadian soldiers would bring chocolates, candy, dolls and other things my parents could not get. They were kind and generous. On the front, my grandfather fought alongside Canadians, and he saw the sacrifices they were willing to make in order to preserve democracy and freedom.

Democracy and the ability to vote is a privilege and it requires careful thought and consideration. Ultimately, I do not see a compelling argument that this bill would do anything to address the issue of lower voter turnouts. We have known for years how to address this ongoing issue. We need to lower barriers to make it easier to vote, yes, but we also have to encourage those existing voters by giving them good policies and a positive direction for the future of this country.

Most importantly, we need to give people a reason to vote for good things. This legislation will not do it. Ultimately, we have to earn the voter's respect.

• (1415)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of the wonderful bill introduced by the great member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I think the bill is so pivotal and engages so many important concepts about our democracy.

When I was first elected 14 years ago, in 2008, I sat down with my young staffer, Sam Heppell, and we talked about bills to be introduced in the House. I asked him what he thought should be the first bill I introduced as a private member. Without flinching, he said, "Lower the voting age." I said, "Really? Tell me why that is an important bill." He said, "Well, tell me. Are you a democrat?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "That is the only reason you need."

In listening to the debate and listening to my colleagues on the Conservative side there is a fundamental difference in what the proper characterization is to give to voting in a democracy. I just heard a Conservative colleague refer to voting in this country as a privilege. I disagree. Voting is a right. It is a right of citizenship. I think that is where we start this debate.

The truth is that in a democracy, if we really have government by the people for the people, if we really have values of democracy that we uphold to the world on the global stage, that means we give to our citizens, without discrimination, the right to have a say in who their government is and what laws govern them. That is democracy. When we have barriers that seek to take away that right

from certain citizens based on different attributes, that is where I think this debate starts.

The truth is that the history of the franchise in Canada is one of constant movement. This country started off with giving the vote to white males of a certain age who owned property. I think it was over the age of 21. Then it became white males over 21 regardless of whether they owned property. Then it was white males over 21. Over the years, it has been expanded to women and to indigenous people. At one time, based on one's race, one could not vote in this country. If one was of Japanese or Chinese ancestry, one could not vote in this country. Ultimately, of course, we lowered the voting age from 21 to 18. The history of the franchise as democracies evolve is one of constantly expanding the right to vote.

Why is this an important bill? New Democrats have stood in the House and outlined literally a dozen or more different reasons. This is a time of low voter turnout. I have just added up the percentage of every federal election since 2000, and we have an average of 63% turnout. That means about four in 10 Canadians do not even cast a ballot. That number has been steadily declining over the past century. The numbers in provincial elections and municipal elections are actually appalling, where the percentage of democratic participation in this country sometimes is in the high teens or low twenties.

In this country, we have a crisis in our democracy that we, as parliamentarians, ought to address. One way to address it is to expand the voting age to a portion of our population that has been discriminated against purely because of their age. It is the arbitrary drawing of a line without any regard to ability.

What are the benefits of lowering the voting age? First of all, it would increase participation. Research is absolutely clear. We should lower the voting age and combine that particularly with a strong program in our high schools where we educate our young people of the obligations of citizenship and teach them how our democracy works, without any regard for how they vote but just that they should vote. If we can get young people to vote in the first election they are capable of voting in, they are like to be voters for life.

The chances are good of an election happening for a 16-year-old or 17-year-old in grades 10, 11 or 12. We have a three in four chance that there is going to be an election while they are in high school. We can use that crucial time to start establishing that positive record of voting in our democracy.

Sixteen-year-olds and 17-year-olds have the longest view of any citizen. The issues that are important for them may be different from those for someone who is 80 or 90 years old. They are looking 80 years into the future, yet we are preventing them from having their say in the issues that will affect them probably most profoundly.

• (1420)

I also think young people show a responsibility and, as never before, are engaged in our democracy. I have met 17-year-olds and 16-year-olds, frankly I have met 14-year-olds and 15-year-olds, who are engaged politically, interested in the world around them, informed and would cast an absolutely informed and responsible vote. It pains me to say this but contrarily I have met 50-year-olds who are completely disengaged from the political process, and we would never think of preventing them from going to a ballot box. The idea that some people have raised that 17-year-olds are, by some definition, not qualified to vote is applying a standard to 17-year-olds that we would never apply to anybody else.

We have already outlined that many 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds work and pay taxes. The American Revolution was fought in part over the rallying cry of “no taxation without representation”. We take money off a paycheque of a 16-year-old and a 17-year-old, willingly. Conservatives do this. Liberals do this. Then we turn around and tell those people they have no say in how that money is spent. Frankly, that is absolutely unacceptable.

We allow 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds, in many cases, to drive, to serve in the military, to shoot a firearm, to buy ammunition and to marry with consent. They can join political parties and vote in political leaderships, just like 14-year-olds, 15-year-olds and 16-year-olds do in the NDP, and I am sure under 18-year-olds did in the recent Conservative leadership.

To wrap things up, I will just say this is an excellent idea. Let us engage people in our democracy. Let us support this and make Canada's democracy flourish in a better way.

• (1425)

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other intervenors, I will recognize the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his right of reply.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been such an honour to bring forward Bill C-210, the right to vote at 16 act, on behalf of all those brilliant 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds across Canada who are currently excluded from voting. They are young people like Will Cooper from Lisgar Collegiate right here in Ottawa, who is part of the #Vote16 movement.

I want to thank all of my colleagues, my brilliant colleagues in the NDP, the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith and the member for Vancouver Kingsway for their support over the course of the debate on this bill. I also thank the member for Manicouagan for her words. I, too, have a 17-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old daughter and my conversations with them have helped shape my thinking around this legislation.

To the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent and the member for Moose Jaw, it seems we have a bit more work to do to convince them to come over and support this piece of legislation. I will say that I had an interesting conversation with one of their colleagues about a month ago. I asked them about this bill, and their response was very blunt. They said they hated it. I asked them why, and this person said, “Young people are not going to vote for me,” and that very well may be the case. They might not vote for me either, but

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that is not the point. The point of this is that young people have a voice.

Young people care about the issues. Young people have a stake in the future, and young people deserve to be included in the voting franchise in our country.

We have heard so many points and arguments, and some of these have to do with this idea around voter turnout. I think this is a rather technical point, but it is a compelling one, because we all want our democracy to be stronger. Make no mistake, though: The international evidence from places like Austria and Scotland shows that 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds vote in higher percentages than their 18-year-old and 19-year-old peers. They do that for a number of reasons. It is because 16 is a relatively stable time of life for young people.

It turns out that 18 is a terrible time to expect young people to vote for the first time. It is a time of great transition, when young people are moving away from their home ridings and entering the workforce or going to school. That is why we see lower voter turnout among 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds.

We look around the world and we see that democracy is embattled right now. I think that is something that concerns all of us in this place. More and more people are feeling disenfranchised and they are feeling alienated from our political institutions. The way we buttress our democracy against these headwinds is by including more people, not fewer, in our democratic process, and by making our democracy more inclusive, not less.

Recently, I had a chance to chat with a dynamic young leader in a small coastal village on the central coast of British Columbia. She talked to me a bit about youth engagement. She is a young person, as I said, and I know youth engagement is something a lot of members in this place are interested in. I think many MPs have youth advisory councils. The Prime Minister has one himself.

This young person was a member of a youth advisory body for another government, and she said to me that sometimes it feels as if youth engagement is a performative thing for politicians and that it is more about creating a certain perception of the elected official than it is about giving the young person agency and the ability to change the future.

I was thinking about this conversation when I came across this report from last year called “Canada's First State of Youth Report”. The federal government convened 100 youth from across this country and held 90 consultation sessions with them, and 13 of these youth formed a special advisory leadership group that pored through all of this data and came up with a series of recommendations for how the government should respond to the concerns of youth.

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If we turn to page 50 in that report, we find recommendation 5(c), which is to urgently lower the voting age in Canada from 18 to 16. I think the very least we could do for these young people who engaged in this process in good faith is to vote for this bill at second reading, send it off to committee, hear from expert witnesses and show these young people that we are listening and that their voices and participation matter.

• (1430)

In conclusion, I want to thank all of the people who have been a part of this #Vote16 movement, who have spoken in support and my friends in all of the parties who have at least given a curious ear. I want to thank the folks at #Vote16 Canada, Children First Canada and UNICEF Canada for their advocacy in support of this bill. I want to thank my team, especially James Hammond and Ben Tassell, for their help; Senator Marilou McPhedran for her leadership; and so many others.

I ask my colleagues in all the parties to please vote for this bill. It would make Canada stronger.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, as you might expect, I would love to request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 28 at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

It being 2:31 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:31 p.m.)

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