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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, September 25, 2023

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1100)

[*English*]

APOLOGY BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker: Before beginning our proceedings today, I wish to make a brief statement.

[*Translation*]

On Friday, in my remarks following the address of the President of Ukraine, I recognized an individual in the gallery. My intention was to show that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not a new one, that Ukrainians have unfortunately been subject to foreign aggression for far too long and this must end.

[*English*]

I have subsequently become aware of more information which causes me to regret my decision to recognize this individual. I wish to apologize to the House. I am deeply sorry that I have offended many with my gesture and remarks.

I would also like to add that this initiative was entirely my own, the individual in question being from my riding and having been brought to my attention. No one, including you, my fellow parliamentarians, or the Ukraine delegation, was privy to my remarks prior to their delivery.

[*Translation*]

I thank all members for their attention.

[*English*]

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that apology.

I am parliamentarian, a Canadian of Jewish origin and a descendant of Holocaust survivors. A majority of my family walked into Auschwitz-Birkenau and only my grandfather and his brother walked out. I think this hurt all of us in Parliament. Personally, I feel particularly hurt by this.

As parliamentarians, we place our trust in you, Mr. Speaker. There are many times when we recognize people in the gallery, and we do so on your good advice and your good offices. All of us here did that in the chamber on Friday, because we trusted you on that.

This unfortunate situation has been deeply embarrassing for Canada's Parliament. It has been deeply embarrassing for Canada. It was deeply embarrassing for the President of Ukraine, who came here in friendship, who came here because we are a strong ally, and who came here because he trusted Canadians.

I appreciate that you are taking responsibility, Mr. Speaker, because this was your initiative, and you have confirmed that neither the Government of Canada nor the Ukrainian delegation had any prior knowledge of this individual being invited to the House or that he would be recognized.

However, given this deeply embarrassing situation, for all of us as parliamentarians on all sides, it is very important that we collectively work together to strike this recognition from the record. I will work with my colleagues to do that.

For all those who have loved ones who were in the Holocaust, for Jewish Canadians, today being Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, a day of atonement, a day to prepare for the year ahead, we stand with you, Mr. Speaker, in this. We recognize this was a deeply hurtful moment. Many of us in this chamber feel that hurt acutely.

I want to ask all colleagues, particularly those in the Conservative Party of Canada, to please ensure that we do not politicize this issue. I do not think it helps anybody. We need to ensure that we move forward, recognizing this mistake and standing in solidarity together to reiterate our commitment to Jewish Canadians, but also to Ukrainian Canadians and the people who are fighting for freedom, peace and justice in Ukraine right now.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to respond to the statement that you just made and to address what happened in the House on Friday.

[*English*]

Every day members of Parliament entrust the Speaker to guide this Parliament through challenging circumstances. You, Mr. Speaker, have done an admirable job doing just that through COVID-19, the occupation of downtown Ottawa last winter and the putting in place of a hybrid Parliament.

[Translation]

As members know, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* indicates that the Speaker's role is not just administrative and procedural, but also ceremonial and diplomatic. It states that the Speaker often acts as a representative of the House of Commons. Because of his ceremonial role and his role as a representative, he is the only one who has the privilege of recognizing the presence of guests and visitors in the gallery.

It was this privileged role that led to the recognition on Friday of an individual who, as the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center pointed out, was a member of the Waffen-SS, a Nazi military branch that was responsible for the murder of Jews and that was declared a criminal organization during the Nuremberg trials.

[English]

It is shocking that this individual was a guest of the House and shocking that members of Parliament rose to give him an ovation. Members did so because we took the Speaker's word that this individual should indeed be granted this honour in good faith.

We have members of Parliament who have dedicated significant parts of their lives to fighting racism, fascism and anti-Semitism. We have members of Parliament who lost family members to Nazism. Two members of my family, my uncle and my grandfather, whose names are commemorated on the cenotaph in New Westminster, B.C., are part of the scars of this history. These same members of Parliament feel betrayed right now, as do members of the Jewish community and other communities who were victims of the horrific violence of the Nazis.

[Translation]

In many ways, the Speaker is the face of the House. Not only does he represent its members, but even more importantly, he represents our shared commitment to democratic principles and institutions. In upholding these democratic norms, the Speaker's actions must be above reproach.

Although we appreciate the Speaker's apology yesterday and his remarks today, I very regretfully and sadly consider them insufficient.

[English]

Ultimately, this was an unforgivable error. It puts the entire House in disrepute. Unfortunately, a sacred trust has been broken. It is for that reason, for the good of the institution of the House of Commons, that I say sadly that I do not believe you, Mr. Speaker, can continue in this role. Regrettably, I must respectfully ask that you step aside.

[Translation]

For the good of Parliament, I ask that you resign from your position as Speaker.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House leader of the official opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very grave incident, on the day when the Government of Canada was welcoming the head of state of Ukraine, a country that is undergoing an unjust and illegal invasion, that there was a guest in the gallery whose presence fed into the

Russian propaganda and narrative about the bogus justification for Putin's illegal invasion.

State visits are organized by the government. Every aspect of President Zelenskyy's visit would have been highly managed by the PMO. There are incredible security concerns. When we have not just a head of state, not just a foreign dignitary, but someone whose people are fighting for their lives and their survival, someone who is targeted by Vladimir Putin's regime, obviously, there are massive security implications.

Your statement, Mr. Speaker, does not answer questions around how this individual was vetted, how the government, which would have seen all aspects, all guest lists and all interactions with President Zelenskyy, would have allowed that person to be in the chamber.

Members of Parliament do not have the ability to vet who might happen to be in the chamber on any given day. That is the responsibility of the director of Parliamentary Protective Service, who reports to the Minister of Public Safety. The coordination between the Prime Minister's Office, the protocol office here in the House of Commons and that protective service is what members trust is happening to ensure that things like that do not happen.

If someone of that background, which a straightforward Google search would show served in that particular division during World War II, if that basic level of vetting was not done by the government, that raises serious concerns. What kind of message does that send to our allies around the world, that when they come to the House of Commons to address the House and Senate that this basic rudimentary vetting as to who might be in the galleries is not done? That is incredible.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we will take your statement under advisement. We will have more to say on this, but there are still many questions that need to be answered as to how the Prime Minister's Office so completely dropped the ball on this.

• (1110)

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to my hon. colleague, because I think we both share the frustration about what happened on Friday. However, I do want reiterate, and as you made very clear in your statement, that this was your initiative. The Government of Canada had no knowledge of this individual. The Speaker is responsible for this chamber. He invited him of his own accord, and he made the decision himself to recognize him. Neither the Government of Canada nor the delegation of Ukraine had any knowledge of this.

I would respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that you clarify this for the members opposite. It is important that this information be clear and that these false allegations do not continue, because they are not true.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, before I speak about the situation at hand, I would like to say that my thoughts are with those who suffered the horrors of the Second World War, which claimed 70 million lives. It was one of the darkest periods in history, particularly for the Jewish community, which at the time bore the full brunt of a ruthless invader's unspeakable aggression.

As you well know, I have always thought you have done an exceptional job, Mr. Speaker. I have always made a point of telling you so. I rise today with a great deal of emotion.

For us, you have always been a beacon. We have never doubted your actions or suggestions, so much so that, on Friday, when you proposed that we recognize this individual, who turned out to be someone who helped the Nazis, we would never have thought that he was anything but a person who deserved to be recognized in the House.

Afterwards, we realized that he did not deserve it, that he was someone with a dark and grim past. It came as a shock to us to learn that you were somehow responsible for his recognition in the House.

That being said, you have apologized to us and I do not question the sincerity of your apology. I am appealing to your wisdom. It is up to you and your conscience to decide whether this apology is enough. I want to rise above partisanship because what we are talking about today needs to be free of partisanship. This is serious. There will be consequences for the Ukrainian people, for the leader of Ukraine, who will likely be caught up in this situation.

Quebeckers and Canadians, who are wholeheartedly behind the people of Ukraine and their leader, did not want this. Ukrainians are fighting for freedom. Their leader is a Ukrainian liberation hero. Unfortunately, he will end up being tainted by a mistake he did not make.

• (1115)

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Canada-Slovakia parliamentary friendship group, it is my obligation to point out that the individual in question who was recognized on Friday was part of the division that was used against the Slovak National Uprising, which was the military uprising organized by Slovak resistance movements during World War II, comprising the anti-Nazi political faction of the Slovak nation, which is my heritage. Units of this division this man fought with were sent to help squash the Slovak rebellion. Battle groups were formed to actively search out and destroy members of the resistance. According to Slovak historian Karol Fremal, the division's members were helping anti-partisan, repressive and terrorist actions, and they committed murders and other excesses.

Based on what I have heard in the House today, I feel that this is a government trying to collectivize responsibility for an incident that was solely within its purview. By inviting the Ukrainian president to our country, we had a duty to protect him in all aspects. With the government's either having a non-existent vetting process or failing to have a judgement-free one for people who would be

recognized and lauded in the House of Commons, the House of Commons should not be accepting collective responsibility for the abject, egregious lack of judgment that has tarnished the reputation of our country and led to people like the ambassador from Poland's demanding an apology from us.

This is a time in which our allies need to be standing with us. There should be no question about whether or not we have our act together, yet here we are having this debate. It is beyond an embarrassment; it is a stain on our country. I refuse, as a member of this place who represents 120,000 Canadians, to collectively share responsibility with a government that has a pattern of not vetting questionable individuals with whom its members take meetings, such as Jaspal Atwal and Joshua Boyle. I will not, on behalf of my constituents, take one ounce of blame for the government's failing a vetting process.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can say that it was within your purview, but they invited this world leader here and they failed to vet this. So, no, on behalf of the constituents of Calgary Nose Hill, I will not accept collective responsibility. The buck stops at the Prime Minister's Office.

The Speaker: Before anything starts, I just want to make it clear that it was my decision and my decision alone. This was a constituent who wanted to be here, and I recognized him. It was my decision, and I apologize profusely. I cannot tell members how regretful it is, which may not be good enough for some of you, and for that I apologize.

I will let the hon. opposition House leader take it from here, and then we will go to the government House leader.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I just want to underscore the point my colleague just raised. Is it the government's position that when we have a foreign head of state visiting, the government does zero security vetting for who will be in the same room as that head of state? Is that the message we are sending to our allies, so that when they come here, they will not know who is going to be in the gallery? What kind of a message does that send to Canada's partners and allies around the world?

That is the point that we are raising, Mr. Speaker. It is all well and good for you to come in and accept your share of the responsibility, but there is only one entity in the chamber that has the resources and the mandate to keep people safe. As my colleague just pointed out, when President Zelenskyy comes here on the invitation of the Prime Minister, when the entire itinerary is planned by the PMO, the government of Canada has an obligation to him personally to secure his safety. It has a responsibility to the people of Ukraine to ensure the safety of their president. The Prime Minister has a responsibility to all Canadians to uphold the dignity of Canada as a country and as a trusted partner and ally. In all three of those areas, the Prime Minister failed to take that basic level of responsibility. That is the point we are underscoring. There was a Nazi in the chamber. There is only one entity, one group that could have done anything about it, who could have flagged that.

As I mentioned, the director of the Parliamentary Protective Service reports up to the Government of Canada for operational matters. That is in the mandate of the Parliamentary Protective Service. The director of the Parliamentary Protective Service must be a member of the RCMP. That is in the enabling legislation. That was all done for a reason. I was in the chair when that legislation was passed, and it was precisely because the House of Commons itself did not have the capability to do full security vettings and background checks on individuals. That was the reason we did that, to make available to the House of Commons the resources of federal institutions like the RCMP and CSIS.

That is why we do not accept the attempt to collectivize blame for this. Opposition parties do not have access to CSIS reports. We do not have access to the RCMP's vast capabilities to do background checks and vetting. In this case it would have taken a simple Google search to find a blog post written by that individual saying that he served in an SS division, in a Nazi division, during World War II.

Again, all of those resources are available to the government. The mandate, the responsibility, lies with the government. The entire reporting structure of the Parliamentary Protective Service here flows up to the government. That is why we still have many questions, and this issue does not end with your statement or your apology.

• (1120)

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I have immense respect for my colleague opposite. In fact, he occupied that chair, so he would know that, as the Speaker, you do have prerogative to invite guests into the chamber. I will reiterate that neither the government nor the Ukrainian delegation had any prior knowledge. In fact, if colleagues will recall, when the recognition was done, it was done by the Speaker, and we did it on the good offices of the Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I ask the hon. member to respect that this is a very difficult time for everyone in the chamber. I understand that emotions are running loud and high, but I am going to ask everyone to listen to each other. I do not think that I have ever been through a tougher time in the House since I came here in 2004, so I would ask for some respect for both sides. If someone is speaking, please show some respect.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: That is not even worth responding to.

The hon. government House leader, please continue.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I would just reiterate for colleagues that, if they recall when this happened, which was during the Speaker's remarks, we were all caught off guard by this. I am not trying to collectivize responsibility; I am trying to lay on the table the facts, which my Conservative colleagues are choosing to ignore. I have asked them respectfully not to politicize this issue. In fact, it hurts communities more than it helps them. As someone who personally has been deeply hurt by this, as indeed I believe all members of the chamber have been, we need to work together to strike this recognition from Hansard and to ensure that this never happens again.

• (1125)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your desire to take full responsibility for this entire event, but those of us who asked for guests to be able to attend Friday's proceedings know that we were required to give notice of the individuals for whom we were asking permission. They went through a process. Emails were sent to those individuals.

You, Mr. Speaker, were not standing at the door of the parliamentary precinct. There were massive security protocols. Individuals were required to be on extensive lists. I do not believe that you individually vetted each of those names. The Parliamentary Protective Service is responsible to the government. The lists were given to the government. One would assume there would have been some process of vetting. Is the government now saying that none of that happened?

Mr. Speaker, I know your desire to take this on, but I do not believe for a second that you verified each person who was invited to this place, verified that they were not a security risk and then stood at the door and let them in. I know that is not the truth. Therefore, this attempt by the government to state that this was your doing, and your doing alone, that you alone are responsible and that it bears no responsibility, is to send a signal to all Canadians and all of our allies that we are not serious about anything. I am not going to take collective responsibility for what, in fact, is the government's responsibility, and, Mr. Speaker, I recommend you not do it either.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I think my hon. colleague has misinterpreted what I was saying. What I was saying and what you, indeed, have said is that you invited this particular individual. You decided to recognize this individual without informing either the government or the Ukrainian delegation that you would be doing this. When it comes to everyone who was invited to Parliament, of course that vetting happened. However, the decision to recognize an individual was that of the Speaker.

I would ask that the members opposite please be respectful. This is a very difficult time for all of us, but I do ask them to stick to the facts and the issue at hand, which is the fact that this individual was invited by the Speaker and the decision to recognize him was by the Speaker, not by the government.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, we are getting completely mixed messages today. Today is Yom Kippur, which our Jewish fellow citizens will be celebrating. It comes hot on the heels of this atrocious international incident that the government allowed to happen, and we need clarity. Just a few moments ago, the government House leader said the government had no idea that this individual had been invited. Now, the government House leader has just said that there was a vetting process. I would like some clarity. Did the Government of Canada receive a list with this individual's name on it, yes or no?

Private Members' Business

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, of course security measures are taken for invitations to Parliament. However, this individual was invited by the Speaker. The government had no knowledge that this individual was invited or that he would be recognized in Parliament.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your taking responsibility for your part in this. It is weighing very heavily on all of us here. A lot of the public does not understand how this person or anyone with that history could possibly have been here and how we could not have known. It has been explained that there is no ability for opposition members to know when someone is introduced from the gallery. We had no notice or context for that.

However, in law, there is a concept of responsibility, which is that someone either knew or ought to have known. This is where we have a disconnect in these discussions today, because who sits in the gallery is not only up to the Speaker of the House. It is the responsibility of those charged with our national security and our overall security in this House. Those of us who lived through a terrorist attack back in 2014, when someone charged into Centre Block with a weapon, know this all too well. We were all engaged in that terrible day.

We used to have just an unlocked door in front of Parliament, and our naïveté was shattered that day; changes were made, as the House leader has already said. Those changes determined whom the responsibility for the safety and security of all members in this House is squarely put on. There are countries that have bulletproof glass between the public galleries and their legislators; that is not what we have here. We still have a very open way of doing our business. However, we put trust in those in authority: the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council Office and the Speaker's office. We do this to ensure that we have our debates and discussions free from worry about security issues. When it comes to recognizing people, we trust that the reason we are being asked to recognize them is that they have made significant contributions, either to Canada or internationally, or they are noted and elected government officials from provinces or other countries. We repose that trust in our authority positions.

In my view, it is wrong, and it is trying to escape responsibility, for the government to say its members had nothing to do with it. If they did not have anything to do with it, they should have. If they let it all happen and they are on the outside and mere observers in the great play of life, as they often say about so many things, I say no, they are the government. They are the executive, and they are the ones in charge; they should have done their job, and they did not.

• (1130)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a Polish Canadian, I can say that the month of September is difficult for many Poles and Polish Canadians. This is when they commemorate the German Nazi invasion of Poland, as well as the Soviet Russian invasion of Poland on September 17.

Six million Poles were murdered in the Second World War. One out of five citizens was killed.

The presence of the gentleman in the gallery was deeply hurtful to Polish Canadians and to Poles. He was a member of the First Ukrainian Division, or the Waffen-SS Galicia Division. This was a particularly and exceptionally cruel unit that viciously murdered thousands of Jews and Poles in eastern Poland.

That moment in the House was deeply painful to my community, to Polish Canadians and to Poles abroad.

However, Mr. Speaker, I know you as a good man. The delegations that come here, internationally, know you as a good man. You have taken ownership of this grievous error. You have promptly taken full responsibility on your shoulders. You apologized deeply.

My interest here is that we work together as parliamentarians to make sure that we have the systems in place so that this never happens again in the House.

• (1135)

The Speaker: If there are no other interventions, once again, I want to apologize for what happened and really tell you that the intention was not to embarrass the House.

[*Translation*]

The intention was to illustrate that what has been done in the past is still happening today in Ukraine and it must stop.

[*English*]

This was the intention. I offer my sincere apologies to the House, to each and every one of you who are in the House today, and to all Canadians for having been put through this.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

EXCISE TAX ACT

The House resumed from April 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-323, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (mental health services), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite difficult to deliver this intervention after the conversation we just had in the House. However, the business of the government has to continue.

Private Members' Business

I appreciate the opportunity to take part in today's second reading of a private member's bill, Bill C-323, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act in relation to mental health services. As we know, this bill would exempt supplies of psychotherapy and mental health counselling services from the goods and services tax and the harmonized sales tax, or the GST/HST. At the outset, I am pleased to announce that the government and I will be supporting this private member's bill to go forward to committee for further study.

Our government has a proven record of supporting the delivery of mental health services for Canadians, and we look forward to building on this record with Bill C-323. At the same time, my colleagues will know that our government also likes to ensure that we get things right.

The creation of tax legislation is an area of public policy where we certainly do not want to get things wrong, as the results can be particularly costly and unfair to Canadians. That is why our preference is ordinarily that tax changes, such as those proposed in Bill C-323, be undertaken through the budget process. This enables us to fully consider trade-offs, balance priorities, close potential loopholes and undertake new fiscal commitments only to the extent that they are fair and affordable.

This sort of policy safeguarding is typically undertaken by the tax professionals and lawyers at the finance department. However, when it comes to this private member's bill, Bill C-323, this responsibility will fall to us as parliamentarians. There are some important considerations that we will need to address in this regard before moving the bill past the House.

As I am not sitting on the finance committee, and I understand this bill would go to the finance committee, I would like to talk about some of the policy considerations regarding Bill C-323. I hope my colleagues, especially the member proposing the bill, whom I have the honour and privilege of sitting with on the health committee, will take note of this.

We know, for example, that the policy underlying the GST/HST treatment of the health care sector generally exempts basic health care services from the GST/HST. We also know that, to determine which services should be considered basic health care services for the purpose of ascertaining eligibility for this exemption, the federal government looks to provincial funding and regulatory practices as key criteria. This is appropriate, since they are on the front lines in delivering health care to Canadians. More specifically, if a service is covered by the health care plan of two or more provinces, it may be exempted from the GST/HST in all provinces. Likewise, if a profession is regulated as a health care profession by at least five provinces, the services of that profession may be exempt from the GST/HST in all provinces.

Under the status quo, psychotherapy and mental health counselling are not covered by the public health insurance program of any province and are not regulated in at least five provinces; this is why they are not eligible to be considered for a GST/HST exemption. Psychotherapy services provided by a psychologist or other health professional, such as a physician, nurse or social worker, are already exempt if the services are within the scope of practice of their profession.

In short, provincial policies currently determine what medical services should be considered for a GST/HST exemption, and it is based on these policies that psychotherapy and mental health counselling are not currently exempt from the GST/HST. I think we have to bear this in mind and remain sensitive to the fact that we are doing a bit of an end run around this process as we move forward with Bill C-323.

● (1140)

Exempting the GST and HST on psychotherapy and mental health counselling services, as proposed by Bill C-323, could undermine the long-standing criteria established by deciding whether services of recognized health practitioners should be GST and HST exempt. This, in turn, could make it more difficult to make objective decisions on any future requests to exempt other services.

There are important questions related to this bill that must be examined more closely at committee. The most fundamental one is whether this bill will apply in the same way in each province. This is a basic question of fairness for all Canadians. I think we need to also better understand how each province regulates the health care practitioners this bill targets and how each province defines the services it provides for the purpose of health care.

Should this bill make it to the finance committee, with our government's support it is our hope that provincial health officials, mental health service providers, mental health advocates and other experts can testify to shed light on these issues that I have discussed.

On a completely personal note, since 2015, I have had the honour and privilege of being a member of this House. I have always advocated for parity when it comes to mental and physical health. I believe this might be a gateway for us to open that conversation. Although I know this is a narrow passage, I think it is a great opportunity for us to engage in a broader conversation. Naturally, it will not be at the finance committee. However, it is something we should consider.

I just want to quickly talk about a few of our government's achievements and focus in support of mental health since 2015. Canadians can rest assured that our government has already made it a top priority to invest in mental health services for Canadians and will move forward on this basis.

I want to talk about the most recent budget, budget 2023, which proposes to provide a total of \$359 million over five years starting in 2023-24, with \$5.7 million ongoing, and a \$1.3-million remaining amortization in support of the renewed Canadian drug and substance strategy, which will guide our government's work to save lives and protect the health and safety of Canadians. Also, our government has provided about \$158 million over three years, starting in 2023-24, to the Public Health Agency of Canada to support the implementation and operation of the 988 suicide prevention line.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the fact that we are making investments because a strong and effective public health care system is essential to the well-being of Canadians, which includes mental health care. It is also an important foundation of a growing, healthy economy. Our economy is stronger when people are healthy and can get the care they need before a complication arises or they are in crisis. Our government will move forward in supporting Bill C-323 on this understanding, but we also want to make sure that we get it right. We look forward to hearing from key stakeholders at the finance committee.

Once again I thank my colleague for bringing this bill forward. Many constituents in my riding are looking forward to having this bill passed, and hopefully amended, to address the concerns we have so they can get the services that are much needed in the community. I look forward to the debate on the bill at the finance committee.

• (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: I saw someone taking a picture up in the gallery. Phones are not allowed in the gallery, so please delete the photo. Thank you.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncás (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very excited and very proud to rise today, for the first time since Parliament resumed, to represent and defend the interests of the people of my riding, whom I always represent with pride and dignity. I am talking about the good people of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, whom I salute.

The subject we are talking about today is very important to us. Mental health affects every Quebecker and every Canadian. In today's complex, extremely demanding and ever-changing world, more and more people are experiencing mental health problems.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an explosion in the need for mental health care among Quebeckers and Canadians. Some people are even talking about a mental health crisis. The uncertainty, the anxiety and the hardship caused by this unprecedented situation have largely contributed to this secondary epidemic, which often slips under the radar. The Bloc Québécois will be supporting Bill C-323, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act (mental health services), precisely because we believe in the importance of facilitating and promoting access to mental health care. This measure is designed to improve the affordability of psychotherapy and mental health counselling services by exempting them from the GST, the goods and services tax.

As we go through the worst inflationary crisis in 40 years, it has become hard for middle-class people to make ends meet. Times are tough for many people. Everything is more expensive, including mortgages, rent, groceries, gas and equipment. When forced to choose between feeding their children or going to psychotherapy, pretty well everyone will choose the former. In that context, the Bloc Québécois believes that it is a good idea for the federal government to waive the GST on those services in order to give every-

Private Members' Business

one a bit of breathing space. Investing in our mental health is always a win-win and is something to be encouraged.

Before going any further, I will answer a simple question: What is psychotherapy? Psychotherapy is a type of psychological treatment that aims to bring about changes in a person's attitude, behaviour or way of thinking so that person can feel better, find answers to their questions, solve problems, make decisions and understand themselves better. It has been regulated in Quebec since 2012 under Bill 21 from 2009, guaranteeing Quebeckers quality services.

Although mental health counselling is not a regulated profession or one subject to legal guidelines, it can be a meaningful and useful form of therapy. However, the Quebec psychologists' association points out that it is essential to check the service provider's training credentials before choosing that option, as counselling can be offered by individuals with widely varying levels of expertise and ethical obligations.

Quebec has long been a pioneer in social and health care policy. Our legislation in the field of psychotherapy in particular has been emulated by several provinces, including Ontario. We have always taken Quebeckers' well-being seriously, and that is reflected in our commitment to providing quality mental health services.

Because mental health issues are invisible, because prejudice about them persists, and because they are often taboo, mental health services are undervalued compared to other health services. However, mental health is just as essential to our health as physical health, which is why it is important to end some of the tax inequalities that still exist with respect to mental health services. For example, many health services relating to physical health are already zero-rated, such as optometry, nutrition services and occupational therapy. There is also a disparity between the various professional orders that can provide psychotherapy services. For instance, psychotherapy falls within the areas of expertise and practice of both physicians and psychologists. Since all their services are zero-rated, psychotherapy provided by a physician or psychologist is already zero-rated. If, however, it is provided by a member of one of the seven professional orders authorized to offer psychotherapy, it will be taxed.

• (1150)

We need to update our tax legislation to reflect the progress made in regulating psychotherapy in Quebec. Mental health services are just as essential as physical health services and it is time we treated them the same way in the tax system. Bill C-323 meets this need by levelling the playing field for all by completely eliminating the tax on these services, regardless of who provides them.

When it comes to access to mental health services, we cannot ignore the elephant in the room any longer: The inadequacy of the federal health transfers has a significant impact on our health care systems in the provinces and in Quebec.

Private Members' Business

On April 1, 2023, more than 20,400 people were waiting for mental health services in Quebec. Our public system is under pressure and, unfortunately, it will not improve any time soon because there is not enough money in the system.

We must keep in mind that Quebec and the provinces asked for \$280 billion over 10 years but only received a fraction of this amount, a meagre \$46 billion. This funding gap compromises our ability to meet the mental health needs of our citizens.

The Bloc Québécois would like to remind the federal government that it is still difficult to access mental health services in the public system. This is largely due to the inadequacy of health transfers.

When it comes to mental health, Quebec is not simply asking for additional funding. Since the 1980s, the Quebec government has developed mental health policies aimed at increasing access to and improving the quality of services provided to our constituents. These policies have evolved over time to adapt to the changing needs of society. We have integrated mental health care and prevention in a health and social services network since 1998. Successive action plans have strengthened this integration, fostering collaboration between health care stakeholders to speed up the healing process.

We understood that quick intervention could prevent the need for more specialized care. The most recent action plan, known as “Le Plan d’action interministériel en santé mentale 2022-2026 — S’unir pour un mieux-être collectif”, shows our ongoing commitment to mental health. This plan was developed in consultation with various community groups, researchers, workers and civil society groups. Several departments are involved, and the total investment in the plan has reached \$1 billion over five years. The Quebec plan covers seven key areas and focuses on promoting mental health, improving access to care and preventing mental disorders. However, the needs are greater than ever, and we need to keep doing more.

In my riding, in the Lower St. Lawrence, requests for mental health counselling have doubled in recent years. In response to the reality of rural life and the lifestyle of agricultural workers, a farm outreach service was created by the Union des producteurs agricoles du Bas-Saint-Laurent. I am proud to support this initiative, which helps us take care of our people.

In conclusion, Bill C-323 is an important step in improving access to psychotherapy and mental health counselling services in Quebec and Canada. In keeping with Quebec's reputation as a pioneer in the field of mental health, the Bloc Québécois will be supporting this bill.

We believe in a strong, innovative, united Quebec, where everyone has access to quality mental health care. That is why we will continue to press the federal government to increase health transfers, because Quebec and the provinces need more resources to meet the rising demand for mental health care.

• (1155)

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Cumberland—Colchester for

tabling this important bill, Bill C-323, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act, mental health services.

As members know, the bill would expand the category of health care services exempt from point-of-sale taxes to include psychotherapy and mental health services. Members also know that physical health services, such as chiropractic and physiotherapy services, are already exempt from federal sales taxes. Eliminating that sales taxes from psychotherapy and mental health services would be one step further and would only be fair, because there are so many other services that are so similar that do not have to provide that federal sales tax on their services.

There should not be any health care service taxes in this country. Furthermore, all services, be it mental health care, dental care, pharmacare, physical health care, need to be covered in a way that is universal and free for all people in this country. A tax exemption is a small step in the right direction, which would reduce the cost of these services directly and increase access to them, so this is an important bill.

In December 2021, I had the honour of introducing my private member's bill, Bill C-218 in the House. Interestingly, my bill would also have amended the Excise Tax Act to exempt psychotherapeutic services delivered by psychotherapists and counsellors from the goods and services tax. They say imitation is the highest form of flattery, so once again, I thank the member for Cumberland—Colchester. Ultimately, Bill C-323 is so similar to my own bill, but as someone who is 175th on the list of precedence in private members' bills, I am happy to see this bill being brought forward. I am happy to support it.

I want to bring a little bit of historical context for the introduction of why I introduced Bill C-218. It was because of a local psychotherapist in London, Stephanie Woo Dearden, a registered psychotherapist, who asked me to take action on the issue. She contacted me in the fall of 2021, and so I did my research. I discovered that this bill had actually already been previously introduced by an NDP MP, Pierre-Luc Dusseault, in 2017, and I would like to thank him for his work on this issue. Like Bill C-323, our private members' bills work to ensure that psychotherapists are treated fairly, the same as their fellow practitioners in other health care fields. This bill would work to create equality among those who do the same kind of work and are exempt from the excise tax.

I was very happy to hear my colleague's speech earlier saying that the Liberals will be supporting the bill to go to committee. However, I urge them to fully support this very simple but necessary bill so that they can rectify the blatant tax inequality that has occurred. The government says that Canadians' mental health is a priority, and this is a key opportunity for it to do something that is very easy to do to ensure that something good is done for Canadians' mental health.

Just this past March, I presented a petition in the House of Commons to remove GST from counselling therapy and psychotherapy services, and that petition received over 14,000 signatures. I thank Barbara MacCallum for bringing that forward. There were so many signatories, 14,000, because they saw that the government must act to rectify this error, and it is quite a simple thing that the government can do.

According to the Canada Revenue Agency, if a profession is regulated as a health profession by at least five provinces or territories, the services of that profession are exempt from GST/HST. Now, the profession of counselling therapy or psychotherapy meets this criteria, and it has for some time. However, a tax exemption was refused because the provinces regulating the profession had different titles, but counselling therapy and psychotherapy are the same profession, as demonstrated by a shared scope of practice, comparable qualification requirements and aligned codes of ethics. They are also recognized under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. The federal government must respect the expertise and practices of provinces and territories in the health care field with regard to naming their professions. My bill, Bill C-218, as well as Bill C-323, demand just that.

We all know the impact that COVID-19 has had on people's mental health, and it was certainly a crisis before the pandemic. However, we are seeing the consequences on folks now, and I see it my riding.

- (1200)

People are stressed out, and they are worrying increasingly about their skyrocketing mortgage payments, the increase in food prices and increases of the climate crisis. All of this stress builds up, and people need more and more support. The bill is a small but good first step toward helping people, but there are a lot of barriers that get in the way of the availability of psychotherapy and counselling to the degree people need it.

As we know, right now in Canada, provinces are spending about 5% to 7% of their budgets on mental health. Some percentages, sadly, are even lower. In my province of Ontario, it is at 3% under the Conservative government, yet many OECD countries spend about 12% to 14%. In the U.K., it is higher than that.

We have a two-tiered health care system in this country when it comes to mental health. This is a huge part of the problem. Getting help should not be dependent on how much money one has. New Democrats believe that everyone should have access to mental health supports, including psychotherapy, and we believe everyone deserves timely access to a full range of mental health treatments and services.

Last spring, I held a round table and a town hall in my riding, and I would like to thank the member for Courtenay—Alberni for joining me in that discussion to discuss those key issues around mental health care. I was honoured to speak with key community leaders and hear about their challenges. We talked about the need for parity between physical and mental health in our country.

According to the report by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, fewer than one in three people with current mental health concerns is accessing mental health services. Key barriers to ac-

cessing these services are, of course, financial constraints and long wait-lists. The people around that table spoke to me about the need to meet people where they are in this discussion, so just like everyone is an individual, their mental health journey is an individual journey. Just because one form of help is right for someone, it may not be something that someone else needs, and we need to work together to figure out all those different layers and forms of help people need.

Another thing we need to change in our system is how we treat key people who are delivering the mental health care we need. Many of those frontline professionals are in jobs that do not pay them a living wage. Because they are providing urgent care or social work, they told me, they felt less valued by the system. They also felt that governments do not fund those programs adequately. Governments think these workers do these jobs solely because they want to help people, as though that altruism should be free and as though those workers do not have student loans, mortgages or bills to pay.

Many attended that round table, and they warned us that, like the frontline workers we see in the health care sector right now, mental health care workers are leaving their professions in droves because they do not have adequate pay, stable pensions, the benefits they need or safe working conditions. These services are critical, and it is up to governments to ensure that those workers have the supports they need to be able to provide the services others need.

Other mental health care workers told me that, while they see people in extreme crisis, mental illness is not the sole cause. Yes, there are people who live with a number of diagnosed psychiatric ailments, but so many whom they treat now are dealing with prolonged stress and post-traumatic stress disorder. These are caused by other factors, such as homelessness, physical sexual abuse and poverty, and these are things that the government has to address as well. The workers demanded that the government deal with these problems so that people could move away from relying so heavily upon mental services while dealing with the man-made stresses we create, ensuring that people live in these debilitating cycles.

In conclusion, the bill is a good step forward, as I have said. It is a small step, but a good step forward, and I support it because I support my own bill, so I support this one.

Canadians who are seeking help with mental health services should not be reliant upon the fact that they cannot pay for them, so I and New Democrats support the bill. I want to thank everybody who helped me to develop Bill C-218 and who will continue to work to force things such as this bill and this issue to move forward.

Private Members' Business

• (1205)

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today on behalf of the residents of Kelowna—Lake Country. I would like to thank my Conservative colleague, the member for Cumberland—Colchester, for introducing private member's bill, Bill C-323. It is my privilege to second this bill and speak to it today.

Canadians are facing a mental health crisis. The statistics are alarming. Nearly 200 people attempt suicide daily. One in four Canadians is experiencing anxiety, and 56% of the people who are struggling are not receiving the care they need and deserve. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, the CMHA, in any given year, one in five people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness. By age 40, about 50% of the population will have or have had a mental illness. This continues to be a significant issue in my community and home province of British Columbia.

Back in 2010, the Government of B.C. estimated that mental health problems cost our economy an estimated \$6.6 billion annually. When looking at increasing statistics of people struggling, we can only assume this would be much higher now. The CMHA reports that about 17% of British Columbians, somewhere around 800,000 people, are experiencing a mental illness or substance use issue today. The limitation of accessing mental health services already poses a barrier to many in accessing health care and tackling our nationwide health crisis.

In addition to the ongoing addiction health crisis, Canada is faced with a crisis in mental health. An estimated 84,000 children and youth in B.C. have a diagnosed mental disorder, yet fewer than one-third of those children seeking help are receiving mental health services. That means as many as 58,000 children in B.C. are not receiving the treatment they need.

I know that I have just given a lot of statistics about unmet mental health needs. However, behind each of these statistics is a person, a family affected and a community affected. Recently, a mom from Kelowna—Lake Country reached out to let me know about a situation her child was going through where she has a physical health condition that she is attempting to get resolved. The mom says her child is dealing with mental health issues of depression and suicidal thoughts because of bullying due to her physical conditions. This is just one of many situations people have brought to my attention, and we need to do everything possible to ensure that people and families have access, in a variety of ways, to mental health services.

Right now, looking at attempted suicide rates and deaths, societally we are paying for mental anguish in the most extreme way possible. It is clear from the numbers that many people are waiting until the point of crisis. That can mean too many hospital stays and perhaps cycling through our criminal justice system instead of receiving treatment, or worse. As we heard recently, a woman came forth publicly in August to explain how she was having a mental health crisis and a clinician at Vancouver General Hospital shockingly suggested medical assistance in dying, MAID, as an option.

Bill C-323, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act, works to put health service providers on equal footing when people come to

them for mental health assistance. I am proud to second this bill and speak to it today. This legislation sets to end the charging of GST or HST upon the services of psychotherapists and mental health counsellors. For context, psychotherapists and mental health counsellors are currently the only regulated mental health service providers who must remit GST or HST tax on their services. This would put them on equal footing with other health professionals.

Psychotherapy and mental health counsellors often are also not covered by many insurance providers, and the additional cost of the GST or HST on their services limits their capacity to serve many Canadians in the time of need, especially at this time of high cost of living, when paycheques are so stressed. It makes no sense for fully regulated psychotherapists and mental health counsellors to be subjected to this type of taxation when physicians, psychiatrists, registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers are all exempt.

• (1210)

Health Canada has reported that 24.7% of Canadians over the age of 15 report having unmet mental health needs. We need to do everything possible to get help to people so they are not living in mental anguish and so families are not heartbroken when getting devastating phone calls no one ever wants to get, like 12 families a day do in Canada, who hear loved ones died of suicide.

The Conservatives are offering tangible solutions within federal jurisdiction to help people. This is a compassionate common sense bill.

Not only are there costs to the federal government associated with this legislation by it not happening, but any loss in tax revenue resulting from the tax exemption would likely be inconsequential in the greater scope of federal budgets. Many organizations and stakeholders, like the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, have spoken in favour of removing the GST or HST taxes from the services of psychotherapists and mental health counsellors.

The Standing Committee on Health heard extensive testimony from Dr. Carrie Foster, president-elect of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association at the time, and Lindsey Thomson, director of public affairs for Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association earlier this year. Both witnesses expressed that this policy would help to alleviate Canada's mental health crisis.

The Liberal government has failed Canadians when it comes to supporting their mental health. As of last fall, the \$4.5 billion in Canadian mental health transfer funds promised by the Liberal government in its 2021 campaign platform had yet to be fully committed. The Conservatives have taken action and continue to fight for the mental health of Canadians.

In 2020, the Conservatives successfully passed a motion to create a national three-digit suicide prevention hotline, which was put forth by our Conservative colleague, the member for Cariboo—Prince George. The 988 hotline will apparently finally be launched in November of 2023 by those slow-to-do-anything-in-government Liberals.

I recently put forth a private member's bill, Bill C-283, the end the revolving door act, which sought to get mental health assessments and addiction treatment and recovery in federal penitentiaries, as determined and offered by a judge at the time of sentencing. It would have expanded and focused the mental health and addiction recovery services available to those who found themselves repeatedly entering and exiting our criminal justice system.

It is well known that mental health and addiction issues are leading causes of recidivism in Canada. Better provision of mental health assessment and curative treatment while inside a federal penitentiary is a common sense approach to tackling this issue, helping not only those who are incarcerated but also to help the communities they go back into after their release. I was proud to have a wide base of support for this, including those confronting our mental health crisis on the front lines and who work in criminal justice.

Unfortunately, though this was a non-partisan common sense bill, the end the revolving door act was voted down by the Liberals and their NDP partner, as well as half the Green MPs, and it did not proceed. I hope the members in those parties will not waste this new opportunity we have before us today to take action for those in need of mental health services.

I was happy to see this legislation to amend the federal taxation regime on mental health professional services from my Conservative colleague as another tool to help people. The Conservatives are the ones bringing practical mental health initiatives forward with compassion and common sense. On this side of the House, the Conservatives will continue to advocate for people to fight Canada's mental health crisis.

In summary, the bill is an important step in tackling Canada's mental health crisis by removing barriers to mental health services, putting psychotherapists and mental health counsellors on equal footing with other regulated health professionals and helping to alleviate financial burdens by those struggling. That is why I am proud to support the bill, and I call on all members of the House to support this compassionate common sense legislation.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a quick reference to what the member for Kelowna—Lake Country said. She has tried to give an impression that the Conservative Party of Canada, which is not a progressive conservative party, genuinely cares about the issue of mental health

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and it would do something about it as a national government. That is a bit far-fetched.

When the Conservatives were in government, I went through some of those opposition days. Where were these ideas then? The issue of mental health is of great concern to Canadians. I did not witness the Conservative government do what its members talk about now, yet they say we have done nothing.

Since 2015, we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into mental health. We have established programs and worked with stakeholders to establish and support things like Wellness Together Canada. People can call a 1-866 number and receive help. That is something tangible over and above the hundreds of millions we have transferred for mental health.

For the first time in the last 20 years, we have a national government that has invested in a substantial way in mental health. There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever in my mind that health care is an issue for all Canadians. When they think of health care, they think of issues like mental health, long-term care and dental services. These are all important issues for Canadians, but we need to recognize that the federal government needs to work on those issues with provincial entities.

The good news is that the bill we are debating today is a positive one that could move us forward. There is a need for the committee to look at it and get an assessment on whether we can implement some amendments that would give some clarification in some areas, and hopefully get the support to move it to third reading. I welcome the idea of having debates on the issue of mental health.

I remember a former colleague of mine back in the early 1990s, Dr. Gulzar Cheema, who was the health critic for the Province of Manitoba. When we were talking about mental health care, he said that we almost needed to designate a separate ministry, and we advocated for that. Interestingly, he moved to British Columbia and became the first-ever minister of mental health for the Province of British Columbia.

Mental health does matter. We see it on our streets in many different forms. When we talk about housing and the homeless, a wide spectrum of reasons need to be incorporated to explain why it happens. Mental health is one of those reasons.

When we think about what this legislation tries to do, it is very admirable. Psychotherapy and mental health services are becoming more and more recognized. We see provincial and territorial jurisdictions recognizing the value of these professions and the need for them. We are starting to see more interest.

We need to remember that health care is a federal and provincial jurisdiction. Ottawa provides a great deal of money and we have the Canada Health Act. However, the provinces and territories establish the necessary regulations.

An hon. member: What about your dental care plan?

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I know the Conservatives do not support the dental care plan. That is fine. The moment of truth will come out on that. The issue is whether they support genuine changes in dealing with mental health. I am trying to give some free advice to my Conservative friends on this.

• (1220)

At the end of the day, we need to work with provinces and territories to look at how we can ensure that we have a proper regulated program so we can ensure that psychotherapy and mental health care services that have been recognized by our provincial jurisdictions can receive things such as the tax break being proposed in this legislation.

If we take a look at the very basics of what is being suggested in the legislation, I would pose the question for the members opposite, and this is something the standing committee will have to take a look at. If someone says that he or she is a life coach, would that life coach not have to pay the tax?

Some Conservative members want to be able to individually identify those who should or should not pay the tax. That is the problem with the Conservatives. It does not work that way. That is why we need regulations.

The judgments of the Conservative Party are very difficult to understand and comprehend. I would not want to get into the mind of a Conservative member in dealing with issues such as this. It could be somewhat interesting, to put it nicely. At the end of the day, a regulated mental health service is important.

We can talk about that here, but we have standing committees. That is why we support it going to the standing committee. The standing committee should take its time and have a good discussion on the issue. I would think it would want to invite, for example, the minister of health from the province of Quebec and other ministers to get their feedback and thoughts. We need to have a good understanding of psychotherapy, mental health services and how they can be regulated and supported with respect to health care services.

Many Liberals, including myself, recognize that we need to get more done on the issue of mental health. What that means is not only talking about it here on the floor; we have to be talking to our provincial counterparts. It means that we have to work with the many different stakeholders.

I made reference to the Wellness Together Canada site. People can google it. They will find that there is a number of stakeholders, or sponsors or supporters. I can point out Bell Canada as one example and its commitment to assist on the issue of mental health. I can identify individuals, non-profit groups, all of which have a genuine interest in the issue. That is why, when we look at this legislation, not only I but, I believe, the Liberal caucus see the merits of it. That is why there is great value in seeing this legislation go to committee.

I would strongly encourage the committee not limit itself to the consultations that need to take place on this legislation because of its ramifications. We need to work with the stakeholders in this situation. For individuals who are passionate about our health care and believe that the federal government has a role to play, this is a

very important debate. A portion of that debate is going to be taking place in the standing committee.

I look forward to the amendments that will, in all likelihood, be brought forward to enhance the legislation. Canadians from coast to coast to coast will benefit if the national government is able to contribute in any way to the development of mental health care as a more tangible part of our health care system, and supporting our provinces, territories and other stakeholders.

• (1225)

We have demonstrated that in recent years with our investments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by acknowledging the position taken by the member who just spoke. I assume he was speaking on behalf of the Liberal government. I must commend his stance, because all too often we see governments, whether Liberal or sometimes Conservative, oppose bills simply for the sake of opposing them. Obviously, it is currently a Liberal government.

The Bloc Québécois has introduced many bills, and we have often been disappointed to see the Liberals oppose certain ones for no good reason. Basically, they want to prevent their opponents from building a track record. Even if the bill is a good one, the Liberals will oppose it.

In this case, there is some light at the end of the tunnel. I hope this will not be the only time. The Liberals are saying that even though Bill C-323 is not one of their own bills, it may have enough merit to be considered. That is a good start.

My colleagues will have guessed that there is a good chance that the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-323, based on what I have been saying. We are not supporting it because it is a Bloc bill, because it is not a Bloc bill. It is not an NDP bill either. It is a Conservative bill.

This is worth noting because I often feel disappointed by the kinds of questions the Conservatives ask in the House and their priorities, like oil and gas, abortion and firearms. There comes a point where there are other things to talk about. When their attention shifts to other topics, the results are sometimes positive. Bill C-323 is a good example. I congratulate the Conservatives for tabling this bill. It shows a different side of them. Even if it never happens again, we are glad of it now.

I am going to say a few words about Bill C-323, a bill to amend the excise tax. Whenever we make a transaction, we pay a 5% federal excise tax. The bill's goal is to amend a specific section of the act to exempt psychotherapy and mental health counselling services from this tax.

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We know that some services are considered essential, and we want to make it so that taxpayers do not have to pay extra for them. When these services are taxed, they become even more expensive for taxpayers. Therefore, eliminating the tax is a way to lower their cost for the people who use them.

We know that there is a dearth of mental health services. Often, when people start getting therapy it takes a bit of time. Problems are rarely solved in one counselling session. This gets expensive very fast.

Unfortunately, this 5% tax, or the federal portion, is added to the 10% tax, which is the Quebec portion. On a \$100-per-hour fee, the client pays an additional \$15. Eventually that really hurts the budget. Sometimes a person who needs mental health services has money, but sometimes they do not. It is good for people to get help. We welcome this kind of support.

I can share a story. I know that I am running out of time, unfortunately. My constituency office is above a centre called the Centre des IIs et des Elles, a multidisciplinary professional centre for childhood and early childhood. It offers all sort of services, such as speech language pathology, psychoeducation, occupational therapy, psychology, special education, and even sexology.

One of the centre's co-founders is himself a psychoeducator. I met him because my office is upstairs from his, and also because I used some of his services to help my son on his personal journey. This well-known psychoeducator told me that the situation is not normal. He says that he is providing essential mental health services, yet patients do not pay taxes when they go to an optometrist, chiropractor, hearing aid specialist or doctor.

Why should people have to pay taxes for mental health services when they do not pay taxes for any other recognized services? There is an inequity there, and we need to put an end to it.

I would like to congratulate the sponsor of this bill. Above all, I want to say that psychoeducation is one way of lightening the load on psychologists and enabling qualified people to meet the high demand for mental health care.

• (1230)

I would like to comment on another aspect of the bill, namely the issue of mental health counselling, which is not regulated in Quebec. We may want to raise questions about this in committee to determine the impact of recognizing this practice from a tax standpoint when it is not regulated.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand here and represent the folks in our country who suffer from mental health issues. Bill C-323 is a common-sense initiative. We know very clearly that the Liberal government has failed to support the mental health of Canadians, even though we know this is a burgeoning issue.

We know very clearly, from statistics, that more than 6.7 million Canadians are affected by mental health issues. By age 40, which we have heard before, almost one in two Canadians will have suffered with a mental health diagnosis. Sadly, the Liberal government, in its multiple failures, has failed to honour the \$4.5-billion

Canada mental health transfer that it announced in platform 2021. It has never been allocated.

The difficulty with that is it was a much-lauded announcement about how the Liberals were going to look after the mental health of Canadians. It was very sanctimonious with much pomp and circumstance. Of course, Canadians were, once again, left disappointed with the Liberal government's lack of action. It is very good at making announcements and very poor at doing things.

We know very clearly that there is a significant cost to the economy when we speak about the effects of mental health. We know, from The Centre of Addiction and Mental Health, that nearly 500,000 Canadians are prevented each week from attending work due to mental health issues. It also notes on its website that the cost of leave due to mental health is nearly double the cost of physical health problems.

Finally, I would point out that the cost to the Canadian economy is almost \$51 billion per year when direct health care costs, lost productivity, and reductions in mental health and quality of life are taken into consideration.

The other thing, which is a very sad issue, is that nearly 4,000 Canadians die by suicide every year. On average, that is 11 Canadians every day. The other thing we know is that people with mental illness are more than twice as likely to have a substance use problem than those who do not. We know clearly, as these are things we have heard in this House many times, that almost 20 Canadians are dying every day due to overdose.

A third of Canadians over the age of 15 report having unmet mental health needs. We know, from the report that Statistics Canada released September 22 about mental disorders and access to mental health care, that this is clearly an issue for Canadians and it is something that needs to be addressed.

We already know that 6.7 million people have difficulties with their mental health. This report states that nearly five million people meet the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, alcohol use disorder, cannabis use disorder and other substance use disorders.

More Canadians met the criteria for a mood or anxiety disorder in 2022 than in 2012. The prevalence has basically doubled. I sense a theme here. Perhaps there is a connection to mortgage costs, rental costs, food costs and heating costs, all of which have doubled under the Liberal government.

Sadly, only half of those with a mood, anxiety or substance use disorder have spoken to a health care professional. In the words of this report, disparities in coverage for counselling services will need to be addressed.

Government Orders

This bill may need minor additions, and certainly I am open to having those amendments made at committee. I urge members to support Bill C-323 for the sake of the 20% of Canadians struggling with mental health issues at this current time.

• (1235)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 12:36 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired. The question is on the motion.

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, given what happened this morning, I ask that this motion be adopted on division.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we would request a recorded vote, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 27, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

changer for housing in our country. Mike Moffatt, one of Canada's leading housing experts, called this "a fantastic transformative step." and Toronto's former chief city planner, Jennifer Keesmaat, said that this measure could be "the beginning of a sea change."

This is the newest measure in our ambitious housing plan, one that is about building more homes faster, cracking down on unfair practices by investors and ensuring that Canadians can afford a safe place to call home. Our plan includes the new tax-free first home savings account, which is already helping tens of thousands of Canadians save up to \$40,000 tax-free toward that first down payment. Our plan also includes the \$4 billion race-to-the-top housing accelerator fund, which is already breaking down barriers and encouraging municipalities to build more homes.

With Bill C-56, we are doing even more with provinces like Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia already following our lead by eliminating provincial taxes on new rentals. We will build even more of the rental homes that Canadians need.

• (1240)

[Translation]

This bill also seeks to amend the Competition Act to give more power to the Competition Bureau so that it can investigate price gouging and price fixing.

It would put an end to anti-competitive mergers that drive up prices and limit Canadians' choices. It would also enable the Competition Bureau to ensure that big grocery stores cannot prevent smaller competitors from opening stores nearby. Our government is relentlessly focused on building an economy with stable prices, steady growth, and abundant, well-paying, middle-class jobs.

There are currently 980,000 more Canadians in the job market than before the pandemic. Both the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predict that, on average, Canada will see the strongest economic growth in the G7 this year and next. DBRS Morningstar also confirmed our AAA credit rating earlier this month.

Since we were elected, 2.3 million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty. In 2015, 14.5% of Canadians were living in poverty. By 2021, that number had dropped to 7.4%. Our affordable Canada-wide early learning and child care system is supporting a record labour force participation rate of 85.7% for working-age women. It is also helping to grow the economy and make life more affordable for families from coast to coast to coast.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to seek unanimous consent to share my time with the member for Guelph.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mister Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act.

I would like to explain why it is so important that we work together to pass this bill. This bill includes urgent measures to make life more affordable for Canadians, including removing the GST on the construction of new apartment buildings, which would help get more rental homes built faster.

The bill would also enhance competition across the economy, with a focus on the grocery sector to help stabilize food prices for Canadians.

[English]

Specifically, this legislation would increase the GST rental rebate from 36% to 100% and remove the existing GST rental rebate phase-out thresholds for new rental housing projects. That means for a two-bedroom rental unit valued at \$500,000, our plan would deliver \$25,000 in tax relief. This is about encouraging developers to build homes that otherwise would not get built. It is a game-

Furthermore, whether by enhancing the Canada workers benefit or by creating the Canada child benefit or the new Canada dental care plan, we have strengthened the social safety net that millions of Canadians rely on, while ensuring that Canada maintains the lowest deficit and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7.

[English]

We are working hard for Canadians, but we know we have more work to do. Bill C-56 will deliver real, concrete solutions. More competition will help with the sticker shock at the grocery checkout counter. Eliminating the GST on rental housing will get more homes built faster, so that more Canadians have an affordable place to call home.

Bill C-56 is an important step in our plan to continue delivering on what matters most to Canadians, and I encourage my colleagues to support its swift passage.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the finance minister said that interest rates would stay low for a very long time. Then she dumped hundreds of billions of dollars of fuel on the inflationary fire, giving Canadians the most rapid interest rate hikes seen in the last three decades.

In November she said she would balance the budget and would be careful not to pour fuel on the inflationary fire that she started. She then turned around and dumped a \$63 billion jerry can on it.

Two months ago, she was doing victory laps, saying that she stopped inflation. It has gone up 43% since then.

Now her deficits have fuelled inflation and put Canadians most at risk in the G7 for a mortgage default crisis. When will she balance the budget so Canadians will not lose their homes?

• (1245)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that the question has absolutely nothing to do with the legislation we are presenting. However, let me take a moment to clarify some of the incorrect assertions embedded within it.

It is really important to be honest and truthful with Canadians. The truth is that Canada has an AAA credit rating, which was reaffirmed by DBRS Morningstar this month. It is also important to be clear with Canadians that we have the lowest deficit in the G7 and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio. Those are the facts. Everything else is a partisan muddying of the waters.

When it comes to our legislation, it speaks to the immediate needs of Canadians today: getting more rental housing built now and bringing more competition into the economy, including the grocery sector, to keep prices down.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend the Deputy Prime Minister on her speech, which seemed to be full of good intentions.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, released some alarming and very troubling statistics. By 2030, Quebec will need 1.1 million housing units. It will be the hardest-hit region of Canada. The Government of Quebec also released some

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statistics. Homelessness has gone up 44% in the past five years. Those are the numbers. We are in the midst of a housing crisis, but for the past six months, the federal government has been withholding \$900 million and taking a paternalistic and irresponsible attitude. In the midst of a housing crisis, the cities, which the federal government is once again accusing of dragging their feet, are unable to submit applications to build new housing projects.

I would like the Deputy Prime Minister to explain to us today why the government has been withholding money for new housing projects for six months, if housing is truly one of its priorities.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois that there really is a housing crisis. That is why we introduced our bill last week, the first week after the summer break. We are absolutely certain that this bill is urgent. We agree that there needs to be more housing. We agree that more rental housing needs to be built and that it must be done quickly.

I hope that every member in the House, including the members of the Bloc Québécois, will support us because I agree with them that Quebec also needs more housing and more rental housing.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are very aware of the fact that we need non-market solutions, as well as market solutions, in order to address the housing crisis. The minister, in her remarks, mentioned three planks of the government's housing plan: a tax-free savings account for down payments; the housing accelerator fund, which talks a little bit about affordability but does not talk about social housing or make affordability a requirement of the program; and this bill's GST measure. All these things have in common that they are largely market-based initiatives.

The NDP has called for a non-profit acquisition fund and a replenishment of the coinvestment fund. These are things that really ought to happen hand in hand with any market-based measures. Therefore, what measures is the government planning on presenting this fall alongside the legislation that will lead to the creation of new social and affordable housing units in Canada?

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Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for the work that he has been doing alongside our government, together with me, on the housing crisis. I believe that this measure of lifting the GST on all rental construction would help all Canadians with housing, including affordable housing. The fact is that we need to add to supply. That is what this measure would do, and this would have a positive impact on everyone who rents, as well as on people looking to buy.

• (1250)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House for the first time this session to discuss the very important bill that we have in front of us.

This summer, I spoke to many constituents of mine in Guelph who had concerns about the price of housing, the price of groceries and big business taking over the marketplace in many areas. I am really pleased that the first piece of legislation of the session that we have in front of us to talk about is Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act.

The government understands that many Canadians are struggling to make ends meet in these times of high inflation. Many measures that we have been introducing have been to help people who are unfairly affected by the inflationary winds that are blowing globally right now. We need to do more than we have been doing in terms of targeted support. The bill in front of us today addresses what we could do to help build more rental housing, as well as to try to curb the inflation that we see in the grocery market in particular.

Families across the country are relying on parliamentarians to do what we can to help with measures such as those we have outlined in Bill C-56 and the ensuing debate that we will have.

Making housing more affordable is something that we need to look at, including where the federal government can influence the activities within the marketplace, so that young people, young Canadians, have the dream of owning a home again. Right now, it is increasingly out of reach, and paying for rent has become more expensive across the country. This is really affecting younger Canadians, as well as people who are just trying to get their foot into the market.

The housing crisis has an impact on our economy. When people are not succeeding, our economy does not succeed. Without more homes in our communities, it is difficult for businesses to attract the workers they need to grow and succeed. When people spend more of their income on housing, it means less money is being spent in our communities for necessities such as groceries. This has a direct impact on small business.

Bill C-56 would enhance the goods and services tax rental rebate on new purpose-built rental housing; this would encourage the construction of more rental homes, including apartment buildings, student housing and seniors' residences across Canada. The enhanced rebate would apply to projects for which construction began on or after September 14, 2023, and on or before December 31, 2030, with construction completed before 2036.

Working on the supply is an important part of what the federal government could do to help. For a two-bedroom rental unit valued at \$500,000, for a developer, the enhanced GST rental rebate would

deliver \$25,000 in tax relief to incent the developer to make the numbers work. This tool could help create the necessary conditions to build the types of housing that we need and that families want to live in. This, in turn, would open up the opportunity for renters to have a reduction in the cost they are paying for the units that are constructed.

The measure also removes a restriction on the existing GST rules to ensure that public service bodies, such as universities, public colleges, hospitals, charities and qualifying not-for-profit organizations, could build or purchase purpose-built rental housing and be permitted to claim 100% of the enhanced GST rental rebate.

The government is also calling on provinces that currently apply provincial sales tax or the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax to rental housing to join us by matching our rebate for new rental housing. It was very encouraging to hear that Ontario, the province where my riding exists, will be participating in this program.

We are also requesting that local governments put an end to exclusionary zoning and encourage building apartments near public transit in order to have their housing accelerator fund applications approved. I know that Guelph has worked hard on this application. We have had many community discussions around this, but sometimes the numbers just do not work. In those cases, programs such as the one we are initiating today, through this bill, would help the numbers to work.

• (1255)

Launched in March 2023, the housing accelerator fund is a \$4-billion initiative designed to help cities, towns and indigenous governments unlock new housing supply, targeting about 100,000 units across the country; speed up development and approvals, like fixing out-of-date permitting systems; introduce zoning reforms to build more density; and incentive development close to public transit. Last week, the government announced that London, Ontario is the first city to benefit from this fund. Of course, Guelph is watching that very closely. The fund also supports the development of complete low-carbon and climate-resilient communities that are affordable, inclusive, equitable and diverse. Every community across Canada needs to build more homes faster so we can reduce the cost of housing for everyone.

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We are also looking at how we can help Canadians with their grocery bills, and we need to stabilize the price of groceries in Canada. Through the one-time grocery rebate in July, we delivered targeted inflation relief for 11 million low- and modest-income Canadians and families who need it the most. It was up to an extra \$467 for eligible couples with two children and up to \$234 for single Canadians without children, including seniors. This support was welcomed by Canadians, but we knew that more needed to be done to address the rising cost of groceries. The interim measure was really to address the increase in groceries and not actually the groceries' being purchased at a higher price every week. This is why we are taking immediate steps to enhance competition across the Canadian economy, with a focus on the grocery sector, to help stabilize costs for middle-class Canadians.

Through Bill C-56, the government would be introducing a first set of legislative amendments to the Competition Act, intended to provide the Competition Bureau with powers to compel the production of information in order to conduct effective and complete market studies and to remove the inefficiencies defence, which is currently allowing anti-competitive mergers to happen if the corporate efficiencies are being used as a reason for them to go forward. Canadian customers would still pay higher prices even if these efficiencies are realized. The bill would empower the bureau to take action against collaborations that stifle competition and consumer choice, in particular, in situations where larger grocers prevent smaller competitors from establishing operations nearby.

This bill would build on our other measures that have been introduced to make life more affordable for Canadians. These include delivering the automatic advance payments of the Canada workers benefit, starting July 2023, to provide \$1,518 total for eligible single workers and \$2,616 for an eligible family, split among three advance payments and the final payment after a person has completed their 2023 tax return. We are also supporting three and a half million families annually through the tax-free Canada child benefit, with families this year receiving up to \$7,437 per child under the age of six and \$6,275 per child for children aged six through 17. Increasing old age security is another measure we have taken, including indexing that to inflation. We have also reduced fees for regulated child care by 50% on average, moving towards the cost of \$10 a day by 2026, with six provinces and territories already reaching that goal.

We are looking at what we can do to influence the market to help people who are facing these costs. We are working on helping Canadians put food on their table, pay the rent and be successful within their communities. We want to ensure that Canada remains the best place in the world to live, work, go to school and raise a family. Making life more affordable is a key part of that.

I urge hon. members to support this legislation, and I am open to questions.

• (1300)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was very honoured in June 2022 to host a round table on housing in Calgary, where I welcomed such individuals as Craig Dickie from Anthem United; Kory Zwack from Calgary Housing; Michele Ward from Homes by Avi; Cliff Stevenson and Jackie Stewart, both from BILD Calgary; and Brian Hahn from BILD Cal-

gary. I apologize; Cliff Stevenson is from CREA. Of course, there was my favourite councillor, Dan McLean, from ward 13. To share with my colleague, since we are both working on solutions together to solve the housing crisis, the problems identified at that time included lack of supply due to land release, approval timing and not enough lead time or certainty for those who wish to build homes. There was also the cost of utilities, with the carbon tax now really adding to that.

I would like to ask my colleague why the government always does too little too late.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Madam Speaker, we have had similar discussions in Guelph, with round tables that have the service providers, the builders and the community agencies focused on housing solutions. In fact, similar to Calgary, we have identified supply as being one of the major issues, as well as approval. How can we speed up the approvals process? The housing accelerator fund will be addressing the approvals process by providing funds for communities to increase their support for the approvals process. This bill in particular is looking at supply. In particular within that, it is looking at supply of rental housing, and within rental housing, making sure that 30% of the rental housing is affordable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I did not have a chance to ask the Minister of Finance a question earlier when she made her speech. Since my colleague across the way is from the same party, I assume he may be able to answer my question.

In her speech, the Minister of Finance mentioned that the proposed cut to the GST on housing construction with the rebate system would help lower the cost of building a housing unit. For example, for a housing unit valued at \$500,000, the rebate would be \$25,000.

The cost of building a home will be reduced for the person building it, but after that, the housing unit will be sold to the person who will start renting it out.

What incentive does that person have to lower the rent if the market price remains the same? We know that if the market price for rent is \$2,000 to \$3,000—

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

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Madam Speaker, reducing the cost of a \$500,000 unit by \$25,000 would really give a developer the opportunity to move forward with plans it has to create more supply. Creating more supply in a marketplace such as ours would reduce the cost, because of supply and demand. We have a demand that is right now not being met by supply. If we meet supply with more units, automatically the market would adjust itself accordingly.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, from my colleague's previous work on the industry committee, he knows there would be some improvements in the bill from the competition bureau. The concern I have that I would like the member to talk a bit about is whether he thinks the bill goes far enough. Would we see some improvements? As he knows, grocery CEOs fixed the price of bread and had to be caught. They have also ended pandemic pay, all at the same time. Technically they did not violate the law, but they got together and almost colluded to do it at the same time. Last, most recently, the CEOs met with the minister privately, but I am not sure how successful that is going to be, because most recently the competition bureau has been ordered to pay nine million dollars just doing its job challenging the Shaw-Rogers merger.

Does my colleague have confidence that the bill would actually resolve some long-standing challenges?

• (1305)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Madam Speaker, the review we have done, starting in 2022, has been a public consultation on the Competition Act. A couple of things we heard about are finding their way into this bill, but there is a lot more on the website to show the other things we have heard that we need to address with future legislation.

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to request unanimous consent to split my time with the hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Ryan Williams: That is okay, Madam Speaker. I have all the time in the world today.

Canadians pay some of the most punishing prices in the world at the grocery store. Canadians pay double the rent they did only a few years ago. Canadians have it really tough, and inflation is the culprit, fuelled by the government's reckless spending and a punitive carbon tax. It has increased prices significantly over the past year, almost 18% for groceries alone. Inflation is rising in faster in Canada than in the United States, and has risen over 43% in the last two months. This is after the government said it was gone.

It is also a story about a lack of competition and competition laws to look after the consumer, the people, and to boost competition in the industry. After eight years of the Liberal government, we are finally seeing some results. We are finally seeing some competition law changes in a government bill. I will be the first to admit this is a really good idea, especially to eliminate the efficiencies defence, which, of course, right now allows any companies to merge if they find efficiencies. A lot of times those have been in job loss-

es. Superior Propane used it not just once but three times because it is such a good law.

I say it was a great idea, because it was actually my idea. For the first reading of the efficiencies defence in Bill C-339, I read in the House on June 8, and we were supposed to go to debate in November, but I digress. This is a great idea, and I give credit to the government where credit is due for taking this great idea. It is a good start. That is combined with the Leader of the Opposition's idea only a few weeks ago to eliminate the GST in purpose-built rental housing, which is a great idea. I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on his first piece of government legislation. Just wait until we form government. It is going to be something.

This is a big one. As much as we can shrug and say this bill would do some of what we want to do to tackle grocery prices in Canada, this bill misses one of the biggest, most pressing actions of all, which is to remove the carbon tax, which is added for farmers with no rebate. The median price is \$150,000 per farm. Where does that price go? It gets added to what the consumer pays. What about the carbon tax for the trucker who picks up the food from the farm? Where does that price go? There is no rebate; it gets added to what the consumer pays. The carbon price is added on the cold storage facility that stores the food. Where does that carbon tax go? It gets added to what the consumer pays.

Where does the carbon tax to the grocery store go? It is added on what the consumer, who drives to the grocery store and picks up the groceries, pays. The carbon tax adds cost after cost to what the consumer pays. It punishes farmers and consumers. At the end of the day, when we look at what is missing from this bill, when talking about trying to tackle grocery prices, we are missing the deletion of the carbon tax, which is something that the Conservatives really support.

Additionally, Canadians can buy food across Canada from really only five competitors. Let me tell everyone this right now. If anyone has ever visited No Frills, Provigo, Zehrs, Fortinos, Valu-mart, Dominion, Superstore or Shoppers Drug Mart, they have shopped at Loblaws. For those who have ever gone to Farm Boy, Lawtons, Foodland or Longo's, and my favourite, the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, which is not independent, they are all owned by Sobeys. Those who have ever gone to Jean Coutu, Super C, Food Basics or Brunet have gone to Metro.

Three Canadian competitors plus Walmart and Costco makes five competitors controlling 80% of all the grocery retail in Canada. By comparison, Americans have 10. At least they have dealt with it. The Americans are not perfect, but at least they are there. When we compare Canadian grocery prices to American ones, the Americans have no carbon tax, there are more competitors and the prices are lower. If Canadians are buying \$40 or \$50 worth of groceries, Americans are paying only \$25 to \$30. Sometimes it is really great to have these American neighbours so we can compare what they have and what we do not have.

How big is Loblaws? Let us talk about that for a moment. This is really neat to me. Loblaws sells 62% of Coca-Cola in Canada. Let us think about that for a minute. Loblaws is so big that it controls the whole market for Coca-Cola.

• (1310)

Why is that important? Take an independent like Freson Bros. Freson Bros. is Canada's largest independent grocer in the great province of Alberta and they have independent grocers. Freson Bros. is so great. As an independent supplier in rural Canada, they have Red Seal butchers and Red Seal bakers.

They employ really great individuals in their local independent stores. These are really, truly independent stores that pay good wages in rural areas, and yet they have to pay more for Coca-Cola because Loblaws holds the monopoly.

That is what monopolies do. They hold dominance and they control prices. When one has less choice as a consumer, then the monopolies win. If it was not for Coca-Cola having dominance through Loblaws, maybe that would be something that we could pay less for.

That example can be used over and over again when it comes to products that consumers try to buy every day in their stores. We call it abuse of dominance and it is prevalent among our big five major grocers.

Worst of all, Canadians are paying increases on food that is actually shrinking. Shrinkflation is the phenomenon of buying products that are actually decreasing in size. A lot of Canadians are not even aware of this. When one goes to the grocery store and one buys a pack of, let us say, granola bars for our children, normally there would have been six in a box. Consumers are now finding that there are five.

When parents go to put those granola bars in their students' lunches, they are paying a little bit more for a product that is smaller. That phenomenon is shrinkflation. That is coming because of inflation, because of this dominance of monopolies.

All the while, Canadians are seeing food prices that are actually going up. Food prices in all of Canada, this year, increased 6.8%, almost 7%. The two-year increase is 17%. Meat had a 6.5% increase this year. Over two years, it was 13.5%. Eggs increased around 3% this year. Over two years, it was 20%. Breakfast cereals increased 10% this year. Over two years, it was 25%. Fresh vegetables increased 9% this year. Over two years, it was 19%. Coffee, and we all need coffee, especially, sometimes, in the House, increased 8% over one year. Over two years, it was 24%.

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Food purchases by restaurants increased 8% this year in costs, and 14% over two years. Think of a lot of these restaurants, these small, independent local businesses that took on loans during the pandemic and now have to try to pass these costs off to consumers. It is really difficult for consumers who want to go out for a meal.

From seed to source in Canada, there is also little choice. We talk about what has come into Canada. We talk about the growing influence of Walmart and Costco. Decisions made by the Competition Bureau over the last 20 or 30 years allowed, in one instance, one grocery store to buy another; and allowed a major chain, Amazon, to buy Whole Foods, which I think will have a dominant effect in the future, even though it has decreased stores lately.

We think of where we have Amazon warehouses. If we look at the next 50 years, we may not even be using grocery stores any more. When we look at automation and the increase of innovation, grocery delivery could be all in the form of warehousing. When we look at what that impact of Amazon, an American company, not a Canadian company, has, it is pretty significant, when we look at what it could mean over the next 20 or 30 years.

When we look at the consolidation, the actual competition laws that exist, yes, we have had some pretty bad decisions by the Competition Bureau, but it was all the result of a bad Competition Act.

We allowed Sobeys to buy IGA. This one is amazing to me. The Independent Grocers Association should be independent and was formed as being independent. Sobeys now owns IGAs. They say half are independent. I do not really believe that. They are owned by a major corporation.

Metro bought A&P. Loblaws bought Shoppers Drug Mart. I think, at the time, when the Competition Bureau looked at it, it said, look, we have a pharmacy, we are not going to have an impact for consumers.

Now, as we look at it, Shoppers Drug Marts, which are open sometimes to midnight, are the only grocery store in some of these rural towns across Canada. What I am hearing is that they are making as much as 20% profit on fresh produce. Let us think about the costs already. Again, it is based on supply and demand, but we allowed this under our laws. We allowed Loblaws to buy Shoppers Drug Mart. Sobeys bought Longo's. It bought Farm Boy, and again, there is less independence. We have allowed this through our existing competition law.

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The result has been that if one walks into any store, it is an illusion that it is not part of the big three. It is also a consolidation that gives Canadians little choice. We talk about freedom. It is the freedom of Canadians to decide where their money is going to go, where their paycheques are going to go. The illusion has been, through this lack of competition, that Canadians have choice.

• (1315)

The reality is that Canadians have little choice. Even with the Loblaws brand of Your Independent Grocer, it is no more independent than any other grocery store or any other business.

I want to tell a little story also about Kleenex in Canada. We can no longer buy Kleenex in Canada. Is that not sad? At the end of the day, Kleenex is beholden to the big brands. Loblaws, for instance, because it has a monopoly, decides where it wants to put certain brands. It says to suppliers that if they are going to lower prices, this is where they need to lower them to. If they are going to drop five or 10 cents, this is where it is at. Right now, that is held by Kruger paper in Canada, and that is the Scotties brand, with the funky boxes and great colours.

The problem with that and the story of Kleenex leaving Canada is this. As we did last week, we have a “perp” walk and bring all the five grocers in. The government officials told them to lower prices and that they are going to impose a tax on them. We know that, with these companies being big conglomerates and publicly traded companies, a tax will only go to the consumer. We know this in a capitalist society. It is simple economics. Everyone knows this. The conglomerates put pressure then on the manufacturers.

Let me say this. I have a Kruger paper manufacturing facility in Quinte West in my riding, which employs 120 employees. If the companies feel the pressure to decrease prices, they start to find savings in other areas of that business, which means layoffs and shorting shifts, hurting Canadian workers. That is the power that these big monopolies have. With respect to competition laws and how we have to fix them, we need to fix the dominance that these big monopolies have. It is Kleenex today and we do not want it to be Kruger tomorrow. That is really important. Big players cannot control smaller players. We have to make sure small players have their say when it comes to the Canadian economy because then it is really the consumer who has the say.

I want to talk about shrinkflation. It is really fascinating. It is the process of shrinking product sizes while keeping the prices the same or even increasing them. In essence, people are getting less for the same amount of money. This trend is becoming more prevalent in the grocery industry and its consequences ripple through our households.

Let us start with the grocery stores themselves. As people walk through the aisles, they might notice that their favourite products do not seem as big as they used to be. A cereal box, a bag of chips or a carton of ice cream all appear slightly smaller. Manufacturers are reducing the quantity of the product. It is often in subtle ways, like reducing the number of cookies in a pack or slimming down the width of a candy bar. I have some examples of this. A year ago, a jar of Nutella was 400 grams and now it is 375 grams, which is a 6.3% reduction. Campbell's Chunky soup was 540 millilitres and now it is 515 millilitres, which is a 5% reduction. Crispers used to

be 175 grams and is now 145 grams, which I noticed the other day when I was picking up some groceries for my children for school. This is a reduction of 17%.

With respect to a family on a budget, I talked to somebody the other day who said that for their family, because of the increases in rent and mortgage and bringing home less of a paycheque, they make a dinner for the family and they make something else for their children. They cannot afford to give the same meal to the children as they do for their family, and it might be a grilled cheese sandwich. Even with Kraft Singles, before, a package was 24 slices and now it is 22 slices. When people are making lunch or dinner for their family, that is a big deal; It is a reduction of 9%.

We have Chewy granola bars. A box used to contain six bars and now it contains five bars. A bag of Tim Hortons fine-ground original blend coffee used to be 1,000 grams and now it is 930 grams, which is a reduction of 7%. That is pretty sad.

When I talk about a box of granola bars that went from six bars to five bars, there is something else significant that happens with that reduction. That is the imposition of a new tax, called the snack tax, that goes onto everyday grocery items. Not a lot of Canadians know this, but there is a snack tax that goes on many items like cookies, chips, ice cream or granola bars, which maybe sometimes is the only thing we can put in our child's lunch bags. When the manufacturer uses shrinkflation and decreases prices, that snack tax is automatically implemented. This means that because of inflation, because of dominance of our monopolies and now because manufacturers are shrinking their products, we actually have government tax going on some of these items in the grocery stores. The government is now making money on items because of inflation and that is really sad.

• (1320)

When we take this to committee, this is something we are obviously going to study. I know my colleague before me from the NDP talked about some other elements. How sad is it that the government is making money on certain elements of what is happening in the grocery store? That is what is happening when it comes to shrinkflation.

When it comes to looking after the consumer, who looks after rent and groceries, we certainly have a lot of ideas we need to implement that are going to help the consumer. A lot of these ideas came from this side of the House but also from a lot of great committee work from members on this side of the House. We need to be very cognizant when we are putting all this forward that we are doing the best we can for consumers, the families who every day need to make decisions for their households at the grocery store.

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This bill is equivalent to the shrug emoji. We can support it, but it needs a lot more to actually make grocery prices affordable in Canada. After eight years, the tired Liberal government is out of ideas. There are a few good ideas in here thanks to Conservatives, but it fails for the most part to follow through with better ideas to address the major oligopoly in Canada, which gives Canadians little choice and has them paying more at the grocery store for less.

Shrinkflation and the taxes that follow are eating more of Canadians' paycheques. The carbon tax takes a chunk from farmers, those who deliver the food and of course the consumers who buy the food.

Competition Act changes are good, but we must go further to stop the abusive dominance provisions that exist in the Competition Act. The provisions that are the most prevalent include those that allow monopolies to take advantage of Canadians, of consumers, and most importantly, of manufacturers and farmers in the whole process.

Most of all, we need more competition in Canada from food manufacturers and farmers to ensure Canadians have freedom of choice. When they have freedom of choice, they will decide best where to put their money, where to put their hard-earned paycheques. We need more competition to bring lower prices home for Canadians and their families.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there were a couple of things I was listening for but did not hear, so maybe the hon. member can help clarify them for me. One is in terms of external competition. In August, Saudi Arabia cut a million barrels a day of oil out of production, which was about a 20% cut of the supply of oil. When one reduces supply, one increases prices, and that is what we are seeing now with nine billion barrels a day as current production driving up the price of oil. I did not hear much about external competitive factors.

Also, I was really hoping to hear something about the Competition Bureau and the role that independent organization plays in Canada to enforce the act we are discussing, as well as how having an independent review is such an important part of the process. Quite often I hear the other side saying it is all the government's fault, but really we have an independent review through the Competition Bureau. Maybe he could discuss that.

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, to the first question, if we just cut the carbon tax, it would at least eliminate 14¢ or 15¢ right now and about 60¢ later, so that is a good idea. We are full of great ideas.

Second, yes, the Competition Bureau is important, but it needs to have the right laws in order to enforce them. Right now, we look at different examples, but the Rogers-Shaw merger for one, was allowed to go forward. By the way, it would have gone forward regardless because of the efficiencies defence.

The Competition Bureau needs to have the right tools and the right powers in order to look at competition and to stop some of the mergers I mentioned that happened in the grocery industry. Five or six of those mergers probably should never have been able to happen, so much so that we had an Independent Grocers Association owned by a major monopoly in Canada. How bad is it than an inde-

pendent grocer is not independent at all? We need to strength those laws and we look forward to making those changes.

• (1325)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it was refreshing to hear the Conservatives finally identify that corporate greed is driving inflation when it comes to food prices. We saw Conservatives in Great Britain, for example, charge an excess profit tax on the outrageous amounts of excess profits on oil and gas.

Here in Canada we have excess profits on oil and gas, at the grocery store and at the big banks. We cannot even get Liberals in Canada to charge an excess profit tax. In fact, what I heard from my colleague is the need for improvement when it comes to competition in the Competition Act. I am hoping he will support our leader, who has tabled a bill that would ensure we have a comprehensive package to break apart monopolies and improve competition.

When he talked about the carbon tax, greedflation is about 20-fold the impact on grocery store prices compared to the carbon tax. Will my colleague support our leader's bill for the NDP and will he support an excess profit tax on these corporations?

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, a tax is a tax, and a tax that is imposed on companies is always passed onto consumers. We want to ensure there is no more tax.

When it comes to an example of that, we just have to look to the utility sector in Great Britain in the late nineties when there was a windfall tax imposed on the utility companies. In the studies that came out 10 years later, every company that had a windfall tax increased their prices and those who bore those prices were the middle class. The middle class will always pay the higher prices imposed by any windfall tax or tax in general.

We on this side of the House are for no new taxes.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, we heard it here first. History was made when someone entered a shrug emoji into the Hansard. I commend the hon. member for that.

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I want to talk about process for a second. The government tables legislation twice per year as major money bills. For some reason, the government is now touting this bill as a marquis bill that would make a massive difference in the lives of consumers, except it neglected to do it a few months ago in the budget. What has changed? Maybe a couple of members of Parliament put ideas forward. In fact, one was from the NDP and the other two were from Conservative members, which the government stole.

Could the hon. member talk about the process? Why was this not in the budget? How are Canadians supposed to believe that the government will have solutions to problems it did not believe existed until a week ago?

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, I agree. After eight years of the government we see that it is out of ideas. Obviously, we are waiting for the next government and the next prime minister of Canada for those ideas. Where was the government eight years ago when it had all the opportunities? Every year there is a new budget and new measures announced.

Four years ago, the government was denying there was a problem with inflation, even though this side of the House was proclaiming what would certainly happen. We speak with Canadians. We are the ones who have spoken about the issues that have come up. The government is just catching up, but it is too little too late. We look forward to forming government and being able to fix these problems once and for all.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on the member's very last comments. He said that the Conservatives were looking forward to forming government to fix the problems, but in a good portion of his speech he talked about Loblaws and Shoppers. All one has to do is google that merger. Who do members think was in government when that happened? When those two giants merged, everyone was saying that it was going to be like the Walmart of Canada. When that came to be, it was under Stephen Harper. I do not mean to pop the member opposite's bubble, but at times the Conservative Party needs a reality check.

My question is on the other aspect of the bill, which the member did not spend much time on, and that is with respect to the need for Canada to increase our rental housing stock. I wonder if he could provide his thoughts on why we are now witnessing provinces coming on board and duplicating what we are doing at the national level with respect to giving that tax break so we can see more apartments being built. Is it not a good thing to see the provinces on side?

• (1330)

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, first, Sobeys bought Farm Boy and Metro bought Jean Coutu. That was done under the Liberal government. I love how the Liberals try to blame everything on us when it is happening under their watch. They are the ones in government right now.

Our leader has some great speeches, and I know members are going to hear a lot of good speeches today on our housing measures, and, of course, removing the GST from purpose-built rentals. There are a lot of great changes our leader has come up with that the government has not. I am sure we are going to be talking about those great ideas.

We do not focus on building penthouses, but making sure we are building affordable housing. This means that the everyday Canadians, whose paycheques are stretched and are unable to buy things at the grocery store, will be able to afford an apartment. We are focused on everyday Canadians.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member touched briefly on the compounding effect of the carbon tax. The carbon tax is very different than the GST. The GST has input tax credits and the tax itself, so the consumer only ends up paying a one-time 5% tax. However, the carbon tax is a compounding tax: tax on the carbon tax, then carbon tax on carbon tax. Could the member explain a bit more on how that has a very damaging effect on Canadians and really propels inflation?

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, it has a very profound effect. We just have to talk to the manufacturers and farmers who have had it implemented upon them.

The Canadian public only sees the rebate, which they still pay more of on their side, but farmers, manufacturers, truckers, cold storage facilities and grocery stores do not get a rebate at all with the carbon tax. Every time that cost is imposed on a business, it has no choice but to pass it down to the consumer. When that is done one, two, three, four or five times, the result is seeing that price increase five times. The consumer pays it. At the end of the day, Canadians are suffering.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the speeches from the Conservatives, who seem to delight in reminding us that removing the GST from housing was their idea. Whether the idea came from the Conservatives or the Liberals, ultimately, will it actually make a difference?

I sincerely wonder, because in the end, the money will not go back into the pockets of those who rent housing, but rather into the pockets of those who build it. This sends a message to builders that they will be able to build homes for less. As the Minister of Finance said, it will cost them \$25,000 less to build a \$500,000 building. If the building is valued at \$800,000 on the market, why would someone sell it for \$25,000 less? It will be sold at the same price and the builder will simply make more profit.

I am having a hard time understanding how this magic solution will suddenly solve the problem.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, we all know about the housing crisis we are in. It is the worst in the world. I know all of us, as parliamentarians, want to fix that. We all agree that we need more supply, and I think the debate in the House is how to get more supply.

How do we work with those municipalities and the provinces in getting more supply? There will be different ideologies on how to do that. Taking the GST off of purpose-built rentals is a great idea, as is working with municipalities to make sure we get permits approved faster. That is what our leader is all about, and it is a great idea. Let us work together to make sure we get houses built so Canadians can finally afford a home.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would ask for the consent of the House to share my time with the hon. member for Shefford.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member have the consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, I want you to know that I am very critical of this bill. Obviously, it does not set out any harmful measures. It sets out some mini-measures and some relatively important things. It is clearly not a panacea, but we will support it because we cannot be against it. However, when I read the bill, I could not help but be very critical of it for the following reasons.

We are dealing with a government that is incapable of thinking long term or seeing past the end of its nose. We have been in a housing crisis for two, five, 10, 15, 20 years, yet never has there been any long-term action except for a failed national housing strategy. We are in a situation where food prices have increased exponentially. Still, it took a Liberal caucus meeting where backbenchers were probably so angry at the government that something had to be done.

What was the centrepiece of its action? No joke, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry decided he was going to do something. He decided he was going to call up the people who represent 80% of Canada's grocery retail market for a meeting. He picked up the telephone and then realized there were only five of them: three big chains, Costco and Walmart. It took him 30 seconds to make the calls.

Economics teaches us that industries find ways to concentrate. Some are more complex than others. However, when there are so few players controlling the grocery market that they could all tee off together, the industry concentration is obvious. The Conservatives are no better. Concentration has been an issue for years. Everything had to blow up before the Minister of Industry decided to invite them over for a coffee. There are so few of them that they would only need one Nespresso pod.

What has happened since 1986? Steinberg and A&P closed down. Loblaws acquired Provigo. Sobeys acquired IGA. Metro acquired Adonis. In the 1980s, there were 13 grocery chains. That was already a small number, but now we are down to three. Now we have to include Walmart and Costco to say there is some competition. The Minister of Industry was never interested in this. It is funny: The Liberals are suddenly seeing that an election may be looming. It is funny: All of a sudden they are seeing their poll results. It took polls for them to realize that their constituents would like to eat three meals a day.

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This serves as a very sobering reminder of how out of touch the Liberals are. I would remind the House, however, that this all began under the Conservatives, and no one did anything. We know what happened. Are the Bloc Québécois members the only ones saying this? Not necessarily, although we have been proposing measures for 20 years to improve competition and ensure that consumers come first. The Competition Bureau is also saying these things. More and more mergers and acquisitions are happening. No one is stopping them. The profit margin on products is increasing.

What does that mean? It means that it costs companies less thanks to economies of scale and additional savings when they merge. At the same time, they are charging more for their products. Between those two things, they are earning an excess of profits due to a lack of competition. These people are lining their pockets. No matter what the Conservatives say, it is not the result of free enterprise and the genius of capitalism. It is the result of less competition.

We therefore need to seriously rethink how this market is organized, because a market that works is one where consumers can go and see a competitor, where people can say that if the price is too high at company A, they will go and purchase from company B. Those companies would then have to compete with one another. This is no longer the case in Canada. When five individuals sitting in a room control 80% of the market, we no longer have a healthy grocery market.

As I said, Bill C-56 proposes measures that the Bloc Québécois has been requesting, not for two years, not for five years or eight years, not just since the Liberals came to power, but for 20 years. That is a verifiable fact. We care about the middle class and purchasing power, even between election periods.

There are some good things in this bill. It gives the commissioner real investigative powers. Instead of just conducting small studies and giving his opinion, as he is currently being forced to do, he will be able to compel people to testify. He will be able to ask for documents. A competition bureau needs to be able to investigate. In Canada, the commissioner's powers are limited.

● (1335)

The bill broadens the range of anti-competitive activities. Right now, we have a model that is unique in the world, but we are not the best country in the world. Members know what I think about that. When companies want to merge, the Competition Bureau lets them as long as doing so will generate efficiency gains, because that will lower costs.

However, the commissioner cannot say that the result will be less competition and therefore fewer reductions, higher prices and more money in the pockets of company shareholders because of a lack of competition. The commissioner cannot prevent that. Today, we will be able to take a step toward doing so. That is good, but it is just a start.

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We will support the bill, but we are not commending the government for this, far from it. The government is congratulating itself on this. However, the members on the other side of the House have some soul-searching to do, as do the Conservatives. There is still a lot of work to be done. We need to review the notion of abuse of dominance. We need to prevent the big players from abusing their large share of the market. That is just a start. This bill is disappointing, but we cannot be against it.

Let us talk about housing. Right now, there is a flaw in the market: It is not housing the poorest. That is a serious problem. Canada is still part of the G7. The market is not housing the poorest. The market is not building co-operative housing. The market did not build the Centre d'hébergement multiservice de Mirabel, which helps people who hit a rough patch, such as a separation or substance abuse problems. The market is not putting people back to work, and that is what is needed. While we should be talking about this, while it should be our primary concern, while there are 10,000 homeless people in Quebec, while there are people sleeping in tents, the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister are in a kind of intellectual symbiosis all of a sudden. They have become buddies. They are both attacking municipalities.

Instead of helping to release the \$900 million for Quebec, they go on about the national housing strategy because Ottawa wants to put a Canadian flag on the corner of the cheque. Suddenly, there are too many regulations. They are against protecting farmland, even though food is supposedly important to them. They are against protecting our architectural heritage. They are against harmoniously organizing our municipalities. They are against housing.

In the meantime, this is what is going on in my riding. When land was expropriated to build the Mirabel airport in the 1970s, the stolen land eventually had to be returned. At the time, airport easements were implemented. Today, there is one runway. At the time, there were plans for six. Today, for much of the land in Mirabel, which is zoned residential, federal regulations prevent the municipality of Mirabel from building housing, from housing people.

It is funny. The federal government does not care about those regulations. They are within its jurisdiction. Rather than doing what it needs to do, it is going after mayors. It is going after municipal consultants and cities. When Mirabel made the request in 2007, it never heard back. It never heard back in 2014, either. In 2022, at committee with the minister and again with the deputy minister, not a word came from Ottawa. I wrote to the Minister of Transport about this over the weekend. I urge him to review those easements.

The problem is, Quebec is being blackmailed by Ottawa, which is imposing conditions on releasing the funds. Meanwhile, real people, real families are on the street, living in tents or giving birth in their cars.

I want to say one last thing. We need to think about the demand. It takes four seconds to increase an immigration target, but it takes time to build housing. Even if the federal government's plan to eliminate the GST worked, it applies to housing starts in 2030, which will not be complete until 2035. The National Bank and the TD Bank have the same message: The immigration plan is poorly thought out. As usual and as with the GST rebate, no studies were

done. That is what we were told at the briefing. We were told that the market is buckling under the demand.

That is because the Liberals are always busy coming up with stunts to win votes. They continue to invite the grocery stores, increase immigration targets, come up with poor plans for housing, impose conditions and turn a blind eye to their own federal regulations that hinder the creation of housing. With the attitude of this government and the Conservatives, I predict that this crisis will be even worse in 10 years.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not think that spending literally billions of dollars is a political stunt. It is a reality.

I do not believe that the first-ever national housing strategy is a political stunt. I believe these are attempts by the government to ensure that we are able to address this as best we can. The national government needs to play a strong leadership role. We can understand the issues out there that need to be dealt with. However, other levels of government are also required to be equally engaged.

For the first time in a generation, we are seeing different levels of government coming together to address this issue. When the member talks about homelessness that on the streets, it is more than just having a shelter. There are all sorts of issues around that.

There is no one level of government that needs to be engaged, and not only governments, but also non-profits and other stakeholders, are needed to resolve the issue of housing before us. Would the member not agree with that?

● (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, let us deal with the parliamentary secretary the way we have to deal with the Conservatives on social media, in other words, let us set the record straight.

When it comes to the \$900 million in the national housing strategy that is stuck in Ottawa's coffers—it is in fact stuck in Ottawa's coffers—if it were not for the Bloc Québécois bringing this up during every question period in the House, no one would be talking about it.

It took three and a half years to negotiate with Quebec because under the national housing strategy, Quebec, in its own jurisdiction, wants to have the money that is just sitting in Ottawa. This is not fiction. It is fact.

The airspace easements that are preventing thousands of people in my own riding from getting housing fall under federal jurisdiction. Funnily enough, the Liberals do not question that. What a coincidence.

If the government really wants to house people, then it will get on with it and show leadership. When I look up the word “leadership” in the dictionary, I do not see a federal government that drags its feet for three and half years before paying out the money and needs to be prodded every question period just to give Quebec its funding when all the other provinces have already received their share.

When I talk about leadership, I am not talking about a program where the government boasts that it has invested a certain amount, but more than half of the funding comes directly from Quebec City and the provinces are subject to federal conditions.

If that is the kind of leadership the parliamentary secretary is offering us, we can do without it.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

[English]

I agree with some of what my colleague has said with respect to unchecked capitalism creating market failure. On that, I think we should all listen to the member. He is very well versed in economics when it comes to that issue.

I want to ask the member two questions. First, does he think it is a problem when the CFO of Pepsi brags, on national television, that they can sell their product for whatever they want? It seems as though we are focused on just the grocers, but there is a whole supply chain before the grocers that is completely absent from this discussion.

If the member does not want to answer that question, could he say why the government waited so long to get dragged into doing something?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, earlier, the previous Conservative member was supposed to speak for 10 minutes. The Green Party objected and he got 20 minutes. He did not even talk about housing. He focused on the price of a bag of chips.

Now my Conservative colleague, who deals with economic matters, is talking about the price of Pepsi. I find that a little unusual. Earlier I mentioned all the mergers and acquisitions that have happened since 1986. As a result, today we have a handful of people who probably belong to the same private club and control 80% of the market price.

The Harper government did nothing about it. There was nothing about that in the Conservative platform. There has been nothing about that in the Conservatives' questions in the House. Today, as the price of food continues to rise, there is still a significant lack of details.

My colleague asked why the Liberals have not done anything. It is for the same reason that successive Conservative governments did nothing.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we keep hearing from the Liberals and the Conservatives that this development-driven model is going to solve the affordable

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housing crisis. Nowhere in the world has a developer in the private sector model solved an affordable housing crisis.

Right now, 3.5% of the housing stock is non-market housing. We just need to go outside these doors to see what it looks like for every large or medium-sized city in this country. It is homelessness.

We have an urgent need. Hopefully my colleague could speak about the sense of urgency in Mirabel, his community. Does the member agree that the federal government needs to urgently step forward with non-market housing?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, Quebec is the only province with ongoing social and co-operative housing construction programs. Because it does not understand Quebec's programs, the federal government is incapable of negotiating this quickly and correctly.

I agree with my colleague on the substance. The market does not house those who need it most, those with fewer financial means. We need to correct that market with social housing.

However, it is important to remember that the construction of housing falls under Quebec's jurisdiction and, unfortunately, we are not the right Parliament to be talking about this issue. The money needs to be transferred to Quebec.

• (1350)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-56.

As the member for Shefford, I have had a lot of people talk to me about the issue of social housing and homelessness. The town of Granby has been hit hard by this crisis and, as the critic for seniors, during my tour of the four corners of Quebec, I was also made aware of the housing challenges that seniors face.

We cannot remain indifferent and believe that a wave of a magic wand will fix all this. We have a duty to be conscientious. The issue of housing is constantly in the news right now, so we cannot be against the idea of studying this bill in committee.

In my speech today, I will summarize the bill. I will then talk about the importance of respecting what each level of government can do. Finally, I will present the Bloc Québécois's proposals.

First, let me first remind the House that Bill C-56 essentially contains four measures. The first is a GST rebate for the construction of new rental apartment buildings. As everyone knows, this will not really bring prices down, no matter what the Minister of Finance says. During recent briefings, we asked for the studies on which the Deputy Prime Minister based her claim that prices would go down. No one was able to confirm that assertion. She did not have an answer and wanted to check the information and get back to us later. I think it is unlikely that she will ever get back to us.

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Clearly, this does not replace the Marshall plan for low-cost housing that the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, our critic for social programs, is calling for. My colleague was kind enough to accept my invitation to come and speak with the community organizations involved in these issues in my region, in collaboration with the Groupe Actions Solutions Pauvreté and its two subcommittees on social housing and homelessness. Their expertise is so valuable and deserves to be recognized more.

However, to return to the GST rebate on new rental apartment buildings, some developers may be swayed by profit-related concerns to build rental apartment buildings rather than condos, and this could ease the pressures driving the cost of market-based housing higher.

According to the Société d'habitation du Québec, although roughly 40% of Quebec households are renters, only 14% of new construction between now and 2030 is expected to be rental housing. This means that the current shortage will worsen in the years to come. If Bill C-56 can raise that percentage, at least it will help reduce the shortage.

Part 1 of the bill, which amends the Excise Tax Act, proposes giving builders of rental properties a GST rebate equal to 5% of the selling price. The rebate would apply at the time of sale, or deemed sale if the builder becomes the owner. However, the rebate will only apply where the purchaser has already been fully exempted, such as a government agency or municipality, or partially exempted, such as a non-profit organization or housing co-operative. Thus, Bill C-56 will have no impact on the cost of social or community housing projects. It only covers private housing. Even so, this is the kind of change that will need to be considered in committee and studied.

Another aspect of the bill is that it proposes three amendments to the Competition Act. One proposal is to give the Competition Bureau of Canada real power to conduct an inquiry when it studies a sector. We regularly proposed this type of measure prior to 2011 in bills on gas prices. The proposal makes it harder for companies to merge. We were already asking for this. Another proposal is to broaden the concept of anti-competitive practices. It is worth looking at.

Right now, when a company wants to buy out a competitor, the Competition Act provides that the bureau will allow it only if the company can show that the buyout will lead to gains in efficiency, even if the merger lessens competition. This provision promoting concentration is unique in the industrialized world and is repealed in Bill C-56.

The Bloc Québécois, including the member for Terrebonne, called for this measure. The Bloc will stick to its way of doing politics: It will be a party that makes suggestions. It will continue to make suggestions throughout this session, while also avoiding spreading disinformation.

For a long time, the Bloc Québécois has been saying that the provinces and municipalities are best placed to know the housing needs in their jurisdictions. The federal government should not interfere. Let us not forget that housing is the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. Need I remind our colleagues that sec-

tions 92(13) and 92(16) of the Constitution state that property and civil rights and matters of a local nature are provincial legislative jurisdictions? This means the federal government has no standing to interfere.

The numbers speak for themselves. Bill C-56 is just one drop in an ocean of needs. With the rise in demand, Quebec will need 1.1 million extra housing units within the next six years. Homelessness is rising in every region of Quebec. The homeless population has jumped by 44% over the last five years to reach an estimated 10,000.

• (1355)

The housing shortage and the resulting high cost of available apartments are playing a direct part in this crisis. The Bloc Québécois already has a wide array of suggestions and comments concerning possible solutions to the housing crisis currently raging across Quebec and Canada.

We initially took a favourable view of the Canada-Quebec housing agreement signed in 2020. The agreement is worth \$3.7 billion, half of it provided by the federal government. However, we were dismayed that the negotiations leading up to the agreement took three years. Funds intended for Quebec were frozen until the two levels of government could find common ground. The Bloc Québécois is concerned about the federal government's constant need to dictate how Quebec should spend its money.

Once again, Quebec wants its share transferred to it without conditions. Had this been done back in 2017, Quebec could have started building and renovating numerous housing projects, including social housing, three years sooner, which would certainly have alleviated today's rampant housing crisis. Unconditional transfers would significantly streamline funding processes, whereas the various agreements add to the red tape involved—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the hon. member because the hon. Leader of the Opposition is rising on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion to address what came to light on Sunday, which was that a Nazi Waffen-SS officer was in attendance during the Ukrainian president's visit to Parliament.

I move that, whereas on Friday, September 22, a former member of the Nazi Waffen-SS was admitted to and recognized in Parliament, as the Ukrainian president visited the House; whereas it is the job of the Prime Minister of Canada to ensure the success of all visits to Canadian soil by foreign dignitaries; whereas it is the responsibility of the government, the Prime Minister's Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's global affairs department, as coordinated by the diplomatic protocol office, to organize arrangements for visits of foreign dignitaries; whereas, in 2015, legislative changes were made to establish the Parliamentary Protective Service, and in situations like this, the Parliamentary Protective Service reports to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Government of Canada and ultimately the Prime Minister; whereas all parties were required to submit lists of guests to this event to the House of Commons protocol office, which should have worked with the government's diplomatic protocol office, the Prime Minister's department and national security agencies to vet individuals; whereas the government House leader today confirmed in the House of Commons that the government had vetted everyone that was invited to Parliament; and whereas the information confirming the individual's involvement with the Nazi Waffen-SS was easily found and accessible through a basic Internet search; I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following conclusion: that this House condemn the invitation and recognition of this individual at an address to the Parliament of Canada, that this House condemn the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada for failing to do appropriate vetting of that individual or, having done vetting, failing to stop him from being admitted to and recognized in Parliament.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CANADA-PORTUGAL RELATIONS

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it was an honour to meet Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, his foreign minister João Gomes Cravinho and other members of the Portuguese Parliament, who were all formally welcomed to Canada by our Prime Minister. They were in Canada to celebrate 70 years of Portuguese immigration to Canada and to strengthen Canada-Portugal relations. It was an outstanding visit, which highlighted the extraordinary contributions of the now 500,000 Portuguese Canadians.

It was also a pleasure to have them visit my riding of Davenport for a tour of Little Portugal and for the groundbreaking ceremony of the Magellan Centre, a transformational housing project that will provide Portuguese-Canadian seniors 57 affordable rental homes and 256 long-term care beds.

Statements by Members

President Rebelo de Sousa reminded Portuguese Canadians that they are the pride of Portugal, having kept the Portuguese identity alive for decades while also contributing to Canadian society. As our Prime Minister has said, diversity is truly our strength, and Canada is stronger because of the meaningful contributions of the Portuguese community to our nation.

Viva Canada. Viva Portugal.

* * *

● (1400)

SCOTTY CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer I was proud to host The Scotty Charity Golf Tournament in my riding. We raised over \$100,000 for charities in Parry Sound—Muskoka. I would like to thank our generous presenting sponsor, Andy Kidd with Devonleigh Homes, and the gold sponsors, Tulloch, HLD Muskoka and the Burry family, for their generous support.

Over 150 participants came together to raise funds for Community Living Huntsville, which is building a sixplex for persons with developmental disabilities; MiND-AID Muskoka, which helps young people navigate the complex mental health system; and, of course, the Stan Darling Environmental Education Fund.

This is in memory of the legendary former member of Parliament for Parry Sound—Muskoka, Stan Darling, who was a passionate advocate for the environment and really one of the main reasons we have an acid rain treaty with the United States today. We will ensure his legacy lives on through scholarships for students in his name.

A big thanks to Myke Malone for making it all happen. I could not do it without him.

I cannot wait until next summer when The Scotty travels to Parry Sound where we will gather at Rocky Crest Golf Club to raise more money for more amazing organizations in Parry Sound—Muskoka.

* * *

KURDISH HERITAGE

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure to host and celebrate Kurdish Heritage Day on Parliament Hill yesterday with hundreds of Kurdish Canadians.

Recently, I visited Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which, like Canada, is a wonderful place where people of several different religious faiths coexist peacefully. I met Yazidi people at camp Sharya and Yazidi community leaders at their holy temple in Lalish.

The foreign minister of KRI, Safeen Dizayee, who is visiting Canada, attended the first Kurdish Heritage Day on Parliament Hill.

Statements by Members

I would like to recognize and thank Shawn Najim, president of Kurdish Diaspora Center, Ottawa chapter, for his immense contribution in making the event a grand success. I also thank the leaders of the Kurdish-Canadian community, who came from many different places in Canada and made this event memorable.

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[Translation]

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF ATELIER ALTITUDE

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this month, I had the opportunity and pleasure to participate in the 40th anniversary celebrations of Atelier Altitude.

Atelier Altitude is a public education organization that seeks to help adults with intellectual disabilities to become and remain independent and develop and maintain social and other skills.

Atelier Altitude is a key player in the community life of Thérèse-De Blainville, with its crafting workshops, training programs and various other activities.

I want to commend the organization's staff and volunteers for their commitment. These men and women do extraordinary work. They make an essential contribution and immeasurably improve the living conditions of the people they support.

I want to once again say a heartfelt thank you to all of them.

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ANNIVERSARY OF THE FRANCO-ONTARIAN FLAG

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, September 25 is the anniversary of the Franco-Ontarian flag, which was raised at the University of Sudbury.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages and as a proud francophone, I want to thank all the partners who keep the Francophonie alive: the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario, or ACFO, the health centres, Richelieu clubs, Club Calumet, the West Nipissing Arts Council, which is known as CANO, Collège Boréal, the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne, and the 12 French-language school boards in Ontario.

I also want to congratulate the municipality of Markstay-Warren, in Nickel Belt, on declaring itself a bilingual community this past Friday.

Also, this afternoon, with the West Nipissing Historical Society, my aunt Florence Serré will be sharing her many books that bring our culture to life and celebrate our pride in our identity. There are even books on *joual*, *ben voyons*, with French slang expressions like *attache ta tuque* and *j'ai mon voyage*.

I invite all francophones and francophiles to celebrate today.

● (1405)

[English]

I send a warm thanks to all anglophones and multilingual allies across Canada.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, next year, the government will expose the most vulnerable Canadians to medical assistance in dying. Assisted suicide will be available to those who suffer from mental illness, including depression. This is profoundly wrong and unprecedented.

There is no consensus in the mental health community that MAID can be safely and ethically administered to the mentally ill. Issues of suicidality, irremediability and competency are far from being resolved. There is growing fear among persons with disabilities over the slippery slope our country finds itself on.

Who is next? The veteran suffering from PTSD? The poor who have no escape from poverty? The addicted on our streets with no hope of accessing timely treatment? That is why I have tabled Bill C-314, the mental health protection act. It repeals the portion of Canada's MAID laws that captures the mentally disordered, while preserving the remaining elements of the government's MAID regime.

I encourage my colleagues to vote in favour of Bill C-314.

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HUDSON VILLAGE THEATRE

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize and congratulate the Hudson Village Theatre on its 30th anniversary. Created by Heather Markgraf, a Hudson resident and theatre educator, in the summer of 1993, the Hudson Village Theatre has grown to become a staple in our community and the largest off-island English theatre in Quebec.

In 2000, the community came together in support of the theatre and raised enough money to buy the historic Hudson train station, which was built in 1890. Now, the station has transformed into a stage auditorium with seating for 148 people, and has regular programming year-round.

I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the theatre team: Kalina Skulska, John Sheridan, Peter Vatsis, Dean Patrick Fleming, Karen Burgan and Sarah Oakes, as well as board members Elizabeth Corker, Glenn Lucas, Helen Hodgson, Marian Kuiper, Amelia Robinson, Gerry Semmelhaack, Peter Leslie Freud and Michel Laventure, and everyone who has stepped up over the years to make this incredible dream a reality.

I send cheers for many more decades to come. Let the show go on.

ANNIVERSARY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the year was 1958. John Diefenbaker was prime minister of Canada, and the 24th session of Parliament began on May 12. Tommy Douglas was the premier of Saskatchewan, and Terry Fox was born that year. The Avro Arrow flew for the first time. Canada-wide television started, and the Canadian Football League was established. Go Riders.

Arguably, the best news event of 1958 was when my parents, Don and Kaye Aldag, were married in southwestern Saskatchewan at the Good Hope Lutheran Church. My parents raised our family, including my siblings Debbie and Rick, on the family farm that my great-grandparents homesteaded, instilling the values of hard work and optimism, even during the most challenging of times.

This past summer, our family celebrated Mom and Dad's 65th wedding anniversary. I thank my parents for their unwavering support of me and my siblings. I wish a happy anniversary to my mom and dad, and I send my love to them.

* * *

HARDEEP SINGH NIJJAR

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my sincerest condolences to the family of bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar on their loss due to this outrageous assassination.

In June, Conservatives called on the RCMP to conduct a full investigation into this murder, reiterated in strongest terms by the Conservative leader just last week. He said that Canadians, "must be safe from extrajudicial killings of all kinds, most of all from foreign governments" and called "on the Indian government to act with [full] transparency" in the investigation of this murder so the truth comes out.

Conservatives brought forward a foreign agent registry bill, Bill S-237, nearly two years ago and it is still being blocked by the NDP-Liberal coalition. Only Conservatives have brought forward any meaningful action on foreign interference. This registry would have exposed foreign agents operating in Canada on behalf of foreign governments.

The NDP-Liberals need to stop the talk and take meaningful action. They should join us in passing this bill immediately so Canadians and the *sangat* can feel safe. Those who assassinated bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar must be exposed and brought to justice.

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RICK O'BRIEN

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with regret that I rise today in this place to honour RCMP Constable Rick O'Brien of the Ridge Meadows detachment, who was struck down in the line of duty while executing a search warrant in Coquitlam last Friday.

Words cannot ever encompass a tragedy like this. Nevertheless, on behalf of me and my family, on behalf all of the residents of Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, on behalf of the whole of the Tri-Cities area, and I dare say on behalf of all of us in this place, I

Statements by Members

would like to express my deepest sadness and most profound condolences to Constable O'Brien's wife and children, and to his many friends and colleagues, all of whom will feel his absence forever.

[Translation]

Maintiens le droit.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

RICK O'BRIEN

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, Ridge Meadows RCMP constable Rick O'Brien was shot and killed. Two other detachment officers were also wounded as they were executing a drug search warrant in Coquitlam. Previously Rick worked many years with at-risk youth. This is devastating for his wife and six children.

Ridge Meadows RCMP superintendent Wendy Mehat stated, "Rick's contribution to his work and his fellow...members...was immeasurable". She said that Rick loved visiting schools, helping students and supporting the detachment with food drives and sports events. He was truly exceptional. His death is senseless and heart-breaking.

Sunday was Police and Peace Officers' National Memorial Day. Over the past year, 12 officers have lost their lives in the line of duty: the most ever. May we as a nation be more appreciative of the men and women in our police forces.

May God bless them and may God sustain the O'Brien family.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by offering my sincere condolences to Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar's family. I also did so in person with his son soon after his assassination, an assassination of a Canadian on Canadian soil in the parking lot of a gurdwara.

At that time in June and now, we called on the RCMP for a full investigation. We call on the Indian government to act with utmost transparency in this investigation, because these allegations represent an outrageous affront to Canada's sovereignty.

Statements by Members

Canadians must be kept safe from extrajudicial killings of all kinds, most of all from foreign governments. Canadians must be protected on Canadian soil. It is for this reason that Conservatives brought forward a foreign agent registry bill, Bill S-237, in November 2021, which continues to be blocked by the Liberal-NDP government. If this bill was passed two years ago when Conservatives proposed it, foreign agents working to intimidate, influence and even assassinate a Canadian citizen could have been stopped.

We must work together to protect Canadians from foreign interference and to ensure Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killers are brought to justice.

* * *

[Translation]

ANNIVERSARY OF THE FRANCO-ONTARIAN FLAG

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, September 25 is the anniversary of the Franco-Ontarian flag.

This day is very important for several reasons. First, we get to celebrate the Franco-Ontarian people and, by the same token, francophones throughout the country. Second, the fact that Canada is a country with two founding cultures and two vibrant official languages is a source of pride that should be celebrated.

I am proud of our French roots and francophone culture, and also of our recognition of the other cultures that enrich our country. Of course, I am thinking about the indigenous nations who were here long before the French or the English, and I am also thinking about how we embrace the immigrants who have arrived in the country more recently.

In my riding, I would specifically like to thank the Communauté du trille blanc, the Association des francophones de la région de York and the group Partagez le français. All these groups work hard to promote the French language and francophone culture in our region.

I hope everyone has a wonderful time celebrating the anniversary of the Franco-Ontarian flag.

* * *

[English]

MARINE WEATHER STATIONS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day in my riding people work, live and play on the ocean. For many people, they do it all year round. These folks go to very remote locations where a boat or a float plane is the only mode of transportation. To do this safely, my constituents rely on weather stations. If they do not have that information, they travel at a higher risk. Some weather stations in my region have not been working for months and in some cases years.

Both my constituents and I have reached out to the ministries of transportation, environment and climate change calling for action. One of my constituents told me he goes out in his boat during the winter, and all too often the weather stations are off-line. He uses whatever information he can, but once he is out there, there is no

turning back. They deal with the weather as it arrives, and it can feel like they are taking their own lives in their hands.

This is an issue of safety, of protecting communities, of protecting workers and of protecting people. It needs urgent action.

I am calling on the government to make it right. Lives are at stake.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

FRANCO-ONTARIAN DAY

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, September 25 is Franco-Ontarian Day, which commemorates the first time the Franco-Ontarian flag was raised in Sudbury in 1975.

Creating a flag means defining an identity. On their flag, Franco-Ontarians put the white trillium, the floral symbol of Ontario, and the fleur-de-lys, the symbol of the francophone community of America, similar to our own fleur-de-lys flag.

When a kinship is woven into the very fibres of two flags, it is more than just a pictorial wink and a nod. It is a reminder of our duty to support the vitality of the French language. It is a reminder that respect for our language in North America is a battle, now more than ever, and that fighting it together is part of our identity.

Thanks to people like Damien Robitaille, Katherine Levac and Véronic DiCaire, we can continue celebrating the next generation, together, in both Ontario and Quebec.

I wish my Franco-Ontarian brothers and sisters a happy Franco-Ontarian Day.

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LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now more than ever, the Leader of the Opposition is proving that he is the common-sense leader that all of Canada needs.

On September 1, during his speech in Quebec City, he rightly said that taxing people more, as the Liberals are doing, or drastically increasing taxes, as the Bloc Québécois wants to do, is not going to reduce pollution. Rather, it will take concrete, effective, realistic and responsible actions.

Let me quote the Conservative Party leader: "To fight the real issue of climate change, we need more hydroelectricity, and fast. My common-sense plan uses technology, not taxes: by incentivizing companies to reduce their emissions; by giving the green light to green projects like dams and wind turbines—no more duplicating all these studies and federal hurdles; by producing green minerals here, not importing them from China. The Bloc Québécois and the Liberals choose taxes. I choose technology."

Oral Questions

Now more than ever, Canada needs a leader and a team with common sense.

* * *

[English]

ALS ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a memorable viral moment, celebrities, athletes and even MPs dumped buckets of ice on their heads to raise awareness for ALS, a disease not many had heard of but one that impacts thousands of people, usually with a life expectancy of two to five years.

This trend attracted worldwide attention and generated significant funding for ALS research. Unfortunately, it was short-lived and the momentum behind ALS advocacy drifted. This issue is particularly poignant for the House, as we fondly remember the late hon. Mauril Bélanger, who tragically succumbed to this disease.

This summer, I met two courageous young girls in Washington, D.C., Clara and Ellie, who persist in raising awareness and establishing an ALS youth platform for affected young individuals.

Today, I extend gratitude to the MPs who joined our reception to discuss ways to find a cure for ALS. Additionally, we appreciate Clara and Ellie, as well as their parents, Mark and Rebecca Wetzel, present in the House today, for their dedicated involvement in a battle we all need to embrace and support.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the news that the House of Commons paid tribute to a Nazi Waffen-SS officer here, in the House of Commons, has sent shockwaves around the world.

The incident embarrassed Canada, harmed victims of the Holocaust and gifted a propaganda tool to the Russians. The Prime Minister is solely responsible for guaranteeing the success of all visits by international leaders here in Canada.

Will he personally take responsibility for this huge problem, which he helped cause?

• (1420)

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like every other member of the House, I was extremely disappointed by this situation. Personally, as a descendant of Jewish Holocaust survivors, I was very hurt, and I know everyone in the House was hurt too.

As the Leader of the Opposition knows, and as you mentioned, Mr. Speaker, it was your decision and yours alone. Neither the government nor the Ukrainian delegation was aware of the situation ahead of time.

We are all very disappointed by the situation.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question was for the Prime Minister because, indeed, it is the Prime Minister's sole responsibility to guarantee the diplomatic success of major world leaders who come to this country. It is the Prime Minister and his government who are responsible for both the security and diplomatic vetting of everyone who comes in close proximity of a foreign leader on Canadian soil, particularly a foreign leader who is at war.

The government has now admitted that it vetted everyone who was in attendance that day. Will the Prime Minister apologize for having vetted this individual and letting him come anyway?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all members of this chamber, I am incredibly disappointed in the fact that this individual was invited. As you yourself, Mr. Speaker, confirmed, this individual was recognized in the gallery. I found out just like every other member in the House at that time that this individual was present. This is deeply embarrassing for us as parliamentarians, as Canadians. It is something that I think all of us take extremely seriously, and I would ask my hon. colleagues not to politicize this moment.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is responsible. He is in Ottawa today. He can get on his feet and answer for his massive diplomatic embarrassment and shame. The minister admitted that the government vetted every single person that was here for the speech. That was the job of the government, which has an entire security and diplomatic apparatus set up for that purpose.

Will the Prime Minister finally take responsibility for his latest embarrassment and apologize to Canadians for this massive disaster?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a descendant of Jewish Holocaust survivors, I am personally very hurt by the fact that this chamber recognized this individual. I am sure that everyone feels the same way in this chamber.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: The chickens have come home to roost.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Protective Service had the appropriate screening in place to ensure the security of last Friday's event, and that is what I was referring to. However, what I can continue to say is that we all must take this seriously because it is hurting many communities—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the job of the Government of Canada, the Privy Council Office, which is the Prime Minister's personal department, and the Prime Minister's security forces in the RCMP to vet every single person who comes within proximity of a high-profile foreign war leader who is involved in a very difficult conflict right now. It was the job of the Prime Minister to protect that foreign leader from this massive embarrassment.

If the Prime Minister failed to have vetting in place, then that in itself is a massive act of incompetence. Will he take responsibility and apologize for that?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to not politicize this issue.

He knows, just as well as everyone else in this chamber does, that the decision to invite this individual was yours, Mr. Speaker, and yours alone, and that you did not inform the government or the Ukrainian delegation that you were inviting him or that you would recognize him. You made that public yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition knows that, and I would ask that he stick to the facts.

• (1425)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister were so proud of how he conducted himself, he would be on the floor in the House of the Commons today answering questions instead of hiding under a rock.

Canadians are sick and tired of a Prime Minister—

The Speaker: I would remind hon. members that all MPs have duties in the chamber and outside. I just want to remind them that referring to their presence or absence is not allowed in the rules.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, Canadians are sick and tired of a Prime Minister who never takes responsibility for the things that happen under his watch. Whether it is the record-high inflation or interest rates, the doubling of housing costs, or the constant international embarrassments, he always finds someone else to throw under the bus. Are you that person?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the Leader of the Opposition does not want to rely on the facts, but the facts in this situation are that the government had no prior knowledge that this individual was being invited, nor that he would be recognized.

If members go back and recall what happened on Friday, they will see that it was indeed the Speaker of the House who recognized this individual. We were all caught off guard. It is deeply embarrassing to this Parliament and to Canada. I ask that we all deal with this responsibly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what happened in the House on Friday is having serious consequences. The media around the world are talking about it, and the Russian media are already using it as propaganda. In wartime, this type of propaganda could help recruit Russian soldiers to go fight Ukraine.

An incident like this one can also have a negative impact on our efforts to seek international support. It is tragic, because this is a time of war. The repercussions are real.

What does the government intend to do to fix the damage caused by what happened on Friday?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

As I mentioned, it was a very painful incident for everyone in the House and, of course, for all Canadians, especially those who have family members who were affected by the Holocaust, namely, the Jewish and Eastern European communities. This really hurts. Personally, I was disappointed by what happened.

I would like to ask everyone to deal with this responsibly.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the negative impact this incident will have on the Ukrainian war effort, but we must not forget our Jewish constituents.

I acknowledge the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and all those who were the victims of Naziism during the Second World War. As long as any of the perpetrators are still alive, there are still victims, and our thoughts are with them. We need to show all those who have been affected in any way that this House and this government do not take lightly what happened on Friday.

What will the government do to correct this terrible mistake?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, everyone in the House is deeply hurt by what happened on Friday. We were all taken by surprise. This is something that is completely unacceptable. There are communities across Canada, including Jewish and Eastern European communities, for whom the Holocaust and the Second World War are particularly painful.

As a descendant of Jewish Holocaust survivors, I take this very seriously. I think this is an opportunity for us all to reflect—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

* * *

[*English*]

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what happened last Friday never should have happened.

Turning now to another crisis, the last 30 years have demonstrated that successive Liberal and Conservative governments' market-driven approach to housing has failed Canadians. Housing serves as a social good. It should not just be treated as a commodity for greater profits. People need housing that they can afford, and waiving the GST for new rentals is not enough.

Will the Prime Minister commit to creating an acquisition fund for the non-profit sector to help stop the loss of low-cost rentals to profiteering landlords?

• (1430)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her advocacy for non-market housing. We need to continue to do more. We know that although the recent measure to remove the GST from apartment construction is going to have an enormous impact, it is not enough on its own.

We are going to continue to make investments in low-cost financing to build more homes that ordinary people can actually afford. We have advanced programs in the past, and will continue to do so in the future, to directly subsidize the kinds of homes low-income people need built. We do not have a monopoly on good ideas. We are willing to take feedback from members of all parties in this House. I look forward to continuing my collaboration with the member opposite in that regard.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then the minister should commit to creating an acquisition fund.

Let me say this: The Liberal plan is not working. The minister should know that relying on market forces will not solve the problem. That is what the Liberals and Conservatives have done for the last 30 years, and we can see where it got us. The average rent in Canada is now over \$2,100 a month. In Vancouver, it is over \$3,000. It is time for bold action.

Will the minister commit to building two million units of social housing to meet the needs of the community?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that building market housing is not enough, but we must also increase the supply of market housing in the market. We need to encourage the construction of homes for low-income Canadians and for middle-class Canadians.

As we move forward with a measure that is going to allow people to build more market-based homes, we are also advancing measures that are going to disproportionately have a positive impact on builders who are seeking to build homes for low-income families outside of the traditional market.

There is no silver bullet to the housing crisis. We will pull every lever at our disposal to make things right.

* * *

GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, a Nazi received a standing ovation in the House.

Oral Questions

Today is Yom Kippur. The Jewish community, my community, is horrified. Only one office in the country is responsible for vetting visitors to this place: the Prime Minister's Office. When the Ukrainian president, a head of state, addresses the House during a time of war, the Prime Minister's Office is responsible for security, full stop.

This scandal is entirely on the Prime Minister's Office. Either it vetted this Nazi and did not care or it did not vet him and is completely incompetent. Which is it?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a Canadian of Jewish origin, I have shared very clearly with the House on several occasions how disturbing this event is for me personally. I also know how disturbing it is for Canadians who are Jewish right across this country. Today, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, the day of atonement as we prepare for the new year, this is particularly disturbing.

However, I have to correct my hon. colleague in the sense that the government was not aware this individual was invited. It was completely the prerogative of the Speaker; it was his decision, and we need to make sure the facts remain on the table.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, shame on the member and the government for not taking responsibility.

The Prime Minister has the massive security apparatus of the state at his disposal, yet a Nazi was honoured in this place. I cannot believe I am even uttering these words. Canada has been embarrassed around the world. Shame on the government for bringing shame on this chamber. My late grandparents are turning in their graves. A simple Google search would have revealed this person's background.

Again, either it vetted this Nazi and did not care or it did not vet him and is completely incompetent. Which is it?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would again ask my hon. colleague to stick to the facts. We know and he knows, because you stated publicly and in this chamber, that it was your decision to invite this individual, your decision alone to recognize him in the chamber. We were all caught off guard on Friday. Everyone in this chamber stood, because we trusted the Speaker to know who this was. At the same time, we must all take this seriously, and we must not politicize this. Communities are hurting, and we need to be there to be united at this time.

Oral Questions

• (1435)

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was Speaker when the government changed the law to ensure that the House of Commons security reported to the government. That was done for very specific reasons, one of which was the fact that the House of Commons itself does not have the resources to do comprehensive vetting and background checks. That is why the change was made. Nobody believes that it is up to your office to do comprehensive background checks. There is only one entity that has access to CSIS information and RCMP intelligence.

How did the government let someone who fought for the Waffen-SS into this chamber?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous respect for my colleague opposite. He was the Speaker, and he is the House leader now. He knows how this chamber operates. He knows that the Speaker has prerogative for whom they invite to the Speaker's gallery. The Parliamentary Protective Service followed all screening protocols to ensure the security of the event on Friday. Nevertheless, neither the government nor the Ukrainian delegation was aware of that individual's presence until he was recognized by the Speaker. Those are the facts.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the government that is politicizing this issue by refusing to accept its responsibility. There is only one group of individuals with control over who has access to a foreign head of state. This is a head of state who is fighting for his country's life against an illegal invasion by Russia. The Prime Minister has a duty of care for that entire visit.

Now the government House leader is trying to change her tune and say that a list was gathered, but vetting was not done. What is the point of gathering a list of invitees if the government is not doing any background checks?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me continue to lay out the facts for this chamber.

It is a fact that the individual was not granted access to either the President of Ukraine or the Prime Minister of this country. He was specifically invited by the Speaker of the House, who did not make either the Government of Canada or the Ukrainian delegation aware. We all found out at the same time, when he was recognized in the chamber.

We are all deeply embarrassed by this. It has embarrassed Canada. We must reiterate our strong allyship for Ukraine, Ukrainian Canadians, and Jewish—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, we had the privilege of welcoming the Ukrainian president here in the House of Commons. Unfortunately, one of the special guests was a Nazi. When a major event is being put together, the Prime Minister's Office has to be made aware and order a screening of the event. This scandal is entirely

the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister. There are two possibilities: Either a background check was done and no one saw a problem with the individual's past, or the Prime Minister's Office did not vet the people present and is totally incompetent. Which is it?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat for my hon. colleague what I have already said because it is a matter of fact and the truth. Neither the government nor the Ukrainian delegation knew in advance that this individual was invited or that the Speaker of the House would draw attention to his presence during his speech. We have all been hurt by this incident and we are deeply disappointed by what happened. This has repercussions on parliamentarians, Canada, and of course Canada's reputation in the world. Nonetheless, it is something that everyone must take seriously and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members of the House expect the government and the Prime Minister's Office to do some research when it comes to guests here in Parliament. Now that it has welcomed an individual who was a member of a Nazi unit responsible for murdering thousands of Jews, our trust is forever shaken. What a disgrace to not only welcome such an individual, but to praise him. Ignorance is a war crime. All Canadians have been humiliated.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to his fellow parliamentarians, Canadians, the international community and, in particular, Jewish Canadians?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a Canadian of Jewish origin, I am extremely hurt by what happened last Friday. My grandfather is a survivor of Auschwitz. This is so very painful for me, and I know that it is also very painful for all members of the House. However, the facts are the facts. It was the Speaker of the House of Commons who invited this individual and decided to recognize his presence in the House. No one in government or in the Ukrainian delegation knew ahead of time that he was going to do that.

* * *

• (1440)

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a cloud of bankruptcy is looming over our companies, and this is only just the beginning. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 250,000 small and medium-sized businesses, or SMEs, are at risk of closing this year because they are unable to repay their CEBA loans on time. It is wrong to suggest, as Ottawa is doing, that extending the deadline by three months will miraculously resolve this problem. The federal government needs to provide those SMEs that need it with deferrals and special agreements or else they are going to go bankrupt.

Oral Questions

When will this government give SMEs in difficulty the flexibility they need rather than watch them die?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand very well that the current global inflationary environment is having a major impact on our entrepreneurs and everyone. The cost of living is very difficult to deal with.

We are offering flexibility on CEBA loans. Companies will be able to benefit from this flexibility in a difficult fiscal situation. I think it is a balanced, sensible measure. Entrepreneurs still need the government, and we will be there to help them.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 18 days or three months will not fix everything. One thousand, nine hundred companies already went bankrupt last year, and that is just the start. The Canada emergency business account is a government program, not a banking service. It was created by the government, and struggling businesses want to negotiate and sign agreements with the government. Today, the responsibility of ensuring that our SMEs avoid bankruptcy falls to the government, not financial institutions. That is not their role.

When will this government assume its responsibilities towards our SMEs?

[English]

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and to the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CEBA program provided unprecedented support to nearly 900,000 small businesses, totalling over \$49 billion of financial support. Last year, the government extended the forgiveness qualification deadline by one year to the end of this year. We travelled this country, listening to businesses that asked for more flexible repayment options and time. That is why we recently announced a full one-year extension on the term loan repayment deadline to the end of 2026.

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is especially serious for our farmers. They are the ones most affected by rising interest rates, they have climate change wreaking havoc on their crops, and they are already saddled with excessive debt, partly because the federal government is not doing a good job supporting our farmers. What is more, Ottawa is asking them to take on even more debt with their bank within three months. Otherwise, they will have to pay back their entire emergency account.

Will this government finally show some flexibility instead of forcing agricultural SMEs to go bankrupt?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that Quebec farmers and farmers right across the country understand and see exactly what climate change is doing, with the heavy rains, floods and strong winds.

That is, of course, why, with the provinces and territories, we have the business risk management programs in order to make sure we are able to assist farmers in these difficult situations. We have done so and we will continue to make sure we support the agricultural clean technology program and the climate solutions program. These all help with the environment.

GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the inclusion of an SS member in Parliament during President Zelenskyy's speech is unacceptable and embarrassing, but what is further embarrassing is an admission from the government that it did not do proper background checks on everyone who was in Parliament. President Zelenskyy is a target of death from the Russian regime. His security in Canada should be our highest priority. The minister in charge of parliamentary security must be held to account.

If a Nazi was allowed in Parliament, how can we know that the government took all precautions necessary to ensure the protection of President Zelenskyy?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have already stated, the Parliamentary Protective Service followed all screening protocols to ensure the security of last Friday's event. I agree with the member opposite in that it was profoundly embarrassing for Parliament and for Canada that this individual was both invited and recognized. However, as the member knows, and as all members know, it was the Speaker of the chamber who decided to invite this individual and recognize him. We were all caught off guard, and we are all hurting because of it.

● (1445)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ukraine has survived multiple genocides at the hands of both the Soviets and the Nazis: the Holodomor, the Holocaust and the Sürgünlik of Crimean Tatars, so it is shocking that a self-proclaimed Nazi was allowed into the chamber by the Liberals and officially recognized by the Speaker during the state visit of the president of Ukraine. The Liberals abdicated their duty-of-care responsibilities to President Zelenskyy during his state visit.

Will the Prime Minister officially apologize to President Zelenskyy for his incompetence and, indeed, apologize to all the people of Ukraine?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, I think the episode on Friday was one of profound embarrassment for parliamentarians and for all Canadians.

As has been stated clearly, the Parliamentary Protective Service did all of the required security protocols to ensure the security of the event. However, neither the government nor the Ukrainian delegation was aware that this individual would be present in the gallery nor that he would be recognized, until such a time as the Speaker did that. The Speaker has made that public and clear, and we were owed and received an apology—

Oral Questions

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

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is more than an embarrassment. It is disgusting. Zelenskyy is Jewish and lost family in the Holocaust. The Ukrainian defence minister Rustem Umerov is a Muslim Crimean Tatar who was born in the gulags.

I am angry that this Liberal incompetence is playing right into the hands of Russian disinformation. Due to the Liberals' negligence, the government is eroding support for Ukraine against Russia's illegal invasion.

Will the Prime Minister accept responsibility for embarrassing Canada and undermining Ukraine on the world stage?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a descendant of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, this is something that is profoundly disturbing and upsetting to me, as it is to everyone in Canada whose family has been impacted by the Holocaust and, indeed, to everyone around the world.

It is not lost on me that the President of Ukraine is Jewish and has also suffered the same way my family did, but I will reiterate to the member opposite that this was not the government's decision, and it had no prior knowledge of this. It was a decision made by the Speaker of the House. He has apologized. We were all owed that apology because it was profoundly embarrassing—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Edmonton, over 33,000 households pay more in rent than they can afford. Meanwhile, corporate landlords like Boardwalk and MainStreet are jacking up rents right across our city and forcing people out onto the streets. The Liberals' and the Conservatives' plan is to buddy up and cozy up with big real estate CEOs. The NDP's plan is to build more homes that people can actually afford.

Will the government commit to building non-market homes and stopping renovictions so Canadians can keep a roof over their head?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that there is actually quite a bit that my hon. colleague and I may agree on. We are going to continue to make the kinds of investments that are going to support low-income families, including in his city of Edmonton and across the country. It is important that we also advance measures that are going to help increase the supply for middle-class households in this country. When we add more supply to the market, we can actually bring down the cost of homes across the country, resulting in homes that people can afford.

I am pleased to work with the hon. member on non-market housing solutions, and we are going to continue to advance measures that will build homes for middle-class families as well.

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian children have been going to school hungry for years. Skyrocketing grocery bills are making things worse, yet Canada is the only G7 country without a national school food program. New Democrats have been calling for one for years. Despite their promises, the Liberals have only delayed action and disappointed families. Children are going hungry on the Liberals' watch.

Why is the government not delivering a national school food program to help our kids learn?

● (1450)

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while we have taken historic action to reduce child poverty and see child poverty at one of its lowest levels, with hundreds of thousands of children being lifted out of poverty since Stephen Harper's government.

It is not enough. The reality is that making sure that every child has a good meal is something we want to work with provinces and territories on. That is why we are actively developing a national food policy, working in collaboration with provinces and territories. We are taking action on marketing to kids. We are taking action on front-of-pack labelling. We are making sure we are doing everything we can to put the nutrition of our children first.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the core responsibilities of any government is to keep Canadians safe, to represent their best interests on the global stage.

While here at home we see the government acting on Canadians' priorities, on things like the affordable housing and grocery act, which we are debating today, there is also a need to work with global partners to act against existential threats like climate change, the weaponization of information and the threat to democracy by a growing authoritarianism.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs outline the work done by her and her colleagues at the UN General Assembly last week to demonstrate Canadian leadership on tackling these critical issues?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that more than ever, what is happening in the world has an impact on their day-to-day lives, and Canada is definitely stepping up on the world stage. Last week at the UN, I co-hosted, along with Secretary Blinken and Michael Kovrig, an arbitrary detention summit. At this point, the declaration on arbitrary detention has now been signed by 75 countries. We also launched a new declaration along with the Netherlands to fight disinformation by states, signed by the U.K. and the U.S. This is global leadership.

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GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the chief opposition whip, my office was required to provide a list of names and contact information in advance of President Zelenskyy's address. That information was shared with the protocol office and the Parliamentary Protective Service, which report directly to the RCMP and the Minister of Public Safety on operational matters.

Does the Prime Minister expect Canadians to believe he invited a world leader currently at war to our Parliament and did not vet the list?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has made clear the government's disappointment with the events of Friday. All parliamentarians were taken by surprise with this particular individual's being invited to the gallery. The opposition whip knows very well that the Parliamentary Protective Service reports to the two Speakers, the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons. To pretend otherwise is simply to distance oneself from the facts.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am dealing with facts, and those are not the facts. The Liberals do not get it. The Prime Minister either knew or ought to have known who was invited to attend. He embarrassed a foreign leader of a country at war and every parliamentarian here. With the resources of the RCMP and CSIS at his fingertips, basic due diligence was ignored.

Will the Prime Minister take responsibility and explain to Canadians why a Nazi was given a hero's introduction in the House under his watch?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows, because she heard it from you this morning and from me several times today, that it was not the Prime Minister who either invited this individual or recognized him. She acknowledged that he was recognized during the Speaker's remarks, because the facts of the matter are that this individual was invited by the Speaker of the House and was recognized by the Speaker of the House, who did this without informing either the Government of Canada or the Ukrainian delegation. This is profoundly embarrassing to us all, and we all need to take this seriously.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday a Nazi was given not only a seat in the chamber, but also a very warm and honouring welcome. This never should have happened. In fact, a list of all guests was given to the government well

ahead of time and was thoroughly vetted, yet somehow this individual was celebrated.

Does the Liberal government truly expect Canadians to believe that it really had no clue?

• (1455)

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have clearly laid the facts on the table several times today. In fact, the only person who invited this individual and decided to recognize him was the Speaker of the House. The Parliamentary Protective Service followed all security protocols to ensure the security of the event.

However, I agree with the member opposite that this should never have happened. It is profoundly embarrassing and disappointing to all members of the House and to all Canadians. To that end, we stand with all Canadian communities that are impacted, and of course with Ukraine.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no way this is correct. We have a world leader whose country is at war. He came to Parliament as a state guest. He was granted some of the strictest security that has ever been granted to a world leader prior to him, yet he was here with a Nazi in his presence. The government would like me and other Canadians to believe that somehow that individual was not thoroughly vetted, that somehow the list was not viewed by the Prime Minister's Office. That is what that side of the House and the Prime Minister would like—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Speaker has already clarified and expressed that this was his decision alone, that he did not inform the government or the Ukrainian delegation, that this was entirely his decision.

I cannot force Conservative members to believe what the facts are. I can only put them on the table as they are. They have been clearly outlined, and we will continue to stand by them, because that is the truth.

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[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of the Environment was gallivanting around New York and had the nerve to lecture Quebec about the fight against climate change, his government did more than just pay lip service. Yes, it took action.

What did his government do? What did the Liberals do during the UN summit on climate ambition? They made thousands of additional kilometres of marine environments available for oil exploration projects. Protecting biodiversity and addressing the climate emergency will not stop this government from selling oil, no, sir.

When will the government take the planet's future seriously?

Oral Questions

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

I was honoured to accompany the Prime Minister last week at the UN Secretary General's Climate Ambition Summit, especially since Canada was the only major oil-producing country that was invited.

Why is that? It is because, between 2019 and 2021, we had the best performance in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Our reduction was the equivalent of taking 11 million cars off the road.

We are also the only G20 country to have eliminated fossil fuel subsidies two years earlier than planned. We are the only major oil-producing country to put a cap on greenhouse gas emissions.

That is why we were invited to New York.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am certain the champagne glasses were full at the World Petroleum Congress in Alberta. It is such wonderful news that Canada intends to double Newfoundland's oil production by 2030. That is 200 million barrels a year.

The Minister of Environment knew it. His government has decided to be the undisputed leader in fossil fuel expansion; meanwhile, the planet burns. They are dangerously close to shifting from irresponsibility to intentional harm.

How can the minister, a former leader of Greenpeace and Equiterre, look in the mirror and agree to be at the oil companies' beck and call?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would invite my colleague to read the speech given by my colleague and friend the Minister of Natural Resources, who went to tell the oil companies that, according to International Energy Agency scenarios, if we want to fight climate change, we need to go from a world that consumes 100 million barrels a day to a carbon-neutral world in 2050 where we will consume only 25 million.

We need to work together to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. That is exactly what we are doing in Canada, in collaboration with our partners around the globe.

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GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is ultimately accountable for ensuring the safety of the heads of state he invites.

Today, he would have us believe that no one in his cabinet or his office, no one at the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Public Safety or the Office of Protocol of Canada was involved in the process by which this Nazi fighter was invited to and given access to Parliament and was allowed to stand up in the House just a few feet from President Zelenskyy.

After the last terrorist attack on Parliament, the RCMP was given full responsibility for overseeing our safety.

How can the Prime Minister deny having any responsibility and claim that he knew nothing?

• (1500)

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that neither the Prime Minister nor anyone in his cabinet or in the Ukrainian delegation knew in advance that this individual was invited or that he would be recognized by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

As I said many times, the Speaker of the House of Commons invited this individual of his own accord and he made the decision himself to recognize him. It was very painful for all of us, as parliamentarians, who were there and who were surprised by this decision.

It is painful for every Canadian who was affected by the Holocaust and the wars—

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

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all painfully hurt by the irresponsibility of the Prime Minister who allowed, either by negligence or incompetence, a Nazi to be recognized in the House.

The Office of Protocol of Canada, which falls directly under Global Affairs Canada, is responsible for state visits in Canada. Part of the mandate of the Office of Protocol is to “define standards of treatment for state, official, working and private visits of heads of state, heads of governments, ministers and guests of government.”

How can the Liberals claim that the Prime Minister knew nothing when the entire protocol machinery of the whole government is involved in the slightest details of every visit, as it surely was for the visit of President Zelenskyy here in Ottawa?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague knows, because he listened to you this morning and he saw your message yesterday, that you clarified that it was your personal initiative and that you had not notified the government that you were inviting this individual and drawing attention to his presence.

We are all deeply hurt. We are hurt as parliamentarians and as Canadians. More importantly, communities across the country are hurt by this initiative of the Speaker of the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, a member of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the Nazi SS was celebrated in the presence of President Zelenskyy.

No one believes that the government would not see the list of attendees when a foreign leader attends this chamber. Canada's reputation is damaged. This chamber's reputation is damaged. Our valiant Canadian World War II veterans are shocked and humiliated. Jewish Canadians are horrified. Russia could not be happier.

Oral Questions

Does the Liberal government really expect Canadians to believe that it did not know a Nazi was in this House?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can only share the facts and the truth. The truth and the facts are that, no, the government did not know that this individual was invited, nor that he was going to be recognized by the Speaker of the House.

As the member opposite heard the Speaker say earlier today, this individual was from his riding. He decided to recognize him. He did not inform either the government or the Ukrainian delegation. This has caused profound hurt and embarrassment to this chamber, to Canada and to Canadians from so many different backgrounds, Jewish Canadians, Canadians of Eastern European descent, Ukrainian Canadians and, of course, the President of Ukraine.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Franco-Ontarian Day, a day to celebrate francophone culture, art, tradition and people in this beautiful province. The French language is an essential part of our culture in Sudbury, Ontario, and across the country. It is our responsibility to protect it.

Can the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages update the House on what our government is doing to support the Franco-Ontarian community?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Sudbury for her question and for her incredible advocacy on behalf of the Franco-Ontarian community. With our new action plan for official languages, we are supporting official language minority communities across the country with \$4.1 billion to support organizations, education, communities and more. Whether we are talking about francophones, francophiles or the “franco-curious”, our government will always support the French language in Ontario and across the country.

I wish everyone a happy Franco-Ontarian francophonie day.

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● (1505)

[English]

GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have sat here during question period and, like all Canadians, have listened to the Liberals deflect and place blame on the Speaker for a Nazi being allowed in this chamber.

Like we have seen with so many others, the Prime Minister, and apparently his House leader, will go to any length to ruin personal and professional reputations to protect himself.

After eight years, our nation is living through a rotating loop of international humiliation that lies solely at the feet of the Prime Minister. Why will the Prime Minister not accept responsibility and

apologize to not only the House but to our nation, our international partners and those who have been retraumatized?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague heard your statement this morning. He knows very well that this was your decision, and your decision alone, to invite this individual and to recognize him in the gallery, without informing the government, without informing the Ukrainian delegation.

We are profoundly hurt by this. We are profoundly embarrassed by this. I would ask that the Conservative colleagues pay attention to the facts, rely on the facts, and treat this matter with the seriousness that it deserves. There are communities across the country that are hurting, and politicizing it helps no one.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, time and time again, the Prime Minister and his Liberal House leader say, “I had no idea; it didn't involve me.”

Time and time again, the Liberal Prime Minister fails in his duties to Canadians and has someone else take the fall. This week it looks like he is going to come to you, Mr. Speaker, and ask you to leave, and to take the garbage out with you on the way out.

Is that really what the government wants to show to Canadians?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, that hon. colleague would have seen the your statement yesterday and heard your apology in the House today. The Speaker confirmed that this was his decision, and his decision alone, to invite this individual from his riding and to acknowledge him in the gallery. We were all caught off guard by this. We all stood and applauded, but this was not the individual we were led to believe he was. That is something that hurts all of us and embarrasses all of us, but there was no prior knowledge from the government.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect better than incompetence from their government, and that is what they continue to get. There are dozens of questions for the Liberal Prime Minister, and he refuses to stand up and take responsibility for an international embarrassment that lies solely at his feet. His government House leader and those Liberals continue to stand, and they want the Speaker to take the fall.

Canadians deserve better. We know that. Why do those Liberals not know that Canadians deserve better?

Oral Questions

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would invite my colleagues on the Conservative benches to rely on the facts. You have laid out both in a statement as well as in an apology to the House that it was you who decided to invite this individual. You decided to recognize him in this place without informing the government, the Ukrainian delegation or, indeed, any parliamentarian.

I think we are all profoundly hurt and embarrassed by this as are Canadians. We need to take this seriously and not politicize it. We need to make sure that we are bringing Canadians together during this difficult time.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Vaughan—Woodbridge are feeling the pressure of increased housing costs and grocery prices. This summer, I heard them loud and clear, from the skilled trades workers who are building our homes and critical infrastructure to the workers creating made-in-Canada products in the manufacturing sector and the seniors who helped build our country. That is why I was pleased to see our government introduce Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act, as the next phase of our government's plan to bring down the cost of living for Canadians.

Could the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance tell my residents what this bill would do?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the MP for Vaughan—Woodbridge for his hard work for his constituents and all Canadians.

Canadians need more homes built faster and they need affordable groceries. Bill C-56, which the government tabled last week, would help to provide both.

With this bill, we would remove the GST from the construction of rental housing to build more homes faster. We would empower Canada's Competition Bureau to help small grocers compete. We are demanding CEOs of Canada's largest grocers to present a plan to stabilize prices.

We are going to continue to move forward with a serious plan to help Canadians.

* * *

● (1510)

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is now a backlog of over 57,000 air passenger complaints before the Canadian Transportation Agency. Canadian travellers have had their lives upended. Many are out thousands of dollars. For those who have managed to navigate a complex complaint process, they are having to wait well over a year to have their complaints heard.

The government is on its third attempt to fix this debacle. Will the minister apologize to Canadian travellers for failing so utterly to stand up to the big airlines?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government was the first to protect the rights of travellers, and we will make our passenger rights regime even stronger by making compensation mandatory for disruptions, putting the onus on airlines, not passengers, and ensuring an improved standard level of service during any disruption. We have also invested in the Canadian Transportation Agency so it can resolve cases faster. It will be much faster.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, on December 2, February 15 and March 23, I asked the government about a 30-year-old tax law whereby Canadian companies are penalized by our tax system, despite the fact that they use only local and healthy ingredients.

The government told us that it wanted to quickly introduce legislation to help people with the exploding cost of groceries. Tackling this situation would encourage people to buy healthier, less expensive food, and put an end to this injustice that unfairly pits Canada's small businesses against multinationals. This is a direct way to help Canadian families and make it cheaper for them to eat better.

Does the government intend to make any changes?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take the health of all Canadians seriously, especially that of our children. Our tax system is data-driven, as is our health care system. We will always implement taxes and health rules based on facts and expert advice.

* * *

[English]

RICK O'BRIEN

The Speaker: I understand that there have been discussions among representatives of all parties in the House and that there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence in honour of the fallen RCMP officer in Coquitlam, British Columbia.

[A moment of silence observed]

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent to adopt the following motion.

I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the recognition made by the Speaker of the House of an individual present in the galleries during the joint address to Parliament by His Excellency Volodymyr Zelenskyy be struck from the appendix of the House of Commons Debates of Thursday, September 21, 2023, and from any House multimedia recording.

● (1515)

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

It is important, when we say no to this motion, which is on such an important matter, that we state our rationale. It would be—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. member to start over—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

I ask the hon. member to start over. I did not hear what he started with or what he was saying, and I want to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, I want to state the rationale for why the motion is completely out of order, and that is why I am rising on a point of order.

It would be absolutely wrong to strike what was said from the record. It goes without saying that those who do not learn from history are—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am going to ask the Clerk to come up and try to figure out what is going on here so that we can make a call on it.

I am curious to see where the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley is going. He will please get to the point.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, it will only be a few seconds, but I appreciate your giving me the floor to explain our rationale.

It goes without saying that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. What happened on Friday was shameful and brought embarrassment to this chamber. It was an ugly reminder of what survivors of the Holocaust know too well: that we must never forget. Deleting the text of the Speaker's words from Hansard would—

The Speaker: I am going to have to interrupt. I am afraid this is getting into debate more than anything else, and I cannot take a point of order on something that has already been voted on. I am just trying to make some sense out of it.

I will let the hon. member go a bit further, but I am trying to figure out where he is going with this.

I cannot say I disagree with what he is saying, but it is not a point of order.

Oral Questions

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, deleting the text of the Speaker's words from Hansard would have only one purpose: to try to forget what happened and wash the record clean. Removing this from the—

The Speaker: I am afraid this is debate.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I move for my colleague from Winnipeg to continue to be heard.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I think we can all agree that what happened here on Friday was deeply hurtful. My point of order is actually that, as a Jewish Canadian, I have been very much hurt by what I have been hearing and seeing. When the government House leader was mentioning that she was the descendent of Holocaust survivors, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk said that the chickens have come home to roost. As a Jewish Canadian, that is so deeply hurtful to hear in this context. I would ask that she apologize, because it added to the pain we are feeling.

● (1520)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

My colleague just expressed in a valid point of order that she was deeply offended by what a member from across the way stated during question period. It is definitely appropriate to ask for an apology, and we look to the Conservative Party to provide that member the opportunity to do the right thing and apologize. That was a point of order. At least let us afford the member the opportunity to apologize for the offence that was—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, like the member who raised this, I too have Jewish ancestors. My mother is Jewish. In our ancestral town of Bialystok in Poland, 95% of the Jewish population was murdered during the Holocaust.

Every time the Liberal government missteps in this way, it pulls this stunt of coming out and saying, "Look at us, we have some kind of background," and then it finds a word said by somebody else and says that person is an anti-Semite.

The fact is that the member for Haldimand—Norfolk was referring to the chickens coming home to roost for a government that consistently abuses human rights issues for its own partisan purposes. Shame on all of them.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue, one that the House did not ask to debate. The reason these points of order are going back and forth is due to decisions made last week. I think it is incredibly important that all of us understand the context in which this occurs.

I genuinely hope my colleagues will grant unanimous consent for my request to table the reporting structure of the Parliamentary Protective Service, which states very clearly that it reports to the commissioner of the RCMP on operational matters. That was the point the line of questioning was making today. It is about the government's responsibility to provide comprehensive vetting and background checks.

I have those two documents, including the memorandum of understanding signed by the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Speaker of the Senate, the Minister of Public Safety and the commissioner of the RCMP.

I would like to table these two documents so members can know what they are talking about when they are trying to run cover for the Prime Minister.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, on a separate point of order, while our member was speaking, a member of Jewish heritage, the member for Kingston and the Islands used unparliamentary language again by swearing at one of our members who was trying to make a point, a legitimate point, about a very difficult and sensitive matter, particularly for those of Jewish heritage. He should apologize again.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I do apologize for saying shame on the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I heard the utterance from the member. It included an expletive that was not included in his apology. The government House leader turned around and looked at him when he said it. She knows he said it. He knows he said it. His apology was not addressing the point raised by the official opposition whip.

The Speaker: This is a he-said-she-said situation. I rely on hon. members for what goes on. We are going to check the blues, see what we have and come back to the House should we see fit.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1525)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 48th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the 48th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

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

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay. Hearing none, the motion is carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

AQUACULTURE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise virtually in the House today to present a petition on a subject of keen interest to many of my constituents.

To cover it briefly, this relates to the ongoing crisis for west coast wild salmon and the need for action to reduce their exposure to viruses and disease, as well as infestations of lice, that come into the wild salmon population from locations in marine coastal areas of foreign-owned toxic fish factories, otherwise known as salmon aquaculture. Work was under way under the previous minister of fisheries and oceans, and petitioners hope to find out whether the commitments to get these toxic operations out of our waters are still under way.

HEALTH

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I first want to offer my condolences and support to Constable O'Brien's wife, children and family, and the members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and all law enforcement agencies in Canada, who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect us.

I rise today in support of not only Brooke from Nelson but the people of Kootenay—Columbia and across Canada to present this e-petition with 15,000 signatures on proposed changes to the natural health products that the NDP-Liberal government has proposed to Health Canada. We rely on health food products every day as part of our proactive health care. Health Canada is proposing significant fees for the import, manufacture and selling of NHPs and new labelling laws. This over-regulation will force people to seek out products online outside Canada.

I stand with and support the natural health product industry and call on the Minister of Health to work with the industry to embrace modern labelling and cost-recovery rates to reflect the scope of the industry.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to present this petition. I hope you had a wonderful summer in your riding. I was fortunate to go to Portugal and learn about the toxic drug crisis, so it is timely that I present this petition on behalf of constituents of mine who are calling basically for the same model and approach that Portugal took in terms of a health-based response to the toxic drug crisis.

The petitioners are looking for a compassionate, integrated and coordinated approach to respond to the toxic drug crisis with a timely plan and resources to respond to it, including just-in-time treatment, recovery, prevention, education and resources to support that, a safer supply of substances to replace the toxic drugs on the street, and decriminalization. As we know, the evidence says that criminalizing people who use substances causes more harm.

The petitioners are asking for the federal government to table a plan and respond to the toxic drug crisis.

• (1530)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of members of my community who are calling to the government's attention the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Specifically, they are asking the government to move forward immediately with bold emissions caps for the oil and gas sector that are comprehensive in scope and realistic in achieving the necessary targets that Canada has set to reduce emissions by 2030.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise for the 11th time on behalf of the people of Swan River, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. The people of Swan River are sick and tired of the Liberal government's excuses on the rising rate of crime. The reality faced by local businesses is grim. They are forced to either spend their hard-earned money on security or risk shutting down. Businesses are struggling because of the constant crime by repeat offenders who plague the community.

The people of Swan River demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies that directly threaten their livelihoods and their communities. I support the good people of Swan River.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition regarding Canada's euthanasia regime, otherwise known as MAID.

The petitioners note that legalizing the state-sanctioned killing of people with mental health challenges will undermine suicide prevention efforts. Consequently, they call on the government to provide treatment and recovery to persons with mental illness.

In addition, they call on the government to reject the proposal to allow for the killing of infants under Canada's euthanasia regime, as was proposed by the Quebec college of physicians.

Government Orders

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED DUPLICATION OF PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to a point of order raised on Thursday, September 21, by the member for Bay of Quinte regarding the Private Members' Business item Bill C-339.

As members will know, the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business is scheduled to review the votable status of the 15 items that were added to the order of precedence last week. It is for the subcommittee and for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to review the votable status of these items of Private Members' Business, including the bill brought forward by the member for Bay of Quinte.

I submit that it would be premature for the House to consider the matter raised by the member until the subcommittee and its parent committee undertake their work, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1, and table their report in the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was about to explain, when I was interrupted by the Leader of the Opposition, that the Bloc Qu b cois deplores the federal government's constant need to dictate to Quebec how to spend its money.

Government Orders

First, we want the government to transfer Quebec its share with no strings attached. Had the government done so starting in 2017, then Quebec would have been able to begin building and renovating a number of housing projects, particularly social housing projects, three years sooner, and that definitely would have helped to mitigate the current housing crisis. Transfers with no strings attached would make the funding process much simpler, since the various agreements complicate the associated bureaucracy and increase the wait times before the amounts in question are actually allocated. That is important, particularly since the programs put in place by the Government of Quebec are often innovative and effective.

Second, the Bloc Québécois reiterated the importance of federal funding targeting first and foremost the many needs in the area of social and deeply affordable housing because those are the most pressing.

This is what we proposed during the last election campaign. We proposed that Ottawa progressively reinvest in social, community and truly affordable housing amounting to 1% of its total annual revenues, to ensure constant and predictable funding, instead of having ad hoc agreements. We proposed that every surplus federal property be repurposed for social, community and very affordable housing to help address the housing crisis. We proposed the creation of a property speculation tax to prevent artificial market inflation. We proposed a reform of the home buyers' plan to account for the different realities of Quebec households and increasingly diverse family situations. We also proposed that the federal government proceed with a financial adjustment of the different programs stemming from the national housing strategy to create an acquisition fund. Implementing this fund would enable co-operatives and non-profits to acquire housing unit buildings that are currently accessible in the private market, to keep them affordable and turn them into social, community and very affordable housing. We proposed that Quebec receive its share of funding with no strings attached from federal homelessness programs while calling for the money allocated over the last year during the pandemic to be made permanent.

I had the opportunity to test all these ideas because I was proud to represent the Bloc Québécois in the Eastern Townships in a debate on housing, but the Liberals and the Conservatives were absent from the debate in the Eastern Townships during the election campaign in 2021, on an issue as critical as that. It really struck me at the time. Social housing and homelessness organizations noted the Bloc Québécois' good ideas and the absence of the other two political parties.

In conclusion, we will continue to call for a real housing policy, but there is nothing overly terrible about this bill. Consequently, we would like to see it go to committee for further study.

I would like to add one last thing. It is undignified to leave so many people deprived of a basic need like housing. It is undignified to let women be raped in the street or give birth alone. It is disrespectful to those who built our society to let seniors lose their homes and find themselves without a roof over their heads. They have a right to want to age with dignity. We must put aside partisanship and take action on this all-important issue of social housing and homelessness.

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what we see within the legislation is a very positive step that would lead to the construction of thousands of new homes. One of the things that reflect well on this particular legislation is that we have now seen other provinces adopt the same principle in terms of providing the same break, which would complement the policy that much more. I wonder if my colleague across the way would acknowledge, as I have done, the importance of recognizing not only the need and that Canadians want the government to do this, but that it is also important that the different levels of government and stakeholders work together to best address the overall issue of housing shortage.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I think I was fairly clear in my speech. Ottawa has no business dictating our fiscal policy to us. This was precisely Quebec's response. Quebec is asking for its share because social housing and homelessness are part of its jurisdiction and it wants to take action.

I clearly demonstrated why Quebec, the provinces and the municipalities should not be browbeaten, as certain other parties tried to do during this debate. Rather, they should be empowered to act.

I saw no shortage of innovative ideas among community groups when I led a round of consultations with my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert. Community groups want to put these ideas into practice.

Let Quebec take action.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know that not enough new social housing is being built. However, is it not also true that one of the most serious problems surrounding the housing crisis is the loss of existing social housing?

Does my colleague think that creating an acquisition fund for non-profit organizations could help slow or even stop the loss of social housing?

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I talked about this in my speech, but I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to come back to this much-vaunted acquisition fund.

In 2021, during the election campaign, when I spoke about the acquisition fund during the Eastern Townships housing debates, organizations very much in touch with the needs of the community said that it was a promising idea that would allow community groups and co-operatives to carry out social housing projects. These groups embraced the notion of an acquisition fund.

There are some very interesting models in my riding of Shefford, including a seniors' co-operative that celebrated its 20th anniversary and even appeared before the World Health Organization to show that it is possible to have different housing models for seniors.

Government Orders

Let us allow these organizations to benefit from this acquisition fund and let us get some buildings out of the private speculative market so we can give the power back to the organizations.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is always a good day when we can speak to the challenges that are facing many Canadians. Right now, with respect to housing, it is no secret that the shortage of supply is making it difficult for folks to keep up, whether that is their mortgage or rent.

I enjoyed the member's speech because we have a lot in common and we believe the solutions are the same. Could the member speak to how important it is to build non-market housing and to the fact that the existing housing market has not delivered the results that Canadians deserve? It is seeing high prices and high competition with huge mega-corporations. Can the member speak to why non-market housing, social housing, is so important?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, as I was saying to my colleague, we need to look at what should be done with private housing and find the best solution.

Beyond what is proposed in this bill, the Bloc Qu b cois also wants to debate it in committee in order to make suggestions, ask more questions and work with all the other political parties to come up with the best solutions. We realize that this bill is not perfect, but we have a duty as elected representatives to set partisanship aside when the time comes to debate an issue as crucial as social housing. When the bill is studied in committee, we will be able to continue working on it and propose improvements.

At the end of the day, people are waiting to have a roof over their heads. The right to housing is absolutely crucial. These people are counting on us and are watching us. We have a duty to act with dignity. We owe it to them to study this bill in committee.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, everyone knows that times are really tough for Canadians. Housing and grocery prices are higher than ever and continue to rise. There is a real need for the government to intervene and adopt public policies to try to create circumstances in which those prices are more affordable for Canadians.

Bill C-56 sets out what the government is proposing to accomplish that. There are some good ideas about the Competition Bureau. However, I would say that more could be done. The bill introduced by the leader of the NDP goes even further with regard to the Competition Bureau. For example, it seeks to impose harsher penalties on companies that fix prices and to make the companies in the industry that are planning a merger responsible for showing that they are not doing something that would be harmful to Canadians. Right now, it is up to the Competition Bureau to prove that a company merger would be harmful to Canadians.

We think that the burden of proof should fall on the companies, that they should have to prove that their activities are in the interest of Canadians. The status quo that we have had for so long has not served Canadians well. There are some good ideas in the bill, but we must do more.

When it comes to housing, we in the NDP think that it is very important to not rely solely on market-based solutions, should we have to use them. If we truly want to resolve the housing crisis that has been growing for decades in Canada—under Liberal and Conservative governments alike—then we need solutions that come from outside the market as well as within the market. We have made several proposals, including an acquisition fund for non-profit organizations to give them the opportunity to buy affordable social housing when the organizations that run them decide to sell them.

All too often, large corporations are the ones buying these buildings. They renovate them, only so they can kick out the existing tenants and take on new ones who can afford to pay higher rents. If we are going to implement market-based solutions, we think it is important that the government adopt policies that will help address the critical shortage of social and affordable housing. We do not see anything like that in Bill C-56. We know that there are opportunities to work with the government and the other parties to ensure that Canada takes a strategic approach that includes non-market solutions, but we are not there yet.

• (1545)

[*English*]

I am really happy today to speak to Bill C-56. I think it is an interesting bill. We know that it is a really hard time for Canadians and that it has been for some time now. The costs of housing and food are higher than they have ever been, and they continue to go up.

There is no doubt in our minds, as New Democrats, that some kind of public policy intervention is required in order to try to get a handle on this situation.

In both cases, we have reached this moment of crisis because, for 30 years now, we have had Liberal and Conservative governments that have largely said to leave all this to the market. The market has not produced solutions around affordability.

It is not that the market does not have a really important role to play in the building of housing, for example, or in the delivery of groceries. However, we know, from what we have seen over the past number of years, and in the case of housing, for decades now, that if we just leave it to the market, then we are going to continue to end up in a worse and worse situation. The fact of the matter is that there are a lot of housing needs in Canada that will never be met by the market, because it is not profitable enough for the market to meet them.

That is why we need a strategy that pushes private actors into making available, as part of their holdings, affordable suites. It is why we need governments to take responsibility again, as governments did from the 1940s all the way up to the 1990s, when the federal Liberals of the day cancelled the national housing strategy that was in place.

Government Orders

Unless we get governments back to the table and taking responsibility for the creation of social housing, we are not going to see an adequate resolution to the housing crisis. We are going to see it continue.

I have more to say about that. I will carry on with the housing piece, because I think the evidence has been that we have a pretty unified approach between the Liberals and Conservatives. What we have seen this fall already, and, in fact, if we looked back over the last 30 years, is that it is largely a market-based approach to the housing sector.

That is one of the things that changed significantly in Canada in the 1990s, whereas before, we had governments that said that there is a responsibility and an obligation to be investing in social housing and to be maintaining and expanding social housing stock. Really, in the 90s, a decision was made to say that, actually, we are going to leave housing entirely to the market. This has been consistently followed by every government we have had after Chrétien.

This is not done in the other G7 countries. In fact, of our G7 comparators, Canada has one of the lowest percentages of social housing in its housing stock. Canada has really dropped the ball because of this “market-think” that has dominated both Liberal and Conservative governments.

I rush again to say that it is not that the market does not have a role. It is not that there is not going to be market-based housing. It is that a whole other pillar, which was social housing and affordable housing, evaporated; we are living with the consequences of that now. Affordable housing, in some cases, can be provided through market mechanisms if one has the right rules in place, set by public policy.

The problem with Bill C-56 is that the government has not proposed the next stage for meaningfully building social and affordable units, whether in the bill or alongside it. This means that it is an incomplete strategy.

There is a risk of just adding to the public policy that prefers market solutions and puts money back in the pockets of developers without being upfront with Canadians about what the plan is or presenting a plan for a really aggressive social housing building strategy.

That can be the government building social housing. It can be meaningfully engaging the non-profit and co-operative sectors to build social housing. The real point is that we do not see it here.

There is an affinity with the Conservative leader's presentation of a housing plan last week as well. He also talks about taking the GST off purpose-built rental. He does talk a little bit about some affordability conditions in his bill, but they are not defined. When he talks about how it has to be rented below market, we really need a definition of what he means by that. If one charges just 1% below the market rate, we are not really helping Canadians.

● (1550)

I think it is noteworthy that, when the Conservative leader talks about using federal land in order to build more housing, there is no talk about affordability conditions in that part of his bill. That is actually where developers stand to make the biggest gains and make

the most money. Therefore, it is really important to have some kind of affordability or social housing framework in respect of the forfeiture of federal lands for housing.

If those conditions are in place, it can be a very good thing to use federal land to develop for housing, but not in the absence of those criteria. In Ontario, we recently saw a Conservative government that decided to allow for the sale of protected lands in order to build more housing; however, it did not establish good rules about that, and it subsequently had to backtrack completely.

Canadians are watching this file very closely. They are not interested in seeing politicians abuse the housing crisis to make money for their developer friends. This is why the conversation that we have around affordable and social housing conditions here in Parliament as we discuss Bill C-56 is so important.

For instance, I think of the NDP's call for a non-profit acquisition fund to try to stop one of the important contributors to the housing crisis. This is that, where there have been apartment blocks with affordable and social units in them, non-profit housing providers or co-ops that have been running them for decades decide they cannot do it anymore, and they put them up on the market. When and if this happens, we have seen a lot of real estate investment trusts or big corporate landlords swoop in and buy those buildings. They have fast access to capital, and they have a lot of money in reserve that they can use to buy these places. They renovate, ask for exceptional rent increases, kick out all the people who were there before and get new tenants who can pay higher rents.

What that means, and some have calculated this, is that for every unit of social affordable housing we are building in Canada right now, we are losing 15. That is not sustainable. It means we are not on track. That is why it is not enough to just propose new market mechanisms to get developers to build new housing, rental or otherwise.

We really need to have a concerted and strategic effort to make sure that we are building a lot more affordable social units and that we are not losing the ones we already have, particularly in communities where there are experienced and competent non-profit or co-operative agencies to take those places over and continue to offer them as units with either affordable or social housing rents, which are calculated as a percentage of one's income, so those who have a lower income pay a lower rent. That is really important.

I have to add that one of the reasons why there have been so many of those buildings come on the market in the last 10 years or so and why real estate investment trusts and big corporate landlords have been able to scoop up so many existing affordable housing units, is the Harper Conservatives. The federal government, in the heyday of its involvement in housing, used to offer operating grants that would help subsidize the rents for these buildings that were tied to the mortgages. In some cases, the mortgages were 40- or 50-year mortgages, and when they came up for renewal, the federal government had to renew that operating funding.

The Harper government, while the leader of the Conservatives was at the table, made a decision not to renew those operating agreements. That is why so many buildings across Canada ended up for sale. The current operators could not continue to offer what they had been offering before, which was affordable rents, or properly, social housing, because the federal money that made that possible went away as a result of the decisions of the Harper Conservatives.

The Liberals ran in 2015 on renewing those operating agreements, and then they did not. There was some talk about coming up with an alternative arrangement, but the evidence is that it was not successful, so the operating grants were not renewed and there was not really a successful initiative that replaced that money to make sure that those units could continue to be offered on an affordable or social basis. Therefore, in the Harper years, we lost 600,000 units of social housing. The leader of the Conservatives, who gets up and talks a lot about housing, how much housing we have lost and how expensive it has become, sat at the table while his government refused to renew funding agreements that, in some cases, had been in place for 40 or 50 years to make sure those units could continue to be affordable.

Also, we saw big profit-seeking interests come in and buy up those buildings, kick out the tenants, fix them up a bit and then charge exorbitant rents. We cannot allow that to continue, and we really need to see, alongside or in this legislation, depending on the mechanism that parties can come to some agreement about, either conditions on this GST rebate or something like a non-profit acquisition fund.

Certainly, the housing co-investment fund was the only real housing initiative under the new national housing strategy the Liberals announced and have been working on in various ways over the last seven to eight years. Although I think most people feel it has not been very effective, it was what got some social housing built. That fund has been depleted, and we need to see it replenished so the organizations that do have plans in their community on how to provide affordable and social rents, with some help from government funders, can get down to doing that work instead of being held up.

Government Orders

When it comes to grocery prices, we in the NDP do not think the Liberals' approach of calling in CEOs for a meeting and wagging their finger has a likelihood of success. If a wagging of the finger was all that corporate executives needed to lower their prices, goodness knows the Liberals should have done it a long time ago. They should not have waited those 20 months while grocery inflation was outpacing the regular rate of inflation, at a time when grocery store profits were neither standing still nor diminishing. What we saw over that time was that they were making far more money than they did pre-pandemic.

● (1555)

The Conservatives would have us believe that the carbon tax is the only thing driving up grocery prices, but if that were the case, then their profits would not be growing. If all they were doing was passing on the increased costs that grocery stores have experienced as a result of the carbon tax, their profits would not be growing. However, they are growing, which means those companies are increasing their prices by more than the increase in input costs. Any government or any party that wants to form a government with some sense of seriousness about addressing the challenges that Canadians have been facing at the grocery store has to recognize the role of corporate greed in the equation, or they will be unable to do this.

For a long time, going back to during the pandemic when we saw big grocery retailers and other big box retailers making way more money than they had in the years just prior to the pandemic, the New Democrats have recommended a windfall profit tax along the lines of what governments in some other countries, including some places where they have conservative governments, have done. We think that one of the best ways to ensure that corporate greed is not unduly affecting grocery prices is to have something in place that says to grocery retailers that, if they are price gouging, they are not going to get to keep it. That is the best way to make sure that they are not gouging Canadians at the store. We think that is called for because not only have grocery store profits gone up but also even the margins for groceries have gone up.

We would say to those who say that traditionally the grocery sector is a small-margin industry compared to other industries and that again it is the same thing as we see in housing, where Conservatives and Liberals want to treat housing as if it were any other good. This is where they say, "Oh, do they need a house?" Although I should not say "need" because that does not capture the market approach. It is, "Oh, do they want a house? Do they want a Nintendo game? Do they want a new pair of shoes? Do they want to eat at a fancy restaurant?" All these things are just things that people want, ultimately, from a market point of view.

Government Orders

New Democrats are here to say that, when it comes to food and housing, these are not just commodities like anything else. These are things that people have a right to because they are essential to live a dignified and healthy existence, and we have an obligation as a country to make sure that people are housed and fed at reasonable prices they can afford. More and more, we see those prices getting away on us. This is why, alongside effective market mechanisms, such as taking the GST off purpose-built rentals, if the goal is just to build more rental apartments, we also need mechanisms with non-market solutions to make sure not only that we are getting more units that Canadians will not be able to afford anyway, but also that we are getting more units that those who can afford them can access, while also ensuring that we are building units that those who cannot afford the options on the market are also able to access because everyone should be able to access a home here in Canada.

• (1600)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate a number of things the member made reference to. I want to pick up on the point that the legislation that we have before us today is great because, when it comes to homes, thousands of homes would be created. We have seen, as I mentioned earlier, other provincial jurisdictions now doing what Ottawa is doing to further enhance it.

However, I want to pick up with the member how important it is that we continue to work with different levels of governments and stakeholders and just emphasize the important role of organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. The member is very familiar with Habitat in Winnipeg, and I believe it has built over 500 homes over the last number of years. Organizations can actually make a difference. This is one of the tools that is being used, but it is important that not only the national government but also governments at different levels work together to build more homes for all sectors of our society.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North is absolutely right that obviously it takes a lot of different kinds of organizations to properly attack the housing crisis and get a handle on it. I am very familiar with Habitat for Humanity. I have had the pleasure of volunteering on some Habitat projects. In fact, not long after I was elected, we did that as an office-building exercise. We went out to a Habitat site.

However, with a number of the programs out there, whether it is Habitat or others that we have seen produce some really great infill housing in, for instance, the city of Winnipeg, one of the real challenges is that the housing market is running away on them so much that being able to acquire the property they need to have successful projects using the financial model that gave birth to the organizations is seriously strained and put in jeopardy. It is why things that are, strictly speaking, just market mechanisms cannot just go ahead on their own without a clear strategy by government to ensure that those non-market pieces are being addressed as well. The problem that we have here this fall is that the government has singled out a market mechanism that it wants to move forward on without saying more to Canadians about the other piece that has to follow, which is the social and affordable housing piece.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is really too bad that my colleague from Manitoba is taking this intervention from his home in Manitoba when this is a very important subject of affordability.

• (1605)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is best to not make references to where members are speaking from. Virtual proceedings are the norm now. We do not mention where people are making their statements from.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, we know that Parliament has recognized virtual. We know that the Conservatives participate virtually. This is an inappropriate attack—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I just addressed the issue.

The hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Madam Speaker, it is really too bad. This is part of the problem of the abuse of the virtual system.

Meanwhile, we have a provincial election going on back in Manitoba. I am sure the member is helping out there.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there is nothing abusive about using virtual Parliament. In the Standing Orders, it is made very clear that sitting in the House or virtually is seen as the same. I think it is important for you to make that very clear.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I absolutely agree with the hon. member. That is the way we proceed in the House. It is now the acceptable way of the House to proceed. We make no references to which site the member is speaking from.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Madam Speaker, the member went on quite extensively about the rising costs of food. He seems to have a very good grasp of it.

Could the member acknowledge, though, that the carbon tax does in fact increase the price of food?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I do not think there is any doubt that, through the supply chain, the carbon tax is obviously something that is a factor for pricing of food. It is why the NDP has been concerned and has proposed so many affordability measures.

We want to make dental care accessible to Canadians. That is why we proposed the dental care plan. For so many families that rely on child care, we have fought for years and years. We ran on a \$10-a-day child care program in 2015, when I was first elected, because we recognized that there are a lot of things that affect the prices Canadians pay for the various things that they cannot do without. There are a lot of things that put pressure on their household budgets.

Parliament is a very appropriate place to talk about the ways we could help control the cost of things that people cannot do without. That is a debate I have always been quite willing to show up for, both in person and virtually, whenever—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will do without the references.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, Bill C-56 includes measures to eliminate the GST on new rental housing. In the long term, this could impact supply, at least theoretically. However, this is for housing that will be built a long time from now, housing that will be started in 2030 and completed in 2035. Meanwhile, during a briefing, we learned that the government had not commissioned any analysis or study on how much this measure will cost or what impact it will have on new housing construction.

I would like to know if this way of doing things worries my colleague. Once again, this is a quick pre-election ploy of creating a measure without knowing how much it will cost or what the outcome will be. The Liberals did the same thing when it came to increasing the immigration target with their friends at McKinsey.

Has the government's tendency to propose legislative changes without doing the necessary calculations become problematic?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I think it would be good if the government did its research before announcing these kinds of measures. Yes, I think it is important for us to have that information.

It seems as though this was decided very quickly, perhaps at a caucus meeting where people were unhappy and asked the government to do something about the housing crisis. This is the only component in the Liberals' social and affordable housing strategy. We are going to need more than that if we really want to address the housing crisis. Yes, there are signs indicating that the government acted quickly, on the spur of the moment, rather than taking a more strategic approach based on good research.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, one of the elements of the member for Elmwood—Transcona's speech that I really appreciated was his honesty about the decades of underinvestment in social housing that have contributed to the crisis we are seeing now across the country.

Could the member speak to how important this is? If we were even to double our social housing stock, we would still be just in the middle of the pack of the G7. Can he speak to how the CMHC, for example, could get back into the business of building affordable housing across the country?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, when I was first elected, one of the things I did in Elmwood—Transcona was to bring together a group of organizations in the riding that had an interest in the housing question, because there was a lot of talk then about a new national housing strategy and I thought that we should be ready in Elmwood—Transcona for when the strategy hits the ground.

In that effort, I spoke to some folks who used to work for the federal government and the provincial government kind of prior to the cancellation of the national housing policy by the Liberals in the 1990s. One of the things they said was that because the offer for

funding every year was reliable, people could plan. Someone could say that they did not have the capital right now, but they could access funding to create a plan to scout out some of the land that they might be able to acquire in order to have a budget and, over the course of six or seven years, deliver a project in a community.

For so long, we have not had that despite some of the offerings in the national housing strategy. The co-investment fund was depleted. Nobody knows when it is going to be replenished. Nobody knows when people will be able to make a request under that program again. It is very hard for non-profits that are not sitting on a pile of cash to be able to do the planning work to be able to deliver housing. That is one of the ways the cancellation of the national housing project strategy, and the ad hoc approach since, has really cost us getting affordable and social units.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on that last question. It is worth pointing out that prior to 1980, the notion of homelessness simply did not exist in Canada. There were certain inner city skid rows with local charities, but housing began to be the crisis in the 1980s as the government began to underfund, and then, of course, when Paul Martin cut the national housing program which gave the green light to multiple provinces. We have seen a slow-moving hurricane finally touch down in real time over the last 30 years, such that now upwards of 280,000 Canadians are touched by homelessness in any given year. That is a staggering number.

I want to ask my hon. colleague about the importance of making it a priority to get housing, to get non-market housing and co-operative housing, built so we can have homes for seniors, for single mums and for families. We need to make this a national priority to make up for the years of disregard from both the Liberals and the Conservatives on the fundamental right to housing in our country.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, yes, absolutely we need to build those things. The problem is that a philosophical decision was taken in the 1990s that government did not belong in housing, that housing would be a commodity and that only the market would build housing in Canada. It was a philosophy shared by Liberals and Conservatives and that, I think we see a lot of evidence suggests, continues to be shared by Liberals and Conservatives, largely. That is why we cannot trust those parties to fix the housing crisis.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I feel the enthusiasm in the House. I feel everyone at home should have the same sentiment. Every day is a good day to fight for Canadians. That is what we are doing today with the affordable housing and groceries act. I was encouraged, I would say, by the comments I heard from colleagues.

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[Translation]

I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the affordable housing and groceries act. This new bill contains a number of necessary and timely amendments to the Competition Act. I am sure that my colleagues have heard many commentators say that the Competition Act is long overdue for a reform. This is exactly what we are doing today.

[English]

There is no doubt that Canadians are facing a very challenging increase to their cost of living at the moment. That is why, this morning, I summoned the large international food manufacturers to come to Ottawa. First, I expressed to them the frustration of millions of Canadians. I told them how difficult it is for colleagues and for Canadians from coast to coast to see the price of food. I can report to the chamber that the bottom line is that they have agreed to help the government stabilize prices and be part of the solution. We are going to continue to fight for Canadians every step of the way.

We have been working hard to advance solutions. Like I said, I not only met with the international food manufacturers, but I also met last week with the five largest grocery retailers in this country. I told them in very simple terms that we want to see actions. I am very pleased to see that they have also agreed to work with the Government of Canada and with parliamentarians to stabilize the price of food here in Canada.

We are also committed to advancing long-term structural solutions to drive affordability, and the best way to do this is to promote competition across the Canadian marketplace. The reason I am here today is to talk about the bold and decisive actions we intend to take in order to have a landmark reform of competition in this country.

- (1615)

[Translation]

A more effective competition system would generate positive spinoffs for Canadian consumers by stimulating innovation, which in turn could lower prices and encourage better product quality and selection for people across the country. It would allow the country to reap the many benefits of more dynamic markets. I can tell the House that, this morning, people reported other situations in other countries where competition had increased supply and lowered prices. These benefits are not just theoretical. They are extensively documented in the economic literature and proven in markets across the world. I would also argue that we all intuitively understand that less consolidation and more competition leads to lower prices. All Canadians know it.

[English]

The Competition Act is intended to promote greater competition and a fair marketplace by addressing various forms of harmful corporate conduct. These include anti-competitive practices, such as price fixing and mergers that lessen competition, to name just a couple. The act is administered and enforced by the Competition Bureau, an independent law enforcement agency.

[Translation]

I would like to provide a bit of context. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living have reinforced this trend, Canadians have long been uncomfortable with corporate concentration and the seemingly unbalanced distribution of economic power in the country. Our government understands these concerns and has taken a series of concrete measures to address them over the past few years.

[English]

In 2021, we reinvigorated the Competition Bureau, whose budget had been stagnant for way too long in this country. The government provided a much-needed injection of funding to help the agency renew its personnel and the tools at its disposal to take on the challenges of a fast-changing world. Next, we introduced a number of amendments in the 2022 budget legislation that addressed some pressing issues in the law. These included making sure that wage fixing agreements between employers—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the hon. minister to remind him not to make too much noise with his papers because that is interfering with the microphone and bothering the interpreters.

The hon. minister.

[English]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, as a member who has been sitting in the House for many years, I should know that. My apologies to the interpreters and to all those who felt the inconvenience.

As I was saying, we have provided additional funding to the Competition Bureau. In 2022, in the budget legislation, we included additional amendments to make sure that wage fixing agreements between employers would be illegal, and there would be an increase in maximum penalties so unfair practices could no longer be absorbed by the largest firms as simply a cost of doing business.

[Translation]

Before introducing these amendments, we undertook a formal review of the act and its enforcement regime through an extensive consultation process in order to get feedback from Canadians on possible fundamental reforms.

In keeping with that promise, in November 2022, I launched the consultation on the future of competition policy in Canada. As part of this process, we received more than 130 submissions from stakeholders and more than 400 submissions from members of the general public, whom I would like to thank.

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• (1620)

[*English*]

We spent the last several months listening to Canadians and carefully analyzing their submissions. We are now responding with an initial set of amendments to rebalance the marketplace. While it is only the first response to the consultation, these amendments strike at the core of the country's competition law regime and will undoubtedly empower the Competition Bureau to better serve the public and improve competition. I would like to thank it for all its work while I am delivering these remarks to the House.

As part of its mandate, the bureau conducts market studies to identify relevant regulations, business practices or other factors that may impede competition in a given sector. However, unlike many competition authorities around the world, the bureau does not have formal investigative powers to compel information. Rather, it must rely on what information is already in its possession, publicly available or provided voluntarily by stakeholders. Because the bureau cannot compel information, it has become apparent that it can rarely get a complete picture, leaving knowledge gaps and potentially casting doubt on the reliability or completeness of the information it gathers. This means that the recommendations the bureau can provide to the government and Canadians are not as complete and as impactful as they could be.

We therefore propose to grant the bureau the authority to conduct market studies in which it can seek to compel the production of information. This was highlighted as a very important issue by the bureau's retail grocery market study and was formally recommended by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

[*Translation*]

I would also underscore that the proposal to create a formal market study framework was broadly supported by stakeholders during the public consultations. However, many stakeholders emphasized the need for safeguards to prevent fishing expeditions or investigations that place a heavy burden on companies or the government.

We considered these comments carefully and came up with a proposed framework aligned with international best practices. I think this will ensure that any burden placed on the companies is limited to what is strictly necessary to achieve public policy objectives.

[*English*]

We have a quite unique feature in our competition law regime that has been the subject of much debate and criticism throughout the law's existence, known as the so-called efficiencies exception or efficiencies defence. It currently protects a merger that harms competition from being successfully challenged, so long as the efficiency gains that it generates for the companies involved will exceed the harm to competition and therefore, supposedly, the harm to consumers.

The provision has been cited as a significant obstacle to competitive markets by a broad cross-section of stakeholders for many years, and particularly so during the public consultation. This exception makes it nearly impossible for the bureau to successfully challenge anti-competitive mergers, so much so that it rarely tries to do it.

[*Translation*]

Many stakeholders have argued that the act is too narrowly focused on gains in efficiency that benefit specific companies over the short term, but that ultimately lead to industry concentration that hurts consumers over the long term. We are proposing to eliminate the efficiencies exception, which would mean that if a proposed merger were considered anti-competitive, it could be reviewed despite any efficiency gains generated for the companies.

Repealing this exception would give priority to competition and bring Canada in line with international standards.

[*English*]

Of course, if a proposed merger creates efficiencies that strengthen competition in a sector, the tribunal would be able to consider them in its deliberations.

Let me talk about vertical collaborations. The act already recognizes that certain collaborations between competitors may result in significant harm to competition, even if they fall short of the true cartel practices like price fixing or bid rigging. Currently, only agreements between competitors, or so-called horizontal collaborations, can be addressed under the act in most cases. However, agreements between non-competing entities, such as a landlord and a tenant, are known as vertical agreements and are outside the scope of the bureau's review of potentially anti-competitive agreements, even if they result in less competition.

As identified in the bureau's recent retail grocery market study, cases have emerged about property controls made between commercial landlords and tenants to exclude potential competitors from a rental property, sometimes even after the tenant has left. One can understand why we are focusing on that. At the same time as we are talking to the CEOs of grocery chains to say they have to help Canadians, that they have to be part of stabilizing prices, we want this landmark reform on competition because we need to address these issues.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

In some cases, controls like these have prevented independent grocers from moving into the only shopping centre in a community. In other cases, discount retailers were prevented from selling certain products near large supermarket chains renting from the same landlord.

We are proposing to amend the provision to allow for the review of vertical collaborations that essentially seek to limit competition, even if the agreements are not between competitors. It would also open the door for the Competition Bureau to look at other forms of collaboration, beyond property controls that can harm competition.

*Government Orders**[English]*

In conclusion, the consultation revealed a strong appetite for further reforms to strengthen the law and its enforcement. I would say it is about time that we had landmark reform of competition in this country, at a time when Canadians want to see less consolidation, more competition and lower prices. Now is the moment to act. I hope everyone in this House will join us, because this is about Canadians. This is about Canada. This is about our competitiveness around the world.

As the next step in our continued efforts to modernize the law, these proposed amendments directly contribute to addressing the most immediate concerns of Canadians about the rising cost of groceries, while we continue to consider further reform to ensure that Canadians and small businesses can benefit from fair marketplaces across Canada.

Let us improve competition in Canada, increase innovation and lower costs for Canadians. With that, I hope that all members in this House will support Bill C-56 so that we can show Canadians, not only as government but as parliamentarians, that we will act to help them in times of high costs.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, we heard from my Conservative colleague, the member for Bay of Quinte, about how this bill actually incorporates a few Conservative ideas.

The minister just acknowledged that maybe there are some further reforms that could be needed, so I have a couple more great Conservative ideas that he could maybe incorporate into this bill. One would be to use some federal buildings that are vacant and turn them into affordable housing units. If he does not want to do that, the second one he could maybe do is another great idea of ours, which would be to sell off the CBC, take the \$400 million in real estate holdings that it possesses and turn that into prime real estate for affordable housing in downtown Toronto. That would be a fantastic idea. Does the minister agree?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, members know by now that I have enormous respect for colleagues on both sides of the aisle, because we are all parliamentarians.

Canadians are watching at home, and I know many are watching these debates. In times of need, at a time when they are asking for help, I think Bill C-56 is really addressing the most pressing needs of Canadians. One is around competition, one is around more housing and one is around the CEBA loans extension.

I am always open to listening to members of this House. I am always open, obviously, to listening to Canadians. I hope that what I hear from the member is going to be strong support for Bill C-56, because Canadians are watching and they expect all parliamentarians to be on their side and to lower costs in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I know that the hon. minister is delighted that I am here for his speech. I thank him for his clarifications.

It is true that the current Competition Bureau regime focuses on efficiency when analyzing mergers and acquisitions, sometimes to

the detriment of consumers. As a result, over the years, many large grocery groups have formed. This enabled them to lower their costs while raising prices. Consumers did not benefit from that.

Now, with regard to mergers and acquisitions in this market in Canada—the minister knows about this because there were just five CEOs in his office the other day, which is not a lot of people—we have basically come to the end of the exercise. It is not clear whether, in this market, the measures in Bill C-56 will allow us to reverse course and have new entrants.

I know he is an energetic and creative man. What solutions does he have for bringing new entrants into this market, because five is not enough?

- (1630)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, I like my colleague's ideas, and I have a great deal of respect for him. He always has good ideas for getting things done.

I met with a group known as the Canadian independent grocers, who represent 6,900 small grocery stores across the country. They told me that the most important thing is the whole issue of competition reform, because that is what will help them.

Let me give a very concrete example. As we have seen, in shopping centres in small communities like the ones in our ridings, there are often clauses in certain leases that prevent competitors from setting up shop within a certain radius of kilometres. This kind of practice has a direct impact on smaller grocers who would like to set up shop near the major chains.

To answer my colleague's question directly, I think competition reform will certainly make some of the major international chains take more interest in Canada. I intend to have discussions with Carrefour, as well as some grocers across the border on the American side, to see how we can work together to increase competition here in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for Bill C-56. Some movement on the Competition Bureau is very important, and I appreciate his efforts.

It is the 1386 “Yeoman's Tale” that the phrase “better late than never” comes from. It is good to see the efficiency defence being looked at.

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This was previously a motion in committee, an amendment to the previous Competition Bureau work we did, which was actually defeated by the Liberals. Since that time, we have also seen greater mergers. Are they really committed long-term to this? We opposed the Rona takeover by Lowe's, which was approved by the Liberals, Zellers being taken over by Target, Future Shop by Best Buy, and most recently the Rogers and Shaw merger. Is this actually going to be a change in behaviour for the long term from the Liberal Party of Canada to increase competition?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, my colleague is a member of the industry committee and always comes with valuable input in the work of this House, and certainly we listen.

It is always a good day to fight for Canadians. I think everyone in this House would agree that our job is to keep fighting for Canadians at every step of the way. The landmark reform we are seeing, with more power to the Competition Bureau, goes exactly to what we heard at committee, which is that the market studies on grocery were less than adequate because we could not have full information. We need transparency and full accountability by businesses in this country that are subject to a market study, to be required to provide full information.

Also, with respect to the so-called efficiencies defence, we are a modern economy. We are a mature country. It is about time we get rid of something that was put in the books in 1968. We want less consolidation and more competition, which will bring lower prices.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, there are a number of things that could continue to reduce prices for Canadians and continue to open up more housing. There are literally thousands of ideas, but there is one I am attracted to. New York City has recently taken action, which others have been afraid to do, with taking on Airbnb. We know a substantial portion of Canadian housing is now taken up in short-term vacation rentals, to the benefit of this large offshore corporation.

New York has said Airbnbs can be operated but apartments cannot be rented out, or a full residence, for less than 30 days. We will see how this works out, but it is something for our Canadian housing minister to look at, although the way we react is obviously multi-jurisdictional. Short-term housing rentals, being consumed as we know they are, take properties out of circulation for Canadians who need homes.

We should also look at a guaranteed livable income so Canadians can afford their groceries and no one lives in poverty. Are there any comments from the minister?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, the member is a great member who is always contributing to the debate in this House. I think she would find comfort in the fact that in Bill C-56 we are not only addressing issues around groceries and stabilizing the price of food in this country but also addressing the issue of housing.

She is quite right that there is always more we should be looking to do. The fact that we are going to be removing GST on the construction of rental housing is a step in the right direction. The fact that we will have a landmark competition reform is a step in the right direction. The fact that we are continuing to fight for Canadi-

ans to stabilize prices is a step in the right direction. I welcome her suggestions. This is something that should be studied in committee, and we always listen very carefully to what committee members have to say.

• (1635)

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the minister today, but I also listened to the press conference the minister gave with four other ministers last week, where he said that these are some of the most fundamental changes to the Competition Act that are being made. I want to focus on process. Why were these changes not made in budget 2022, when at that time the minister said that these are the most monumental changes being made to the Competition Act? Why did the government not fast-track the two opposition member bills, one from the NDP and one from the Conservative Party of Canada, that called for the elimination of the efficiency defence? We would have fast-tracked that right away.

How come this monumental legislation was not in this past budget or in the budget last year? How come it shows up in a government bill just after opposition members table the idea?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, first of all, I am very grateful for the question from the member; he knows I like him very much.

Talking about fast-tracking, I think Canadians watching are going to hear that the Conservatives are going to fast-track Bill C-56 because, as they claim, a lot of their good ideas are in it. I suspect what I am hearing very loudly now is that the Conservatives are going to support and even fast-track this bill. What a great gift it would be to Canadians struggling if there was unanimous consent, something that rarely happens here, to send Bill C-56 to the Senate so that we can help Canadians.

We did something in budget 2022, but what we are proposing today, I would say, would more particularly affect the grocery sector. It is always the right day to do something great, so why do the Conservatives not unite with the NDP and Bloc, give unanimous consent, send Bill C-56 to the Senate and show Canadians that we all care about what they are going through?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Democratic Institutions; the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Democratic Institutions; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Emergency Preparedness.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I start, I want to inform you that I will be splitting my time with my good friend, the very hard-working member for Simcoe North.

"It was all a dream", as the late Notorious B.I.G. put it. After eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, that is exactly what home ownership has turned into, just a dream. When we talk about the Canadian dream that many newcomers come here for, when they have sometimes left some of the hardest conditions in the countries they are from, that Canadian dream is much more broken now than it has ever been before after eight years of the incompetence of the Liberal-NDP government.

It took until now for the government to even admit there is a housing crisis. It was only months ago when the former housing minister would refuse to stand in this House and even admit there was a housing crisis. It was the current Prime Minister who just months ago refused to say that housing is even his responsibility. We are glad the Liberals finally moved out of that frame of mind and admitted there is a major housing crisis.

How did we get here? How is it possible that a place like Canada has such a bad housing crisis? After eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, hundreds of billions of dollars have been flooded into the Canadian economy, which has resulted in too much money chasing too few goods, including homes. The CMHC warns that Canada will see a 20% decline in the number of new homes being built this year. The government's record is to do less, spend more, and put it on the backs of Canadians. That is exactly what is happening right now.

Toronto has the worst housing bubble in the world. Vancouver is the third most overpriced market globally. Canada has the fewest homes per capita in the G7, this despite having the most land to build on. It just does not make any sense.

We saw the finance minister just three years ago tell Canadians, along with the Prime Minister and the Governor of the Bank of Canada, to go out and borrow as much as they want because interest rates would stay low for a very long time. What these borrowers did not expect was for this out-of-touch, out-of-control Liberal-NDP government to throw hundreds of billions of dollars of fuel on the inflationary fire that it started. What did that do? It gave Canadians rapid interest rate hikes not seen in the last three decades.

It was just two months ago when the finance minister said that she solved inflation, she stopped it, she put the brakes on it. The problem was solved. She started to pray. It has gone up 43% since then to a whopping 4%, and now there is a risk of another interest rate hike. That is another interest rate hike that Canadians just can-

not handle because, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, housing costs have doubled, rents have doubled, mortgages have doubled. When it used to take 25 years to pay off a mortgage, that is what it takes today in Toronto just to save up for a down payment on a house. This is the housing record of the Liberal-NDP government, which by the way committed \$89 billion, the most expensive housing budget ever in the history of Canada, to doubling housing. It does not make any sense.

Back in November, the finance minister said there were two things she would make sure were in her failed budget. The first was that she was going to be very careful not to add fuel to the inflationary fire. The second was that she was going to balance the budget by 2027-28. She blew right through those promises, just like every promise the government has made before that and has promised that she will balance the budget in the year never, and poured a \$63-billion jerry can of fuel on that inflationary fire, putting a debt of \$4,200 on the head of each and every Canadian household.

• (1640)

The Liberals also made the housing crisis and cost of living crisis worse with their failed carbon taxes. Both of these scams are going to cost each and every Canadian household an average of \$2,000 a year extra, in gas, groceries and home heating. So, not only have they doubled all the costs of housing, but the things that go into a house, like gas, groceries and home heating, have gone up because of their failed carbon tax scams.

Now where are we at? According to the IMF, Canada is most at risk today for a mortgage default crisis. Those rapid interest rate hikes happened so fast, which had not been seen in the last three decades, and have made it impossible for people to keep up with their mortgage payments. When Canadians went with the advice of this finance minister and Prime Minister that they could borrow because interest rates would be low for a really long time, they did not expect this government to turn around and throw all of that fuel on the inflationary fire, increasing their monthly payments and reducing what they take home every month. On top of that, there are the other taxes, like the carbon tax, which take more and more out of their pockets.

Have members ever seen, in the history of Canada, international students and refugees living under bridges, in tents and not being able to meet their payments? Now, even reverse migration is happening in some cases. One in five newcomers are saying that they want to go back to where they came from and the number one reason is because of the high cost of living, and number two is because their credentials do not get recognized. This is eight years of this NDP-Liberal Prime Minister and his absolute failures on every single front.

What else are the Liberals doing? Even on their housing accelerator fund, CMHC says that Canada will still be over three million new homes short of building enough homes by the end of 2030.

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Well, I have good news for Canadians. It was not like this before this NDP-Liberal Prime Minister and it will not be like this after this Liberal-NDP Prime Minister, because once the member for Carleton, the Conservative leader, becomes prime minister of Canada, we have a plan to get more homes built, bring home lower prices and bring home more powerful paycheques for our Canadians.

Unlike the Liberals, the Conservatives have a plan right now on the table that goes far beyond this limited bill. We have a clear plan where Conservatives would bring home more homes that Canadians can afford. Our leader's common-sense legislation, the building homes not bureaucracy act, would do just that.

We will incentivize municipalities to build. The more they build, the more they would get. The less they build, the less they would get. We need to incentivize these municipalities that this Prime Minister continues to fork over hundreds of billions of dollars to, with failed results.

Unlike the Liberals, the Conservative plan would fire the gatekeepers and get NIMBYism out of the way. We would sell off 15% of federal buildings and acceptable land so that homebuilders could turn it into homes people can actually afford and get more supply into this country, which is so needed. We would make the GST rebate for new rental housing make homes and apartments people can actually afford. The Liberals will just make it easier for developers to build more expensive homes for their ultra-rich friends and donors.

The Conservative plan would cut bonuses and salaries of the gatekeepers at CMHC who are slowing down new home construction and keeping Canadians out of affordable homes. We would rein in government spending to bring down inflation so that the Bank of Canada lowers interest rates and mortgages can come down.

It is just simple math that this NDP-Liberal government still does not understand. It was its out-of-control deficits that fuelled inflation, which made interest rates go up and put Canada most at risk in the G7 for a mortgage default crisis. It needs to reverse course. The Conservatives would rein in the spending so that the deficits will come down, inflation will come down, interest rates will come down and Canadians will be able to keep a roof over their head. We are going to bring it home.

● (1645)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would note that this piece of legislation goes to amend, once again, the Competition Act.

A number of years ago, when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, we saw the merger of Shoppers and Loblaws. Now, Loblaws consumes a giant share of the market when it comes to groceries. Some of the measures that we see in the bill are looking to ensure that companies do not get into a position to be able to do that. I wonder if the member can comment as to whether or not he thinks that those measures in the bill are appropriate.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, I hope the member is charging Stephen Harper rent for living so free, in his mind, for so many years.

After eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, everything has gotten worse. There has been less competition and less growth. Our Conservative plan, once the member for Carleton becomes prime minister, would actually lower costs. Today, under the Liberal-NDP government, Canada's GDP per capita is the worst in all developed nations.

Investors do not want to invest in Canada because of the high regulations made by the government and economic uncertainty that the Liberal-NDP government is responsible for. We need to ignite our economic power in this country so people want to invest, get more competition so we can bring prices down and axe the failed carbon tax.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was very interested in my hon. colleague's comments and I want to point to one very crucial part of his speech where he talked about the government only being there to help its friends, its "very rich donors". I think he is talking about the Conservatives of Ontario and Doug Ford.

What did Ford run on? He ran on promising people a buck a beer, but what did he deliver? He delivered \$8 billion for his insider crony pals. Here is the thing. I know the Conservatives all get whiny whenever their record as a party is questioned, but the mysterious Mr. X, who has been named by the integrity commissioner for being involved in this, is also a friend of the Conservative leader, the member for Stornoway.

I would like to ask the member if he would have any of the discussions between Mr. X and the member for Stornoway made public so we could know what kind of backroom deals the party is already making.

● (1650)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind the hon. member that there is no such thing as the member for Stornoway, so it is not possible to answer that.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I would like to withdraw that comment. He is the member who lives in Stornoway. He is not the member for Stornoway. I thank the Speaker for that.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, I do not know if the member is launching his bid for provincial politics. Once the good people of Timmins—James Bay fire him in the next election for his party supporting the corrupt and inept Liberal government, he is not going to have a job anymore. It is because he refuses to stand with the hard-working people of Timmins—James Bay and continues to prop up the inept, corrupt Liberal government. Not only does it want to create more bureaucracy and red tape, it wants to blow up the public service and give less and less service to Canadians.

What Conservatives want to do is fire the gatekeepers so we can actually get more built in this country for people who are in his riding and all across Canada. That is what Canadians deserve, not more of the tired Liberal-NDP government.

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Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague from Calgary has experience in the construction industry and the building industry. He worked from the ground level up in this industry when he came to this country. I think he would understand what it takes to build in this country.

From the member's own background, could you relate to us how you know that this needs to happen because of your past experience in the construction industry?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I certainly do not, but I expect the member for Calgary Forest Lawn can answer.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, I must acknowledge that I am still jealous of the member for Bow River's mustache.

He is absolutely right. I come from the construction industry where many people, including newcomers, get started. There is one consensus in that industry, which is that, just like any small business, people want less government in their businesses, not more. We have seen, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, the problem is that it creates more government and more bureaucracy. The government wants to put its hand in the candy jar, leave it in there and take more and more from people.

Small business owners, newcomers, anyone who wants to open a business needs to have less government intervention. There are so many brilliant newcomers to this country, immigrants who come here, want to work hard and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here with you today. I happen to rise one more time to talk about this important issue. I had an opportunity to get some questions in. It was nice to hear from the minister how much affection he has for me.

Perhaps I will save members the suspense. I can be persuaded to vote for this bill, not to fast track it all the way to the Senate, because maybe we have some amendments. As the member mentioned, there are a couple of ideas the government plagiarized from other parties in the House, both the Conservatives and, dare I say, even the NDP.

I have lots of questions and I want to focus on process for a minute. Typically, a government introduces significant money bills twice per year. It tables a budget in the spring, and then there are important measures included in a budget bill in the spring. Then it has a budget bill usually sometime in the late fall, and we typically pass it before everyone goes home for the winter break and Christmas holidays. Five ministers did a press conference last week at the national press gallery, where they all exclaimed that this bill is so important in order to address problems in the country. That is nice. They are finally waking up, but if these ideas were so amazingly brilliant and needed, why did the government omit them from the budget?

The government spends 12 months preparing a budget, and basically admitted a couple of months later that it did not get it all right and that it has a couple more ideas. Where did it get those ideas? It found out the leader of the official opposition was tabling a bill in

the House to reduce the GST on purpose-built rentals, so the government rushed like heck to get a bill ready to do just that. Two bills were tabled before the House to get rid of the efficiencies defence, one by the NDP and one by the member for Bay of Quinte, a Conservative member. Last week, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry said about getting rid of the efficiencies defence that it is about time and we have to do it.

If the Liberals thought it was such an important idea, they could have fast-tracked any piece of legislation in June, before we left for the summer. What has changed? Why do they all of a sudden have these so-called solutions to problems that the government has not even been able to admit exist? The process matters because it highlights that this is a tired government that is out of ideas and is plagiarizing on its homework. It is now rushing and is likely to make mistakes by rushing and doing significant money bills on such short notice.

Frankly, with respect to the efficiencies defence, it was the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry who last year, in the last budget, introduced what he called sweeping changes to the Competition Act reform that had not been seen in at least a decade. If this were such an important change to make to the Competition Act, why did he not make the change last year? Why was he waiting until now?

I will tell members why he waited. It is because the leader of the NDP and a member from the Conservative Party made the suggestion. Liberals have actually run out of ideas, but we cannot blame them. It is human nature. How can we believe that we need solutions to problems when for months, members of the government were telling Canadians that no problems exist?

Let me read a few quotes, or let us go back to the tape as they say; we are now in football season.

The first quote states, "Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to talk down the Canadian economy, but the reality is that Canada is the best country in the world...[when] coping...with the challenging global economic environment," and says our economy grew faster than every other economy. It also says that the reality is that Canada is doing really well and inflation is way better here than it is elsewhere.

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• (1655)

A Conservative member in the House stood up and asked the Minister of Finance what happens if inflation lasts just a little longer than we think and we hit a period of economic uncertainty. That question was asked in May 2022, and the answer from the Minister of Finance was, “I have to urge a bit of economic literacy among the members opposite. The reality is that in data released today, the Canadian economy grew by 3.1% on an annualized basis in the first quarter of this year.” This was an unwillingness to admit that there is trouble on the horizon. Now, last quarter, GDP contracted, and, guess what? Inflation is still around.

Now, we should not worry, because the government is here to solve the problems because it is just realizing that there is a problem and has all these solutions. However, they are not the government's solutions, they are solutions from others. Am I happy that the government took some ideas from opposition parties? Of course I am, but it goes to show that the government is actually just running out of ideas. The government told everybody that interest rates would remain low forever, and they have not. It said that because interest rates were low, it had to spend and that it would be unwise to not spend.

We are now going to spend as much in debt service costs this year as we send to provinces to deliver health care. It is only going to get worse for debt service costs, because when the budget was tabled, all economists, including the government's; the Governor of the Bank of Canada; and all the experts, said interest rates were going to go down by the end of the year. However, they have not; they have actually gone up, not down. That change is going to represent billions of dollars more in spending to service the debt, even just this year, but for at least the next five years as the government renegotiates, repapers and rolls over \$421 billion of debt this year.

The reason the government has to roll over \$421 billion is complete and utter negligence in the way it financed its COVID spending when COVID hit. The government told everyone that interest rates were going to remain low forever, and may have even believed it itself. When the government issued the debt, it issued only short-term debt. I cannot take credit for that. A very smart individual, Richard Dias, who is a well-known economist, showed that the government could have saved billions of dollars by issuing long bonds. However, the government chose to issue short-term bonds during the pandemic.

We cannot forget that Liberal tweet and the finance minister's starting the parade when in one month out of 28 months, inflation dropped below 3%. They said their job was done and government's plan to bring down inflation was working.

The Liberals really have not actually done that much. What they have ignored is the actual one thing, or maybe even two things, that would make a difference. One would be to reduce spending, and another would be that one does not have to be Einstein's cousin to realize that if taxes were reduced on the good that is causing inflation, it would reduce inflation. For some reason, that is pretty hard for the members on the other side of the chamber to figure out. However, Canadians are smarter than that. They know better than to trust a government to have solutions to the problems that it does

not believe exist. I am glad that the Liberals are borrowing some ideas from the opposition parties.

I look forward to sending the bill to committee. I look forward to bringing some amendments, because I think the bill could actually be better. We could expand the GST rebate. Why are we not including triplexes, co-ops and duplexes? We could be driving more investment in this country, but the Liberals are determined to not have any other party in the chamber get a win.

• (1700)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member opposite very closely, and one might draw the conclusion that the government has not been aware of the issue of housing for Canadians. The government has been very much aware of the important role the federal government plays in housing. We have seen that virtually from 2015 and even this year, when Canadians are having a very difficult time with regard to housing. That is why we continue to provide programs like the rapid housing initiative and supports in different forms of infrastructure programs. The particular GST issue we are talking about today is something we have talked about in the past as one of those potential options. Today, and it does not matter who has the idea, the legislation would incorporate the idea, and Canadians would benefit from it.

I am glad to hear the Conservative Party giving the impression that it is going to vote in favour of the legislation. The question is when the member would like to see the legislation actually go to committee. Will he confirm he is voting in favour of its going to committee?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has been around a long time, and as a rookie member of Parliament, I am speaking only for myself. I cannot speak for my entire party. I am just saying I am encouraged to see it go to committee when it gets there.

Let us talk about rapid housing. Those funds have not been delivered at all rapidly. How about the shared equity mortgage plan that has barely given out a few per cent of its allocated money? It has been a few years. Yes, the member is right; the government has talked about this GST issue for eight years. Why is it making this proposal off cycle and out of budget? It is scrambling.

• (1705)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to focus on the housing part of this and the proposal in the bill to take the GST off purpose-built rental housing, which is something we support. I want to ask the hon. member about the importance of non-market housing in providing security of housing for many people who are shut out of the market by their income. In my riding, there are 15 co-operatives that provide housing for more than 400 families and have done so for the last 20 years. With just a quick look, I found more than 10 co-op housing projects in Simcoe County providing housing for about 300 people.

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Does the member support our proposal that the federal government get back into the building of co-operative housing?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Madam Speaker, there may be multiple ways the government can support co-op housing. Why not allow co-op housing to qualify for the GST rebate for rentals? Why can it not get the same rebate? All kinds of different housing can be supported through the GST rebate. I would support an examination of how we could best do that. If the hon. member has an amendment to the bill that could include co-op housing, I would be open to supporting that or at least taking a look at it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the fact that the bill contains no specifics on the type of buildings, the type of housing or any affordability requirements to qualify for the rebate.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Chambers: Madam Speaker, I will note that a very big difference between the leader of the official opposition's bill and the government bill is that the actual Leader of the Opposition's bill would have required that a certain number of the units in an apartment complex, in order to get the GST rebate, had to be affordable. That might surprise some members in this place, but the Conservative position was that in order to qualify for the GST rebate, one had to have a certain percentage of those units as affordable units.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my friend from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke anticipated my question, because the hon. member for Simcoe North mentioned co-operative housing, and that is also a large priority for Greens. We see it as a very successful form of housing. The comments from my hon. colleague from Simcoe North are encouraging. I know he is speaking only for himself, but does he have a sense of how other members of his caucus would feel about really pushing for more co-operative housing to be built?

Mr. Adam Chambers: Madam Speaker, build, baby, build. We need to build it all: market-rate, affordable and everything in between, and in all different sizes, shapes and everything else. I would welcome any thoughtful amendments to the legislation that would see us build more homes of all types faster for Canadians.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure and honour to rise in this most honourable of House to speak to something very important: Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act.

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, who will rise after I speak.

With that, let me first say that as an individual, I love capitalism, as I believe many others here in the House do. I love the free markets and creating wealth. Why do I encourage those things? I do so because this is what creates jobs and futures. At the same time, we need government and our regulatory bodies, including the Competition Bureau, to play a role to ensure that there is competition in the marketplace. Everybody likes the free markets and capitalism, but we also need competition to ensure that innovation occurs, that prices become lower, and that the standard of living for all Canadians and for people literally across the world improves.

I am so happy to see that there are a number of items here with regard to the Competition Bureau that will strengthen its role in markets across this country. Getting rid of the efficiencies defence is one thing that I applaud the minister and his team for putting in, as well as the industry committee and other committees that have looked at these issues. It is just so important.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-56 puts forward legislation to encourage the construction of much-needed new rental housing. We are proposing to eliminate the goods and services tax, the GST, on the construction of new rental apartment buildings. This is one more tool to create the conditions necessary to build the kinds of housing Canadians need and families want to live in.

[*English*]

With this bill, we are also moving forward with immediate actions to enhance competition across the Canadian economy, with a focus on the grocery sector. By doing so, we are helping to drive down costs for middle-class Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Bill C-56 includes a set of legislative amendments to the Competition Act that would do the following: provide the Competition Bureau with powers to compel the production of information to conduct effective and complete market studies; remove the efficiencies defence, which I spoke to earlier, that currently allows anti-competitive mergers to survive challenges if corporate efficiencies offset the harm to competition, even when Canadian consumers would pay higher prices and have fewer choices; and empower the Competition Bureau to take action against collaborations that stifle competition and consumer choice, particularly in situations where large grocers prevent smaller competitors from establishing operations nearby.

Our government is taking concrete actions to help stabilize food prices and improve competition in Canada. However, the industry also needs to step up with meaningful solutions. Canadians can be assured that the government will continue to work day in and day out to bring them much-needed relief.

[Translation]

Our government is well aware that the economic situation is still difficult for many families. Many are struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table. However, inflation has fallen from a peak of 8.1% in June 2022 to 4% in August this year. There are now almost 1 million more Canadians in the workforce than before the pandemic. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicts that, next year, Canada will experience the strongest economic growth among G7 countries.

[English]

However, we know that the past three years have been really hard for Canadians. COVID took its toll on our mental health and on the economy. Thankfully, we are past that. We have gone through COVID, the COVID recession, Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, supply chain snarls, wildfires and hurricanes. We continue to see high global inflation and are now enduring elevated interest rates.

Our government will do everything we can to help Canadians get through these challenging times and to build an economy with strong and steady growth, stable prices and abundant, well-paying middle-class jobs for hard-working Canadians. Our government has always believed in investing in Canadians, restoring middle-class prosperity and building a country where everyone has a chance to succeed and prosper.

There were 2.3 million Canadians lifted out of poverty between 2015 and 2021. In 2015, 14.5% of Canadians were living in poverty. Today, that is down to 7.4 %; this is real progress for Canadians across this beautiful country.

Our Canada-wide system of early learning and child care is making life more affordable for hard-working families, saving families in Ontario up to \$8,500 this year per child after tax; pre-tax, that is over \$10,000. With a record 85.7% labour force participation rate in July for prime-working-age women, it is helping to address labour shortages and grow our economy at the same time.

From enhancing the Canada workers benefit to creating the Canada child benefit and a new Canadian dental care plan, we have strengthened the social safety net that millions of Canadians can count on and depend on. All the while, we have ensured that Canada maintains the lowest deficit and net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7.

On the housing front, we have been active. We created the tax-free home savings account and doubled the first-time homebuyers tax credit, which will in turn help Canadians afford the home they deserve in the future.

[Translation]

With Bill C-56, we are proposing to do even more by eliminating the GST on the construction of new apartment buildings.

Our goal with this legislation is to temporarily change the economic equation so that builders who are dealing with higher construction costs as a result of global inflation get financial incentives to build projects that otherwise would not get built. The removal of the GST will encourage builders to build more housing in commu-

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nities across the country, which will lower the cost of rent for Canadians.

Our objective is very clear. We want to eliminate the obstacles to building a larger number of housing units more quickly to reduce the cost of those units. Of course, we will also need the co-operation of our partners.

• (1715)

[English]

Our government is calling on all provinces that currently apply provincial sales taxes or the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax to rental housing to join us by matching our rebate for new rental housing. I would like to say that organizations such as RESCON, the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, and its members that build high, low and medium housing have come out in favour of the removal of GST on new purpose-built rental housing. It is something for which I have called for a long time. It was in our platform, and I am glad we are having it done now.

We would also require local governments to end inclusionary zoning and encourage building apartments near public transit in order to have their housing accelerator fund applications approved. Canadians need support when it comes to accessing housing. We need all levels of government to come together in this effort.

In conclusion, there is a lot of work ahead of us to do. As global inflation and the cost of housing continue to impact Canadians, we must continue to take real action to make life more affordable and build an economy that works for all Canadians. With this legislation, we are leading the charge on housing, to create the necessary conditions and build the types of housing we need and that families want to live in.

[Translation]

Since 2015, our priority has been to build a strong middle class to offer everyone the chance to succeed, but there is still some work to be done.

The measures we are proposing in Bill C-56 line up with this goal by making it possible to build more of the housing units that Canadians need and to work on lowering the price of groceries.

I invite my colleagues to support this important bill.

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[English]

I am so glad to see Bill C-56 come to the floor of the House of Commons for debate. I encourage the House to get this bill to committee as soon as possible so the finance committee, or whichever committee will be looking at it, can debate it and even look at amendments to strengthen it. There are many things that are good for the economy in this bill. They are good for the housing sector, for the Competition Bureau and for helping our businesses, as we have done with the Canadian emergency business loan, which put in place during COVID and helped hundreds of thousands of businesses survive in our country.

Let us all work together in the House to get this bill approved for all our businesses, for our stakeholders and, most important, for every single Canadian in this beautiful country.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. Today, I rise for one special person. I would like to recognize my mother's birthday. Obviously, without her sacrifice and my father's sacrifice, I would not be here. My family came from southern Italy, as did that of the hon. member opposite who gave the speech.

The government said that interest rates would be low forever. The Liberals told people to borrow, and they borrowed like crazy; so did the government. Would the member agree with me that this is in part why we are in the crisis that we are in?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: [*Member spoke in Italian*].

[English]

Madam Speaker, my family and the member's family have known each other for over six decades, if memory serves me well. There is much respect between our families, who both immigrated here from southern Italy.

With regards to the question on interest rates, as an economist and someone who worked on Wall Street for a number of years and on Bay Street for over a decade and who follows the financial markets very closely, there is obviously a period of normalization of rates going on across the world, not just here in Canada. Following the 2008-09 financial crisis, rates were made very low.

I will stop there, but I would be more than happy to sit down with the member and give him my views on interest rates, on where the long bond will be and on where short and mid rates will be in the future.

• (1720)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, this issue is important. The housing crisis is affecting every single one of our communities. Certainly, in Timmins—James Bay, when we look at the indigenous communities, we have massive rates of homelessness. Even in our urban centres now, where we have a young population looking to live, there is no place to live. We have a growing economy; people cannot move in. For senior citizens who cannot stay in their old farmhouses and want to move into town, there is no housing.

I would ask the hon. member about a sense of urgency. I have heard about housing since this government was elected, but I have

not seen the urgency on the ground to actually move towards mixed units, co-operative housing and apartment opportunities so that we can get housing now, whether for new Canadians, students, workers or senior citizens in communities like Timmins, Kirkland Lake or Belleville. In any community we name, it is the same crisis.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay and I sit on the natural resources committee together and have travelled together, and so I know the individual quite well.

Housing is obviously a priority for all Canadians, and we do know that there is currently a housing crisis happening here in Canada. We do know that we have to build, which is why we are working with all levels of government.

We saw a very important step. We have seen the rapid housing initiative with our national housing affordability plan put in place, which has helped a lot of Canadians who are very vulnerable find housing, but we also know that we need to build. That is why we have the \$4-billion housing accelerator fund working with municipalities to end exclusionary zoning so that we can get that density up. We are working on ensuring that funds that are invested by the federal government for infrastructure have density with them, much like what is happening at the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre in the City of Vaughan where we had a population of zero going up to almost 50,000 in over a 10-year period. It is very dynamic to see and a lot of good stuff is going on.

We know that the builders are up for it, we know that the skilled trades are up for it, we know that municipalities are up for it, and we are working with them.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question about the grocery portion of Bill C-56.

I am reading the Competition Bureau's report from June of this year entitled, "Canada Needs More Grocery Competition". In that report, the Competition Bureau makes the point that the big three retailers earn a profit combined of \$3.6 billion. It sounds like a lot of money, but that is on \$100 billion of sales. So, that is a 3.6% profit margin, which certainly does not sound like greedflation, as our NDP colleagues like to call it.

My question to the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge is whether he thinks 3.6% is too much profit.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I always believe in looking at the first derivative, what the percentage change in a number is and so forth. I would obviously look to see how the margins have fared over the past couple of years.

Having covered the grocery sector and the private sector, I know quite well how they operate. Literally tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands, of people work for grocers across Canada along the continuum from the food terminal in Etobicoke to our local grocers in my riding, such as Cataldi, Longo's and Fortinos. Those are wonderful folks who need to be supported. They need to have good wages and good benefits, and we will make sure that we encourage that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House to share my views on a bill. This one is extremely important because it deals with housing affordability and the cost of groceries, an essential matter.

[*English*]

Throughout the summer months, I too heard clearly from constituents about the price of groceries.

I heard it from my kids. I have three kids and they remind me whenever they see me. When I go to the grocery store, I notice the prices are much higher than I believe they should be. I can go to certain grocery stores and see items at half the price. Something needs to be done, and our objective is to try to bring stability in pricing.

In my speech today, I will talk about what we have done thus far, what we are going to do now to help affordability, because it is a real issue to Canadians right across this country, but I will also talk about the importance of investing in our strengths so we can bring more revenues to the table and do more to support Canadians.

Prosperity is the key to success, as my dad used to say, and we have shown big investments that look into the future. Electric vehicles is one, of course. We have given big contracts in Ontario for batteries. The trade agreements we have signed over the last four or five years bring prosperity. I will also talk about offshore wind farms and the Atlantic Accord, which the Conservatives do not want to support.

Let me start with some of the key things we did to help with affordability, because this is crucial. We doubled the GST to two quarterly payments to help those in need, the low-income Canadians, which is so important. There is the Canada workers benefit; depending on one's salary, one can receive \$2,400 a year. We made some changes so every three months one will receive a quarter of that sum, so one can have more money as one faces some the challenges out there.

There is the disability benefit, which we passed in the last legislation and is so important, because we know people with disabilities are the most vulnerable. The highest poverty in the country is

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among people with disabilities, so we need to move forward on that very quickly.

I need to talk about something extremely important, which is indexing. Indexing of inflation is key here, because if one's pension or the benefits being received do not increase with the cost of living, it makes it even more difficult. Therefore, we came forward with the CCB, which is tax-free, but it is now indexed to inflation so young families can continue to count on that growth to help them. This is so important.

The GST is exactly the same; we have adjusted that. As well, there are changes to the Canada pension plan, to help Canadians not fall behind. We already made a big improvement in that area, and where a person was getting about \$11,400 a year, now it is up to \$20,000 a year, which will be a great help.

I want to talk about the OAS and the GIS, because those are specifically touching seniors. In here, we have ensured indexing for these as well. This indexing, which is so important, will see a 30% increase by 2027-28 in the OAS and GIS, which is crucial. Our government will be investing about \$20 billion a year to continue to support our seniors, which is over and above what we are paying now.

Early learning and child care is such an important investment. It is tax-free as well. Already, today we see that 50% of the provinces have lowered the price to \$10 a day, with the rest to follow in the next couple of years. This is having an effect on affordability for young families.

On housing, last year in one of our bills there was a top-up that helped 1.8 million low-income Canadians. As well, there was a one-time payment for groceries that helped 11 million Canadians, with single people receiving a little over \$200 and a family of four over \$400. Those are specific investments helping affordability, but it is not enough, which is why we will bring more forward.

● (1725)

Also, we talked about students in university, now having a tax-free interest rate, which is very important. We increased, by 40%, the grant funding so that they can have more money to pay for their expenses because we know the challenges. Just the interest rate and the student loan is over \$600 a year for a student. That is a help, as well, toward affordability.

Who can forget, of course, our very important investment in dental care for Canadians? We will see over nine million Canadians, by 2027, receive dental care. Already today, over 340,000 children have received support through dental care, which is crucial.

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My riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook has seen some of these benefits but so have the ridings of many other members of Parliament in the House. We have seen investment in child care spots in my riding. It means more space. We made 500 more spaces in Nova Scotia. My riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook will receive 119 of those 500, well over 20%.

We are also receiving, of course, the CCB, for young families. The CCB in my riding alone will be over \$5 million per month for young families. That is over \$60 million a year. People in all of the MPs' constituencies are receiving those monies to help them, which is so important.

We then see an investment in the Canada community revitalization fund, which allows many of my communities to benefit from these important investments.

I cannot understand why a Conservative would not be in favour of the tweaking of the Atlantic Accord, which is so important. For the first time ever, we are going to see an offshore wind farm here, right here. It will be the only one in Canada. There are none today. This creates that opportunity to allow this industry to bring more revenues and more great jobs for Canadians. These are major steps and there is a trillion dollars to be had in investment by 2040.

This legislation today that needs to move very quickly to committee is the GST rebate and this is focused on various types of housing, which is crucial, of course.

The minister tells me that the five main grocery chains, when they were here last week, did understand that they too have a role to play to support Canadians with regard to affordability. It is important that they play a role and they are open to coming back to us, I understand, by the end of this week with some proposals that will see those costs lowered, which is so important.

I want to talk about the Competition Bureau's act. The competition bureau has a major role to play. We are going to make some major changes here. This came out of a report back in 2022, that more competition is needed, more innovation is needed and this is one way we can ensure that the prices, again, find their way downward.

As I said, we have made some investments in the past. We are bringing forward some major investments this time around. We also have to keep our eyes focused on our strengths and that is investing in our people and looking to, in the future, where our investments should go. We did it with the electric car. We did it with the batteries.

On the wind farm project, it is hard to believe that Canada has the biggest coast and shores in the world and Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador have the fastest winds in the world. This is how we can grow this economy. There is so much to be had through this investment.

Why, again, I ask, are the Conservatives not supporting Atlantic Canada, especially today when we need to?

• (1730)

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from Atlantic Canada for his inspiring speech. What inspires me is what you are missing. There is an easy way to address

affordability for housing and groceries and I think you have overlooked it.

You have recently, as a government, announced that there is going to be a GST credit for new construction of rental properties. That is a start, but that is a one-time tax credit. Why do you not look at the carbon tax, which is a compounding credit? It compounds every single process in a product and it compounds every single movement that a grocery item makes to the grocery store.

If you really want to make life more affordable for Canadians, why do you not drop the carbon tax, both of them, the clean fuel standard tax and the carbon tax?

Let us axe the tax.

The Deputy Speaker: There are lots of things I would like to be able to do, but I cannot do it here in the Chair. I will ask the hon. member to make sure he runs his question through the Chair and not directly to a member.

We have a point of order from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we have very clear rules about how to address members; it has to be through the Chair. I just want to clarify did you, Mr. Speaker, bring in the carbon tax or is he misunderstanding the rules of the House? I would like to have that clarified.

• (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: I just addressed that before the point of order got going.

Maybe the hon. member for Provencher wants to retract or change how his question was worded.

Mr. Ted Falk: Absolutely. Let me try that again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, did the member perhaps consider whether a better way to address the affordability crisis of housing and the cost of groceries would be to axe the tax, which would be the carbon tax and clean fuel standard tax, because they are compounding taxes? Every step of the way in processing, groceries or in the construction of housing—

The Deputy Speaker: I think we got the gist of it.

The hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question and I also want to thank him for praising our government in bringing forward the GST under housing. That is a very important project and I am glad he is realizing the project is important.

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We know that their party, when it comes to climate change, cannot see that climate change is extremely important and is walking hand in hand with investments in the economy. When I talk about investments in the economy, why are they not supporting the Atlantic Accord? It could bring trillions of dollars to Canada and we could be leaders in the world. Do not hold back; join the team. Let us go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his high-energy speech. That is not surprising. We know our colleague well.

The Prime Minister, who is of course a member of his political party, recently took aim at Quebec municipalities by saying that housing was not being built quickly enough because of all kinds of regulations. What is rather surprising is that, in my riding, for nearly 50 years, the federal government has been imposing non-construction easements on an airport in Mirabel that has effectively been shut down. This is preventing us from building on residential land and potentially depriving the people of Mirabel of thousands of housing units.

How is it that the government is so quick to point the finger at the municipalities but has such a hard time looking inward at its own regulations? Are there no mirrors in the Liberal backroom?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I must say that he represents Mirabel well. He often talks about the Mirabel airport and its land.

It is very important to note that our government has been the most effective at working closely with municipalities. Many municipalities across the country have seen great improvements, including in Quebec, a province that is key in this discussion. This is a partnership. We have invested in Quebec, and we will continue to invest in housing, because it is essential. Whether someone is from Quebec, Cape Breton Island or Vancouver, they need housing, and that is exactly what we are going to work on.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like many members in this House, the people of Vancouver Kingsway are experiencing unprecedented high prices for food. People are going to supermarkets and finding that the price of three apples is about \$5. I am not sure how anybody can eat nutritious food with the kinds of prices we are being charged in this country.

There has always been a problem in our schools with children not having access to healthy food and it is even worse today. The Liberals and the NDP campaigned last election on having a billion dollars over five and four years respectively to get started on a national school nutritious food program. We are the only country in the G7 that does not have one.

Would my hon. colleague not agree that, at a time of unprecedented high prices for food and when so many families are struggling, this is the ideal time for the federal government to bring in this long-overdue program to make sure that kids, when they go to school, get at least one nutritious meal, so they can learn better and help relieve the strain on family budgets across this country?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I agree that we need to stabilize prices. It is very important. Coming from the education system, I know that many schools have a program to support vulnerable kids. That does not take the point that the hon. member is making that we can do more. I think a national program is something we need to look at. As I said, we have structures in place as we speak, but we can improve them and that is something that we need to continue to have conversations about, because it is a very challenging time for many families in this country.

● (1740)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

We have a cost of living crisis in Canada. The prices of housing, groceries, fuel and home heating have pushed far too many to the financial breaking point. Once upon a time, if people worked hard in Canada, they could earn a paycheque that would comfortably pay for their necessities. They would even have some cash left over and maybe take a family vacation.

My father was an electrician. One of my brothers is an electrician and another is a carpenter. These are good blue-collar jobs in the skilled trades. We grew up in a safe neighbourhood on Vancouver Island, a place that is not that safe anymore. My father worked hard, and he was able to raise and support six children. We did not always have a lot, but we always had enough. My brothers worked hard and were able to live comfortably. Sometimes, we did not have a lot in our kitchen cupboards, but my father never had to visit the food bank to put food on the table for us.

That was the promise of Canada, but under the Liberals, that promise is broken. After eight years of the overbearing NDP-Liberal government, Canadians are out of money and they are turning their backs on the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister knows it. Out of pure political desperation, he has put forward new legislation to address the mess he has made of housing and grocery prices. Unfortunately, this legislation, Bill C-56, is inadequate.

The Liberals could have adopted the comprehensive housing policy put forward by the Leader of the Opposition in the building homes not bureaucracy act, but instead, they are taking a patchwork approach to the housing crisis. The bill would remove the GST for rental unit construction projects, a campaign promise the Liberals made and broke in 2015. I support this proposal, but would have preferred that the Liberals adopt the positive and sweeping reforms contained in our Conservative leader's bill. I will have more on that in a moment.

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Bill C-56 also includes Conservative policy introduced by my colleague from Bay of Quinte in amending the Competition Act by removing the efficiencies defence. This change would give the Competition Bureau more teeth to prevent mergers that would lead to higher prices and less choice. The changes in the legislation are positive and supportable, but it is lamentable that we are in this economic position in the first place.

After eight years of the NDP-Liberal costly coalition, the promise of Canada is broken. Canadians with higher education and many working in the skilled trades find themselves living in tents or in their cars. Crime, chaos, drugs and disorder plague our streets, and we have a Minister of Justice who says it is all in our heads.

After eight years of the NDP-Liberal government and its punitive carbon tax, the cost of groceries is out of control, and Canadian families are hurting. There is a tax on the farmer who grows the food, a tax on the trucker who ships the food and a tax on the store that sells the food, and they are all a tax on the family struggling to buy the food. One in five Canadians is now skipping meals because they simply cannot afford food, and food bank usage is now up at levels we have never seen before. Food banks in my community are at risk of bankruptcy because they cannot keep up with demand. Put simply, our citizens cannot afford to feed themselves because of the NDP-Liberal government.

They also are struggling to put a roof over their heads. Nine in 10 young Canadians believe the dream of home ownership is just that: a dream. Mortgages have doubled. Rents have doubled. Down payments have doubled. Greater Vancouver is now the third most over-priced housing market on the planet. In the city of Vancouver, the average rent is over \$3,300 a month, and for a two-bedroom apartment it is nearly \$3,900 a month. We can add that to the \$2 plus for a litre for gas.

A recent C.D. Howe Institute study determined that in Vancouver nearly \$1.3 million of the cost of an average home is from government gatekeepers adding unnecessary red tape. That means that over 60% of the price of a home in Vancouver is bloated by delays, fees, regulations, taxes and high-priced consultants.

● (1745)

Data from Statistics Canada shows that residential construction investment has declined for the fourth consecutive month, including a decrease of 3.2% in Vancouver. In Canada, it used to take 25 years to pay off a mortgage. Now it takes 25 years just to save up for a down payment. The NDP-Liberal government's record on housing has been nothing short of disastrous.

Just a few weeks ago, the Liberals met in London, Ontario, for a three-day retreat. They said that housing and affordability were their top priorities. What did the retreat accomplish? They reannounced their broken campaign promise from 2015 to remove the GST from new, purpose-built rental housing. After the Liberals heard about our common-sense Conservative plan to axe the housing tax, they flip-flopped and tried to take credit.

To address the increase in the price of food, the Prime Minister announced that they were calling in the grocery store CEOs for a meeting. I am sure they were very intimidated. He then threatened them with tax measures that would inevitably be passed on to con-

sumers if they did not lower prices. As expected, this amounted to nothing more than a stunt, a grocery gimmick, theatre. Photo ops, announcements, virtue-signalling, and now they are plagiarizing ideas from the Conservatives.

If the NDP-Liberal government is looking for another idea to plagiarize from Conservatives, it should repeal its carbon taxes and stop the reckless spending that caused this affordability crisis in the first place. These are the real reasons Canadians are struggling with the high cost of living: high interest rates, and high prices in the grocery stores and at the gas pumps.

Bill C-56 does not go far enough and simply would not cut it when it comes to addressing and fixing the housing crisis in this country.

The Leader of the Opposition introduced the building homes not bureaucracy act in Parliament last week. This is a real plan that would tie housing completions to infrastructure funding so we can get shovels in the ground while providing a building bonus to municipalities that exceed their home-building targets. Simply put, if one builds more houses efficiently, one would get more money. Projections are that Canada needs 3.5 million new homes by 2030. We had better get started. Our message to municipalities is clear: build, build, build.

The Prime Minister rewards big city gatekeepers with tax dollars, regardless of whether or not they build homes. Our Conservative plan would require municipalities to build homes close to transit. Conservatives would also list 15% of the federal government's 37,000 buildings so they can be turned into affordable housing. We would remove the GST for any new home with rental houses below market value, incentivizing the construction of affordable homes. Conservatives would cut the bonuses of the gatekeepers at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation if they are unable to speed up approval of applications to an average of 60 days. Under the watch of the Prime Minister, these bureaucrats have been rewarded with huge performance bonuses for an abysmal performance. Much like the current Prime Minister, Bill C-56 is weak, inadequate, and reeks of desperation.

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Only a common-sense Conservative government would fix this housing crisis by building homes not bureaucracy. Only a Conservative government would bring home lower prices for Canadians by ending the inflationary deficits and axing the carbon tax. The promise of Canada is broken, but hope is on the way. Conservatives would reverse these reckless policies and restore the promise of Canada.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know in this bill there are specific improvements to the Competition Act, in particular, what the Competition Bureau can do to ensure that monopolies and such are kept at bay, because they are obviously not a good thing for competition. I wonder if the member can provide some comments as to how she sees the parts of the bill with respect to the Competition Act and whether or not she thinks they will be successful at achieving their goals.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, yes, we do think they will be successful in achieving these goals. That is why the member for Bay of Quinte brought forward the legislation in the first place. We are really glad the Liberals decided to steal our ideas because these are good ideas, and they would benefit Canadians.

• (1750)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my hon. colleague from British Columbia, and I usually find her speeches to be informed and interesting, but she, like a lot of her Conservative colleagues, keeps referring to eight years of an NDP-Liberal coalition. She knows that the confidence-and-supply agreement signed between the two parties is two years old, and prior to that, there was no formal or informal arrangement of any type between the NDP and the Liberals.

I am wondering if this is the kind of thing that we would see from a future Conservative government, where there would be active exaggeration to, if not outright misleading of, Canadians about the goings-on in Parliament? Does she agree with me that it is important to speak with integrity and accuracy in the House?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do agree with hon. friend that it is important to speak and act with integrity in the House. We see too little of it from the government, but I do believe in it. If I misspoke or exaggerated, I guess those two years have felt like eight years.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the Société immobilière du Québec, 40% of Quebec households are renters, yet only 14% of the housing expected to be built by 2030 will be rental housing. If we do not reverse the trend, it will be a national tragedy. We would need to triple the proposed amount of new rental housing to keep the housing crisis from getting worse.

Is it going to take more than 25 years to resolve the situation?

[English]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague that we are in a crisis. We need affordable housing. We need rental housing. We need homes that people can buy. We need homes that people can rent. We need to increase supply.

We have the smallest number of housing units per capita in the G7, with the most land to build on, and that is exactly why we want to see more purpose-built housing. We want to incentivize that building. We want it done efficiently, and we want it done solidly, but there is no reason it should take the kind of time it does or that the bureaucratic hoops people have to go through should add such an egregious cost to it.

We need to understand that we are in a crisis. We need more. Canadians are suffering, and this has to end.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from South Surrey—White Rock represents a riding that has a very diverse base, and I would imagine that she has an understanding as to why this bill is very limiting on what it could do for housing in her riding.

I wonder if the member could respond to the types of housing that are needed and not addressed in this piece of legislation.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I live in one of the most beautiful spots in the country, but it is unaffordable for many people. I was door knocking recently and people would immediately get tears in their eyes, telling me how they are doing double shifts and everyone in the family is working just to try to keep the home they are already in to meet the increases in mortgage payments, which are unfathomable to them. We pay mortgages in this country with after-tax dollars, and it is very difficult for people right now.

What Conservatives are saying is that the bill could have been more comprehensive, there could have been a lot more attention paid to the kinds of things the Conservative leader is proposing, such as incentives and disincentives, to work with all levels of government to make this happen. It is going to take a coordinated, comprehensive approach to improve housing in this country, and right now too many people are operating in too many silos and the bureaucracy is adding to the costs and the delay.

• (1755)

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2017, we saw the Prime Minister announce with great fanfare the national housing strategy. He said it was going to be life-changing and transformational. That was in 2017.

Since then, house prices have doubled, and we have just heard the opposition whip remind us that about nine out of 10 young people in this country do not own a home and do not believe they will ever have that opportunity. Rents have doubled in this country, and that is if someone can find a place to rent. Vacancy rates are now at an all-time low, generally hovering around 1% across the country.

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Inflation is skyrocketing, which of course, means that interest rates have spiked, which caused mortgage rates to go up. Mortgages have doubled. People with variable rate mortgages have seen their payments double. Those with fixed rate mortgages who are going to renew those mortgages in the next several months or years are worried that they are not going to be able to afford their home anymore. This is in the midst of a housing crisis.

Homelessness is on the rise. There are tent communities now in cities large and small all across the country. There are new immigrants and students who are living in homeless shelters, like Covenant House in Toronto. On average, three homeless Canadians die every week on the streets of Toronto.

The national housing strategy has certainly been life-changing for many. It has been transformational, but not the transformation that I suspect the Liberals had hoped for. It is not just in the big cities, of course. I represent a smaller community. I would like to say it is as beautiful as South Surrey—White Rock, maybe more, but it is also very expensive there.

Forty percent of households in Parry Sound—Muskoka spend more than 30% of their income on shelter costs. The median employment income in Parry Sound—Muskoka is about 20% lower than the provincial average across Ontario. The vacancy rate for rentals in Muskoka is 0.65%. That means there is nothing to rent. People are stretched thin because they cannot afford to pay for groceries because of the carbon tax. I get calls every week, and I am sure everyone in the House gets these calls as well, from constituents who are facing high prices at the grocery store. They feel the pinch of the carbon tax every time they go to the grocery store, fill up their car or need to get more fuel to heat their homes.

The people in my riding do not think the Liberal government cares, and it is hard for me to tell them otherwise. With an ever-increasing carbon tax that punishes rural Canadians and the most vulnerable in our society, there is no relief in sight.

On grocery prices, it is no wonder prices are so high. There is carbon tax one and carbon tax two point zero. It is on the farmer who grows the food and the trucker who delivers the food. It is a tax on food.

Here we are today. Over the summer, the Prime Minister shuffled his cabinet and named a new Minister of Housing. Someone started to wake up and realize that there is in fact a crisis in housing, and that the government has to do something because what it has done clearly is not working. However, it was not before the Prime Minister took an opportunity, while announcing a few units in Hamilton, to deflect from his failure by saying that it is not primarily his responsibility.

It was a life-changing, transformational program in 2017. In July 2023, he told Canadians that it was not really his fault. Now today, we have Bill C-56, which is supposed to be a big new change coming to the housing portfolio. What is offered on housing in this bill?

The Liberals are finally delivering on a promise they made back in the 2015 campaign to give back the GST on the construction of new rental buildings. That is it. That is all. We were expecting big change from the new minister and big change coming from the Prime Minister. However, this is what we got.

What is not in the bill? How about some CMHC reforms? The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which reports to the government, might be one of the biggest gatekeepers in the whole country. I know lots of colleagues around the House who have heard from people in their ridings, whether it is from small community groups trying to get housing built or smaller municipalities, about the stories of anguish when they go to CMHC to try to get their ridiculously complicated funding application approved. With the bureaucratic hurdles at the CMHC and in Ottawa, they often give up. If they do get a response, they often do not even get a reason why they have been rejected.

• (1800)

We can see builders and community groups, which do not really have the resources to battle with the CMHC, going back to the drawing table without much guidance on what they have to do differently. It is like this, of course, because this government has allowed the CMHC to grow and grow over the last eight years, and it kills more projects that it approves.

The member for Carleton, the Leader of the Opposition, put forward a bill that Bill C-56 certainly would not address. It would provide accountability to Canadians for the CMHC in Ottawa. The CMHC would have, on average, 60 days to respond to an application. We would put the executives at the CMHC on notice. We would put their bonuses on the line and say, “You have to meet these timelines”, because in a crisis, we pull out every stop. It is a bold target, but in a housing crisis, there cannot be some bureaucrat in Ottawa who is blocking homes. They have to be looking for every way possible to get more homes built.

Speaking of targets, they are another thing that is missing from the bill before us. For too long, the federal government has been happy to give massive federal transfers to cities to help them build all kinds of infrastructure with no strings attached to get more housing built. We need to tip the scales back in favour of the builders, not the blockers, because there is a scarcity of housing. There is a huge lack of supply. There are not enough townhomes, triplexes and single family homes, and not nearly enough density around transit. We need to make housing abundant again in this country. What is missing in the bill is any target for the municipalities to meet.

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The Liberals are happy to fly around the country and hand out a cheque here and a cheque there for a few hundred units here and a few hundred units there, and that is as far as it gets. They do not have targets, so we see no results. On this side of the House, we believe in results. On that side of the House, they seem to believe in photo-ops and talking points, and that is not working. We need accountability, incentives and targets.

To me, it is pretty clear that the government just does not get it. The last minister of housing could not even admit that housing was a crisis in this country. The new minister started out doing what the last minister did by trumpeting on social media about the great success they are having on housing. He then went on a little housing retreat in P.E.I. and listened to the experts, including some experts who actually proposed some pretty good ideas. Then he went to London for another retreat and teased the media on the way in about something that will be really big that we have never done before in housing. Then he came back out and announced the same old funding from a program they started a year ago, which has delivered no results. It is more of the same: meaningless photo-ops and announcements of a little bit of money. There are no plans, no targets, no goals and no results.

To the young people shafted by the government, to all the seniors on fixed incomes worried about how they are going to get by and to the new Canadians who come here and feel like they have been sold a bill of goods, I say that I am sorry we have a government that pretends to care but does not really deliver.

To the House and to the government, I say that Bill C-56 is a cruel joke. It is not serious. The Liberals give themselves lots of pats on the back, but there are no results. The proof of their failure is in the dismay of the young people who have given up the hope of owning a home. It is in the tear-filled eyes I see when seniors come to me and feel ashamed that the food bank they used to donate to is one from which they now have to get their groceries. The proof is in the tent cities, where people living in tents go to their jobs but cannot find a home. The proof is in the number of homeless Canadians who die on the streets.

There is a housing crisis in this country, and Bill C-56 is further proof that the government just does not get it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments from the member, and I think it is unfortunate when we say stuff like “The government does not care.” We certainly can have differences of opinion in terms of policy and the effectiveness of it, but to suggest that members do not care is, I think, disingenuous.

The member talked about CMHC and how a Conservative government would use CMHC and give it a mandate of 60 days to respond, or something like that. However, that just highlights a misunderstanding of CMHC's role in affordable housing and the way it delivers funds to projects. Organizations do not go to CMHC and say, “Here's my application; give me a yes or no.” They go to CMHC, and CMHC helps them walk through the various ways in which to apply in order to maximize the opportunity for funding in order deliver more housing. CMHC is less an agency that stamps either “yes” or “no”, and more an agency that is meant to work with the applicant. I have had my fair share of grievances with respect to

CMHC, but in my community, for example, it is certainly doing exactly that and has delivered on at least seven or eight projects in the last few years.

• (1805)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me that he does not really understand how the CMHC does or does not work, and that is not surprising considering the fact that we have an agency that is charged with the responsibility of delivering this life-changing, transformational national housing strategy. It has been an abject failure and they still pay themselves massive bonuses at the end of the year for a job well done.

Honestly, that is cold comfort to the people in this country who are desperate for a warm, safe bed to sleep in at night.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague, who I respect, and I think he has good knowledge of the file.

The one thing I need to question is this relentless line from Conservatives about gatekeepers, bureaucracy and red tape. They always throw out the line, for example, that it takes 10 years to get a mine into production. I come from mining country. There is not a single investor on the planet who would open a billion-dollar operation in a mine without doing absolute due diligence, which does take 10 years to actually map out an ore body.

It is the same for getting housing right. We have seen the leaky condo scandal that cost \$7 billion in B.C. We have seen the crappy concrete crisis in the U.K. that happened under Conservatives because they were not making sure that things were done right.

When I see the blame about municipalities acting as gatekeepers, in my region, they are more than ready to get these houses built, but they have to be built right.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why his colleagues are clapping for him because he is clearly confusing zoning processes and planning applications with building inspectors.

It should not take six years to get a piece of property rezoned to what someone wants, which is the exact same thing that is next door and on either side of the property. Making sure the building is built properly has nothing to do with zoning and it has nothing to do with planning applications, but it has everything to do with the building inspectors.

I do not know about mines, but I know about housing. The zoning process will have no impact on whether there are leaky pipes in the building or not.

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The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the hon. deputy House leader.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make sure we are talking about zoning and building permits. Am I in a city council chamber right now or is this a federal House of—

The Deputy Speaker: That is debate. It is well understood there are a number of mayors sitting in this chamber.

The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the common-sense legislation theme today sounds a lot like the common-sense revolution under Mike Harris. Members may recall those days when another Conservative government at another level downloaded municipal non-profit housing to municipalities, and they have been stuck with that cost ever since.

Why can the member opposite and his party not see fit to support programs for the seniors he talked about and for those people who are on affordable housing wait-lists across the country? That is not their plan. Their plan is more like the Mike Harris days from the 1990s.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Speaker, I was on a municipal council when that downloading happened. The reason that was downloaded is because the federal government was reducing transfers to provinces because of the outrageous spending of the first Trudeau government, the downturn and the global economy. They stopped building housing. Of course, that trickle-down effect impacted municipalities the most. I know that member, who was on city council, knows exactly what I am talking about.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

I rise today to speak at second reading to Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act; also known as the affordable housing and groceries act. I believe this is an important and very much needed piece of legislation. Before I get into the specific measures contained in this bill, I would like to speak to the global economic situation that makes some of the measures contained in this bill necessary.

The world is experiencing a global inflation crisis. Canada is not an island, and we are not immune to the factors that are driving high prices around the world. From the COVID-19 pandemic to the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, from supply chain challenges to climate change impacting harvests and causing crop failures, inflation is an inescapable global phenomenon. Compared to our G7 allies, Canada has fared very well. In August, Canada's inflation rate was measured at 4% according to the data published by the Financial Times. This is just behind Japan and almost tied with the United States and compares to 6.7% in the United Kingdom, 6.1% in Germany and 5.4% in Italy.

COVID-19 was an unforeseen and unimagined global crisis. The world essentially ground to a halt. Canada has fared relatively well through the pandemic recovery, thanks to the resiliency of the Canadian economy and in part to the programs to support Canadians and business owners to allow them to keep paying their bills when we had to stay at home and many business owners had to

close their doors. Without that support, I shudder to think of where we would be now.

However, just because Canada is doing better than many of our peer countries, that does not make the impact on the day-to-day lives of regular Canadians any less real. Several factors are driving rates in Canada, including energy prices and food prices. I have had many meetings on the issue of affordability. I have heard this loud and clear from my constituents in Scarborough Centre. It was a consistent theme whether I met them at local events or on their doorsteps or in my constituency office: People are hurting and people are worried. More and more Canadians are having difficulty making ends meet. They are having to stretch every paycheque further and further.

Access to affordable, suitable housing has been a problem in our community for far too long. Rents are out of control, home ownership is for many an elusive dream. Interest rates are high and it costs so much more just to cover the necessities of life like putting food on the table. Grocery bills have skyrocketed.

The Grace Place Church operates one of several food banks in my community, and Pastor Amos tells me that demand has increased from 14,000 visits per month during the pandemic to 20,000 per month today. This is not sustainable. I have taken these messages to the government and I am pleased to say that, with Bill C-56, the government is listening. No one measure or measures will be the silver bullet, but the steps outlined in this legislation would have a meaningful impact.

Let me speak first to housing, which is an issue I have raised several times in this House. We need to be clear and unequivocal: There is a housing crisis in this country. We need to build more housing of all kinds. We need to build houses and rental units. We need more affordable housing of all types. We need to build senior homes and long-term care and student housing. We need more supply, and it needs to be affordable as well as accessible. We need more smart density housing, especially around the transit hubs.

There are many reasons for the housing crisis, and one thing must be clear: We cannot solve it alone. Every level of government has a role to play. The federal government, the provinces and the municipalities all have levers and responsibilities and all must come to the table, put politics aside and work for the good of all Canadians. As a federal government, we have limited levers, but we do have a big one: We have money. We need to come to the table with serious dollars; we expect the provinces to match the amounts or at least make major contributions.

However, if we just put money on the table we will have failed. In health care, we use federal funding to enforce national standards of care. Likewise, with housing, we need to make federal dollars contingent on specific changes needed to address the housing crisis and make housing more affordable.

● (1810)

We have already seen this with the government's housing accelerator fund. By making municipalities agree to loosening residential zoning restrictions to allow for more density and accelerating affordable housing projects as a condition to receive federal funding, our government would use federal dollars to help drive change at the municipal level, which would see more smart density and more affordable homes built. It is an important step to addressing housing affordability.

Clearly we need to do more, and with this bill, we would be building on the steps we have taken. I am glad we are tackling the issue of rental units, which are a critical part of our housing ecosystems. They are the choice for students who are away to study, for young people just starting their careers, for newcomers making their start in our country and for seniors looking to downsize but who still want to be independent.

The cost of rent is too high for too many now. That is why we are acting with specific measures on Bill C-56. To build more rental housing faster, we would remove the GST on new rental housing, such as apartment buildings, student housing and senior residences. This would accelerate much needed rental housing builds across Canada.

As well, we are calling on provinces to also waive the provincial sales tax on new apartments. I am so glad to see the Province of Ontario immediately agree to follow our lead, and I hope all other provinces follow suit. This would help rental housing get built faster and encourage new builds to break ground. New supply will help to increase competition and moderate prices. Already, housing experts say that this change will take many rental building projects out of the planning stage and into construction by making building rental units more attractive than before, rather than simply building more condominiums.

Tim Richter, CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, said, "It's the federal government being very serious about taking some meaningful and muscular steps to address the housing crisis."

This is one important measure, but it is not going to solve every issue in the housing market. It is not meant to. We cannot just do one thing; we need to do all the things. We all need to come to the table, and we all need to act now.

Let me turn my attention now to the more basic issue of affordability. We have taken many actions over the years to make life more affordable, especially for the middle class and those working hard to join it. The Canada child benefit has put more money into the pockets of Canadian families that need help the most every quarter. Thanks in part to this tax-free, income-based support for low- to middle-income families with children, there were 782,000 fewer children living in poverty in 2020 compared to 2015. That is

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a big deal. I have heard from many families in my riding how the CCB has literally been life-changing.

● (1815)

Another major step we took, in co-operation with the provinces but largely funded by the federal government, has been the Canada-wide early learning and child care program. In Ontario, for most families, child care costs have already been cut in half and will soon go down to \$10 a day. This is saving families thousands of dollars. We also continue to expand dental care for lower income Canadians, starting with children and seniors.

These measures have been impactful, but with inflation driving up the cost of everyday life, we need to do more. I have spoken to food bank operators in my riding. Demand spiked through the pandemic and is still high today.

That is why we are also taking action to stabilize grocery prices. High grocery prices have made it tougher for many Canadians and their families, all while grocers are increasing their profits. We are acting in both the near and medium terms.

The one-time grocery rebate delivered up to \$467 to a family to help them put food on the table. Last week, the Deputy Prime Minister and the industry minister met the CEOs of the five major grocers and made it clear that we expect concrete measures on how they can stabilize food prices with a plan by Thanksgiving. We will make it easier to crack down on unfair practices that drive up prices and make it harder for local grocers to compete to protect Canadians and help them with the cost of groceries.

I look forward to the debate on this bill. I look forward to constructive suggestions on how it can be made better, and I look forward to working with all parliamentarians to make life more affordable for all Canadians.

● (1820)

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Scarborough Centre's riding and my riding are right next to each other. A lot of the demographics between the two are similar.

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I know that the Conservatives voted against dental care for children. They voted against a \$500 rebate for groceries. They also voted against subsidies to help people in apartments. I know that in my community, those were very valuable incentives for people going through a pretty challenging time.

I would just like to know this from the member: What was the response like in her community for programs that helped people during these difficult times?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Speaker, I had conversations during the summer with my constituents, and they are finding it very difficult to make ends meet. When I talk to them, they tell me what a difference the Canada child benefit and the \$10-a-day child care program are making by saving them thousands of dollars each month. I know that dental care is very important. I have been talking to many of my constituents who have been able to take their young kids to a dentist, which they were not able to afford before.

It is very important that we continue investing in these programs like the \$10-a-day child care, the Canada child benefit and dental care, and that we make sure we do more to make life affordable for all Canadians.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a good day, I think, in Canada when the House, Parliament, can speak to the crisis that so many people are facing when it comes to housing, groceries and affordability. It is no secret, however, that companies, particularly monopolies and oligopolies, have tremendous power in this country. That is evidenced by many indigenous people. For example, I grew up with stories of the Hudson's Bay Company, a monopoly in Canada, one that demanded, for example, an unlimited amount of fur in exchange for one good. It said that someone would have to pile up their fur as high as a rifle in order to get that rifle, an unrealistic measure of wealth.

Today, Canadians are dealing with the same kind of strong-arm companies that are saying we need to pay more for housing, we need to pay more for telecoms and we need to pay more for groceries. The same people who are asking for this are just a few names in a room, not many people, just a few CEOs of these megacorporations. These megacorporations need to be held accountable. They are oligopolies. They are gouging Canadians.

That is why New Democrats have been steadfast in our call for a windfall tax, something that has been taking place in Conservative countries like the U.K., for example, that would disincentivize companies from price gouging Canadians at a time of crisis when groceries are going up like they are, when housing is going up like it is and when food is at such an unrealistic price. It is time for a windfall tax so we can make these billionaires pay their fair share and equal the playing field.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we work together and act now to make life affordable for all Canadians. I heard that very clearly from constituents in my riding during the summertime. People are finding it difficult. That is why it is important that we work together to pass Bill C-56, which would make a difference.

That is why the minister of industry called the five CEOs of the major grocery companies to come to Ottawa, to tell them that it is really very important that we work together to stabilize the price of

groceries. I am sure that by Thanksgiving, they will show us some results. If not, we are ready to take other measures to make sure the price of food stabilizes for all Canadians and we can make life more affordable for them.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to follow up on the message that my colleague from Edmonton Griesbach just shared with the House. CEOs in this country are making outsized incomes, and their corporations are making outsized profits. This is not actually helping Canadians get more affordable groceries and certainly not more affordable housing.

My question to the member is around rental housing and the GST rebate. How can Canadians be sure that any savings these developers are making, if there are developers involved, get passed down to their renters?

• (1825)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Speaker, reducing or eliminating the GST from the construction of purpose-built rental units will give relief to people. It will definitely make a difference. I know that prices will not go down just with doing one thing or another thing. We need a comprehensive plan. This is one major step that will really make a difference in making housing more affordable for people.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know members are a little upset—

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

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to rag the puck here but if it is less than five minutes, I think it would be fair for all of us to see the clock at 6:30.

Would we need unanimous consent for that or would we just need a majority of members in the House?

I think it would be very helpful in order to have us all leave on a good point on Monday but I defer to my colleagues.

The Deputy Speaker: I would be remiss if I did not allow the hon. member to at least get some of his thoughts out, so that we can listen less next time, when we do come back and talk to this bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-56 is very important legislation that we are debating. If we just reflect, in terms of our homes and our constituents, people are genuinely concerned about issues of housing affordability, the housing supply, inflation and the price of groceries.

That is what Bill C-56 is all about. It is recognizing that the constituents we are collectively representing are having a difficult time. That is why we have Bill C-56. I hope that all members, from all sides of the House, will recognize that this is legislation that not only should pass but should pass in a relatively quick fashion, in order to support the people of Canada from coast to coast to coast.

In listening to all of the debate, I want to emphasize to those who might be following it that the government has been on the housing file now for many years. In fact, it is this government, more than any other government in generations, that has made a commitment to invest in housing. We are not talking one sector alone but rather, whether it is free market, non-profits or investing in stakeholders, virtually from day one, as a government, we have been investing in housing in Canada, unprecedented in comparison to any other government in generations.

All one needs to look at are some of our more recent budgets. Members often talk about the important role of non-profits. Take a look at what we are doing in housing co-ops, providing hundreds of thousands of dollars to try to encourage additional housing co-ops to be built. It is a wonderful form of housing.

We could talk about the millions and millions invested into non-profits. We could talk about the rapid transition housing. Having the ability to support housing needs has always been important to this government.

We see what is taking place in our communities. This initiative, this legislation, is actually now being looked at by provincial jurisdictions, and some of them are adopting it as provincial policy, which will see thousands of homes being built.

I would like to think that all members will look at that holistic approach that the government has been taking, the specifics of this legislation, and get behind it.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)

[*English*]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we see clearly how, across the board, the government fails to take responsibility for its failures. When things go wrong, it is always somebody else who is responsible. It is always somebody else's fault. We could talk, for example, about inflation, about grocery prices, about how everything is more expensive under the government, especially so many household essentials that people rely on to feed their families.

The Liberals' response to it is not to acknowledge at all the role that their policies have played in this, not to acknowledge the fact that the reason we have rampant inflation in this country is because the government has spent massively beyond its means and that it has driven up the cost of goods. It is the inflation tax that was a policy choice of the government. That is what is driving up prices. Now Liberals want to present themselves as there to solve a problem that they themselves have created, with absolutely no recognition of the role that they have played fundamentally in causing that problem.

There are the housing challenges. The parliamentary secretary just spoke about how the government spent millions here, thou-

sands over here and they are doing all these things for housing. How is it going? What are the results? We are building fewer homes today than our country did in the 1970s. We are way behind in terms of meeting these needs, and this is because of policies that have been implemented by the government.

We had an incident discussed in question period today, where, unbelievably, the government allowed a Nazi to be in the gallery during a speech given by the President of Ukraine. The government's response to this event was that it is not responsible. It found its fall guy. It had nothing to do with it, when, in reality, we know that it is the responsibility of the government to vet those who are going to be in the gallery for an important event like that. It is responsible for the vetting. It knows this, this is how the process works, and it is denying responsibility. Whether it is in this incredibly embarrassing and wrong incident that happened at the end of last week or whether it is in the approach of the government to policy in general, we see a complete unwillingness by the government to take responsibility.

I asked a question earlier on the issue of the Trudeau Foundation. This is another instance where we see the government's failure to take responsibility. The question I asked at the time was about the fact that the government claimed the Prime Minister has had no ongoing involvement in or interaction with the Trudeau Foundation, and yet a meeting took place in the Prime Minister's Office between deputy ministers and the leadership of the Trudeau Foundation. It boggles the mind that the Prime Minister would try to pass off the fact that, on one hand, he would say he had no involvement whatsoever in this foundation that received very problematic donations and, on the other hand, this meeting would take place in the Prime Minister's own office.

The response we got at the time from the government House leader to these questions about how this happened is that it was just a building. It just happened to be that the Prime Minister's Office was the most convenient location to have it. I think there was a witness at the public accounts committee formerly with the Trudeau Foundation who said the Prime Minister's Office was just a convenient downtown location. Anyone in Ottawa who wants to hold a birthday party needs to know that the Prime Minister's Office is available. It is just a convenient downtown location. That is ridiculous. It is not a convenient downtown location that just anyone can book. It is a relatively small building that is the Prime Minister's Office. It is called the Prime Minister's Office.

Why do the Liberals not stop passing off the blame and start taking responsibility for their numerous failures?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has some challenges in recognizing what real responsibility is all about, quite frankly. Let us give a few examples.

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What I find very lacking in the member's comments are facts. If one listened to the Conservatives, one would think the Prime Minister of Canada is responsible for inflation around the world. One would think so. Back in the days when the Conservatives were posing these questions, Canada's inflation was less than that of the United States. It was less than that of most European countries. In the G20, we might even have been, if not the lowest, very close to the lowest.

The Conservatives completely dunk their head in the sand and say that here in Canada, even though it is the lowest, it is the Prime Minister's fault that we have inflation. They should wake up, look at the environment around us and realize the facts of reality.

This does not mean that as a government we should not do anything because of our inflation rate and the impact it is having on Canadians. As a government, we did take actions. We recognized the reality of the hurt that Canadians were having. That is why we brought in grocery rebates that affected somewhere around 11 million Canadians to help deal with inflation. The member makes reference to the issue of housing and the speech I had just given. What the member does not tell us is that, if we compare our years in government to the years of Stephen Harper, we will find that the Conservatives failed in every way.

We now have a government that does provide, but that does not mean that we do not recognize the hardships that are out there and the reality of what is taking place. That is why we brought in legislation to ensure that there are going to be more homes built. That is why in 2022 we brought in budget enhancement for housing co-ops, and that is not to mention the hundreds of millions of dollars that are allocated to low-income non-profit housing or the rapid housing initiatives.

The Conservatives are very selective with the facts, and they try to twist, turn and bend to be negative and say that the negativity is happening because of the Prime Minister. The last example the member gave was in regard to the Trudeau Foundation.

I have answered questions based on that issue in my capacity as parliamentary secretary. It has been all completely cleared up. The Prime Minister has had nothing to do with the foundation for many years. The Conservatives try to paint this as this hook going here to that thing and this point here going to that point there, and then saying it is corruption. That is garbage, just like the personal character assassination the member just put across the floor when he talked about inflation in groceries and housing is garbage. The reality is that the Conservatives just do not know what direction they are going.

• (1835)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member said that, in my comments, I am throwing all these things out there and really trying to connect the dots to establish that there is corruption in the government. It is actually not very difficult to establish that there is corruption in the government. The youngest of my children could connect that dots that are available.

The fact is that all one has to do is consult with not just a report, but the various reports, prepared by the Ethics Commissioner, that in fact demonstrate the corruption of the government. We do not

have to rely on political parties. We can go to the various non-partisan officers of Parliament.

The member said other countries experienced inflation. I will say other countries that have pursued inflationary policies have also experienced inflation, just as the Canadian government, in pursuing inflationary policies, has caused inflation.

He talked about Stephen Harper on housing. I think it is objectively demonstrable in the numbers that there has been a close to 100% increase in six years, from 2015 to 2021, after Stephen Harper was in office, so whatever the government is doing, it is not working. There has been a massive increase in housing costs that we cannot just blame on exogenous factors. It is not the war in Ukraine that is causing the house of pricing to go up.

When will the government take responsibility for its failures?

• (1840)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day I would rather listen to what the Ethics Commissioner has to say than members of the Conservative Party. There are a number of members in the House who believe in this whole tin hat theory and conspiracies galore. Ultimately, they put things together and they just do not make sense. Then they get upset if I do not agree there is corruption. I do not see any form of corruption in any of the topics the member has raised this evening; what I see is a lot of fishing rods being cast into the water, a lot of stargazing and wishing, and connections that are just not there.

As the Conservatives focus their attention on the personal character assassination of the Prime Minister, he, the government and my Liberal colleagues will continue to focus on the needs of Canadians.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again we find ourselves here today talking about the very foundation of our country, that is, our democratic institutions. What we have seen over the last several years under the Liberal Prime Minister is the steady erosion in the trust Canadians have. Why is that?

The question I put to the government that was insufficiently responded to as it provided no answer, a non-answer, it deflected it, as it often does, was with respect to the Communist dictatorship in Beijing having paid \$140,000 to the Trudeau Foundation. What did it get in exchange for that? Direct access to the current Prime Minister and his brother.

The parliamentary secretary who will respond tonight will say that the Conservatives want to make this about the Prime Minister himself. This is about Canadians. This is about Canadians who deserve to have confidence in their democratic institutions. What have we heard over and over again? What has the House said over and over again? That we need a foreign agents registry. We need to know who is operating in this country. There need to be consequences for individuals who operate outside the law in an attempt to further the efforts of our adversaries, like the dictatorship in Beijing.

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It is important that our allies are able to have confidence in us, just as it is important for Canadians to have confidence in our democratic institutions. We look at our Five Eyes partnership, NATO, NORAD and the G7. There are new alliances forming around the world with some of our traditional allies, like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, as examples. Who is missing from that partnership? We are, and they do not miss us because they cannot trust what is happening under the Liberal government.

Our reputation on the world stage continues to take hit after hit, as we saw as recently as Friday when, through either the willingness or incompetence of the Prime Minister, we had a Nazi in the gallery of this place, recognized by the Chair occupant when the government had a responsibility to protect Canadians, our reputation and our guests, including a war-time president from another country we are supporting. The embarrassment that Canadians and parliamentarians have felt over the last few days after Friday's failure by the Prime Minister is going to continue to erode the confidence of our allies, just like the confidence of Canadians is eroded in our democratic institutions.

Canadians deserve better. That is why we need a foreign agents registry. We need it now. The Liberals dithered and dragged their feet on having a public inquiry into foreign interference. Let us have that foreign agents registry so we can restore the confidence of Canadians in our democratic institutions. Will the Liberals do it?

• (1845)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has taken steps towards a foreign interference registry office. It is already fairly well established that we are moving forward with regard to that.

I am going to go back to this, because whether it is this member or the member who spoke prior to him, the members are very critical on foreign interference, and they make a personal attack on the Prime Minister. Let me reverse it. The foreign interference the member is making reference to is with regard to China. There is a report that came out while Stephen Harper was the prime minister and when, I believe, the current Leader of the Opposition was the minister responsible for democracy. They knew about it. What did they do? Absolutely nothing. They completely ignored the issue.

The issue does not go away, and now it has resurfaced in a different way. The Conservatives are blaming the Prime Minister for not taking action, yet as a government, we have actually improved our democratic system. Do members remember that the current Conservative leader tried to take away the authenticity of the voter identification card as a tool to allow people to vote? That leader and the Conservative Party are trying to say that it is the Liberals who are taking away from democratic institutions.

This member, like the other member, really and truly reflects what the Conservative Party has been attempting to do, as I have been saying for years now. The Conservatives' interest is not in substance but, rather, purely in character assassination. That is what we saw again today. Both members made reference to last Friday and tried to put the blame squarely on the Prime Minister and the PMO, even though the Speaker was very clear.

I was here. Those members were here, listening. The Speaker said he was the one who did the inviting and the introducing. Are Conservatives suggesting that any time a Speaker brings someone into the Speaker's gallery, they would have to be vetted through the Prime Minister's Office or the PCO? What are they suggesting should have happened? Are Conservatives trying to surrender control of the House of Commons and the floor of the House to the government of the day? Is that what they are implying? What role does the Speaker have, being elected by 337 members of the chamber and having a Speaker's gallery? Are we going to start putting limits on that?

We have to be very careful and follow the advice. What took place on Friday does not have to be a political issue. All of us should be united, not trying to set fire to an issue on which we should be trying to build a consensus and demonstrate leadership. However, the Conservatives are again more concerned about character assassination. That is the real reason why they are attempting to manipulate this situation. I find that somewhat sad and pathetic.

We continue to work very closely with the Five Eyes. In fact, we are the government that brought in Canada, in terms of the Five Eyes and having that apolitical, non-partisan standing committee of the House.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, we are asking for the Prime Minister to take responsibility.

I will address a number of things the parliamentary secretary said. First of all, are we going to surrender control of the House? It is the exact responsibility of the Prime Minister. It is the government to whom the Parliamentary Protective Service reports on operational matters. It is responsible for the safety of this place, members in this place and guests in this place.

Do the Liberals want to talk about eight years ago? They have been doing nothing. Instead of taking responsibility, they want to blame a prime minister from eight years ago. What is sad and pathetic is that instead of actually addressing the issues, they have the member who sits next to the parliamentary secretary trying to take secret films in here to see who is clapping loudly enough for what guests in this place say.

The Liberals should spend as much energy as they do trying to catch someone out with "gotcha" politics as they do on actually keeping Canadians safe and giving Canadians the ability to keep a roof over their head, to be able to feed themselves and to be able to heat their homes, but they are doing none of it. Why?

• (1850)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. We can look at some of the initiatives that we have actually taken.

Adjournment Proceedings

I ran out of time when I talked about the Five Eyes. Members will remember when we had a parliamentary standing committee of the highest security clearance, as other Five Eyes countries did. This is something the Conservative Party opposed in government and even in opposition, yet our other partners in the Five Eyes have that. It allows that critical information to flow in an apolitical fashion. Individual members of Parliament from all political parties in the House can participate on that special committee, so that they can look at issues like foreign interference if that is what they want. They can call all forms of security agencies to come before it. That is action, which is something we have not seen from the Conservative Party in over a decade.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am resuming a question I that initially asked in question period on May 29 of the former minister for emergency preparedness. I have to say that I mentioned in my question at the time that I thought he was working very hard and doing quite an exceptional job. However, my plea tonight to the hon. parliamentary secretary, and through her, to our new Minister of Emergency Preparedness, is to please take steps to establish a national climate emergency task force.

What the former minister for emergency preparedness was doing, and what my question on May 29 pertained to, was the extraordinary wildfire situation across Canada. This situation was current, at that time, and it continued through the summer to this day. We were seeing wildfires across the country, and we continue to do so. The efforts really led a lot of us across party lines to call for a national force to fight forest fires force and a national water bomber fleet. In other words, they should not just be federal. However, in terms of preparedness for what we are going to see and what we see more all the time, we need federal government leadership. However, provinces, territories, local governments and especially first nations governments need to be at the table sharing lessons learned and moving forward together. There has never been an issue that demands of us a non-partisan, shared response of all hands on deck as the climate emergency does.

On June 18, 2019, as I mentioned in my question back in May, in this chamber, we passed a motion that we are in a climate emergency. However, the government has never acted as though we were in an emergency. We are literally in it every single day, with fires, floods, permafrost melt and extreme weather events of all kinds, from tornadoes to extreme windstorms to derechos. Nevertheless, we really do not have the response or the resilience to respond to these events when they occur to save lives.

Obviously, as Greens, we want the government to do those things that are required to avoid levels of climate crisis to which we cannot adapt, but that is another debate. We really need to take steps to reduce our emissions dramatically, but we also need to prepare for those levels of climate events that we can no longer avoid from what is baked in.

An example is the question of heat domes. We know that the federal government response in the national adaptation plan says that we will continue to have Canadians die in heat domes until 2040. Why is that? It is because the government has decided that, in a bureaucratic approach, the only way to save lives in a heat dome is to make sure that every Canadian has access to an air-conditioned

space. That is about as far as it goes. However, 619 British Columbians died in four days in 2021. All those lives could have been saved with emergency measures that are easy and affordable.

• (1855)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to express my sorrow and sincere condolences to the family and friends of the four firefighters who lost their lives in a crash last week in northern B.C. This brings to eight the number of firefighters we have lost in Canada in the direct line of duty this wildfire season. They died protecting their fellow Canadians. We, as a nation, need to recognize the sacrifice.

I would like to provide an update on what has been happening on the ground. These past weeks, the wildfire risk, while still present, has greatly diminished across the country, but this summer, over 6,000 wildland fires burned more than 17 million hectares of land in Canada, the equivalent of roughly twice the land mass of the province of New Brunswick.

More than 200,000 Canadians were forced to flee from their homes, and too many of them now have no home to return to. Particularly this year, we have seen the dire effects of climate change destroy communities and livelihoods. I join the member opposite in her call for action on climate change. I know she stands with our government in support of the urgent need to address this challenge.

This summer, once again, our government responded “present” when provinces were confronted with challenging situations they could not face alone. During this year's wildfire season, the Government of Canada received and approved 11 requests for assistance, RFAs, related to wildfire situations in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.

Through these RFAs, we deployed Canadian Armed Forces through Operation LENTUS to provide support in a wide range of roles, including personnel for planning, coordination, basic firefighting, airlift resources and engineering support.

Multiple federal departments were also engaged in assisting Canadians, like Employment and Social Development Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada, the RCMP, the Canadian Coast Guard, Health Canada, Parks Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, to make sure all hands were on deck to help Canadians through this difficult time.

I have just provided an overview of our immediate response to the emergency situations under way across the country this summer.

[*Translation*]

When the smoke clears, we can see the damage that has been done, and we know that we will face a long road back to normal. That is why disaster financial assistance arrangements are so important.

When a disaster costs a province more than it can bear, the federal government can cover up to 90% of the costs, including uninsurable damage to principal residences.

[*English*]

When disaster strikes, Canadians can rest assured that the federal government will be there to help them through the response and recovery. As the member opposite said, we have to work in lockstep with our provinces and territories, and indigenous communities to address our new reality.

I look forward to working with the member of Parliament for Saanich—Gulf Islands on making sure that Canada is ready and able to respond.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend, the parliamentary secretary, and I congratulate her on this new role.

This is the last place in the world we need partisanship. Everybody in this place will know that I have been talking about the threat of the climate crisis for about 40 years. I have watched it and had a front-row seat to failure after failure.

We need to avoid the worst of the climate crisis. The government's steps so far do not get us there, but we also need to be prepared to save lives now. I want to stress that we need to have a real, functioning working group of multi-party, multi-jurisdictional efforts in a national climate change task force that share lessons learned.

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This includes lessons learned from areas like near Williams Lake and the heat dome. If people had gotten into a cold bath with ice, their lives would have been saved instead of waiting for an ambulance to take them to a hospital, but they were dead on arrival.

We know we need to do more and we need to learn from each other.

● (1900)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, I echo what the member opposite has said. The reality is, with climate change and the impacts, we have seen unprecedented wildfires this last season, and they will continue. That is why our government designed Canada's first-ever national adaptation strategy, a whole-of-government action plan to increase the resilience of Canadian communities and respond to the impacts of climate change. Thanks to this strategy, we are making major investments in forest fire prevention, flood mapping and disaster-resistant infrastructure projects.

[*Translation*]

By working with our provincial, territorial and indigenous partners on regional vulnerabilities and engaging in active risk mitigation, we will permanently increase our country's resilience and develop our disaster response capacity to better protect Canadians in this new climate reality.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the member opposite, and I look forward to working with her in lockstep on making sure Canadians are safe.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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