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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 18, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*English*]

FALL ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2022

The House resumed from November 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-32, An Act to implement certain provisions of the fall economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 3, 2022 and certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure this morning to continue to put some thoughts on the record regarding the fall economic statement implementation act.

Seven years ago, the current government inherited a balanced budget and a robust economy, but instead of maintaining balance or even paying down some debt, let us consider that for a moment, perhaps to prepare for the unknown, such as a pandemic or an unexpected war, it immediately began to add more spending, took the government finances back into a deficit and again started to add to the debt.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, which required additional spending. We supported those early programs. However, of the half a trillion dollars, yes, \$500 billion, of added debt by the current government, \$200 billion was not pandemic-related.

Program spending by the current government is now 30% above prepandemic levels. We now have structural deficits presently embedded in our finances, and of course the more that the government spends, the more things cost.

When the current government came to power seven years ago, it promised transparency. Do members remember “sunny ways”? This is what its own Parliamentary Budget Officer had to say on the transparency of the fall economic statement:

In this year’s FES, the Government identified \$14.2 billion in new measures without providing specific details on this spending....

This lack of transparency presents challenges for parliamentarians and the public in scrutinizing the Government’s spending plans, particularly given the magnitude of measures, \$14.2 billion—the largest amount announced without specific details since the 2016 [FES].

On top of all the other spending already outlined, the \$20 billion, the current government is now asking the House for a \$14.2 billion blank cheque. Are these sunny ways? Hardly. We will not be supporting this.

In my remaining time, I want to spend some time on one issue that is not addressed in the fall economic statement.

Last week, I had a series of eight meetings with my own constituents. The primary issue I heard from them was the rising cost of living, particularly the costs of food, fuel and housing. Those are the main things I heard, and in particular, food. Last month, as we are all now aware, there were 1.5 million visits to food banks, that in the country of Canada, a country that is considered a breadbasket.

The FES missed an opportunity to address an issue that has the potential to lower food costs, namely the status of the implementation of a grocery code of conduct.

First, we have heard much in statements in the media today about two seemingly contradictory statements, record grocery retailer profits and the counter-argument from industry that retailer margins have not changed in percentage terms through the pandemic. Both statements can be true, as retail volumes have increased during the pandemic as consumers have shopped more retail versus the food service that supplies the restaurant trade and institutional trade.

Second, the carbon tax, along with other issues, that is applied to the delivery of farm inputs and outputs, and to transportation all up and down the food chain, has increased costs for suppliers. Retailers maintaining their margins in percentage terms are applying this margin to a higher cost of goods from suppliers and to higher volumes generated by the change in market from consumers.

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However, there is an opportunity for us to accomplish many goals if we get it right. What do I mean by getting it right? We can increase profits for food manufacturers and processors because of fair trading practices, and we can reduce the administration costs in attempting to comply with the many “rules” applied by retailers in an updated code of conduct. We can reduce administration costs for retailers in all these programs that are allegedly used as profit centres, but most importantly we can reduce consumer food costs.

Right now, shelf listing fees, fines for short or late deliveries and a host of other administrative exercises are adding costs that eventually the consumer pays. The U.K., Ireland and Australia have all gone down this road of a grocery code of conduct. Retailers were afraid that imposing a code would lead to a reduction in the number of retailers with gross sales meeting the threshold for application of the code. The U.K., since fixing its original voluntary attempts, has seen more retailers. It started with 10 and now has 14 retailers meeting the threshold dollar value, so the code has not driven consolidation there.

In conclusion, an appropriately structured code results in lower consumer prices and fairer trading practices within the value chain. In addition, it allows 10,000 independent grocers, who are so crucial for rural parts of our country, to be treated on par with the big five that control 85% of the grocery retailer trade.

The fall economic statement missed an opportunity to advance this issue for Canadians. Instead, the statement adds more government spending, which would only lead to higher inflation over time and the hurting of our most vulnerable citizens. With that I will conclude, and I look forward to questions.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, only in an alternative reality would the Conservatives think that they are fiscal stewards. They ran nine straight deficits. They tried to balance the budget by throwing in the sale of stock and an EI rainy day fund in 2015. We all know, and Canadians know, that is not true.

In the fall economic statement, there are three things my constituents love: first, the doubling of the GST rebate for six months; second, the top-up for rent; and third, the waiving of interest on student loans. Which one of those programs will he actually tell his constituents he does not support?

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Speaker, as the member knows, this side of the House did support the returning of tax to constituents.

However, when I opened my speech yesterday, I said that the fall economic statement presented an opportunity for the government to make hard decisions. It did not. Now consumers and Canadians have to make those hard decisions.

In the end, the more the government spends, the more things cost. It is as simple as that.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank and congratulate my colleague for his speech.

In the fall economic statement, the Minister of Finance reneges on a commitment she made in last spring's budget, which was to

limit credit card fees for merchants. In the spring budget, she told us that she would introduce legislation and the issue would be dealt with this fall. However, now it has turned into a commitment to talk to the credit card companies, and if they do not self-regulate, she will introduce legislation later to force them to act.

In my hon. colleague's opinion, is that enough?

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Speaker, the member points to a series of behaviours that occur in so many other issues.

There is talk. There are promises. There are announcements. So often there is not follow-through. I can think of another announcement in the spring budget, the funding for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, which is seemingly not being honoured. There is a whole host of things that are talked about where there is not the follow-through by the government for real results for Canadians, particularly now given the cost-of-living increases that Canadians are seeing and the 1.5 million trips to the food bank. The government is not taking the opportunities it has to lower real costs for Canadians.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things that has really hit Canadians across this country is the high price of gas. It has gone up almost a dollar in my part of the country.

The Conservatives seem obsessed with stopping the increase in the carbon tax that comes into effect in April, which would amount to about two cents a litre. They are ignoring the fact that oil and gas companies have had immense windfall profits, billions of dollars, record profits this year because of the high price of world oil. The U.K. has instituted a 35% windfall tax on oil and gas companies. The CEO of Shell has asked the federal government here to tax them more.

I am wondering why the Conservatives are so silent on this way of really bringing help to Canadians.

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Speaker, on the surface, that would seem like a plausible argument. What I did not hear was the books of our oil and gas companies being brought to the fore in the six years previous due to the policies of the Liberal government.

Record profits are not only being incurred in different parts of the country; that is how a market works.

Is there a role for the government to step in there? That is what the House is to decide.

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Mr. Richard Cannings: Other countries are doing it.

Mr. Dave Epp: Some are; some are not.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): This is not a discussion.

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Speaker, the reality is that the government needs to look at the impact of all of its policies on consumers, who are facing 10%-plus food inflation and 6% to 7% on a monthly basis on all other costs of living. The impact of that on our most vulnerable is what concerns the members on this side of the House.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour, as always, to rise in this place, and especially so when it comes to important decisions around helping Canadians get through these times of inflationary pressure, with a housing crisis and a health care system in chaos. Today we are debating the implementation of items included in the fall economic statement, which the Minister of Finance produced a couple of weeks ago.

The NDP is always focused on helping Canadians. That is why we were happy to see NDP initiatives that are clearly designed to do just that, help Canadians who need the support the most, included in that fall economic statement. There are initiatives like providing dental care for kids who do not have access to a dental plan now, like doubling the GST rebate for low-income Canadians to help them deal with the rising costs of food and gas, and like providing a \$500 boost for low-income renters so they can afford to keep a roof over their heads. I would like to point out that the dental care provisions in the fall statement are not in Bill C-32, which we are discussing today, but were in Bill C-31, which received royal assent yesterday, so that was a great day for Canadians.

I am also happy to find a couple of paragraphs in the statement about credit card transaction fees, an issue that the NDP has been raising for decades. Jack Layton brought this up time and again. Canadian small business owners pay some of the highest credit card transaction fees in the world, and in this world of online shopping, the fees make it even more difficult for them to compete for Canadians' shopping dollars.

As the NDP critic for small business, I have talked with executives from Visa, Mastercard, Moneris and other companies involved in these transactions. I know it is a complex issue and that these fees vary with the business volume and the credit card type, but the fact remains that small business owners pay the highest rates, and these are the highest rates in the world. These are the business owners who can least afford those high fees. Now consumers are concerned because business owners have been given the okay to pass these fees on to consumers.

I was happy to see a pledge in the fall economic statement that the government will move forward on regulating credit card transaction fees if negotiations with the industry do not bear fruit. The NDP will be watching this issue with great interest because we want to make sure this actually happens. We want to make sure that real, concrete action is taken to ease the pressure on Canadian businesses and consumers.

I want to spend the rest of my time discussing some items that were not included in the fall economic statement and therefore are

not in Bill C-32. They are items that I was hoping would be there as they would have helped Canadians this winter before we get another update in the spring budget.

There was something in the fall economic statement about eliminating the interest on federal student loans, which is something again that the NDP has been calling for. However, there was nothing for one of the most blatant aspects of student underfunding in Canada. That is the scholarships given to graduate students who are working full time on their research. These federal scholarship amounts provided by the three funding councils have remained unchanged since 2003. That is almost 20 years ago, when housing costs were a fraction of what they are now. Master's students now work full time on their research for the princely annual salary of \$17,500. Ph.D. students work full time for \$21,000. Regular Canadians would have a very difficult time surviving on those wages, but these students have to pay thousands of dollars in tuition on top of that as well. This is below minimum wage. We are forcing our best and brightest to live in poverty.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research recommended in a recent report that the government increase these scholarship levels to rectify the situation. I also sponsored an e-petition, e-4098, organized by scientists across the country and signed by thousands of Canadians, that asked for a 48% increase in the value of those scholarships to match inflation over the past 20 years. The petition also asked that the number of scholarships be increased by 50% to match the demand for graduate students across the country.

Once students get their Ph.D.s, they must compete to get post-doctoral fellowships. It is an essential part of the career track of young scientists. Last year, 840 master's students received scholarships, and 750 received Ph.D. scholarships, but only 150 post-doctoral fellowships were provided. The petition mentioned above asked that the number of post-doctoral fellowships be doubled so that we can keep these students in Canada.

● (1015)

We are forcing young researchers to leave the country to continue their education. These are students we have educated here in Canada since they were in kindergarten. The numbers tell the story: 38% of graduates leave Canada to do their postgraduate work. They go to the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Australia. They go to a host of other countries that know the future of their economies relies on innovation and well-educated workers.

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The negative impact of this neglect of young researchers on the Canadian economy is incalculable, but even the lost cost of that training is estimated to be about \$640 million every year. I was disappointed that this issue was not dealt with in the fall economic statement, but I can assure the House that I will keep up the pressure on the government to ensure that it is fixed in next year's budget.

Another issue that was not dealt with in the statement was the automatically escalating alcohol excise tax. This tax will increase by over 6% in the coming months because of the high inflation rate. Distilleries, breweries and wineries, which are already facing the rising costs of packaging and production, will have to swallow that increase in their costs to consumers. These are costs that are not faced by their foreign competition.

My riding makes the best wine in the country. My hometown is the epicentre of craft brewing in Canada, and there are more craft distilleries in my riding every year. However, these small businesses, which are an important and growing part of the economy in my riding, now face this increase of costs that was never part of their business plans.

I have talked to representatives from these distilleries, breweries and wineries, and they have practical solutions for this problem. They have no objection to paying the excise tax, but they want to make sure it is fair compared to what their international competitors pay.

The United States has a system whereby smaller producers pay a smaller rate of tax for distillers and breweries. Other wine-producing countries support their industries in ways that are trade legal. Canada came up with a similar support for our wine industry, but it is set to expire next year after only 18 months. This program needs to be extended to 2030, at least, to make sure our industry, especially the smaller producers, can continue to thrive.

Most Canadians are struggling to get by these days, but wealthy Canadians and many big corporations are making record amounts of money. Oil and gas companies are making record profits based on the windfall of world oil prices caused by international events. Big grocery stores are making record profits, even as many Canadians are forced to cut back on their food purchases.

The Liberal government could have instituted a windfall tax on these excess profits, which could have generated billions of dollars in revenue to really support the Canadians who need it most. Even the Conservative government in the United Kingdom is taxing these windfall profits. In fact, it just raised that windfall tax from 25% to 35% yesterday. The CEO of Shell Canada literally told the federal government that their company should be taxed more.

Why is the CEO of Shell more progressive than the Liberal government, to say nothing of the Conservatives?

The fall economic statement included a modest increase in the tax rate for banks and other financial institutions, but totally ignored the big corporations that made the biggest profits in this difficult time for Canadians. I hope that, by the time the spring budget rolls around, the Liberal government will have found the courage to bring in windfall taxes to make sure that companies that are making record profits on the backs of Canadians pay their fair share.

In conclusion, I will be voting in favour of this bill. It brings several supports to Canadians that will truly help those who need it most, and it takes some hesitant steps toward a more sustainable future.

● (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member recognized some valid points that the government is seriously considering, and some issues we can address. I want to also highlight and get the member's perspective on a couple of progressive measures that we have seen.

Within this legislation, we now provide support through getting rid of the interest on student loans. Prior to that, we had the children's dental program, where we are providing dental supports for children under the age of 12. Both issues are very much on the progressive side. They are going to have a wonderful impact in communities throughout the country.

Could he provide his thoughts on the importance of progressive policies, such as the two I cited?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, if the member had listened to my speech, he would have heard that I mentioned both of those items. They are things that we support as the NDP, because they were literally our ideas, especially the dental care proposal that the Liberals voted against a year ago. However, we were very happy to see that being carried forward. We look forward to next year when it will be expanded to include seniors and people with disabilities, and in the third year to all Canadians who need dental care who do not have that coverage now.

I am very much in favour of getting rid of the interest on student loans. It is something we have been calling on for a long time, because students are our future. That is why I care so much about the graduate student situation, where we are forcing our best and brightest to live in poverty. We should fix that right now.

● (1025)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate hearing from my fellow Okanagan member of Parliament. It is always good that we can talk about issues that we agree on. I really do hope he will support any future legislation that the Conservatives would bring to eliminate the excise tax on our small and medium-sized wineries, distillers and breweries.

The member mentioned student loans and the charging of interest. The government actually increased the interest rate this year and it is now only pledging to go to zero. The pledges of the government seem to go back and forth, most importantly, on credit card fees. I agree that credit card interchange fees are high in Canada, but the government has promised to change that not only in this economic statement, but also in the previous budget that was tabled in the spring and in the last budget.

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Why do NDP members continue to allow the government to have an infinite amount of time and options, and not use their supply agreement with the government to force it on these issues?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola for those comments, and I agree with him right up to the very end of them.

I do not know if the member knows how supply agreements work, but we do not get everything we ask for from the government when we enter into those agreements. The Liberals agreed to bring in dental care, and that is something that will change the lives of millions of Canadians. I know that the Conservatives are against providing dental care for poor kids across this country, but the NDP is proud to bring that forward.

However, we are very suspicious of the government when it says that, yes, it is going to fix the credit card interchange fees. As the member mentioned, the government has not done it before, and this is all about talking to industry. Therefore, we are going to be watching those pieces very carefully.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

In his speech and during questions and comments, the student loan measure was mentioned. The Bloc Québécois supports this measure because we see that it will help students in the rest of Canada.

However, I would like to remind my colleague that Quebec is not part of that program because it already has its own loans and bur-saries program that works well. An agreement with Ottawa gives Quebec the right to automatically withdraw with full compensation, which we are pleased about.

With regard to the dental insurance set out in Bill C-31, however, it is important to note that Quebec already has its own dental insurance program for children aged 10 and under. We thought that the programs would be harmonized with, for example, funding to extend coverage to children up to the age of 12, especially since Quebec's program is a real program that works well.

However, there is absolutely nothing about that or about a right to withdraw with compensation. To make matters worse, the government has imposed a super gag order to prevent the bill from being examined in committee. That means no amendments can be proposed.

What does my colleague think about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, as for the dental care provisions that received royal assent yesterday, this is a temporary interim measure. Since the government did not act quickly enough, we could not bring in the real dental care program that we would have liked to see. People in Quebec can apply for that funding if their children are not eligible for the funding under the provincial program, and we have heard a lot—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of

International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on Bill C-32, the fall economic statement and its implementation. It is critical to address this kind of issue. It is critical to the constituents I represent in Parkdale—High Park in terms of the cost of living crisis that so many Canadians are facing and in terms of addressing affordability.

I am happy to highlight, in the context of this intervention, what we are doing and what we are proposing to do as a government. Let me start with students. I feel that I am not that far removed from my student years, although it has been almost 30 years. I remember those days fondly. What I did not have to deal with then that students have to deal with now is really crippling debt with skyrocketing tuition rates and the debt loads that young people are taking on.

We want people to be considering post-secondary education. We want them to be advancing themselves and their careers through higher education. During COVID we implemented a new relaxation on the interest being charged on federal student loans. With the fall economic statement, we are entrenching permanently the position that we took during COVID on a go-forward basis to eliminate interest on the federal portion of student loans.

The caveat here is that not every province is following suit with their provincial counterparts. As a proud representative from Toronto, I urge the provincial government in Ontario to follow suit as six other provinces have. This would ensure that the provincial portion in my native province also eliminates interest so that we can render more fairness for these young people.

The next subject area I will turn to is housing. Housing is something we hear about all the time and rightfully so. Housing has become difficult in terms of attaining housing on a purchase model for people who would like to own property. It has become difficult for people who want to rent in this country. It is difficult on a number of fronts.

Colleagues know the actions we have taken as a government, but more needs to be done. The national housing strategy was an important initial step in 2017. We have supplemented that with continuing contributions to the housing portfolio.

What we are doing in this fall economic statement is fourfold. The first thing we are doing is ensuring that a new tax-free first homes savings account is permitted to be opened. This will operate much like a TFSA. This would allow a young person or a young couple to save as much as \$40,000 in savings, tax free, to contribute to the purchase of that first home. That is an important step.

A few years ago, we also implemented something called the first-time homebuyers' tax credit. The fall economic statement proposes to double that amount to reflect the fact that housing prices have gone up. We appreciate that people need more of a credit to take that initial step to purchase their first home.

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● (1030)

On a third front, what we are doing with respect to house flipping is really critical. We have heard about the commodification of the housing industry. We have heard about people using it as a speculative sort of exercise. The proposal contained in the fall economic statement is to tax the profits as business income for those who would sell a property within 12 months of having purchased it, preventing them from taking the capital gains exemption that is otherwise available to them. That is really critical because we want to ease that speculation in the housing market, not encourage it.

The last piece is also critical for those who want multi-generational housing. This is common in some parts of the country and some parts of the Canadian mosaic. We are trying to facilitate seniors to age at home. For example, for people who might want to have elderly parents live in their homes, possibly having three generations within the same dwelling, the renovation tax credit is being expanded through the multi-generational home renovation tax credit.

It does not stop with those who own homes. What we are doing for renters is very significant. Recently we topped up the Canada housing benefit, which was implemented through a proposal that I believe received royal assent yesterday. That was a \$500 top-up. It is unfortunate that not all parties were onside in terms of supporting Bill C-31, which implemented this increase of \$500 to the Canada housing benefit. It targets low-income Canadians who are renting in this current financial environment. Approximately 1.8 million people renting in this country will be affected by this one change, which is direct assistance during difficult economic times to help with the cost of housing.

On the broader piece of affordability, I want to highlight two other key facets. The first is the GST rebate, which I believe is in Bill C-30, if memory serves. Thankfully, there was a lot of consent in the chamber for doubling it for the next six months. That affects 11 million Canadians. That is a very significant form of assistance in difficult economic times.

The second is the dental benefit, which will be up to \$1,300, in Bill C-31, which I believe received royal assent just yesterday. That will enable children under the age of 12 in low-income families to get much-needed dental care. I will salute the approach that has been mooted in the chamber by various parties about expanding the concept of health care to include dental care. That is a step in the right direction. That is a step we need to take and are taking as a government. This is really critical.

Another point I want to add, if I can open a parenthesis, is that it is critical for people to understand, including Canadians watching right now, in dealing with the rising impacts of inflation, they should note how many government benefits that are currently part of our social safety net are indexed to inflation. They are multiple. The Canada child benefit, the GST credit, CPP benefits, old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and even the federal minimum wage are all tied to and indexed to inflation. We do not want to see inflation rise any further, but if it does, the benefits will also have a concomitant increase. That is very important to give people peace of mind about what their benefits will be assisting them with as we deal with difficult issues about the cost of living.

I want to touch on what we are doing for workers. We are working hard to assist workers directly. The fall economic statement would enhance the Canada workers benefit, which we have implemented. For those who are not familiar with it, there used to be disincentives for people coming off of assistance and taking low-paying work. We did not want to disincentivize people from leaving government assistance and entering the workforce.

The Canada workers benefit creates a top-up for those people who are in that particular situation, so they are encouraged to enter the workforce rather than discouraged. With this change, we are not providing that benefit annually, but on a quarterly basis, so those benefits will be in people's bank accounts more frequently, which helps them deal with the cost of living on a more direct and frequent basis. This one change has the potential to affect as many as 4.2 million workers.

We are also talking about a sustainable jobs training centre. This dovetails exactly with something we have heard a lot about over the past four to five years in the chamber, which is the notion of a just transition. How do we transition good, unionized work from different sectors into good, unionized, high-paying jobs in new, sustainable clean tech sectors? We do that through harnessing the power of unions and also through harnessing the powers of a sustainable economy. The sustainable jobs training centre would do just that. That is part of the fall economic statement.

● (1035)

We are also addressing fairness for workers directly by taxing share buybacks. This is important because, as the Minister of Finance outlined when she announced the fall economic statement, what we want to do is encourage businesses to not hold on to their wealth, to not pay for dividends to shareholders, but rather to reinvest in their businesses, including through R and D, which would empower the workers themselves. That is a critical feature, and that is what we are doing in this fall economic statement.

Another component is addressing fairness for small and medium enterprises. I am proud to serve as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Small Business. Insofar as we addressed the small businesses stakeholders around the country, we heard repeatedly from entities about the prohibitive costs of credit card transactions, which only escalated during the pandemic as people turned to cashless methods of payment.

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The charges that are part of the credit interchange fee structures are proving to be more and more prohibitive on small business owners. What we have committed quite openly in the fall economic statement is that we will doggedly pursue a negotiated agreement with financial institutions to reduce those fees. If those negotiations prove futile or unsuccessful, we have made a public statement in the chamber and through the fall economic statement that we will actually legislate in this area to bring down those fees. That would have a direct impact on small and medium businesses.

On this point, I want to read some of the reaction we have heard. The Convenience Industry Council of Canada has said, “CICC is pleased that the government has responded to our calls for action and has acknowledged the impact that credit card fees are having on convenience stores across the country.” They also said that Canadian convenience stores “have reached a tipping point & we need the feds to act NOW.”

That is exactly what we are doing. We are responding to this. When one responds to the needs of small business owners, one also responds to the people who use small businesses, the consumers who are facing escalating costs because credit card transaction fees are passed on to them.

That is part of what we are doing in the fall economic statement. It is critical to address the cost of living needs of Canadians, my constituents of Parkdale—High Park, the constituents of every member in this chamber. That is why I will be voting in support of the fall economic statement, Bill C-32, and I encourage every member of this chamber to do the same.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about programs to assist university students getting into their careers. University students I speak to in my riding are very concerned about the evaporating dream of home ownership. I know the member will probably mention the first home savings account, which would allow them to save up to \$40,000. I will point out that, at the rate of inflation, this is about one year's worth of inflation on housing.

What will the government do to tackle inflation, which is the real problem students are facing?

• (1040)

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that housing is a critical feature. It is a critical feature in the province of British Columbia, as it is in my province of Ontario. What we are doing, as I mentioned, are things such as the first-time home buyers' tax credit and the tax-free first home savings account. We have already initiated a national housing strategy. We campaigned in the 2020 election on more housing starts, and we are working co-operatively with many provinces, including my own, to build more housing. I also point to the rapid housing initiative, which has been very targeted in building more housing faster.

In terms of inflation, I hope every member of the chamber appreciates the inflationary pressures Canada is facing are not unique to Canada alone. They are being faced by all of our G7 allies, indeed by all of our allies around the planet. In fact, comparatively, Canada's rate of inflation is lower than the United States and all of our G7 allies, which is an important feature for this debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his speech. He just went over the whole inflation problem.

The word “inflation” appears in the fall economic update 108 times. We know that in contrast to the previous budget, there are no new measures. It is just a rehash. It uses different rhetoric to justify the same measures.

The government is rightly concerned that a recession could hit this winter. As far as the recession is concerned, the Bloc Québécois is asking for employment insurance to be reformed as soon as possible so it is ready to go. The government was supposed to have it in place for last summer, but the system still has not been reformed. We would not want to have to create a CERB 2.0 to limit the damage and make up for a failing EI system.

Why was this reform not included in Bill C-32?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Joliette for his question and his interest in this very important issue.

Regarding inflation, I mentioned in my speech that all the programs, roughly six of them, are indexed to inflation. In other words, if inflation goes up, the government benefits will also go up.

As far as EI is concerned, that is a very specific issue. Members can see from the mandate letter that the Prime Minister wrote to the minister responsible for this file that we are here to resolve the situation in consultation with all the provinces. We will always be there for employers and workers.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, working with Unifor, the Alberta Federation of Labour and IBEW, we have been pushing the government to get some real standards in place to create a clean energy economy. We were pleased to see that we actually have some labour standards now, some labour obligations, for tax credits for new projects. That is significant.

However, we have not yet seen the commitment for an industrial strategy to really drive a clean energy economy. At what point will we see, from the government, the money on the table required to transform us from a fossil fuel economy and make the investments needed to gather up the huge opportunities waiting in the clean energy economy?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I will point the member to a few different things.

Government Orders

One is the approach that we have taken with labour standards vis-à-vis our conclusion of agreements internationally. CUSMA comes to mind as a fair example. Second, it is not solely about investments that the Canadian government provides. It also about the tax credits we provide to spur innovation and investment. The clean tax credit is now available to entities that are pursuing clean tech and sustainable growth industries. That was revealed in the fall economic statement. I will also point him to the fact that our environmental package of the last seven years includes more than \$100 billion in investments.

He mentioned the Alberta Federation of Labour. Its response to our share buyback taxation on banks was that it is “Very positive news to hear Finance Minister Freeland confirm earlier reports that Canada will tax stock buybacks”—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate. I will remind the hon. member that we do not mention the names of current members of the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kenora has the floor.

• (1045)

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured by the opportunity to rise again today and speak to a government bill, Bill C-32, in regard to the fall economic statement. The member for Winnipeg North believes it is a good bill. Unfortunately, I cannot really say the same, and I am going to get into that here with my remarks.

Obviously, it is an important discussion we are having today, with the cost of living crisis that is facing Canadians across the country. We are feeling that in the Kenora riding in northern Ontario, and we know we are seeing it across the country, but unfortunately, the government's economic statement is really just more of the same policies we have seen over the last number of years from the government. It is more of the same policies that have driven up inflation in the first place and have really created and exacerbated this cost of living crisis people are facing.

In the lead-up to the economic statement, Conservatives called for the same things we have been calling for for quite some time. It will probably not surprise members to know what we were calling for; we were calling for no new spending and no new taxes. We know the government's spending has driven up inflation. The PBO has told us that and independent economists have told us that, and that is the real cause and the reason we are here today and Canadians are facing the concerns they are.

Conservatives believe that every new dollar of spending should be matched by a dollar of savings. It is a very simple principle, something that most people would use in their own households and with their own pocketbooks, that if we are going to spend more money on one thing, we should find savings elsewhere. Unfortunately, that is not what we saw from the government, and it has brought forward a plan that is really just going to add more fuel to the inflationary fire.

Of course, the second thing we have called for, as I mentioned earlier, is no new taxes, because Canadians are really feeling the squeeze right now. The cost of everything is going up, and the government's additional taxes and the increases in the taxes, including

the tripling of the carbon tax, are not going to make that any better. Canadians are looking for relief, and Conservatives are here fighting for that relief and calling on the government to do the same.

We know half of Canadians are \$200 away from insolvency right now, and that is a very stark and striking statistic that shows the real issues and challenges people are facing. I want to share some concerns constituents have brought and sent to me. One comes from a constituent of mine in Pickle Lake, which is the northernmost municipality in Ontario and is in my riding. This constituent says, “Costs are rising at an alarming rate, and living in a remote community makes it even more so. With gas prices and the cost of heating fuel continually on the rise, it makes it hard to make ends meet.” That is just one of the many concerns in letters and emails I know I have been getting and I think all of us in the House have been getting from our own respective communities, highlighting how difficulty it is for people to get by.

Inflation is impacting gas, groceries and home heating, perhaps the most. These are three essential things that Canadians need. In fact, when it comes to gas prices, far too often in northwestern Ontario we see some of the highest gas prices in the country. I want to share a quick excerpt from a Kenora Online news article from September of this year. The headline is “Kenora has the most expensive gas in Ontario, again”.

This is something we see over and over again, that the Kenora district has the highest gas prices in the province of Ontario. Of course, being in a remote northern area, the issues of the added cost of the carbon tax hit us so much more than they would in areas like Toronto, Ottawa and across southern Ontario. This specific article notes that Kenora had the “14th most expensive fuel in Canada, behind [only] 13 communities from British Columbia”. I think that highlights, at the time of writing, just how challenging the fuel prices are.

• (1050)

Gas is essential in the Kenora district. People need it, not only to go to work or get groceries, but often to travel multiple hours to medical appointments. It is really something that is perhaps taken for granted for those in southern Ontario and in the larger urban centres, who have public transit and many more options and services close to home. People need to use fuel to travel long distances in the remote north, and that is something that definitely makes everything more complicated for people in the Kenora riding and across northern Ontario.

Government Orders

I also want to share a couple more letters that I received from constituents about that. Wendy from Red Lake reached out to say that the prices of gas, food and electricity are all making it difficult for seniors to remain in our area as well. Tina from Dryden is a single mother of three. She says that she is forced to work two jobs to support her children, and more often than not it has become easier to eat takeout, which of course is super unhealthy, so she is very concerned about that.

This all goes back to the taxes and the inflationary spending policies of the government. It is not just gas. As I mentioned, it is groceries and home heating that are getting hit as well.

When it comes to groceries, we are seeing record food bank usage across the country. It is at an all-time high. There have been 1.5 million visits in one month to food banks in Canada. I have heard a lot about that as well from constituents.

Another individual, from Sioux Lookout, reached out to me saying that the cost of food has become so unaffordable, especially the healthy, nutritious food that is essential for her children. She is very concerned about how that is going to be impacting her. I have had a couple from Minaki reach out, saying they are both pensioners on a fixed income. They are facing a choice between eating properly or being able to stay warm this winter. That is the crisis they are facing in the Kenora riding.

I just want to share one more, from a constituent who wrote in saying that if we look at the prices in Ear Falls, a carton of milk right now costs \$8.39, and a single head of lettuce is \$7.99. It has become almost impossible for people to afford to put food on the table, specifically healthy food.

With the coming winter months, with the colder weather, we know home heating is something a lot of people are very concerned about. It is not a luxury in northern Ontario. It is essential. Richard from Kenora has written to me to share that his natural gas has jumped from 11¢ a cubic metre to 30¢ a cubic metre, nearly tripling in price as a result of the government's policies. He is very concerned about how he is going to be able to afford to heat his home.

What is the answer? Luckily, a constituent wrote to me to tell me what the answer is. Faith from Kenora simply says, "Eric, the carbon tax needs to go." I could not agree more. She is obviously feeling the squeeze as well.

The concern I have, and I know all of us on this side of the House have this concern, is that when the government is faced with this crisis, its only answer is to spend more money and continue with the same inflationary policies that have really gotten us into this mess in the first place. There is no question that the Liberals like to judge their results based on how much money they can spend. If we ask a question about anything in the House, they say they have spent all this money and they are doing a great job.

On this side of the House, we are looking at the results. When we have record food bank usage across the country, when people are struggling to put food on the table and when those in remote northern communities are struggling to get by, it is clear that these policies are not working.

We are simply asking the government to rethink its approach, to stop its inflationary spending and to look at cutting taxes on struggling Canadians who are looking only for relief. That is why, as I mentioned earlier, I will not be supporting the fall economic statement. That is why I am concerned with the economic direction of the government. I look forward to any questions and comments from my colleagues on that.

• (1055)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives tend to focus on correlation rather than causation, so they will say there is a Liberal government in Ottawa and there is global inflation, including bad inflation in England, and therefore it is the Liberal government's fault. However, that is not how economics works. We have to look at causation.

I would like to understand a bit more the member's logic about food inflation. Is it demand-caused inflation? People can only consume so much food, and food demand goes up with population growth. It is not a function of how much the government spent on infrastructure last month. Therefore, is it demand driven or is it supply-cost driven? The price on carbon did not triple; it went up by 2.2¢ per litre last April. I am just wondering how that 2.2¢ per litre increase can be contributing to so much food inflation, which is running above 10%.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, that is another out-of-touch comment from the Liberal government. The Liberals simply seem to believe that prices are skyrocketing and they are just victims of it and have absolutely no responsibility here. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has indicated that it is the government's inflationary spending that is the cause of inflation. Future Liberal leader Mark Carney has said so, as have other leading economists across the country. There are certainly other challenges that we are facing, but there is no denying that when the government spends more, it adds to inflation, and when it taxes more, it makes things more expensive for Canadians. Why will the Liberals not understand that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have listened to our Conservative friends talk about inflation and January's tax increase, but we cannot take their "triple, triple, triple" chant any more. We would like them to find something new to say. However, they are right that costs will triple and that that will have consequences for people. That much is true.

Let us talk about climate change. The current carbon tax rate is pretty much ineffective. We are the laughingstock of COP27. Canada is ranked 58th out of 60 countries. It is the only G7 country where emissions have increased since 2015, the year the Liberals came to power. We have to take action on climate change.

Statements by Members

At COP27, we heard that if we do nothing, the cost to African nations in particular will be atrocious. If we do not pay now, we will pay even more later.

What is the solution, according to my Conservative friends?

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, I would agree in many respects with my colleague from the Bloc, that the Liberal government has missed every single environmental target it has set. Canada is now at the bottom of the pack when it comes to climate change. The government has brought forward all these taxation policies that cause economic pain for Canadians, but we are not seeing any environmental gain as a result. Therefore, it is clear that the Liberal plan is not working and it is time for a new government that is going to work to make life more affordable for Canadians and bring forward a real plan to protect the environment. That is what we are going to do on this side of the House.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on the question from the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis to the member for Kenora, because a really critical point is understanding that what we are experiencing now is not typical inflation. Real costs have really gone up.

I was recently talking to a farmer in Alberta who had real drought that meant that he could get a yield of only about half the barley he would normally get, but on balance the year was good because the war in Ukraine is so caught up in the cost of barley that the prices have soared, so half as much barley yielded more profit.

This is complicated stuff, and it is not about one thing only. It is a bit about demand-driven inflation, but it is a lot about supply-driven inflation, which means that the tools are not as easily described as government spending too much money. I wonder if the member has any thoughts on that.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, as I said in an earlier response to a Liberal member's question, there are many aspects that are impacting a lot of the challenges we are seeing here in the country, but there is no denying the fact that, as the PBO pointed out, as Mark Carney has pointed out and as many economists across the country have pointed out, when the government spends more it makes life more unaffordable for Canadians; it drives up inflation.

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands says that this is very complicated, but it is not complicated for people in northern Ontario who are just struggling to put food on the table and to fill their gas tanks, and who are worried about heating their homes. They know the government's spending is driving it. They know they cannot afford any more tax hikes, and that is why they are looking for relief from the Liberals.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[*English*]

VETERANS' WEEK

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today, following Veterans' Week, to highlight

the work veterans across my community of Ottawa Centre have been doing to commemorate and remember those lost serving our country at home and abroad.

I was honoured to begin this year's Veterans' Week by taking part in a community-led ceremony, organized by local veterans, at the Brantwood Place Gates in Old Ottawa East. This annual ceremony is cherished by residents, and it was heartwarming to see it back after two years.

In addition, I had the opportunity to visit the Montgomery Legion on Kent Street in Centretown and the Westboro Legion on Richmond Road, where I saw first-hand the dedicated service shown by so many veterans and legion volunteers to keep the memory of our fallen soldiers alive. The work of our local legions is truly indispensable, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for supporting them in our community and those they serve, while we remember our veterans for the sacrifices they made for our country.

Lest we forget.

* * *

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I cannot see why.

Millions of Canadians suffer from age-related macular degeneration, or AMD. This presently incurable disease starts with a loss of visual acuity in the centre of the eye. Eventually, the condition almost always results in blindness.

Many of our constituents and even members of our own families are affected, but now there are emerging treatment options. For instance, a new non-invasive device from a Canadian company has been clinically tested in Canada, and it offered positive results to all who were actively treated. It is less expensive than the present course of treatment, which only slows AMD's progression. There are other innovations on the horizon as well.

Unfortunately, Health Canada has been studying and delaying the approval of this life-changing treatment for almost two years. I am not questioning the thoroughness or importance of Health Canada's work. However, I am saying that procrastination and delays are not acceptable when our loved ones are going blind.

I cannot see why.

*Statements by Members***CANADA-POLAND RELATIONS**

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the relationship between Canada and Poland has never been stronger. This week, under the auspices of the ambassador of Poland, our Polish Canadian community gathered to celebrate the 80th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries.

I was also proud to join the Canada-Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group in hosting the Polish Secretary of State and his delegation from Poland. We talked about our unwavering solidarity in defence of Ukraine, highlighted by Canada's most recent commitment to send 40 combat engineers to Poland to lead the training of Ukrainian soldiers. We also talked about the critical role Canada can play to help Poland become energy independent, transitioning away from coal to nuclear power through Canadian small modular nuclear reactors.

Poland and Canada have been examples to the world of the power of solidarity. May that friendship continue to grow and prosper.

* * *

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, today I stand to mark Transgender Day of Remembrance, and I call attention to the 375 trans and gender-diverse people murdered last year, and the nearly 4,000 people killed over the past decade worldwide just for being themselves. These numbers are a glimpse of the harassment, discrimination, violence and undocumented deaths of transgendered people happening worldwide.

Despite this, I am profoundly moved by the strength of so many transgendered people. On this day, I am thinking fondly of an amazing transgendered woman named Melanie. Melanie describes her experience to me before transitioning as being full of struggles to get through each day in a body that was not her own. After transitioning later in life, Melanie is now happily remarried and living as her true self.

Today I call on members of the House to unite in showing transgendered people, with action, that they are not alone and deserve safety, dignity and respect.

* * *

GREENFIELD PARK PACKERS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last Sunday I had the honour of doing the official kickoff at the Quebec Major Junior Football League championship game between the South Shore Junior Packers and the Ottawa Junior Riders in my hometown of Greenfield Park. With my green and gold cap on, I joined our community in proudly cheering on the Packers as they went on to win the game 37 to 15 and bring home the coveted Joe Pistilli Cup.

The Greenfield Park Packers Football Association, which supports tykes to junior teams, is no stranger to championship wins. Over the years, it has won several provincial cups, and many of its past players have gone on to play professional ball.

● (1105)

[Translation]

This non-profit, volunteer-run association offers youth in our community a unique experience where they learn teamwork and respect for others.

[English]

Congratulations to the QMJFL organizers, with a special shout-out to Elizabeth and Steve Britton, and to the Packers organization and players for doing Greenfield Park and all of the South Shore proud.

We the park.

* * *

AFGHAN REFUGEES

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, when the Taliban seized power last year, about 13,000 Afghans fled north to Tajikistan. Some of these refugees had rendered service to the Canadian Armed Forces earlier during the war. For several months now, the Tajik government has been openly contemplating deporting all Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan. For those who helped foreign troops during the war, this would be a death sentence.

One such family belongs to a courageous interpreter who now resides in my riding in the town of Smiths Falls. His parents and siblings, one of whom is only 15 years old, are languishing in Tajikistan. The family clearly qualifies to come to Canada and had filled out all necessary paperwork back in January, but as of this month, my office has learned that the department has not even started verifying security checks.

This is just one of literally thousands of examples of how the glacial pace of Canada's immigration bureaucracy is risking lives. Surely this country can do better for those who helped us in our time of need now that they are in need of our help.

* * *

SENTENCING REFORM

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday, Bill C-5 passed in the Senate and received royal assent. For the first time in modern history, we repealed mandatory minimum penalties and empowered judges to impose sentences that fit the crime committed. These sentencing reforms will reverse failed Harper-era policies and address the overrepresentation of indigenous, Black and racialized Canadians in the justice system.

In keeping with our government's public health approach to simple drug possession, Bill C-5 allows for a greater use of early diversion programs. This is essential in the context of the overdose crisis, which is devastating communities across Canada.

Statements by Members

I am grateful for the support of all parliamentarians in both chambers for their assistance to advance this bill expeditiously so that Canadians can see the important results of its passage.

With Bill C-5, we kept our promise to Canadians. We believe in a justice system that is tough when it needs to be tough but is always fair.

* * *

HINDU HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we celebrate Canada's first official Hindu Heritage Month, I rise to congratulate the Murugan Temple for its years of service and the Hindu-Mandir on its recent 24th anniversary.

[*Translation*]

Since they were founded in 1983 and 1995, the Murugan Temple and the Hindu Mandir have been playing a vital role.

[*English*]

Their work not only serves the social and religious needs of our community, but also promotes a better understanding of who Canadian Hindus are and their rich traditions and culture.

Like so many others in Canada, when the pandemic hit, the Hindu-Mandir stepped up to assist local food banks, hospitals and international students. Year upon year, the Murugan Temple welcomes 10,000 people from across Canada to their annual 17-day religious ceremony in August. These great accomplishments are owed to the strong leadership and vision of their members.

I would like to congratulate both temples on their success.

* * *

FREEDOMS IN CANADA

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, freedoms are under attack in this country, from the freedom of speech, with a censorship bill, Bill C-11, that would control Canadians' online content, to freedom of the press, with Bill C-18, which may result in news content being blocked from Canadians or may disadvantage small, independent news outlets.

Then there is freedom of religion, with the infamous Canada summer jobs attestation, the burning of 15 Christian churches in Canada without a word from the government and the hiring of an anti-Semitic racist to advise the Liberal government on anti-racism. Also, our freedom to enter and leave Canada and freely move between provinces was violated for two years during the pandemic for the unvaccinated.

As for freedom from unlawful search and seizure, the Liberals will be confiscating the property of lawful gun owners.

I am here to stand up for our freedoms, and I hope others will do the same.

• (1110)

HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, imagine a state so cruel that it brutally murders children as young as 10 years old. Imagine a regime so barbaric that it attacks citizens for demanding basic human rights, and a place where the country's cruel forces treat the people as their targets and enemies. For the people of Iran, this is not imagination, but a cold and hard reality that they have continued to live with for the past four decades.

This is history repeating itself, as protesters today demand justice for the protesters in the movement that the Iranians have called the "Bloody November" massacre of 2019, when this evil regime shut down the Internet, detained 20,000 people and 1,500 lives were lost.

As tomorrow marks the global day of action for Iran, I, along with our government, commit to continuing to stand with the Iranian people in spirit, in voice and in action.

Canada is taking concrete steps to designate the regime and its most senior officials, including the IRGC, as a regime that engages in terrorism. Canada will not be a safe haven for any terrorists.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, two young mothers from Beauce, who also happen to be farmers, wrote to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture to let them know that they are fed up with the NDP-Liberal inflationary policies that are forcing many families to turn to food banks. Does this costly coalition realize that what matters to young families is to be able to heat their homes and put food on the table?

With policies like the carbon tax and the fertilizer tariff being imposed on our farmers, the government is driving up the price of everything. The Liberals are forcing our farmers to pay a 35% tariff on Russian fertilizer. We are the only G7 country to have imposed such an ineffectual policy. What is the government doing with the \$34 million it has already collected from our farm families? We all know that the carbon tax is making everything more expensive, whether it is on the farm, in processing plants or during transportation.

The Conservative Party understands real life. Canadians work hard, and we want them to be able to take home more money for their families. That is why we will fight these inflationary policies until we are in power, which will be soon.

Statements by Members

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have heard the Deputy Prime Minister say numerous times that the government's economic plan is a compassionate plan. I beg to differ. Is it compassionate to triple the tax on gas? No. Is it compassionate to triple the tax on groceries? No. Is it compassionate to triple the carbon tax on home heating? No.

According to Statistics Canada, "Atlantic Canadians paid more for fuel oil and other fuels than Canadians living in other provinces on a year-over-year basis, with prices rising at the fastest pace in Newfoundland and Labrador (+77.3%). Prices also increased in Nova Scotia (+67.8%), Prince Edward Island (+54.9%), and New Brunswick (+51.0%)", yet the current NDP-Liberal coalition is set to raise the carbon tax.

The Conservative Party is the only party that truly cares and can—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

* * *

[Translation]

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want everyone to know that November is Diabetes Awareness Month.

Living with diabetes every day is not always easy. This disease affects millions of Canadians. I want to thank the specialist doctors and nurses and pharmacists for supporting people like me who live with this disease. Jana, my big type 1 girl, and I thank the researchers working on this.

I am especially grateful to a team of Canadian researchers at the University of Toronto without whom millions of Canadians would not be alive today. In 1921, Frederick Grant Banting, John James Rickard Macleod, Charles Herbert Best and James Bertram Collip discovered insulin, which revolutionized diabetes treatment.

We have made great strides, but there remains much to do.

On behalf of all diabetics, I thank the researchers and wish them success going forward.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, with a potential recession in the offing, Canadian workers are exposed to the risk of job loss, but we do not have an adequate employment insurance system to ensure they can pay their bills while they look for work. We should have a system that has a higher income replacement rate. We should have a low universal qualifying hours threshold for employment insurance, and we should have a minimum benefit, but the Liberals chose to do away with those things in September and have yet to present their plan for a new EI system.

We also know they are planning to assign 25 billion dollars' worth of CERB debt to the EI account, putting undue pressure on EI premium payers, whether they are workers or small business owners, to carry CERB debt that properly belongs on the general ledger.

These are things the government has to deal with as a matter of priority, and we are calling on it to present its plan to Parliament now so that we are not having to deal with the new legislation during a crisis.

* * *

● (1115)

[Translation]

WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, this Sunday, November 20, is World Children's Day. The day is intended to raise international awareness about children's issues and remind us of our duty to improve the well-being of children around the world.

At the United Nations in 1991, Canada made a commitment to ensure that all children are treated with dignity and respect and have every opportunity to reach their full potential. Why, then, is Canada not fully complying with the convention?

Not all indigenous children have access to clean water, a safe home or an education. Not all children are heard, despite repeated requests to participate in our democracy. Too many children go to school hungry.

How is it that in 2022, in a country as rich as ours, we are still in this situation?

It is important that we all work together to put policies in place to uphold the rights of children.

* * *

[English]

INFLATION

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, inflation is the most universal tax of all. It is a means for the Liberal government to raise taxes on everyone without having to raise a single tax rate. It is the most regressive tax, because those who can least afford to pay end up paying the most when the costs of essentials like gas, home heating and groceries go up.

Oral Questions

Under the Liberal government, Canada has raised inflation to 40-year highs, and that is just inflation. They are also tripling the carbon tax on gas, home heating and groceries. The Liberals have refused to embrace the solution by cutting their reckless spending. That leaves the Bank of Canada to impose its draconian interest rate increases, which are making Canadians' mortgage payments unaffordable.

We have gone from the middle class and those working hard to join it to the middle class and those barely staying in it.

When millions of Canadians need to access the food bank, it shows there is something seriously wrong with the Liberal government's policies.

It is time for the Liberals to take responsibility for their failures, because it is not just inflation, it is Liberal ideology.

* * *

26TH LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF MANITOBA

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to congratulate my friend and fellow Manitoban, Anita Neville, on her appointment as the 26th Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba. Always a trailblazer, Anita is the third woman and first Jewish person to hold this distinguished position.

Ms. Neville has had a long and impressive background serving our community in Winnipeg. She was a trustee in the Winnipeg school division for over a decade, taking on leadership roles such as chair of the board.

She went on to become the member of Parliament for Winnipeg South Centre from 2000 to 2011 and served as the parliamentary secretary to the minister of Canadian heritage and the minister responsible for the status of women.

Throughout her time in public life, Anita was a strong advocate for promoting diversity and inclusion, reconciliation with indigenous peoples and stronger representation of women in politics.

I know the Hon. Anita Neville will carry out her duties with passion and dedication and be an outstanding representative of the Crown.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, six out of 10 Canadian families heat their homes with natural gas, which Canada is refusing to develop. This means thousands of dollars more spent on home heating bills for Canadian families this winter, and billions in the hands of warmongers. To top it all off, the Liberals plan on tripling the carbon tax while failing to hit a single emissions target.

Instead of hitting Canadians with their punishing tax plan, why not develop clean Canadian energy and give Canadians an environmental plan that works?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today is Friday, so I want to start with some very good news for hard-working Canadian families. Last night, Bill C-31 received royal assent.

That is good news, because it means Canadians struggling to pay their rent will soon be getting cheques for \$500. That is real help. It also means Canadian kids under 12 will be able to go to the dentist.

• (1120)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is not an answer to my question, so I am going to try again.

There are few countries on earth that could displace more coal with natural gas than we can. Instead of developing our own resources to fight climate change, the Liberals are tripling the carbon tax, freezing Canadians in the winter, and starving families so they have to go to food banks. The government keeps the world burning the worst fossil fuels. Canada ranks 58th out of 63 countries on emissions. Liberals should wake up. This is a tax plan. Canadians know it. Does the Deputy Prime Minister?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague probably noticed that just last week we announced in Canada the largest hydrogen plant in the world. This happened in Edmonton. The products of a \$1.7-billion investment will make Edmonton, Alberta, the key place in North America when it comes to hydrogen. That is how we build the future.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, we could have built some LNG or something, anything, in the last seven years. The Germans went to Australia for a 16-year LNG agreement. They went to the UAE and extended their agreement. They bought more from the U.S. They could have gotten it here, from Canada, but the Prime Minister sent the German chancellor home empty-handed. When the finance minister realized he had made a mistake, she said she was going to expedite projects, so I have a few questions for her.

Which projects will she expedite? What are the rules? When will we know?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to again remind my colleague what we did when the German chancellor was in Canada. Not only did we talk about hydrogen, which Canadians have seen on the east coast and across Canada, but we also signed two important things. We signed an MOU with Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz to look at the future and how we can work more closely together with our German friends when it comes to industry. In about two weeks I will be at the boards of both Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz to make the case for Canada. We should all work together to make the case for Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is still nothing about liquefied natural gas.

More and more people in Quebec are skipping meals or hardly eating because they can no longer afford food, which is becoming increasingly expensive. This week, the Institut national de santé publique du Québec reported that “the proportion of the population experiencing food insecurity has grown from 8% to 15%”. It almost doubled from May 2020 to September 2022.

Why do the Liberals want to raise taxes when Canadians are already going hungry?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I am very aware of the difficulties that many Canadians are currently facing in terms of affordability. That is why I am so pleased to be able to share some good news today. Yesterday evening, Bill C-31 received royal assent. That will have specific and important effects for Canadians and the less fortunate.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am talking about pregnant mothers who are finding it increasingly difficult to buy basic food items for themselves and their children.

The Fondation Olo has seen an increase in demand of 32% for eggs, 20% for milk, and 27% for vegetables. One-third of the 671,000 people supported by food banks every month are children. One in two people who experience food insecurity earn employment income. What the Liberals will continue to do, despite what they say, is take more money out of Canadians' pockets.

What will it take for them to finally understand what is happening and cancel—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we understand that Canadian families and Canadian mothers are struggling right now. That is why we decided to send \$500 to vulnerable families having difficulty paying their rent. That is why we decided to pay for Canadian children's dental care.

Oral Questions

What I do not understand is why the Conservatives were against these measures, which are so important for Canadians today.

* * *

• (1125)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, the federal government is threatening to steal \$2.7 billion in infrastructure money meant for our municipalities. It is moving up Quebec's deadline to submit proposals from 2025 to next March. Miss the deadline, miss out on the cash.

The Liberals changed the date unilaterally. Then they had the nerve to accuse Quebec of dragging their feet and leaving federal money on the table.

For starters, it is not their money. It is Quebecers' money. Also, Quebecers are not dragging their feet. The Liberals are the ones changing deadlines and acting like bullies.

Why not honour the deadline and work together instead of jeopardizing projects that are important to our cities?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one thing that needs to be recognized is that never before in the history of Canada have we seen a government that has invested so much in infrastructure in every region of our country. We want to continue to work with the different stakeholders, provinces and municipalities in order to get shovels in the ground.

With regard to the specifics, I will ensure that the minister is very aware of the situation.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, if the minister is so very aware of the situation, he should cancel his decision.

The federal government does not understand the implications of moving up the deadline by two years. Its job is to announce funding and show up at the ribbon-cutting when the work is done.

The fact is, there is a labour shortage in the construction industry, contractors are fully booked, and most municipalities do not have people to write specs. That all has an impact on planning infrastructure projects for the people who build them, and that is why the Union des municipalités du Québec is asking the government to honour the agreed-upon 2025 deadline.

Will the government tune in and listen to our cities? Hello?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for asking a very important question.

Oral Questions

I think that my colleague would agree that if there is a government that works well with the municipalities, including the Union des municipalités du Québec, it is the Liberal government.

As the former minister of infrastructure, I can say that we have always been attuned to the needs and we understand the construction season. That is why we have always worked hand in hand with the municipalities. That is how this government does things, and that is how we will continue to work.

I invite my colleague to continue raising these questions. For our part, we will continue to work with the Union des municipalités du Québec.

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals have been failing veterans for years. The minister refused to hire staff and now he is delegating the task to a private company to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. It is not even clear that they will be able to provide adequate services in French.

Veterans want capable people to help them get better services, not a company whose primary goal is to make a profit.

When will the minister do the right thing? When will he help veterans and their families, not the CEOs of wealthy companies?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am surprised to get that question from my hon. colleague.

The fact is that we have a new contract that will go into effect at the end of November. There will be 9,000 health professionals in 600 locations across the country. What we are doing as a government is providing the services for veterans where veterans need the services. It would be totally irresponsible to cancel that contract.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, our nation's veterans deserve respect and that answer was anything but.

Suspension of services is happening now. There is no transition plan and the government is outsourcing contracts to a company owned by none other than Loblaws. This boondoggle will cost 25% more than just adequately funding the department. Liberals want to spend more money for fewer services.

Why is the minister putting Loblaws' profits ahead of veterans and their families? Will he halt moving forward on this badly botched plan?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, again, I am surprised to receive the question from my hon. colleague.

In fact, what we are doing is taking two contracts and putting them into one. We are making sure that we have 9,000 health professionals across the country in 600 different areas to ensure veterans can receive rehab and health services in towns, cities and rural

areas across the country. We are not opposed to that. We want to provide the services for our veterans and we will.

* * *

● (1130)

TAXATION

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government offers Canadians more debt, more taxes, more spending, more inflation and higher interest rates.

Its out-of-control spending added \$100 billion in debt before COVID, plus \$205 billion in non-COVID debt that triggered an inflation crisis, which leaves Canadians unable to afford basic necessities.

When will the Liberals end their inflationary spending and cancel their plan to triple the tax on gas, groceries and home heating?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government absolutely believes in compassion, and that is why I was happy to share, at the beginning of this question period, the good news that Bill C-31 has received royal assent. Struggling families will get \$500 to pay their rent, and kids under 12 across the country will be able to go to the dentist.

However, I also want to underscore for Canadians listening that our approach is fiscally responsible. Our AAA rating has been reaffirmed by Moody's with a stable outlook. We have the lowest deficit and the lowest debt-to-GDP—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, that answer is cold comfort to the millions of Canadian families that are going to struggle to heat their homes this winter.

The Liberals said that inflation was transitory and that interest rates would never go up. Now interest rates and mortgage payments are through the roof, and millions of Canadians are going to struggle to make their payments. The Liberals are also going to raise the payroll tax. Canadians cannot pay higher mortgage payments and a higher carbon tax with a smaller paycheque.

When will the Liberals cancel these tax increases and the inflationary spending?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the Conservatives should be a little cautious about purporting to offer advice on handling inflation to Canadians. After all, it was their leader who advised Canadians to invest in crypto as a way of opting out of inflation. Had Canadians done that, they would have lost 65% of their savings or been totally wiped out. I hope the Conservatives will apologize to Canadians for that reckless advice.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is from the woman who said that we would have deflation and interest rates would remain low for decades. The highest inflation in 40 years means Canadians cannot pay their bills, yet this costly coalition continues their out-of-control tax-and-spend agenda.

Will the Liberals have some compassion, end their inflationary spending and cut their plan to triple taxes on gas, home heating and groceries?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we learned this week that inflation in Canada had been stable or fallen for four months in a row. That is good news.

We also recognize that we need to take a fiscally responsible approach. I discussed that in a previous answer. We know Canadians need compassion too. That is why we are really glad to be able to send cheques for \$500 to families who need it. We are glad to finally be able to say in Canada families are not going to have to choose between buying groceries and taking their kids to the dentist.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is the Liberals: Give a little with one hand and take a lot with the other. Half of Canadians cannot pay their bills. They have lost hope. The Liberal government is out of touch and Canadians are out of money.

Again, will the Liberals end their inflationary spending and cancel their plan to triple taxes on gas, groceries and home heating?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable Canadians.

It is our government that introduced the CCB. That is a policy that is indexed to inflation. It has lifted two million Canadians, including 450,000 Canadian children, out of poverty. That is good, important policy all Canadians can be proud of. The GIS, also indexed to inflation, is helping 900,000 Canadian seniors.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, people are skipping meals and going hungry because they can no longer make ends meet.

It sounds like I am talking about people somewhere else in the world but no, I am talking about Canadians, people in Canada, in a G7 country. Every month, 671,000 Quebecers, a third of whom are children, use food banks. The reasons are obvious: inflation and rising food prices.

Oral Questions

Will this government stop impoverishing Canadian families and promise them that it will not raise taxes?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I definitely agree that today's global economic situation is difficult, and Canadians are struggling with affordability. That is why I find it astonishing that the Conservatives opposed two measures that we will be putting in place, namely the \$500 payment to help vulnerable Canadians who are struggling to pay their rent and dental care for Canadian children.

How do the Conservatives justify their position?

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, it might be more important for people to have something to sink their teeth into before we worry about dental care.

Food insecurity is not even something we should be talking about in Canada, and yet one out of two employed people are experiencing food insecurity. Men and women who get up every day to go to work are going hungry. Things have gotten that bad in Canada. We have workers who are poor.

Will the government stop impoverishing families and guarantee them that it will not raise taxes?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think it is worth recapping the Conservatives' plan and approach. What the Conservatives want to do is gut the employment insurance system, jeopardize seniors' pensions, make pollution free and leave children without dental care. They do not want to give \$500 to the less fortunate who are having a hard time paying their rent. That is a problem.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Canadian oil monarchy wants to prevent the final COP27 report from including a sentence on the importance of phasing out fossil fuels. Even a small, non-binding sentence is too much. Canada is coming to the rescue of the oil companies.

We will not solve climate change without reducing oil and gas production. Either that or we scrap the planet. The Liberals will have to decide: Is the minister they sent to COP27 the Minister of Environment or the Minister of Oil?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as many members in the House know, we have the most ambitious climate plan in the history of Canada. It is a \$9.1-billion emissions reduction plan that is as much an economic plan as it is an environmental plan. We are going to be eliminating fossil fuel subsidies. We are going to be capping oil and gas emissions. We are going to be building the clean economy of tomorrow, which will be a \$2.5-trillion economy. We have to catch that wave.

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*[Translation]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, the only thing more infuriating than Canada's actions at COP27 is its apology. Yesterday, when we asked the government why it continues to approve oil projects in the midst of a climate crisis, it said that a net-zero world will always need oil, for example to lubricate the parliamentary secretary's bike.

I just want to clarify something. If the government approved Bay du Nord and its billion of barrels of oil and if it approves offshore oil exploration in Newfoundland, is it really just to lubricate bicycle chains?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me be very clear. I have said it before, and I will say it again. Even in a net-zero world, we will always need oil for some things, and not just bike chain grease. We also need it to make lubricant for windmills. If members want to keep seeing latex gloves in our hospitals, we will always need oil. What we are going to do is cap greenhouse gas emissions. That is what we have to do. We have a plan, and we are putting it into action.

* * *

*[English]***ELECTIONS CANADA**

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, when the Prime Minister was briefed by CSIS that at least 11 candidates in the 2019 election illegally received hundreds of thousands of dollars from Beijing, which violated multiple sections of the Canada Elections Act, the Prime Minister had to make a choice. He could report this illegal activity to Elections Canada so that it could investigate or he could cover it up.

What choice did the Prime Minister make?

• (1140)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have said in the House previously, Canada's fair and free elections process was never, ever compromised. It is not just me saying that. This was determined by an independent panel of national security experts. Let us remember that the only ones who benefit from foreign interference are enemies of democracy.

I am disappointed that the opposition members, for five days now, have continued to amplify the foreign-interference messaging in the House. We should be standing together to stand up to this attack on our democracy.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, after that third non-answer to my straightforward question, the only conclusion that can be reasonably drawn is that the Prime Minister made no report to Elections Canada.

The Prime Minister professes to be concerned about Beijing's interference in our elections, but when he had an opportunity to do something about it, to report the illegal activity to Elections Canada, he instead chose to cover it up.

Why? What is the Prime Minister hiding?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, foreign interference is a threat to the fabric of our democracy. We will continue to invest in our intelligence agencies, in CSIS, to ensure they have the resources they need to take action and ensure they are protecting the interest of Canadians. All members of the House should be standing side by side and standing up against foreign interference, and not implying things that were not said by the answers that are given. This is a problem for every member of the House. It is a problem for every Canadian.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is stain on our democracy, and every day that the Liberals refuse to be transparent about it, that stain continues to linger. The government knew there were 11 candidates who received illegal foreign funds in the 2019 election. Now, the Liberals have repeatedly said that this is a threat to our democracy. We agree, but they refuse to give us the evidence.

If the Liberals will not reveal the names to Parliament, will they at least confirm when and if the Prime Minister shared this information with the Commissioner of Canada Elections?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to just take a breath here and remember what is motivating foreign interference. Foreign interference is motivated by a desire to destroy the fabric of our democracy here in Canada. We are taking action by introducing legislation on cybersecurity. I hope the hon. member, who serves on the public safety committee, will assist our government in getting that legislation passed. We will always take protecting Canadian democracy seriously, and we will take every action, including legislative action, to make sure that happens.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, in January of this year, the Prime Minister was informed that 11 election campaigns had received illegal funds from foreign actors that may have influenced our elections. The government is refusing to disclose details about the campaigns involved and will not say what it is going to do about it.

The question is simple: Did the Prime Minister inform the Commissioner of Canada Elections of these allegations or not? If not, when is he planning to do so?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is the fourth question today, and the fifth day of questions, on foreign interference. The opposition seems to not recognize who is being attacked in this foreign interference. It is not this side of the House. It is not that side of the House. It is every single member in the House.

Foreign interference is meant to sow chaos. It is meant to destroy our democracy. We need to be standing together. I invite them to support cybersecurity legislation. I invite them to support the actions other ministers have taken when it comes to mining and other actions our government is—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

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POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canada's graduate students and post-doctoral fellows are living in poverty because the government has not increased their wages in almost 20 years. This week, scientists were completely unimpressed when the minister tried to tell them that ongoing funding was new money. One Canada research chair even tweeted “just the same old investment with a shiny new bow.”

When will the Liberals stop pretending they support science and increase the funding for Canada graduate scholarships and post-graduate fellowships?

● (1145)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think my colleague attended the same conference that I did. I did not get the same feedback he received, obviously, because I met with a thousand people who were there in the room, and we told the group what investments have been done by this government on science over the last few years.

We agree with him we need to do more for our graduate students, scientists and researchers. We want to promote science in this country. If there is one government in Canadian history that has done a lot for science, it is this government. We will continue to invest in science across our nation.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are at least 500,000 non-status migrants doing essential work in Canada. They are caregivers. They work in health care and agriculture. They work for poverty wages for long hours and often in abusive conditions.

Without status, they face the stress of deportation and lack access to basic health care and services. The government must provide

them with permanent status so that they can live and work in Canada without exploitation and the risk of deportation.

When will the Liberals act to grant undocumented migrants with permanent residency?

Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, international students provide significant contributions to Canada. We heard loud and clear their strong desire to continue staying here in the country and to work here. We have launched extensions of expired and nearly expired post-graduation work permits, which will benefit nearly 100,000 people.

We have also lifted the 20-hour-work-week rule so that the almost 500,000 international students already here in Canada can continue to work while doing their studies. We are making sure that we are carving out a place for international students to better integrate into Canada.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Global Entrepreneurship Week celebrates the millions of people worldwide who turn their business ideas into reality. The international event encourages entrepreneurs through a variety of activities and connects them with potential investors, support organizations, mentors and partners to help them achieve their goals.

As Global Entrepreneurship Week is coming to an end, can the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development tell the House how Canada celebrates and supports entrepreneurs?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his advocacy. This week, we celebrate Canadian entrepreneurs from across the country who are driving economic growth and creating good-paying jobs.

We will continue to support entrepreneurs through the \$4-billion Canada digital adoption program, the \$6-billion women's entrepreneurship strategy and the Black entrepreneurship program, which is breaking down barriers and supporting Black entrepreneurs to succeed.

We are home to some of the brightest entrepreneurs in the world, in Kitchener—Conestoga, and across the country. We are committed to growing these entrepreneurs and their innovations.

*Oral Questions***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week, the Auditor General released a scathing report on the complete failure of Indigenous Services Canada to provide support for first nations disaster management. After three years and \$790,000, the auditor found that not one emergency management agreement was completed.

More and more parents are now waking up, trying to figure out how to heat their homes, pay their bills and even feed their families. When will the government actually start getting results for indigenous people and stop their wasteful inflationary spending?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, the extraordinary expense of responding to the climate change crisis is growing. In fact, the Auditor General's report noted that, while Indigenous Services Canada is doing a great job helping emergency management of those crises, we need to invest more in protection and in adaptation.

It is really exciting to hear a member from the opposition talk about climate change and talk about the need to invest in adaptation to reduce the emissions and to protect our climate, because, in fact, all of us are suffering from the extraordinary expense of responding to climate crises.

We will continue—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General and the Parliamentary Budget Office did not say that the Indigenous Services department is doing a great job. In fact, they called it a money pit.

If the minister was truly going to fund projects, why not fund the 112 infrastructure projects that would build dikes, culverts and ditches to help mitigate the effects of climate change instead of spending three and a half times more relocating people, housing them and rebuilding the communities after the disaster hits? The minister needs to mitigate this.

When will the government start getting results for indigenous people and stop wasting money?

• (1150)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not consider it a waste of money to help a community that is under threat from flood, fire or torrential winds. I do not consider that a waste of money at all.

What I am hearing the member opposite call for is increased investment in making our communities resilient to the effects of climate change. I am really pleased to hear this question because it is an indication that the opposition understands that communities are under intense threat from the kinds of incredible climate activity that we are seeing.

We will continue to work with communities to make those important investments.

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TAXATION

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, fuel costs are up nearly 56% from last year. For those in northern Ontario, that means they are struggling to afford to fill their gas tanks. It means that rising grocery bills are causing many people to cut back on their diets. The rising cost of home heating has many people concerned about the upcoming winter months and how they will pay the bills to heat their homes. This is a crisis of the government's making.

When will the Liberals finally show some compassion, stop their inflationary spending and cancel their plan to triple the taxes on gas?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we absolutely recognize that times are really challenging for a lot of Canadian families. We do believe that a compassionate approach is the right one.

That is why I was really glad to share with the House today the good news that Bill C-31 received royal assent. That means cheques for \$500 are going to go to nearly two million Canadian families to help them pay the rent. It means that no family in Canada with a kid under 12 is going to have to choose—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, Liberal inflation is having a disturbing impact on vulnerable pregnant women who are food insecure.

According to Fondation Olo, which provides food specifically to those pregnant women, they choose to go without themselves so they can feed their other children. Why is this happening? Because food has become unaffordable. Ultimately, they are being asked to choose between their unborn baby and the child at the table.

Will the government commit to helping these mothers and cancelling the tax hikes?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government understands how important mothers, children and families are. That is why, since day one in 2015, we have focused on helping mothers, children and families. That is why I want to point out that the Canada child benefit has helped 450,000 children so far—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the World Cup soccer tournament starts Sunday in Qatar, a dictatorship that violates human rights. Players have the right to compete, but Canada must not send a diplomatic delegation to boost Qatar's image, which has been tarnished by the loss of thousands of workers' lives.

The tournament is two days away, and the government is still unable to decide if it will send a delegation. It says it will decide at the appropriate time and place. The time is now, as the event begins in two days; the place is here, in the House.

Will it send a diplomatic delegation to Qatar, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are very proud of the Canada national soccer team qualifying for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which has many members from our community in Brampton. We are also very concerned about reports of dangerous working conditions in building the World Cup's stadiums and infrastructure, especially those resulting in death.

We join international partners in calling for transparency and robust measures to protect the health, safety, dignity and human rights of all workers to ensure the tournament is a success.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, that is unbelievable. That was no answer.

The government has known for 12 years that the World Cup would be taking place in Qatar. It has been 12 years, and now the event starts in two days.

The Bloc Québécois sincerely hopes that the government has not abandoned its values in the interests of diplomacy yet again. Qatar jails members of the LGBTQ+ community. It violates the rights of women. It sacrificed the lives of thousands of workers to build its luxury hotels.

Canada has no business being there. We want an answer. Will it send diplomats to Qatar, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said, we join international partners in calling for transparency and robust measures to protect the health, safety, dignity and human rights of all workers to ensure the tournament is a success.

Details on the Government of Canada's representation at the 2022 FIFA World Cup will be released in due course.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Madam Speaker, lobster fishing areas 33 and 34 are about to open in Nova Scotia waters. This coming season is going to be ex-

Oral Questions

tremely challenging for fish harvesters. They have seen diesel, bait and financing costs skyrocket while lobster prices have fallen drastically. Certainly, the minister is aware of these challenges.

Will the Liberal government commit to opening the mackerel fishery to cut bait costs and allow stacking to let the fishermen save on fuel?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, Canada has a world-class lobster fishery with lobster that is sought across the globe. It is an industry that is important for Canada's economy, and that is thanks to our amazing harvesters and coastal communities. I will say this about mackerel. All of our decisions are based on a couple of factors. One is science. Another is the ability to work with our harvesters hand in glove. That is what we are going to continue to do. We are going to listen to the harvesters. On this side, we listen to science.

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TAXATION

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, a month ago I asked the current government to give Canadian families a break and cancel the tripling of the carbon tax, which is applied to every step in the transportation of food production, processing and manufacturing. The response from the Minister of Environment was that a carbon tax stops hurricanes. The reality is that, with the storms we now face, there are many things outside of our control, but one option we do have control over is crippling taxation.

Will the minister support Canada's food security by immediately cancelling the tripling of the carbon tax?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, families are at the very heart of what we are doing here as a government. Between 2015 and 2019, around 1.3 million Canadians were lifted out of poverty.

We know there is more work to be done. That is why we are investing in dental. It is why we are investing in rental. It is why we are investing in the Canada child benefit. It is why we are investing in child care. On every single one of those items, the party opposite has voted against. We are standing on the side of families.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, whatever the Liberals touch, they break, and it is déjà vu all over again. The Auditor General has reported that the Liberal government keeps wasting tax dollars. According to the Auditor General, the Liberals are about to lose the legal authority to collect half a billion dollars in wage overpayments from the Phoenix pay system. This is on top of the \$2 billion the Liberals have already spent on overpayments to civil servants.

What is the minister's plan to collect these overpayments to public servants and to finally protect taxpayers?

Hon. Helena Jaczek (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think most of us in the House know that the Phoenix system has been very frustrating for our employees, and we are working very hard so that those employees are paid accurately and on time. We recognize the stress and hardship it has had on employees and their families, and we are committed to making it right. We prioritize cases that can have a large impact on the employee's pay. We have made significant steps to help stabilize the Phoenix pay system, and we continue to work with all stakeholders, including unions and employment—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Sudbury.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we all know that the diversification of export markets for our agricultural products is crucial for the development of the sector and that the Indo-Pacific region has high growth potential.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell the House about the most recent initiative to facilitate our agriculture exports to that region?

• (1200)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that just a few hours ago the Prime Minister announced the creation of an Indo-Pacific office for agriculture and agri-food. That is excellent news for our agricultural producers and our exporters of excellent Canadian food, as we know. The team will be able to help them remove trade barriers, diversify markets, increase exports, grow our economy and obviously continue to contribute to global food security.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, imagine the people watching the answers this morning while having to choose between heating and eating in a cold Saskatchewan winter. Imagine them ordering small amounts of heating fuel that last only a few days, because they simply cannot afford any more. Imagine their desperation. Suppliers are low-

ering their delivery thresholds and are compassionately extending credit to people, knowing they may never get paid.

Will the current NDP-Liberal coalition commit to ending its plan to triple the carbon tax on home heating fuel, gas and groceries, or does it simply not care?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thinking, and I think all of us are thinking, about hard-working Canadian families today. The families I am thinking about are those making \$90,000 or less who, until now, have had to make a tough choice between buying groceries and paying their rent or taking their kid to the dentist. For those families we have some relief today. What we are saying is they can take their kid under 12 to the dentist and they will get \$650 to do it.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Madam Speaker, according to Regina Food Bank CEO, John Bailey, food bank use in Saskatchewan is up 37% this year. More fully employed working families are turning to food banks just to make ends meet, and with winter on the way and home heating costs set to rise, the problem will only get worse.

Will the Liberals end their inflationary spending and cancel their plan to triple taxes on groceries, gas and home heating?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we absolutely agree that hard-working Canadian families need some support now, and that is why I am just astonished that the Conservatives opposed dental care for kids under 12. I am astonished that they opposed sending \$500 to two million Canadian families struggling to pay their rent, but they do have a chance to do the right thing. Hard-working Canadian families do need help, and that is why we are enhancing the Canada workers benefit with \$2,400 to a working family. I hope that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, government members continue to blame everyone else but themselves for the affordability crisis plaguing Canadians across the country. The NDP-Liberals stay in luxurious \$6,000-a-night hotels and tell Canadians to cancel their Disney+ subscriptions, as if saving \$14 a month will afford groceries, gas and home heating.

When will the government stop the tax hikes and stop its inflationary spending already?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about hard-working Canadians, unionized working Canadians. Our government believes in supporting them, and that is why one of the first things we did was repeal anti-worker Harper legislation: Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. If the Conservatives really want to support Canadian working people, they should promise never again to put forward anti-worker legislation.

* * *

DENTAL CARE

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I also want to highlight the great news we received yesterday that Bill C-31 received royal assent. While the Conservatives opposed the bill, to prevent kids from receiving affordable dental care this year, the government stood up for Canadian families and put forward real solutions to make life more affordable. These are solutions, not slogans.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health highlight how the government is delivering on dental care for Canadian families and also for families in my riding?

• (1205)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a real honour and privilege to stand on behalf of the Minister of Health today and thank and congratulate the member for Pontiac for her hard work and advocacy, particularly for Canadians living in rural communities across the country.

Indeed, with the royal assent to Bill C-31, over half a million kids will visit the dentist this and next year, kids who do not have dental insurance and otherwise would not have been able to visit the dentist. This is an affordability measure. This is a health care measure. This is how we take care of families on this side of the House. This will have positive impacts across this country, including for families right across the river in Pontiac.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, over the past few weeks, the Liberal government has met several times with its Indian counterparts, but we have seen no statements from the government calling out the ongoing persecution of minorities in India, including Sikhs, Muslims, women and other minority groups. The Indian government must respect the human rights of all Indian citizens, and Canada must call it out when those rights are denied.

At a time when the Indo-Pacific region is becoming more important than ever, why is Canada remaining silent on the horrendous human rights abuses taking place in India?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada attaches great importance to the protection and promotion of human rights globally, including in India. Canada and India share many values, including a commitment to democracy and strong people-to-people ties. This provides the basis for frank and respectful dialogue on is-

Oral Questions

sues, including human rights, which the Minister of Foreign Affairs has raised with her foreign counterpart.

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FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, this Sunday is World Children's Day. It is observed internationally.

My constituent Raffi, whom many members will know, is an advocate for children's rights and for Canada to be a child-honouring society, yet the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly asked Canada to live up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by putting in place an advocate or an ombudsman at the national level to advocate for children, their well-being and their rights.

Can the government update us as to whether there has been any progress in moving toward the creation of a national point person to advocate for our children?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her tireless advocacy on behalf of children from coast to coast to coast.

We are committed to protecting children's rights and providing the support they need to live up to their full potential. To support children, we introduced the Canada child benefit, which has lifted over 435,000 children out of poverty. We are building a nationwide system of high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive child care. We are consulting with Canadians on a national school food policy to help ensure children are well nourished. We are providing up to \$1,300 over two years through a Canada dental benefit for children under 12.

We will keep listening to children, as well as child and youth advocates, and we will continue to explore more options to incorporate a children's rights lens into our policy-making.

Mr. Bryan May: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During question period, I witnessed a non-member of Parliament come to the window door across from me, wave to somebody in the House and start taking photographs with a camera. I think this is an opportunity to mention to all members of the House what the rules are when they have their staff in the House or visitors, and to remind them that those kinds of things are not allowed.

Routine Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I appreciate the hon. member's reminder. Absolutely, we know that picture-taking is not allowed in the chamber, and I would like everybody to remind their staffers of said rules.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, just to add to that point of order, it is well established that when the mace is on the table, pictures in the chamber are not permitted, so if there were pictures being taken from a caucus room, that should be looked into.

● (1210)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Certainly, those pictures should be destroyed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 12 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

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PETITIONS

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and proud to stand to present petition e-4072. This petition was signed by 8,129 Canadians and it hopes to effect change for tens of thousands more Canadians.

The petition calls on the government to remove the ROE codes that identify unvaccinated employees. It also calls for the government to retroactively reinstate eligibility for Canadian EI benefits that were harshly taken away from them because of a personal decision not to be vaccinated. Workers are forced to pay EI, yet the government unjustly chose to strip the rights of Canadians to receive these benefits. These actions caused financial hardship to Canadians who were just exercising their personal freedoms.

On a personal note, I want to thank Dan Janssen for bringing this petition forward. Dan is a member of the Machinists Union. He and I do not always politically align, but on this issue we do.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Mégantic—L'Érable on a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I just want to reassure all members of the House that the messages about taking photos through the lobby windows have been heard and that the photographs that were taken have been deleted.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for reporting that to the House.

Once again, that is something that must not be done in the House or even in the lobbies.

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from the people of Port Moody—Coquitlam, Anmore and Belcarra. They are concerned about the current and rising levels of poverty among persons with disabilities and they want it to change.

Today, I present this petition on their behalf. These concerned Canadian citizens call upon the Government of Canada to end the current practice of legislated poverty of Canadians living with disabilities, and establish a federal disability benefit that upholds human rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and sustainable development goal number one of no poverty by putting in place the Canada disability benefit act.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, residents of Canada are calling on the Government of Canada to have nothing to do with purchasing Kinder Morgan's pipeline and continuing construction as a Crown corporation of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

* * *

● (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, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 846 and 850.

[Text]

Question No. 846—**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:**

With regard to the government's response to the report by the City of Calgary's corporate planning and financial services, which indicated that the federal government's proposed clean electricity regulations that would increase electricity prices in Alberta by \$45 billion over 15 years: has the government's analysis also reached the same conclusion, and, if not, what are the government's estimates with regard to the proposed regulations' effect on Alberta's electricity prices?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is developing clean electricity regulations, or CER, to help drive progress towards a net-zero electricity grid by 2035. The proposed regulations have yet to be finalized. They are being designed to ensure the decarbonization of Canada's already low-carbon grid while ensuring continued energy reliability and affordability. The decarbonization of our electricity grid is an essential prerequisite to achieving a net-zero economy by 2050, as it will enable the electrification of many activities currently supported by emitting sources of energy. This critical energy transition is being supported by the investments that the government is making in clean electricity infrastructure and technology development.

As with all regulatory initiatives, the Government of Canada is undertaking detailed analysis to understand the costs and benefits of the CER for Canadians. These estimates will be included in the regulatory impact analysis statement, or RIAS, which will accompany the publication of the draft regulations in Canada Gazette, part I, or CGI.

Work is progressing on the draft regulations and the accompanying RIAS for CGI publication. A public comment period will follow the publication enabling the government to account for further input on the RIAS and the regulations before finalizing them.

Question No. 850—Ms. Michelle Ferreri:

With regard to the interim dental benefit provisions in Bill C-31, An Act respecting cost of living relief measures related to dental care and rental housing: (a) what are the estimated costs to administer the dental program (i) in the 2022-23 fiscal year, (ii) throughout the interim program, from October 2022 to June 2024; and (b) what is the breakdown, by standard object, of (a)(i) and (ii)?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to part (a) of the question, per the Prime Minister's news release of September 13, 2022, the total cost for this two-year interim benefit, including both the administrative cost of delivering the benefit and the funds disbursed to Canadians, is estimated at \$938 million. This is fully covered within the funding announced for dental care in budget 2022.

The distribution of this amount is \$352 million for the 2022-23 fiscal year and \$586 million for the remainder of the duration of the program, which is 2023-24 and 2024-25.

In response to part (b), a breakdown by standard object is not available at this time.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 845 and 847 to 849 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 845—Mr. Corey Tochor:

With regard to the resumption of in-person services at Veterans Affairs Canada area offices across Canada, on an appointment-only basis, broken down by area of office and by month since January 1, 2022: how many in-person visits through appointments were made by veterans and how many different veterans made such visits?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 847—Mrs. Laila Goodridge:

With regard to the federal carbon tax or price on carbon, broken down by year, since fiscal year 2019-20: how much has been collected in the Province of Alberta (i) in total, (ii) broken down by industry?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 848—Mr. Brad Vis:

With regard to the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI): (a) how many projects have been funded to date; (b) how many units do the projects in (a) represent; (c) what is the breakdown, by province or territory and by municipality of the (i) number of projects, (ii) number of units; and (d) what are the details of all RHI projects funded to date for Indigenous housing, including the (i) location, (ii) project description, (iii) number of units, (iv) expected completion date?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 849—Mr. Blake Richards:

With regard to falconry services obtained or used by the government since 2016, broken down by department or agency: (a) what are the details of all instances where the government has used falconry services, including, for each, (i) the date, (ii) the location, (iii) a summary of the situation, including reasons for using falconry, (iv) what was accomplished with falconry; (b) what are the details of all contracts related to falconry, including, for each, (i) the date, (ii) the vendor, (iii) the value, (iv) the start and end dates of the falconry services, (v) a summary of goods or services, (vi) the number of falcons covered by the contract; and (c) for each contract in (b), was it awarded through a sole-source contract or a competitive bidding process?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

FALL ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2022

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-32, An Act to implement certain provisions of the fall economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 3, 2022 and certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak today and I would like to point out that I am on indigenous lands.

[English]

It is Algonquin and Anishinabe land, and I am honoured to be here on behalf of my constituents from Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Today we are taking up Bill C-32, the legislative interpretation of the Minister of Finance's fall economic statement, as tabled on November 4. I will start with the things I like about the bill. I want to be clear that I will be voting in favour of it, but I will be bringing forward amendments, assuming the bill gets through second reading and we see it at committee, which I think is a foregone conclusion.

Government Orders

In any case, the bill is primarily focused, in its substance, on a number of promises that have to do with making housing more affordable, such as reducing speculation in the residential housing market with really substantial measures, which I am pleased to see, to discourage the flipping of real estate properties. As to first-time homebuyer opportunities, the first-time homebuyers' tax credit is being substantially increased. We are also seeing cuts on interest rates on student loans.

We are seeing a number of measures that one could generally categorize as making life more affordable, and I am pleased to see those measures. Clearly, there are things in the bill that are long overdue. I am also pleased that on facing the climate crisis, although there is very little, we have one good measure: phasing out the flow-through shares for oil, gas and coal activities. In other words, we are stopping one of the many tax advantages offered to fossil fuels.

However, there is a lot to discuss that flows from the fall economic statement that is not in the legislation. With the Speaker's indulgence, I will concentrate more on what is missing than on what is here.

I would like to read from the fall economic statement. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, in the introduction before we get into the substantial part of the statement, calls for a green transition and then says this requires "an industrial transformation comparable in scale only to the Industrial Revolution itself". I completely agree with that. I would say that perhaps it is an industrial transformation that is quite comparable to what Canada's economy went through in the Second World War. These are not incremental steps. This is fundamental and transformational, and that is what is required.

The hon. minister put this forward in connection with a 1903 quote from Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, who said in this place when it was in Centre Block that we cannot wait for transformation. He was referring to building a transcontinental railway and said that this transformation would change "the conditions of our national life which it would be folly to ignore and a crime to overlook."

I agree with all of those words, but the ambition embedded in those words is completely lacking in Bill C-32. Looking ahead to the spring budget and identifying what is missing, I want to reflect a bit on the timing, the urgency, what I hope to see and what all Canadians should put pressure on the government to deliver by spring.

In contrast, looking south of the border, it is very interesting to me that President Joe Biden managed to get through a very ambitious climate plan, but the name of his bill is the Inflation Reduction Act. The target is inflation, and it will in fact reduce inflation, but the measures are ambitious climate-related measures that Canada has not yet undertaken. The U.S., of course, must do more as well.

As we stand here today, our delegates and friends from this chamber, such as my friend from Kitchener Centre and the Minister of Environment, are at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where they just decided to extend the meeting that was slated to adjourn

today. It is extended until midnight tomorrow as progress has not been made.

We are running out of time, quite literally. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, opened COP27 by saying that the world was on "a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator." We have an obligation not to allow our children and grandchildren to live in a climate hell, yet everything we have done so far as a nation has fallen dramatically short of what is required to meet our obligations under the science and meet our international obligations to attempt to hold to less than 1.5°C global warming and stay as far below 2°C as possible.

It is getting impossible, even for an optimist like me, to imagine that we can hold to 1.5°C. We are on track to nearly double that. However, let us look at what we would do if we were serious. I will start by looking at what should be in the next budget and what the government should do, because it is not too late. It is desperately close to too late, but it is not too late.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

We need to stop increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Obviously, it is impossible to reach the targets set by the Paris Agreement with increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions. We must act quickly and also accept the idea that the era of fossil fuels is almost over.

[*English*]

It will not be tomorrow, but we have to accept that our dependency on fossil fuels must end, and soon. It was very disappointing to read that at COP27, within the last 24 hours, Canada rejected the language that we had accepted in Glasgow last year, that we are working towards the phase-out of coal. Most countries, many of our allies, were prepared to say, let us say "coal and oil and gas". Canada said we could not say we were going to phase out oil and gas, on any timeline. Of course we cannot do that in two weeks. Can we do it in ten years? Probably not. However, the goal must be to phase out all fossil fuels, or we are indeed headed on the highway to climate hell.

When Sir Wilfrid Laurier talked about linking the country, east to west, with a railway, what is the modern climate equivalent of that? It is an east-west electricity grid: 100% renewably sourced electricity must be able to flow from one province to the other and north to the territories. Right now, our provincial monopolistic utilities want to sell only one way: south. They sell south for their profits, and that is fine and good, but the grid could operate like the giant battery we really need.

Government Orders

Let us look at where we would be if we considered the links between inflation and climate action. That is an important place to start. We need to stop thinking in silos, in other words, and start thinking holistically.

A lightbulb went off for me recently. I was talking to a friend who is an Alberta grain farmer. I asked how they had survived the very brutal drought. His answer was that it would have been really bad because they had planted barley and only got in about half the crop they would have gotten in a normal year without the extreme drought, but because of the war in Ukraine, the price of grain was so high that in the end they kind of had a good year.

What does that say? It says that when Canadian consumers are looking at increased prices for pasta and increased prices for bread products, it is a combination of things that have nothing to do with the type of demand-driven inflation that we had in the early 1970s.

Food costs are going to keep going up, because the climate crisis will continue to interrupt the growing seasons and will continue to deliver what we had for a lot of farmers and livestock producers in southern British Columbia, when atmospheric rivers killed tens of thousands of animals, mostly chickens. We have droughts that mean farmers cannot plant crops and have a good return.

That is a real cost increase. It is not about spending by the government that drives up inflation because it is demand-driven by people needing more wages. These are real cost increases.

That means we also have to be prepared for extreme weather events, and we are not. The government has postponed the delivery of the adaptation strategy until next year. Yesterday the Auditor General told us that in the case of first nations communities, 112 approved infrastructure grants that would help first nations and other indigenous communities prepare for extreme weather events were not funded by the department, just through pure delays.

There is much to be done in this country to take us from laggard, and as many people know, this week we were rated among the worst-performing industrialized countries on climate. We could still propel ourselves to leader. We could take care of our farmers, our agriculture and our economic future, at the same time as ensuring that our kids live in a livable, hospitable world. We have an obligation to do so.

• (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many things I could make reference to in regard to the fall economic statement.

However, I am very curious about what the Green Party's position is, and more specifically what the member's position is in regard to nuclear power. Does she feel there is a role for nuclear power in Canada?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to parse the hon. parliamentary secretary's question a bit more by saying that there is no case for new nuclear installations in order to avoid climate hell. There is a case for maintaining existing operating reactors and phasing them out when they come to the end of their natural lifespan.

I encourage everyone in this place to examine energy alternatives by a couple of a firm criteria, such as the tons of carbon eliminated per dollar invested; the jobs created per dollar invested; and how long it is, from the moment it is given approval, before energy flows from that development.

Even excluding the unsolved problem of nuclear waste, the link to nuclear proliferation in the military and the risk of accidents, and even if we put that all to the side and say we are prepared to believe we will escape all those problems, it does not make economic sense to go nuclear.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague is very much focused on demonizing the oil and gas industry. She focused her initial comments on the reversal of flow-through funds, so-called Canadian development expenses and Canadian exploration expenses, which I think she should acknowledge in her response here were disposed of by the government several years ago. All it is doing is fast-tracking the un-deployment of those funds, so it is really a very small amount.

I wonder if my colleague can tell the House how small a portion of this fall economic statement that is? It has already been baked in by every industry across Canada.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague nailed it. The reality is that this fall economic statement has virtually nothing new on climate at all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I know that she is very concerned about climate change. I would like to know whether she shares my frustration about the battle that is not being waged and the results that are not being achieved in the House.

We know that the Conservatives to our right are not interested in the fight against climate changes. They do not have a plan. On the other side of the House, the Liberals are not interested in it either, but they pretend that they are. As members can see, they are not getting results. The government continues to invest \$8.5 billion U.S. per year in fossil fuels. Greenhouse gas emissions have risen since the Liberals took office, but they give grand speeches about the fight against climate change and the importance of the green transition. We are caught between a majority of members here who are not interested in climate change.

What are the solutions? I would like to know whether my colleague has any ideas.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my respected colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his question.

Government Orders

He is absolutely right. However, I believe that many members here think, as individuals and human beings, that we are in an urgent situation and it is unacceptable to continue with the Liberals' fraudulent policies or the Conservatives' policies of denial.

We have to do more, urgently. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, says that we cannot wait another decade and we must act before 2025 if we want to limit warming to 1.5°C or 2°C. This situation is a threat to human civilization.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's intervention was very interesting. I noticed that she is wearing a sustainable development goals pin. One of the things that I find most frustrating is that we have a government that claims to have a feminist international assistance policy. We have a government that speaks about being a feminist government that will perhaps, one day, provide a feminist foreign policy, yet we know the impacts on women and girls from climate change around the world are deeply disparate.

Can my colleague talk a little about those impacts and ways in which Canada and the Canadian government could do more to protect those who are most vulnerable, women and girls around the world?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, even though this is not a climate impact, my thoughts are ever with the women in Afghanistan who are at risk from the Taliban, including some prominent feminists we need to help.

I will also say that obviously, in any society, when things are desperate, whether through war such as in Ukraine, or through extreme drought, or through things like hurricane Fiona, it is the women who face the impacts. They are generally less economically empowered than the men in countries around the world, and it is they who take care of their parents and their children. Women are also the majority of farmers around the world.

All those impacts from climate crises particularly affect women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity I have been given to take part in today's debate on Bill C-32 on the 2022 fall economic statement.

In short, Bill C-32 is nothing but minor legislative amendments or a hodgepodge of measures announced in the spring budget that had not been incorporated into the first budget implementation bill adopted in June.

What are the concerns that we hear people talk about daily? It is the cost of living that keeps going up and a possible recession and yet there is no measure to address this new economic reality. It is very disappointing and a missed opportunity.

It is unfortunate to end up with an economic update that mentions inflation 108 times without offering any extra help to people who are vulnerable or alternative solutions when, again, a recession is on the horizon for 2023.

Bill C-32 is a bill that fails to address the major challenges facing our society. The government identifies the problem of the rising cost of living but does nothing beyond naming it. It talks of tough days ahead this winter without making any plans to get through it.

Families, seniors, pensioners, the unemployed and workers cannot take it anymore. They are at their wits' end. The price of gas, groceries, clothing, rent and everything else is going up. People are having to cut back everywhere, do without and make choices: Do I put food on the table or do I buy winter clothes for my kids? Do I buy medicine or do I put gas in the car? These are the kinds of tough choices that most people face.

Bill C-32 includes measures to help people buy their first home. I recognize that that is a good measure, but not everyone can afford to buy a house or wants to buy a house, and those individuals need housing, especially affordable housing.

As we know, the appalling lack of housing in Nunavik can have serious, and I would even say very grave, consequences. Because of limited space, young children are sleeping in the same beds as adults, which poses a risk of death by accidental asphyxiation. Sometimes children are even crushed and die of asphyxiation in their sleep. That is unacceptable. Overcrowded housing has been identified as a recurrent risk factor.

The coroner's office has recommended that the government inject funds into housing specifically in Nunavik. The construction of social housing in Nunavik would solve the problem of the death of infants and young children, as well as other public health problems. When will the government take action? It is urgent. We are talking about saving lives.

Last week, I was in my riding, Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. As members know, it is a vast riding and I represent almost half of Quebec. I met with the CAO of the Vallée-de-l'Or RCM, who spoke to me about the housing shortage. The wheel keeps turning. Housing problems mean labour shortages and an inability to attract people to the region. We cannot stop the wheel from turning. People are tired and demoralized. They cannot manage.

People come to work in our area to make good money and then they return home. They do not buy locally, and so there is no local economy. It is an ongoing problem in Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. What can we do to keep our foreign workers? We must also improve the immigration process, which is very slow. It is outrageous. I feel as though the government is abandoning our regions.

The Bloc Québécois asked the government to focus on its fundamental responsibilities toward vulnerable people by increasing health transfers, providing adequate support to those aged 65 and over and urgently reforming employment insurance, which we know is the best stabilizer in times of economic difficulty.

Sadly, the government dismissed all of those good suggestions. We can therefore only denounce this as a missed opportunity to help Quebecers deal with the tough times that they are already going through or may face in the months to come.

The government itself is making some grim economic predictions without ever considering any of the opposition's proposals as to how to prepare ourselves. Where is the logic in that?

• (1235)

Quebec and the other provinces are unanimously asking the government to immediately, permanently and unconditionally increase health transfers. Emergency rooms everywhere are overflowing. What is the government waiting for to transfer funds?

In addition, people between the ages of 65 and 74 continue to be denied the increase to old age security, which they need more than ever before. This is unthinkable. I have trouble understanding why the government has created two classes of seniors. It is unfair. Seniors live on fixed incomes, so they cannot deal with such a sharp rise in the cost of living in real time. They are the people most likely to have to make tough choices at the grocery store or the pharmacy.

To add to this, the government continues to penalize those who are less well-off and who would like to work more without losing their benefits. Unlike the federal government, inflation does not discriminate against seniors based on their age. Contrary to what the government says, starving seniors aged 65 to 75 will not encourage them to remain employed. That is done by no longer penalizing them when they work.

What about people who lose their jobs and have to rely on EI? For all intents and purposes, the EI system has been dismantled over the years. Currently, six out of 10 workers who lose their jobs do not qualify for EI. This is a serious problem in these tough times. The government promised reform seven years ago, and time is running out. We need EI reform. It is crucially important that we not be forced to cobble together a new CERB to offset the system's shortcomings if recession hits. As we saw during the pandemic, improvised programs are expensive and ineffective. With the looming threat of recession, there is an urgent need to rebuild the system to avoid a repeat of what we went through in 2020.

As the Bloc Québécois critic for families, children and social development, I would be remiss if I did not talk about the plight of some of our children in these tough times given the possibility of a recession. Yesterday morning, I had a chance to meet with people from the Breakfast Club, an organization that was founded in Quebec in 1994. Thanks to them, many children have access to the healthy food that is essential to their success. Thanks to them, children do not start their day on an empty stomach.

Some businesses have shut down because of the pandemic, and this has led to an increase in unemployment and poverty. Food inse-

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curity is affecting a growing number of people. Experts believe that food insecurity could double in Canada by the end of the year. The government is making efforts and investing money, but it is still not enough. In 2020, nearly one in seven people in Canada lived in a household that had experienced food insecurity in the previous 30 days. Nearly 2.1 million households experienced food insecurity. That is a 39% increase from 2017-18 data.

One thing is clear: Things are not getting any better under this government. Our children need to have full bellies in order to reach their full potential. It is also important to note the shortage of children's medicine in our pharmacies. It is impossible to provide adequate care to our young people because the shelves are empty.

It is the same story for all of our constituents. Where will it all end?

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the member opposite's comments, I would like to encourage her to recognize that yes, inflation is very significant and is having an impact, but when we do a comparison around the world, Canada is doing exceptionally well in the inflation fight.

That does not mean we should not put in efforts, and we have been putting in efforts, focusing on the hardships that Canadians are having to go through on a daily basis. That is why, for example, we have a dental program. We have a rental program. We have a student program. We have the enhanced GST rebates.

All of these are there to put more money in the pockets of Canadians in all regions of the country, yet the member seemed to completely overlook that the government has been there.

Is she aware of how many of the provincial governments are contributing to putting money in the pockets of Canadians? Is there a provincial example she can cite that we can take a look at?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I must say that Quebec is doing more than Canada. In fact, Canada often follows the example of Quebec when it comes to dental insurance. The problem is that the federal government is not supporting people aged 65 to 74. It has forgotten about them. It has also overlooked the regions when it comes to tax credits. It has overlooked Quebec when it comes to the needs of self-employed workers and immigration.

What can people do? People need government supports. It is time for the government to take concrete action.

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Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member. I did not see any funds for health care in Bill C-32.

Is the member concerned that the government is not doing enough for health care?

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her good question.

The Bloc Québécois has not forgotten about health. It is important for the federal government to deliver health transfers. All the ministers met with the government to discuss this, but no action was taken. This is important because we see what is happening in hospitals everywhere, both in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. Everyone is exhausted. It is important that the government finally take action on health transfers.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last election we heard loud and clear from Canadians that they wanted us to go to Parliament and work for them and stop the partisan bickering and fighting. We see the Bloc and Conservatives continuing with that.

New Democrats pushed to get the doubling of the GST tax credit, and that is making a huge difference. We pushed for the investigation into profiteering in the grocery chains. We pushed for the national dental care program, which, despite the Bloc's claims, will cover many people in Quebec who are not covered now, and we pushed to get support for low-income housing renters. The big issue for us right now for this winter is taking the HST off home heating, because people cannot afford to heat their homes due to the high price of fuel.

We know the Bloc has opposed every measure that helps people. Does the Bloc support the New Democratic plan to take HST off home heating to help people get through this winter?

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his multiple questions.

I will begin with dental care. In Quebec, we have a much more comprehensive program than the one Canada wants to establish. We are asking for support even though dental insurance will be offered everywhere in Canada, but it seems that it will not be proportional.

With respect to the credit, we have asked for it twice and nothing is happening with that either. We are asking the government to take action. It is like creating Christmas magic and then Santa Claus disappears. That is what the government is doing.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and address the fall economic statement, as delivered by Canada's Minister of Finance over a week ago, but I want to go through some things in this speech. I have to limit my comments, because there is a lot to go through here, and I think the House will appreciate that I am going to focus on only a few things.

Number one is that there is some good news here. That good news, of course, is that Canada collected \$30 billion in extra tax revenue over the last year. We can call that good news, but there is a dark side to it as well. However, \$30 billion more arrived in government coffers than we thought was going to be there last year, and that is really good forecasting, on behalf of the Department of Finance and the minister herself. I give her my congratulations. However, not to be outdone, of course, the minister decided to spend an additional \$16 billion of that \$30-billion windfall that she put onto the backs of Canadians.

Let us think about how government revenue goes up. Government revenue goes up in an inflationary environment because the price of everything goes up, and therefore its collection of revenue on everything goes up. Do people's paycheques go up? They absolutely do not. The government's revenue has gone up, in GST, in collections on excise tax, and on income tax. All of this has gone up, and corporate taxes have as well, but the one main factor here that contributed \$30 billion extra to the government's coffers was an increase in resource revenues.

Revenues from the resource industry, because of a scarcity of resources around the world, went up in Canada, as they did everywhere else around the world, and Canada's resource industry provided more revenue to government, along with Canadians, who were taxed more and gave more to the government.

Inflationary taxes are one thing. Resource sector contributions are quite another, but Canadians need to realize that the government is getting more revenue because they are not doing as well. They do not have as much take-home pay. More of it is going into the government's hands, and still it forecasts a deficit of \$39 billion after a resource windfall that landed in the government's pockets.

We can forget about the effect that continued spending will have on inflation, because government spending is the number one cause of inflation. Over the past two and a half years, \$500 billion has caused excessive inflation in the Canadian economy. The over-spending has been rampant. Our debt is double what it was before the government got into power. It is an anomaly in the world, and we need to address it.

The effect on Canadians in that respect, if we think of an average Canadian in an average house with an average mortgage, and I am speculating that the mortgage is on a variable rate basis, will be an extra \$7,000 per year because of the higher interest rates caused by the inflationary environment the government has produced. That is \$7,000 a year more on top of more taxes being paid by Canadians and more going to the banks. Who is doing well in this inflationary environment, and who is not doing so well? I can tell members right now that Canadian taxpayers are not doing that well.

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However, the minister has to acknowledge as well, as she does in her document, and I need to point it out very clearly to her here, that there will be \$24 billion this year in debt service payments and \$34 billion next year in debt service payments, and the year after it will be \$44 billion going from Canadians' taxes into debt service payments. It will go from \$24 billion to \$44 billion because of an adjustment in interest rates and continued government over-spending. That \$44 billion is more than the federal government gives to the provinces for health care, so this has become a major item in the government's balance sheet and income statement.

It is something we are going to have to address. I suggest we address it sooner rather than later. Perhaps that extra \$16 billion the minister found under her pillow could have been used for some debt reduction, so we would not have that \$44-billion bill, \$20 billion higher than this year, two years from now. It is something we need to start focusing on, and she did use some words in her speech. I read those words, and I heard those words as well.

• (1250)

She talked about prudent fiscal management, but this is anything but prudent, and she talked about keeping powder dry. I do not know how running a \$39-billion deficit in a supposedly inflationary economy is keeping powder dry. It is burning their powder so they will not have any powder going forward.

Just to say thanks to the main source of the windfall gains, the resource sector, the minister acquiesced to some shrill voices of public opinion from her bench and the benches of some of the other parties in the House. She said she is going to have a 2% tax on the share buybacks that these industries are incurring in Canada. I do not know where she has been for the last seven years, but I can say that the companies that are doing share buybacks now are the companies that issued shares at far lower prices over the last seven years. Therefore, they are reconfiguring their balance sheets back to where they were when they had a normal business environment and they did not have to incur hundreds of billions of dollars in losses, as an industry, over seven years.

At that point in time, of course, there were some on the benches who were saying that this was a sunset industry and of course it was going to lose millions of dollars. All of a sudden, one year it makes some money for its investors, and the government comes back to say it needs to tax that back now because it does not want them buying back their shares from investors. Instead, it wants them to reinvest that money in the Canadian economy.

How do they do both? How do they say that there is an impetus to actually reinvest in the Canadian economy and not buy back shares after they have invested so much and taken so much money into their balance sheet, which they had to do in tough times in order to survive?

Let us think about a 2% tax on share buybacks as far as it affects everything in the world. It is the flavour of the day in so many respects. We think about the 1% share buyback mechanism in the States, and we are not to be outdone here. We doubled it in Canada because the resource industry is much less important in Canada than it is in the United States. I say that sarcastically, and I hope that is reflected.

However, profits increased for a reason. Profits increased because an industry is actually cyclical. All our resource industries in the world are cyclical. These things go up, and these things go down. They cannot take with one hand and not give back with the other if they are going to have a sustained industry here going forward.

Here is the issue on investment in Canadian oil and gas. Oil and gas investment in Canada follows international oil and gas pricing, but not anymore. Oil prices and gas prices are going up, but the investment is not happening in the Canadian economy anymore. That is because there is no longer an environment to invest in and there is no longer transparency for Canadian companies to invest in their own industry, which is an industry that we prosper at and that we perform in a more environmentally friendly manner than any other industry in the world. This is something we should be proud of, and this is something we need to make sure we do more of. The result, of course, is fewer tax-paying jobs for Canadians. The minister could get out of the way and actually get more money into her coffers if she just allowed this to happen.

There are fewer jobs, less investment in Canada, less green technology development in Canada, fewer future taxes to be paid and a lower Canadian dollar because of the government's actions. A lower Canadian dollar affects all Canadians because we get so many of our goods from other markets. That means we are paying more Canadian dollars to get the same goods that cost the same in U.S. dollars, British pounds, euros, yuan, or yen, or whatever the currency of where we are importing from at that point in time. We have devalued ourselves because of that.

There is a lack of transparency in what the government wants to accomplish. Any industry that wants to build something in Canada is now subject to an Impact Assessment Act, which has complete lack of transparency. That means that the stakeholders in the critical minerals industry the government wants are wondering how they can do this, and they cannot do this. Looking at the examples shown in our natural resources industry of the building of a pipeline for liquid natural gas exports, we are slow in Canada.

With respect to who has prospered over the last decade, the U.S. has prospered mightily. Australia and Qatar have prospered, as has Mozambique, that beacon of investment in the world, while Canada has not. They all have opportunities that are inferior to Canada's, except for one thing, which is that Canada has an inferior regulatory regime. These investments are not coming back, and the minister's numbers show that. To do better, we need a better fall economic statement.

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● (1255)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in Windsor—Tecumseh, we have referred to the fall economic statement as a workers' budget. One of the items in there is the first-ever labour provision in the clean tech tax credit. We would be providing breaks for companies that invest in communities, such as Windsor, if they pay their workers better and if they hire apprentices. I would love to ask the hon. member what he thinks about the workers' fall economic statement and about the labour provisions in the clean tech tax credit.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I am glad my colleague asked me that question because one thing I did not get to in my speech is the trillions of dollars the minister speaks about that is available for investment in Canada and these clean jobs that are just going to come because she is designing the Canada growth fund.

Is this on top of the Canada Infrastructure Bank at \$31 billion, the strategic investment fund at \$7 billion spent so far, the clean fuels fund, and the zero-emission vehicle infrastructure program? These are all billions of dollars going into artificial jobs. None of these jobs, net net, are beneficial to the Canadian taxpayer because we are throwing more money into acquiring them than they are going to pay in taxes at the end of the day.

Great, jobs are coming. Could we get some jobs that are economically sustainable?

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member. What we all should be doing is working for jobs for workers, making sure that we have family-sustaining unionized jobs across the country.

I do not think the government has done enough for Alberta. I will say that the Conservative Alberta government has a \$13-billion surplus, yet it has not invested in our community. It has not invested in workers. In fact, Alberta is one of only two provinces that has fewer businesses operating today than pre-pandemic.

Would the member agree that there is an opportunity for the federal government to do more to invest more in Alberta because, when we see governments like our provincial government not investing in Albertans and not investing in Alberta workers, what happens is the jobs leave, and we end up with massive surpluses that do not help Albertans and do not help Canadians?

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I would challenge my colleague on that assertion because this year Alberta did have a surplus largely because of excess resource revenue. That one-year budget surplus combats a six-year budget deficit, and those were large budget deficits. The deficits that Alberta incurred over the last number of years significantly eclipsed the surplus.

The wise decision any government should make at this point, when it finds a windfall surplus like that, is to pay down the debt it incurred in those times of challenge. Now we have one year where we have some money, we should not throw it back at programs. My last numbers show the Alberta economy is the best-performing economy in Canada as far as getting jobs back. Spending more money is just government money that would inflate things as opposed to creating any sustainable jobs.

● (1300)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's speech was well thought out and well researched.

In her speech introducing the fall economic statement a couple of weeks ago, the Liberal Minister of Finance highlighted, once again, the lack of productivity in Canada's economy, something that she called the Achilles' heel, a well-known gap.

Does my colleague see anything in the fall economic statement that is going to have any meaningful impact in narrowing the gap of our productivity numbers as compared to our trading nations?

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question.

The minister presented the case that Canada's investments from private sector investment is still 10% below the amount it was when her government came into power, and it has consistently been there. It went down to 20% below during COVID, of course it fell worldwide. However, we are still 10% below, where every other country in the G7 and the G20 has rebounded significantly.

The government is trying to replace investment money with government money, and it is not working. It needs to take the lesson that no matter how many billions of taxpayer dollars it throws at the wall, it is not going to create an investment opportunity that would bring capital here for anything more than a subsidy. We need to get sustainable jobs back here in Canada that are productive.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today for the people of Barrie—Innisfil, representing them as their member of Parliament, to talk about the fall economic statement.

Let me begin by saying that those who are residents of Barrie—Innisfil and the businesses within Barrie—Innisfil are really feeling the inflation and the affordability crisis that is happening right now. Despite the rosy picture painted by the government, this lollipops, gumdrops, rainbows and unicorns scenario, people are finding the affordability factor to be real. They are hurting. Businesses are hurting. People are wondering, as we head into the winter heating season, how they are going to heat their house.

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I hear from seniors and families all the time about their circumstances and how bad things really are, particularly for seniors on fixed incomes who are making healthy nutrition choices about what they are going to eat. This should never be happening in a G7 country such as Canada, yet it is, and the government sits here with the fall economic statement somehow portraying this rosy picture, when in fact it is not the case.

I am just one of 338 representatives in this place, but I know from talking to my colleagues that they are hearing about it. I am sure those on the Liberal and NDP benches, and others, are hearing about the problem of inflation and affordability, the housing crisis and the issue of rent prices. We are hearing about the affordability and attainability situation with houses and about the many young people who are being priced out of the market. They are losing their hopes, their dignity and their dreams of aspiring to be a homeowner, which is being lost as a result of the self-inflicted wound of inflation and affordability that has been caused by the Liberal government.

I have spoken to many young people, not just within my riding but also across Canada. They feel like they have been lied to and let down by the Prime Minister and the government. I will go so far as to say that they are despondent. They are despondent they are not going to have the same opportunities, hopes and dreams as earlier generations. Something has to change, and this fall economic statement does nothing to change the current situation.

What is required here, and I know Conservatives put this forward in advance of the fall economic statement, is the need to lower taxes. We need to put a halt on the carbon taxes, stop the payroll taxes and the CPP taxes, which are impacting not only the people who are employed but also employers. We did fire a warning shot across the government's bow that we would support the fall economic statement if certain measures were put in, but this one was not. It was that, for every new dollar being spent, the government would find a dollar in savings from government waste. There is nothing in the fall economic statement that actually addresses that.

In fact, I read the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report this week, and interestingly, in it he talks about an additional \$14.2 billion in spending with no indication at all of how that money is going to be spent. One would think a government, when proposing \$14.2 billion in additional spending in its fall economic statement, would at least have line by line items or details on what it is going to spend that money on. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that there was nothing in the fall economic statement to give that indication.

Here we are, as parliamentarians, looking over a fall economic statement that talks about billions and billions of dollars in additional spending without the ability to hold the government to account or ask those questions on a line-by-line basis. The government and the Prime Minister expect we are just going to willy-nilly pass this thing through.

That is not the function of Parliament. It is not the function of parliamentarians. Our function is to hold the government to account, and the government needs to reciprocate that by being as transparent as it can. The fall economic statement, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, does little of that. Those were the

two criteria we set, and we gave the government ample advice and ample warning that we would support the fall economic statement if those two issues were met, and neither one was.

• (1305)

We find ourselves in a situation right now where, yes, we are going to dispute the fall economic statement. No, we are not able to support the measures the government is going to implement, because it did not abide by those simple principles, like every Canadian family does: If we are going to spend something, then we have to find those dollars.

Throughout COVID, we have seen a lot of wasteful spending. In fact, recent reports show that \$200 billion of the \$500 billion that was purportedly allocated toward COVID measures were actually not put toward COVID measures. Where did the money go? We are starting to find out. There was the multi-million dollar arrive scam app. We found out about \$240 million in ventilators that were never used. There was \$150 million for SNC-Lavalin to provide field hospitals that were never built.

Parliamentarians on this side of the House have every right to question government spending. They have every right to question what is in budgets and in this fall economic statement. I know the government does not like that, but that is our job.

As I said at the outset, there are many things going on around the country, not just in Barrie—Innisfil, but it is important to highlight some of the challenges this inflationary and affordability crisis is causing for Canadians.

Debt interest payment costs have doubled this year. Next year, interest payments will be nearly as much as the Canada health transfer. We are back in that cycle again, under a Liberal government, where the cost of servicing debt is more than the health transfers that are provided to the provinces. Something has to give. It always does when we increase debt and deficits. One of two things happens, which we are certainly seeing this with the government: Taxes go up or services get cut.

Interest rates, as we all know, are increasing at the fastest rate in decades. Families that bought a typical home five years ago, with a typical mortgage that is now up for renewal, are paying \$7,000 more a year. The Bank of Canada has signalled that interest rates will have to continue to rise even higher, and that will continue the pain.

I mentioned the carbon tax earlier, and that is expected to triple. This is despite the promise of the Prime Minister heading into the 2019 election that it was going to be capped at \$50 a tonne. A year after that election, the government announced that the carbon tax was going to increase to \$170 a tonne. That is a threefold-plus increase in the carbon tax.

Who is paying for that? Homeowners are paying for it with home heating, hydro, groceries and everything else. Wholesalers and producers are paying that on the manufacturing and production side, and they are passing that down to the consumers. It is having a cascading effect across the economy. The government's argument is that this is what it needs to do to fight climate change.

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We found out this week from COP27 that Canada ranks 58th out of 64 in the world for a reduction of carbon emissions. Clearly, the plan is not working, but Canadians are suffering as a result of the carbon tax that is being imposed. The government will then again argue that more families in Canada are getting more money back than what they pay in the carbon tax. The Parliamentary Budget Officer again says that is not true. The government picks and chooses what it wants to hear from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who is an independent agent of Parliament, but when he tells the truth, it does not like the truth.

That is part of the problem that exists today. Liberals are not living in reality. They have lost touch. Their ideology will not allow them to solve the problems that they have created with respect to inflation. Until and unless we get to a point where we reduce government spending, or at least if there is new spending then attach it to dollars found and start reducing taxes to make life more affordable and attainable for Canadians, this situation will be prolonged for a long time. Canadians will continue to suffer, and the only way that we can change that is with a change in government.

• (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member has an issue in terms of credibility. He talks about the price on pollution, and let me use that as an example. The Conservative Party of Canada, in the last federal election, campaigned on a price on pollution. It supported it. It has taken a complete 180° change on that. In other words, it did a flip-flop. Now the Conservatives call it the carbon tax once again, and they are going to get rid of it.

Then the member says that the residents of Winnipeg North and Canadians are paying more than they are receiving. The Parliamentary Budget Officer also made it very clear that, dollar for dollar, 80% of the constituents of Winnipeg North are receiving more than they are paying into it.

The member is trying to give a false impression. There is an independent budget officer saying that 80% of the residents of Winnipeg North and others are receiving more than they are paying into it.

What would he say to that particular report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I encourage the member to read what is in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report and how that impacts Canadians across the country, not just in Winnipeg North.

I can speak to my issue in Barrie—Innisfil. The carbon tax is disproportionately affecting individuals and businesses. People need to drive to go to work, need to heat their homes and need to eat. Businesses that are providing goods and services are being charged a carbon tax and they are not getting any rebate back. It is a tax. It is not a price on carbon. It is disproportionately affecting a majority of people across the country.

Leger did a poll this week, and 71% of Canadians want the carbon tax eliminated, because they know it is having an impact on them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech. I would like to talk to him about the rhetoric coming from the party in power.

In the spring budget, the government said that the supply chain issue needed to be addressed, but no measure was proposed. In the fall economic statement, it is the same thing. It talks about supply chains, but no concrete measure is proposed to deal with the issue.

The government is doing the same thing again with the issue of inflation. The word “inflation” comes up 108 times in the economic statement, but there is no new measure other than the ones that we already voted on in the House this fall or that were announced in the spring budget.

Would the hon. member agree that there is a disparity between the rhetoric and the actions that are actually taken?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, it has been that way for seven years: a lot of rhetoric, fine words and plans, but the plans fail.

[*English*]

Look at what is happening in this country. I cited some things earlier. Again, 1.5 million people are going to food banks in a G7 country. What is happening in this country, as a result of these Liberals, is broken policies everywhere.

I can go on. I can talk about passports. The list is as long as the day, of the failures of this government and the broken promises it has made.

• (1315)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is quite right when he references the fact that Canada raced to the bottom of industrialized countries in terms of our climate performance.

In fact, throughout the previous Conservative government and the current, since 2015, Liberal government, no federal government has gotten the direction right. They set reduction targets for carbon; however, with the exception of the 2008 financial crisis when carbon went down and the 2019-20 difference over COVID, without a pandemic or economic collapse no government has gotten the direction right to start bringing emissions down.

There are ways to reduce emissions that do not involve carbon pricing. I happen to support carbon pricing. It is a necessary but insufficient condition.

What would this member recommend that we do to reduce emissions rapidly?

Government Orders

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, maybe there is a reason our emissions are not going down as quickly as we would like. I know that the hon. member, whom I have respect for, is not going to like this.

Canada represents a small portion of emissions around the world. I think the solution for Canada is to reduce emissions around the world by supplying clean Canadian energy, which has the best environmental standards, the best labour standards and the best human rights standards in the world, to those emerging democracies and those emerging countries that are carbon intensive.

If we want to help, let us help the world.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise on behalf of my community in Kelowna—Lake Country.

This fall economic statement leaves people concerned about how out of touch the Liberal government is here in Ottawa. People do not understand how common sense never seems to be able to enter the thinking of the costly Liberal-NDP coalition. It insists on continuing to mismanage Canada's finances and to make it harder for Canadians and small businesses to manage their own finances.

Less than a month ago, in Windsor, the Liberal finance minister spoke with shocking clarity about the stewardship of the economy she is managing. I will quote her exact words: "Our economy will slow. There will be people whose mortgage rates will rise. Businesses will no longer be booming."

Where has the Liberal finance minister been? Did she just wake up from a seven-year Liberal fairy-tale slumber? Does she not see how crushed businesses are and how dire people's finances are? Does she not read any reports on how small businesses have incurred, on average, \$150,000 in debt over the last two years, or reports on how restaurants are barely hanging on and food bank usage has seen an all-time high?

It was reported this week that Kelowna has the fifth-highest rent prices in all of Canada, only behind Vancouver, Toronto, Burnaby and Victoria. Four out of the top five are in British Columbia. B.C. also consistently has among the highest gas prices in the country; just look around my community of Kelowna—Lake Country.

During the last constituency week, I met with residents and small businesses all week. People were crying. People are desperate. They are considering medical assistance in dying because they cannot afford to live. People cannot heat their homes and are at the breaking point.

After the dire warning from the Liberal finance minister, Canadians were hoping to see the Liberals reining in their spending and cutting taxes. However, now residents in my community are forced to make tough decisions. I was talking with a senior from my community last week who was devastated. He was forced make the tough decision to sell his home because he could not afford to live in it anymore. He does not know what he is going to do.

People in Kelowna—Lake Country are concerned with the possibility of a recession in 2023, yet the Liberal Party continues to spin fairy tales like this fall economic statement. This statement contains no intention of turning back years of out-of-control Liberal spend-

ing that has driven up an inflationary deficit of almost half a trillion dollars. It leaves us with the highest federal debt ever.

The fall economic statement contains no tax relief for young people, families, seniors and persons with disabilities while they struggle to afford painful increases in the price of food, gas and home heating. Instead, the Liberals are squeezing more taxes out of them. So far this year, the Liberals will be taking an extra \$40.1 billion out of people's bank accounts and putting it into the government's bank account. It has no plans to turn off the taps and end the money printing that has driven our generational-high inflation crisis.

The Liberals have a laundry list of benefits they have created that give people a little of their own money back. There are no solutions to help businesses remove the help wanted ads in their windows. There is no plan to refill shelves with essentials like children's fever and pain medication, which is a problem that has been known since July. As usual, the Liberals did nothing on important issues like this for families.

The Liberals are not focusing on what is actually important to families like reducing taxes, getting inflation under control and having basic necessities like medical supplies on store shelves.

Multiple tax increases are still coming in the New Year, such as a drastic rise in excise taxes for Kelowna—Lake Country's local wineries, cideries, breweries and distilleries, along with others across the country. The Liberals call it an escalator tax, which is really a fancy, bureaucratic word for an automatic tax hike. The worst part is that it is tied to inflation, so it will be a bigger increase than ever before, and it will trickle down to retailers, restaurants and consumers.

Conservatives were transparent with our recommendations for this fall economic statement. There is nothing different from what my constituents have been asking for every day. First, cancel all planned tax hikes, including the tripling of the carbon tax. People are already choosing between heating their homes and putting food in fridges. They do not need more tax grabs.

● (1320)

Second is to ensure that there are equivalent savings to match any new spending. Canadians see no benefit from a half-trillion dollar deficit caused by wasteful purchases like the multi-million dollar ArriveCAN app.

Government Orders

Third is to get rid of red tape so our businesses and people can thrive. Red tape is affecting businesses' ability to bring skilled workers in to fill their labour needs. Our natural resources, farmers and manufacturers are all affected. It is like everything is on hold, while the Liberals live in a fairyland.

It is not just the Conservatives that the Liberals are choosing to ignore. The arm's-length, non-partisan Parliamentary Budget Officer's report must disappear like pixie dust as soon as it comes across a Liberal office door. The PBO's latest report proves that there are clear warnings for the country.

First, the PBO estimates that the unemployment rate will increase in 2023, to 5.8%, with a significant factor being people retiring. If the predicted recession hits next year at levels that some economists are projecting, the unemployment rate could undoubtedly increase further, and we will see a move away from "help wanted" signs to companies having to downsize in some sectors, while others will still struggle to get the skilled workers they need.

Food bank usage is already at an all-time high. Food Banks Canada recorded 1.5 million visits to food banks in just one month, which is a 35% increase compared to last year. I fear what increase in usage it will see next year.

Second, the PBO lays out the estimated federal government revenue and debt levels, and states:

Despite the projected decline in the budgetary deficit, public debt charges are projected to more than double from their 2020-21 level (of \$20.4 billion), reaching \$47.6 billion in 2027-28 due to higher interest rates and the additional accumulation of federal debt.

The finance minister talks about how the federal debt should be lower. However, although it is the highest ever in Canada, the PBO reports that the public debt charges will be more than double. What does that mean? It means we are paying more for that debt. A comparison is like doubling the interest we would be charged on our monthly credit card bill. As we make our payments, our bill total could slowly decrease, but every dollar we put in would be worth less. As it will take much longer to pay the debt off, we will end up paying a lot more.

Third is the record-high inflation. The PBO's estimates show federal government revenues increasing yearly until 2028, and the estimated increase is more than \$40 billion from 2022 to 2024. We all know inflation has been as high as 8.1% this year, with food costs being even higher, and the government's revenue increase is primarily due to higher inflation adding tax revenue. In addition, the government's increases in payroll tax, excise tax and carbon tax will all bring in more revenue.

Those increased tax dollars to the government's coffers based on inflation and tax increases do not reflect a robust economy. I spoke with a small business owner from my community last week who said that she is making the tough decision to raise her rates, as she just cannot keep absorbing the higher costs. She feels bad for her clients, but she held off as long as she could.

I spoke with a resident from Joe Rich. I attended a fundraiser last weekend for residents. These are people in our community who cannot afford food, fuel or medicine. She said people do not have money to buy wood pellets to heat their homes; they cannot afford

to eat and cannot afford to buy gas to drive the half hour back and forth to buy medicine and food. She has never seen things so bad in her lifetime.

I spoke with a man in his twenties who is now helping his parents with their mortgage payment because, with the high interest rates, his parents cannot afford to pay everything on their own. This young man is now putting his own future on hold.

This is Canada. What is wrong with the Liberals? Why can they not see how serious this is?

Our Conservative team will continue to stand up for real tax relief to help Canadian seniors, families, young adults, small businesses and non-profits. People are looking for hope, and I will stand up for the people and small businesses of Kelowna—Lake Country in voting against the government's continued disregard for our cost of living crisis.

● (1325)

BILL C-32—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bill Blair (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-32, an act to implement certain provisions of the fall economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 3, 2022 and certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022.

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

SECOND READING

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-32, An Act to implement certain provisions of the fall economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 3, 2022 and certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the member and the Conservatives talk about taxes, one thing that always amazes me is they will refer to the CPP. They look at the CPP as a tax increase. Because there would be more money invested in the CPP, they are calling it a tax on Canadians. However, the money being contributed to the CPP ensures that when it comes time to retire, workers have more money in their pockets. When the Conservatives attack that issue, they are actually attacking the workers and their ability to retire with more funds.

When they talk about the price on pollution, the very thing they supported in the last federal election, they leave out the fact that there are increases in the environment fund, which is putting more money into Canadians' pockets.

Can the member explain why, on those two aspects—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, there are many people who have referred to payroll taxes as taxes, both members in the House on the government side and people from reputable organizations in Canada.

We are referring to this because it is affecting people. We are looking at what is affecting people today. Inflation is at a 40-year high, and people cannot afford to put gas in their cars or buy food. Now is not the time for us to be increasing costs, including any taxes that people would have to bear.

Also on that front, this includes adding costs for small businesses. As I mentioned in my speech, many small businesses took on \$150,000 in extra debt during the pandemic, and they have no way to pay it off. Now, by adding these payroll charges, they will have to pay an extra amount. It is taking money out of their bank accounts, and they are unable to pay off debt or spend money on anything else they want.

With respect to the carbon tax—

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give time for one last question.

The hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I am shocked and outraged. As soon as the member finished her speech, the President of the Privy Council and Minister of Emergency Preparedness rose to announce that he was going to limit debate on Bill C-32. That is really shameful and offensive.

Private Members' Business

Why does the government always want to limit debate in the House, particularly when we know that this bill will be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, when we are beginning a pre-study on it right now with a sunset clause, and when we are going to do the clause-by-clause study in a few days—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order.

The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country has a few seconds to answer because the time is up.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely right. We see the government continually bringing forth the collapse of debate in the House. There are many times when had speeches prepared to speak up on behalf of my community of Kelowna—Lake Country and my time was cancelled. The government continues to do that.

We are sent here and elected to represent our communities, bring their voices forth and bring their positions forth so that we can potentially bring them to committee.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

PENSION PROTECTION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-228, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-228, today at third reading. It was successfully passed as amended at the finance committee. Bill C-228 is centred on pension protection, working to prevent the loss of pensions for employees whose companies have declared bankruptcy.

Private Members' Business

Canadians deserve to know that the contributions they have made their whole lives will result in a secure financial future for themselves and their families, but the last few years have shown us that security can disappear in a moment. My bill would remedy this issue.

The bill would do three things. First, it would require that an annual report on the solvency of pension funds be tabled here in the House of Commons for greater transparency and oversight. Second, it would provide a mechanism to transfer funds into a pension fund to restore it to solvency. Finally, in the case of bankruptcy, pensions would be paid out ahead of large creditors and executive bonuses. The acceptance so far by this Parliament and the good work that has been done on the bill by all parties show that there is a common spirit and desire to improve pension security for Canadians. For that, the House has my sincere thanks.

Over the last 10 years, efforts by many parties and senators have been put forward to introduce bills to improve pension protection in Canada. I cherry-picked from all the ideas that were previously supported in the House and put them together in Bill C-228. Learning from both the numerous cases of company collapse and the various pension protection bills that came before to improve pension protection in a way we can all live with is my goal here today.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

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

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

According to CBC, at the end of 2016, former Nortel employees were pleased with the agreement they reached under which they would get a payout of 40¢ on the dollar. That was an improvement over the 10¢ on the dollar they were initially offered.

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

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

[*English*]

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

about \$133 million. In 2017, Sears Canada declared bankruptcy after attempting to restructure. During the restructuring, Sears Canada faced heavy criticism for giving retention bonuses to 43 executives and senior managers, but it did not plan to offer severance to laid-off employees. Allegedly, the bonuses were intended to maintain the morale of senior staff at the cost of providing necessary funds for the company's pension plan, leaving more than 17,000 pensioners cheated of their full pensions.

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

Looking back further, when the T. Eaton Company folded in 1999, the vast majority of its 24,500 employees were terminated without being paid termination pay and severance pay, as well as other amounts owed to them. All employee and retiree health and other benefits were cancelled. In the end, the liquidator released payments to employees and retirees of just 53.7 cents on the dollar. There are several other noted cases where courts have ruled in favour of creditors and lenders over pensioners, including Indalex, Stelco and Grant Forest Products among others.

In the Indalex case, Indalex Limited obtained creditor protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, also known as the CCAA. The court authorized Indalex to obtain debtor in possession, or DIP, financing, which would provide the company with loans to continue operating its businesses during the restructuring period. These DIP lenders had superior priority over the existing debt, equity and other claims.

At a hearing for approval of this motion in 2008, two groups of pension claimants opposed this distribution, asserting that the assets equal to the funding deficiencies in the two defined-benefit pension plans administered by Indalex were deemed to be held in trust and should be given to the pension plans in priority over the DIP lenders. The CCAA court ruled in favour of the DIP lenders, not the pensioners. This decision was upheld and became a precedent for the Grant Forest Products case. Sadly, many other examples of workers who did not receive their full pensions exist.

Private Members' Business

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

There is no doubt that this has been a problem for a long time. The government needs to intervene by taking stringent measures to rectify this and protect Canadian workers.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of some of my House of Commons colleagues. Many MPs from all parties have come to see me to propose bills on this same topic.

[*English*]

Currently there is a requirement for an annual report on the solvency of a fund, but it goes to the superintendent of finance, and it is not clear what, if any, actions are taken. In fact from 2003 to 2020, there is evidence that companies continued to have insolvent pension funds. My bill would require this report to be tabled here for greater transparency and oversight. Currently the average federally managed fund is at 109% solvency, so it is a good time to implement the measures of this bill.

The second part of the bill is to allow companies with insolvent pension funds to transfer additional funds from other assets in the business into the pension fund, without tax implications, to make it solvent.

In October 2017 and again in 2020, the Bloc member for Manicouagan introduced her private member's bill, Bill C-253, which would amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the CCAA. The bill would provide priority status for pensions in the event of bankruptcy proceedings. This bill ultimately made it to committee, but died on the Order Paper when the Liberals called the election. I have incorporated her bill here with some suggestions brought forward.

There was concern that implementing an immediate priority for pensions could have unintended consequences. The suggestion was to have the coming into force of the reporting on the insolvency of funds to happen immediately, along with a mechanism to top up the fund and restore it to solvency. However, it was recommended to have several years for companies to get their funds in order before implementing the priority part.

Five years was the period suggested originally in the bill, but there were stakeholders who preferred to see it be three years. At committee, we were able to come to a compromise of four years for the coming into force of the priority portion of the bill. I want to also acknowledge that the Liberal member for Whitby sponsored an e-petition on pension protection, supporting this very issue.

My bill has been reviewed by a variety of stakeholders, from the Canadian Labour Congress to financial institutions and many pension associations nationally, including the Canadian Federation of Pensioners and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons.

Bill VanGorder, the chief operating officer of CARP, offered this quote:

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

[*Translation*]

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

This is part of the reason why the implementation schedule should allow time for companies with insolvent funds to get their finances in order. I would like to point out that, if a company cannot restore the solvency of its fund within four years, it should indeed pay a higher interest rate to obtain credit because it really does present a higher risk.

[*English*]

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

An amendment was brought forward by the member for Elmwood—Transcona to include severance and termination pay at the same priority as pensions, ahead of secured creditors, and it was presented at finance committee. Indeed, discussions were held with all parties regarding this, and at second reading I said I would support this measure.

However, it was ruled out of scope by the clerk and the chair of the finance committee. The committee then voted in the majority to overturn the ruling of the chair and add this amendment to the bill.

Subsequently, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader asked for a Speaker's ruling to eliminate the amendment since it was out of scope. The Speaker did rule it out of scope, and that amendment does not appear in the bill.

I respect the decision of the Speaker, although I am disappointed that this addition did not go forward, since I think people should receive their severance in the case of bankruptcy. However, with the priority falling after secured creditors, preferred creditors and unsecured creditors, it is unlikely they will get it, which contravenes the law in many provinces. In Ontario, for example, the law is that people get a minimum of one week of salary for every year of service.

Private Members' Business

Other amendments at committee included the deletion of clause 6, which eliminated a mechanism to get third party insurance on the insolvent portion of a pension fund. No one seemed to think this was as brilliant an idea as I originally thought. Clause 7 was also deleted to clean up sections 8.1 and 8.2, which were holdovers from previous legislation.

I want to thank everyone who helped to improve my bill at committee, and for passing it there expediently to bring it to this stage.

In summary, I am now asking all members of the House and the Senate to work to get this bill over the finish line and truly improve pension security for Canadians. We are so close. Let this 44th Parliament be the one to ensure that Canadians are able to live with dignity into their golden years.

Our continued efforts will ensure that Canadians are able to support themselves and their families with the pensions they have worked over a lifetime to earn. Please vote to support Bill C-228.

● (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there has always been a great deal of concern whenever we hear of bankruptcies and employees being taken advantage of, especially when we hear highlights of executive pay that is definitely unreasonable. A while back we passed some legislation that made it a little more transparent, allowing courts to claw back in situations of that nature.

I was not at the committee, but I am very curious about whether any exploratory work was done on that issue.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, obviously there were full-some discussions on all the topics, with stakeholders and at committee.

One thing I am really disappointed about, though, is that the member opposite spoke against the unanimous consent motion that we brought to the House to try to restore the severance priority into the bill. People deserve to get their severance when companies go bankrupt, and I would encourage the parliamentary secretary to add this to the government's omnibus budget bill when it comes up in March.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to sincerely commend all the work that the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton has done on her private member's bill, Bill C-228. As she so clearly explained again, it is a very important bill to better protect retirees who are entitled to a defined benefit package.

I want to commend her cross-party approach. We were able to work with members from each party and set aside partisan differences for the common good of workers and retirees. I tip my hat to the member.

Since this is a period for questions or comments, I will take the opportunity to make a comment. I tip my hat to the member. As she said, this issue has been raised so often in the House, and she is the one who finally managed, through her approach, to bring all the members of the House together to truly change people's lives.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, the member for Manicouagan and all those who helped with this bill.

Indeed, what Canadians really want is for us to work together to improve our country.

● (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday, on the record, the member for Winnipeg North said that he had said “no” to including protection for termination and severance pay in this bill, even though the will of the committee was to proceed with that protection. Today he said on the record that he was not at the committee where this was discussed and where the bill sponsor appeared to say that she felt very strongly this was part of the scope of the bill.

Why is it that somebody who was not there for the conversation, by his own admission, can stand up in this place to oppose good protection approved by a majority of finance committee members, which he did, again by his own admission, yesterday by saying “no” to unanimous consent?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I am equally troubled at why the Liberals, and the member for Winnipeg North especially, do not want to support Canadian workers who need their severance pay. This is really troubling, and now they have put them behind bankers, large creditors and executive bonuses. It is just really disappointing to me. The government has an opportunity to rectify this error and put that amendment into its omnibus budget bill when it comes in March.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am really pleased to have an opportunity to speak at this moment in the history of Bill C-228 and extend my deep appreciation to the member for Sarnia—Lambton. There have been many attempts in this place to ensure workers are secured creditors in bankruptcy. It should not be so hard. I will be voting for her bill with enthusiasm and merely want to thank her.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite and all members who are supportive of the bill. I do believe, now that the controversial severance amendment is out, every member of the House will support the bill. I look forward to that and a little more debate on it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-228. We are studying this bill at third reading in the House after it was examined by the Standing Committee on Finance.

[English]

As reported back to the House by the committee, Bill C-228 would amend the treatment of pension claims in proceedings under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, or BIA, and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, the CCAA.

Under current law, unfunded pension liabilities and unpaid special payments are unsecured claims. Unfunded pension liabilities are the shortfall between a fund's current assets and amounts owed to pensioners. Pension special payments are additional contributions by employers that are sometimes required under pension legislation to reduce a pension deficit over time.

Bill C-228 would give both these pension claims a superpriority. In BIA bankruptcies and receiverships, pension claims would be paid out ahead of secured, preferred and unsecured claims. CCAA and BIA restructuring plans would need to provide for the payment of pension claims to obtain court approval.

[Translation]

As originally drafted, Bill C-228 provided for a five-year transition period before the pension changes took effect. The bill that was sent back to the House after study in committee provides for a four-year transition period, as proposed by the government members.

[English]

Bill C-228 would also amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985, or PBSA, under the responsibility of the Minister of Finance. The only PBSA amendment, as reported back by the committee, would amend the federal superintendent of financial institutions' existing requirement for an annual report to the Minister of Finance on the operation of the PBSA, which is tabled in Parliament. It would add additional content to this report related to the funding requirements of a federally regulated pension plan under the PBSA and require it to be transmitted to provincial counterparts.

I would note that Bill C-228, as referred to committee by the House, dealt with the treatment of both federal and provincial private pensions in insolvency proceedings under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, or BIA; the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, or CCAA; and the regulation of federal pensions under the PBSA.

• (1355)

[Translation]

However, during the clause-by-clause study of Bill C-228, the committee broadened the scope of the bill beyond pensions by adding a new privileged claim for termination and severance pay owed to a worker by a bankrupt employer under the federal or provincial employment standards legislation or a collective agreement.

These amounts are currently considered unsecured debt. Under the amended Bill C-228, these debts would be paid in full before the claims of any other unsecured creditor.

The government clearly explained in the House and in committee that it understands the challenges that an employer's bankruptcy can present for retirees, current employees and their community. We

Private Members' Business

continue to listen to the concerns expressed by Canadians on the important issues of retirement security, wage protection, and termination and severance pay.

Our government has taken measures to improve the retirement income and security of all Canadians, including retirees, and to improve the protection of Canadian workers who are owed unpaid wages and termination and severance pay by their bankrupt employers.

[English]

No one in the House doubts that Bill C-228 was introduced with good intentions in the interests of pensioners. Having said that, we should be mindful in our continuing debate on the bill that significant concerns were raised by expert witnesses and pension plan administrators during committee study that a superpriority for pension claims may have unintended negative consequences for both pensioners and employees of insolvent employers and the much larger number of pensioners and employees in the Canadian workplace as a whole.

We should also take serious note of the fact that the new preferred claim for termination and severance pay was introduced only during the committee's clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. As such, the committee did not have the benefit of the views of the House at second reading on this new priority claim. It also did not have the opportunity to hear the testimony of expert witnesses and ask questions regarding its potential impact on different employee groups, as well as other stakeholders and creditors in an insolvency proceeding.

[Translation]

Even though all members of the House share the desire of protecting the interests of retirees, we must also consider the significant negative consequences that a superpriority of the unfunded liabilities of a defined benefit pension plan could have for pensioners, employees, businesses and Canadian employers.

First, this superpriority can only protect pensioners from the consequences of the employer's bankruptcy in certain cases. We all know about past cases of bankruptcy where the pension plan deficits were very large, sometimes in the billions of dollars.

During study in committee of Bill C-228 and similar private member bills, experts, lenders, promoters of pension plans and employers, and even certain unions, noted that a superpriority would not guarantee that pensioners would be fully protected in the event of an employer's bankruptcy if the employer did not have sufficient assets to cover the liability.

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[English]

It is also crucial that we take note in our deliberations of the potential impact of a pension claim superpriority on the incentives of pension plan sponsors to continue to provide defined benefit pension plans to current employees. During the committee's study of the bill, pension plan experts and plan sponsors predicted that as many as 40% of private plan sponsors could terminate their defined benefit pension plans during the bill's transition period if Bill C-228 were to pass with a superpriority.

Private defined benefit pension plans currently have 1.2 million active employee members who are still accruing defined benefit pension entitlements. We should be very careful about the potential impact of a superpriority on these employees when we consider whether to support Bill C-228, as reported by the committee.

● (1400)

[Translation]

In some cases, retirees and workers are better served if the company can enter into a restructuring agreement and continue operations, which means pension and benefit plans would be funded.

Let us keep in mind that there have been successful restructurings involving unfunded pension liabilities that have taken place under the current processes in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act—including Stelco, AbitibiBowater and Air Canada—where pension benefits were preserved even though the pension plans were significantly underfunded at the time of insolvency.

[English]

As we consider how to best protect pensioners and workers, we must also consider ways to balance the potential credit consequences of a pension superpriority for employers with pension plans. Lenders will price and allocate credit based on the risks of default and non-payment. If a pension deficit is payable ahead of all other claims, a responsible lender must take this risk into account, either through higher interest costs or reduced credit amounts.

The government made important changes to insolvency and corporate laws in 2019 to protect pensioner and worker interests in an employer insolvency. Corporate restructuring was made fairer, more transparent and more accessible for pensioners and workers. Federal corporate law amendments better aligned corporate incentives with the interests of workers and retirees, and provided greater scrutiny of corporate decision-making. Finally, Canada further improved its strong regulation of federal pension plans that already require full solvency funding.

[Translation]

While these measures have improved the retirement and security of employees, the government has also listened to the voices of pensioners and considered more balanced ways to protect their interests rather than a superpriority.

While no OECD country gives unfunded pension liabilities a superpriority—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the hon. member because the time is up.

The hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by informing the House that Quebec is currently in mourning. We just learned of the death of Jean Lapointe, a great writer, composer, performer, actor and comedian who was very involved in society.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to extend my sincere condolences to his son, Jean-Marie, to his family, friends and loved ones, and to all Quebecers. We will remember him for his comedy shows and his songs. He used to say that we learn to live through song. Many of his acting roles had a profound effect on me. Take, for example, his role in the series *Duplessis*, where he did an extraordinary job of playing “Le Chef”, his roles in various films by my favourite filmmaker Marc-André Forcier, and the role he played in *Les ordres*. We pay tribute to his memory, his political commitment and the rehabilitation centre that bears his name.

Farewell Jean Lapointe, and thank you.

Let us now talk about the important Bill C-228

We are at third reading of this bill in the House of Commons. That is amazing. I want to sincerely congratulate the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for her masterful sponsorship of this bill and for managing to build consensus around a common goal. In committee, members of all parties contributed to the bill, including people like the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, who participated in the work and helped improve the bill.

In the House this afternoon, we are beginning third reading of a bill that will make a difference in people's lives, in the lives of workers and especially of the retirees who are entitled to these pensions.

As everyone has acknowledged, there have been several instances in recent decades when companies declared bankruptcy and their defined benefit pension funds were underfunded. That had a devastating impact on the company's retirees. They could no longer collect their full pension because the pension fund they were entitled to was underfunded.

In life, in a market economy based on supply and demand and capitalism, there are risks and bankruptcies occur. If a worker sees his company close and declare bankruptcy, it is a difficult situation, but that person will try to find another job and get on with their life.

What happens to pensioners? As the member for Sarnia—Lambton was saying, what happens to people who are 70 or 75 years old and depend on their pension when they suddenly learn that the company is bankrupt? The company has failed to meet its obligations and pensioners will no longer receive their pension, which is often the minimum amount required to live well or to survive. Those pensioners will no longer receive the full amount. They might lose half of their pension, for example, but they are too old and do not have the energy or the strength to return to work. These are terrible situations, unspeakable human tragedies. That is what Bill C-228 would fix.

It truly is an extremely important bill. I am very pleased that it has reached third reading stage. I look forward to it receiving royal assent and making a real difference in people's lives.

I also want to acknowledge all the hard work done by my colleague from Manicouagan who was especially invested in this bill. She had introduced a similar bill in a previous Parliament that did not make it through the House. She continued trying, working with the member for Sarnia—Lambton, to see Bill C-228 through the legislative process.

My colleague from Manicouagan has been working closely with union members representing the workers who have gone through this kind of human problem. It was really a good faith, goodwill approach. What can we do to better protect workers? We know that a pension plan is a form of deferred wages.

• (1405)

During the negotiation, the union and management decide on salary and the terms and conditions. A lower salary is accepted in exchange for entitlement to group insurance or more generous pension funds, for example. The pension is therefore a type of deferred salary, and workers are entitled to it. However, we know that under the law, a company can underfund their pension fund for several years and allow shareholders to make more money on the backs of workers because it is failing in its duty.

This bill would make pension funds a greater priority for creditor payment in the event of a bankruptcy. This would take some of the pressure off the shoulders of workers and retired workers and would improve things. As the member for Sudbury said, if this bill is passed, it will not solve every problem. There is no ironclad guarantee and not everything will be resolved. The risk will remain, but it will not be as high. What this bill does is give particular consideration to underfunded pension funds and give them higher priority for creditor payment in the event of a bankruptcy.

One thing we observed in committee and in studies of similar bills was that none of the experts who came to talk to us, including unions, said they should be the top priority. Both pensioners and union members told us they want to give the company a chance to restructure, refinance and come up with a plan to save itself from bankruptcy.

This bill gives mortgage holders priority over pension funds. Everyone recognizes that that is important, although the Liberal Party still seems unsure. Some of our Standing Committee on Finance colleagues are, anyway. I have had personal conversations with a

Private Members' Business

few ministers. Judging from the Liberal member's speech on this bill, there still seems to be some confusion about this.

This is about giving pension funds higher priority while still enabling the company to restructure to avoid bankruptcy. That is what everyone here wants, obviously. That is a very important element.

Several cases have been mentioned, including Sears, Stelco, Nor-tel, Cliff Natural Resources and White Birch. In all of those cases, the pension plan was not fully funded when the company went bankrupt and the workers are the ones who got shortchanged.

As the Liberal member for Sudbury was saying, pension fund managers, large corporations, or the employer, came to see us to say that they did not really like this. Obviously, they do not like this because they will have to fully fund the pension plans and recognize that the amount owed to workers must be included in the financial statements and paid within a few years, with the necessary flexibility. In my opinion, we found a good balance, but it means less money for shareholders and less money for executives simply because they are being forced to pay what they owe.

The Liberal member who spoke before me did not mention that. Every time the employer or pension fund managers raised an argument, the seniors' advocacy organizations and unions responded clearly and simply by proving that the argument did not hold water.

Employers tried to scare people. The Liberal Party still brings that up, but every argument raised in committee was immediately refuted by parties representing pensioners' interests. Fear tactics are often employed when economic issues and other somewhat complex issues come up. In this case, I think the committee did a good job of rebutting fear-based arguments.

I feel absolutely confident about this bill, but it does not fix every problem pensioners face. There is still a degree of risk, but it is lower. Employers do not like this because they know they will make less money. That is true, but they have to pay what they owe, plain and simple.

In closing, I want to once again acknowledge the incredible work of the member for Sarnia—Lambton. As I said, I am the member for Joliette, and the Quebec MNA for Joliette was Véronique Hivon, a person who was all about cross-party collaboration and always tried to prioritize the common good over partisanship. She accomplished a lot in that respect, and the member for Sarnia—Lambton has accomplished just as much here. I thank her and congratulate her.

Private Members' Business

● (1410)

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am quite pleased to be rising in debate on third reading of Bill C-228. There have been many attempts in the past to try to secure pension protection for workers when their companies go bankrupt. I believe this is the furthest we have come so far, and that has been the result of some good cross-party collaboration, which is often what it takes to be able to accomplish things for workers in this place.

I want to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for her collaborative and conciliatory attitude in trying to move her bill forward.

[Translation]

I would also like to thank the member for Manicouagan for her work on this matter and for her co-operation during the negotiations.

[English]

I also want to recognize the work of one of my former colleagues, Scott Duvall, who did a lot of work on this subject over two Parliaments and essentially developed the private member's bill that I was honoured to present in this Parliament on the very same issue.

This bill is an interesting case study, if we look at the process it has been through, of how difficult it can be to achieve things for the working people of Canada.

There always seem to be roadblocks and hiccups, and we do not see those same kinds of roadblocks usually put up when the government is trying to do something for corporate Canada. Those things tend to run pretty smoothly. Sometimes New Democrats try to slow it down, but we have only so many seats in this place. That is up to Canadians. That is why we are always working hard to elect more New Democrats so that we have more of an ability to ensure that corporate Canada does not have the run of this place.

In order to get something done for workers, it usually takes some kind of coming together of many disparate things in the right order, at the right time and in the right place. That is pretty hard to do.

We saw that, just the other day, with the member for Winnipeg North. There was some agreement not only to protect the pensions of workers when their companies go bankrupt, but also to go above and beyond and to really do the right thing.

We saw this in the case of Sears workers as well. It was not just their pensions that they lost, but there was a lot of controversy over their severance and termination pay at that time, millions of dollars.

We now have a Parliament that was prepared to do that for working people. Instead, with some procedural fig leaves, we saw the member for Winnipeg North get up and exclude what I take to be a really important part of the bill as it came out, amended, from committee, without actually speaking to the substantive issue.

We just heard from another Liberal MP on this, who did not address the issue of termination and severance pay and why the government was so keen to remove that from the bill.

I think that they owe workers an explanation on the substance of the matter, not on the parliamentary procedure but on why it was that, when there was just about a parliamentary consensus, and if it were not for the Liberals there would have been a parliamentary consensus on the fact that it makes sense to protect the termination and severance pay of workers, why they blew that up, instead of seeing it for the opportunity that it was to do right by workers and to have a gold standard when it comes to protecting them in the case of bankruptcy.

As I said, it is hard to accomplish things for workers in this place. I know because I am part of a caucus that works relentlessly to try to do that.

The Liberals ran on a promise to do better when it came to bargaining collectively with our public servants. In fact, the Prime Minister wrote them all a very nice note when he first got elected, and said that things were going to change, that it was not going to be like it was under the Harper years, when those guys would go for years without a collective agreement.

I met just last week with representatives of a public sector union who represent the thousands of people in Elmwood—Transcona who work at the tax centre. What are they telling us? They have been a year without a contract. The government will not make a wage offer. They are having to go to some kind of mediation because they cannot get the government bargaining in good faith. We see that far too often.

Frankly, when Conservatives have been in government, we have seen that lack of good faith and difficulty in getting contracts for public servants too. That is part of why it is very difficult to get things done for workers in this place.

In the previous government, we saw Bill C-525 and Bill C-377. Folks in the labour movement will remember those bills because they made it easy to decertify a union. They made it harder to certify a union, and they would have required unions to inappropriately disclose their financial position, which matters if one is thinking about a strike, for instance, in order to make the case for better wages and working conditions.

● (1415)

If the employer knows how much is in a strike fund, it is very easy for them to develop a strategy to exhaust the strike, so that was something that was not good, and the Liberals promised to get rid of it. They did, finally. It took a long time after they came to power for Bill C-4 in the 42nd Parliament to pass. I remember encouraging them to do it a lot more quickly. It did not take a lot of time for them to try to pass a deferred prosecution agreement arrangement when SNC-Lavalin came knocking and said that was something it wanted. That appeared quickly in a budget bill, and all of a sudden it was getting done, when it took a year for the legislation to repeal Bill C-525 and Bill C-377.

Private Members' Business

We have also seen Liberals and Conservatives stand up in this place over the course of many Parliaments now to legislate workers back to work, because God forbid workers get too uppity. They had to shut that down and make sure they were back at work, doing what they were told and working for the wages the government put in legislation.

The Liberals talked for a long time about anti-scab legislation, but until it was put in a confidence and supply agreement it was very hard to have any confidence they would do it, and they still were not going to do it the right way until the NDP said very clearly that anti-scab legislation should not apply just when there is a lockout, but also when there is a strike. We know the Conservatives are not supportive of anti-scab legislation, and that is why it is hard to get things done around here for workers.

Even for 10 paid sick days during the pandemic, we had to argue again and again that it ought to be done. We are told that next month it should finally be in place. We have had to wait a good long time. Do members know who did not have to wait? It was big companies at the beginning of the pandemic, when big banks and others got access to liquidity very quickly, because the government was concerned about them. We have seen that when the government is concerned, it is able to act quickly, and we often see long delays when it comes to doing the right thing by workers.

I am sick of it, and that is why this has been a very hopeful process, working with the member for Sarnia—Lambton and the member for Manicouagan, because something has been coming together here that is a good thing for workers and that we have been working to institute for a long time.

Not only was it going to be just the next little step, but it was going to be the gold standard. We see again that in this institution there are so many ways to pick off victories for workers, sometimes when we least expect it and sometimes for reasons that appear to have nothing to do with the substance but actually have everything to do with the substance in the bill, because we saw the parliamentary secretary for industry come to the finance committee and sing some kind of big tale and sad song from the financial industry about how hard it was going to be on them and how nobody was ever going to have any access to credit or anything like this. That was right out of the mouth of industry through the mouth of the parliamentary secretary.

These are all arguments that have been considered in the past. Parliament has studied this issue many times before. There was no new information in that. The fact remains that when we have a bankruptcy in this country, it is workers who are left holding the bag. It is wrong, and it should change. When we look at the percentage of businesses that go bankrupt and then the percentage of those that actually have defined benefit pension plans, the fact of the matter is that we are talking about a very small percentage of any one financial institution's portfolio. They can surely bear that risk and carry that load.

Most businesses they invest in succeed. We know that, and that is why we can say with confidence that this is something we can do to protect the pensions of Canadian workers. I wish I were saying we could protect the severance and termination pay also, because we know the big banks and financial institutions are going to get along

just fine. The people we should be concerned about in this place are the people who work for 20 or 30 years and do not get a second chance to have a retirement nest egg.

• (1420)

They depend on that, and they went to work on that understanding, and when something goes wrong that is far beyond their decision-making or control, they need to know that the future they worked for is in place for them, so I am very glad we will be doing that with their pension. I am angry we are not doing that for termination and severance pay because the Liberals decided to go for sneaky tricks instead of a straight-up vote on the issue in this Parliament, and I look forward to working with other members of this place to see if folks in the other place, the Senate, will have the good sense to do what we should have done here.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here, or least to be with the House virtually. It is always an honour to rise on behalf of the good people of Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

I would like to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for her leadership in this Parliament on this issue. God knows we need these issues brought up because, in some cases, the issue around pension reform and the need to resolve it is long standing and has happened over periods, not just of governments, but of decades.

We have two issues in this particular space when it relates to pensions. One is legacy pensions, which is broadly what we are dealing with today. The other one is new ones, meaning that fewer companies are deciding to use the standard defined benefit pension plan. I am just going to take a quick moment to share a few reasons why that is.

Obviously the business environment has changed. Technologies have come in. We have seen new business models operating that challenge the status quo and have created all sorts of issues for legacy businesses as technology continues to change things.

The government tried to deal with this by bringing in Bill C-27 in its first mandate, but that particular bill went nowhere because the government probably did not do its homework and got hung up over one particular area that people were contesting around conversion, the conversion of a defined benefit to a target pension plan.

The reason why I raise this issue is because the government has failed when it comes to addressing both legacy issues, as well as trying to invoke new methods for bringing in benefits, whether they be a target-based benefit or a defined benefit. If we want to see more people having secure retirements, then that is part of the solution. I do not think the government has done a very good job, which brings me back to legacy issues.

Private Members' Business

Defined benefit pensions, those are usually handled, most of the time, by the companies themselves. There is no legislation that says that when they are in a surplus position, who actually owns that. Is it the actual company or is it the pensioners or the current workers? That problem, unfortunately, does not happen that often because it is very seldom that these particular private, defined benefits are running at a surplus. In fact, it is the opposite.

We have seen cases such as Sears. I represent a riding that has a large percentage of seniors. They rely on that income. It breaks one's heart when one finds out that they are no longer going to be receiving the benefit they paid into.

There has been inaction on this by the Liberal government since it came into office, but I would not put it all on them. If we just look to those who are fortunate enough to have a pension program, and it is usually in the public sector, the answer has already been given by successive governments over the decades. If there is a shortfall, the taxpayer will fill that gap. However, for these private pensions, that has not been answered.

Unfortunately, we have seen recessions. We have seen where stock markets have been hit hard, in the early 2000s, obviously in the financial crisis in 2008-09, and the subsequent great recession, and now we are looking at where there is a lot of talk about a possible recession. This is the worst time to be bringing these things up.

When these issues happen, when scarcity is abound, this is where everyone tightens up and demands to have what they are owed. The member for Sarnia—Lambton has been trying, struggling through the process of a private member's bill, working through committee, to put a new balance in place that would at least address this.

We do have the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. Bill C-27 that I referred to earlier did talk about having more rules and oversight in place that would force new target benefits to come up with plans to bring themselves back into a surplus position when there is a drop.

• (1425)

That is really important because joint-sponsored pension plans often have these things where they will, on a temporary basis, cut some secondary benefits to smooth things out, and once the plan comes back into balance, then the regular benefits continue. Those kinds of tools, where a pension plan can smooth out those outflows to make sure there is always a plan to get back into surplus, work. It has been shown in joint-sponsored plans, and it could work in defined benefit programs as well, but the government has a responsibility to start the discussion.

Unfortunately, the government seems to have taken the opinion that, if one touches it, one has basically bought it. It has, so far, de-

cidated not to enter into this space since its retreat from Bill C-27. Again, this country deserves better. It deserves to have both certainty for the existing legacy pension plans out there in the federal space and, I believe, an overall discussion on provincial plans. So far, when it comes to that kind of discussion, successive ministers of finance, whether it be former minister Morneau, who is the minister no more, as I like to joke once in a while, or the current Minister of Finance, they have not made this a priority. Thus, this is where members of Parliament need to fill the gap.

The superpriority, although it is an essential process that has been pointed out by the Canadian public, where they feel that if the government cannot put in place a framework that assures them of that, then, by goodness, they should receive superpriority in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act at the very end. It is an option that will have trade-offs in the corporate side, where it will make it in some cases harder for corporations to receive financing for their bonds. However, in the absence of better leadership by the government, members of Parliament have been forced to do this.

It is terrible that we have a government in office that votes down, or I should say denies, unanimous consent. Members of Parliament wanted to see the superpriority component of this bill included. For the Liberal government to continually say no and use whatever tools it can just shows the government is completely opposed to anything in this space. That is lamentable because ultimately it is Canadians who do not have an assured pension, such as public servants or most of us, if we are vested, do.

I would encourage the government to come clean. I would encourage Canadians to talk to their members of Parliament. Most of all, I would encourage the government to start taking this issue seriously, put forward consultations with both provincial governments and the Canadian public on how it intends to deal with legacy issues if it is not going to go forward with the Bill C-228 provisions presented by the good member for Sarnia—Lambton.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and wish all of my colleagues a good day.

• (1430)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

[*Translation*]

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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