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Monday, May 25, 2020

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 25, 2020

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1105)
[*English*]

ORDER PAPER

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that in accordance with the representation made by the government pursuant to Standing Order 55(1), I have caused to be published a Special Order Paper giving notice of a government motion.

[*Translation*]

I therefore table the document in question.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent for the House to adopt the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the application of Standing Orders 15 and 17 be suspended for the current sitting.

The Speaker: Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent for the House to adopt the following motion.

I move:

[*Translation*]

That the provisions of paragraphs (l) and (n) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020, continue to apply to committees scheduled to meet by videoconference later this day.

The Speaker: Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House:

(a) following the adoption of this order, the House shall adjourn until Wednesday, June 17, 2020, provided that, for the purposes of any standing order, it shall be deemed adjourned pursuant to Standing Order 28;

(b) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, a minister of the Crown may transmit to the Speaker a message from Her Excellency the Governor General recommending Supplementary Estimates (A) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, provided that

(i) the said message may be transmitted electronically,

(ii) the Speaker shall inform the House of the receipt of such message and the tabling of the estimates based thereon by causing them to be published in the Journals, and the said estimates shall be for all purposes deemed tabled before the House,

(iii) the votes therein shall be referred to a committee of the whole;

(c) on Wednesday, June 17, 2020, the House shall meet at the conclusion of the proceedings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic for the sole purpose of considering the business of supply, provided that

(i) notices may be filed with the clerk no later than 6:00 p.m. on Monday, June 15, 2020, and shall be printed in the Order Paper and Notice Paper to be published for that sitting,

(ii) the application of Standing Orders 15, 17, 36(8)(b), 39(5)(b) and 56.1 be suspended for the sitting,

(iii) the sitting shall not be considered as a sitting day for the purposes of Standing Orders 34(1), 37(3), 51(1) and 110 and subsection 28(12) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons,

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- (iv) consideration of all votes in the Supplementary Estimates (A) shall be taken up by a committee of the whole at the opening of the sitting for a period not exceeding four hours, during which time no quorum calls or dilatory motions shall be received by the Chair, no member shall be recognized for more than 15 minutes at a time and the member shall not speak in debate for more than 10 minutes during that period, the 15 minutes may be used both for debate and for posing questions to a minister of the Crown or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of a minister, when the member is recognized, he or she shall indicate how the 15 minutes is to be apportioned and, at the conclusion of the time provided for the consideration of the business pursuant to this subparagraph, the committee shall rise and report the votes in the estimates to the House,
- (v) when the committee of the whole rises, all questions necessary to dispose of the business of supply shall be put forthwith and successively, without debate or amendment, and, if a recorded division is requested, it shall not be deferred;
- (d) at the conclusion of the consideration of the business of supply on Wednesday, June 17, 2020, the House shall adjourn until Wednesday, July 8, 2020, provided that
- (i) on Wednesday, July 8, 2020, the House shall meet at noon and the House shall resolve itself into a committee of the whole to allow members to question ministers for a period not exceeding 95 minutes on matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters provided that the rotation used for questions pursuant to this subparagraph be the one used by the Special Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic on Tuesdays and Thursdays prior to the adoption of this order and, during the proceedings of the committee,
- (A) the Speaker may preside,
- (B) the Chair may preside from the Speaker's chair,
- (C) the Chair shall call members from all recognized parties and one member who does not belong to a recognized party in a fashion consistent with the proportions observed during Oral Questions,
- (D) no member shall be recognized for more than five minutes at a time which may be used for posing questions to a minister of the Crown,
- (E) members may be permitted to split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the Chair,
- (F) members may participate in the proceedings either in person or by video-conference,
- (ii) following the questioning of ministers, the committee shall consider a motion "That the House take note of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken by the government to respond to it" which shall be conducted pursuant to the terms of Standing Order 53.1 except that proceedings pursuant to this subparagraph shall last not longer than 2 hours and 20 minutes and members may participate in the proceedings either in person or by video-conference, when the committee rises, the motion shall be deemed withdrawn and the House shall adjourn until the next sitting day provided for in subparagraph (iii),
- (iii) on Wednesday, July 22, August 12 and August 26, 2020, the House shall meet in the manner described in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), provided that, when the House adjourns on Wednesday, August 26, 2020, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, September 21, 2020,
- (iv) notices may be filed with the clerk no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Monday preceding the sittings provided for in subparagraphs (i) and (iii), and shall be printed in the Order Paper and Notice Paper to be published for that sitting,
- (v) the application of Standing Orders 15, 17, 36(8)(b), 39(5)(b) and 56.1 be suspended for the sittings provided for in subparagraphs (i) and (iii)
- (vi) the days on which the House sits pursuant to this paragraph shall not be counted as sittings for the purposes of Standing Orders 34(1), 37(3), 51(1) and 110 and subsection 28(12) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons,
- (vii) during any period the House stands adjourned between Wednesday, June 17, 2020, and Monday, September 21, 2020, if the Speaker receives a notice from the House leaders of all four recognized parties indicating that it is in the public interest that the House remain adjourned until a future date or until future notice is given to the Speaker, the House will remain adjourned accordingly,
- (viii) during any period the House stands adjourned between Wednesday, June 17, 2020, and Monday, September 21, 2020, for the purposes of any standing order, it shall be deemed adjourned pursuant to Standing Order 28;
- (e) until Monday, September 21, 2020, the Standing Committee on Health, the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, and the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans may hold meetings related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters, provided that,
- (i) committee members shall attend and witnesses shall participate in meetings via either videoconference or teleconference,
- (ii) committee members attending by videoconference or teleconference shall be counted for the purposes of quorum,
- (iii) all motions shall be decided by a recorded vote,
- (iv) notwithstanding any deadlines established by a committee, any request or any order for the production of documents be responded to when possible, given the constraints that exist as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic,
- (v) public proceedings shall be made available to the public via the House of Commons website,
- (vi) in camera proceedings may be conducted, for the purpose of considering draft reports or the selection of witnesses, in a manner that takes into account the potential risks to confidentiality inherent in meetings with remote participants,
- (vii) notices of membership substitutions pursuant to Standing Order 114(2) may be filed with the clerk of each committee by email,
- (viii) in relation to their study of matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic, these committees may each receive evidence which may otherwise exceed the committee's mandate under Standing Order 108,
- (ix) these committees shall meet within 48 hours of the receipt by email, by the clerk of the committee, of a request signed by any four members of the committee;
- (f) the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to review and make recommendations on how to modify the Standing Orders for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of an incremental approach beginning with hybrid sittings of the House as outlined by the report provided to the committee by the Speaker on Monday, May 11, 2020, including how to enact remote voting, provided that (i) the provisions applying to committees enumerated in paragraph (e) shall also apply to the committee, (ii) the committee be instructed to present a report no later than Tuesday, June 23, 2020, (iii) any report which is adopted pursuant to this paragraph may be submitted electronically at any time with the Clerk of the House, and shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House on that date, (iv) following the presentation of any report pursuant to this paragraph, the House leaders of all four recognized parties may indicate to the Speaker that there is an agreement among the parties to implement one or several of the recommendations of the committee and the Speaker shall give effect to that agreement;
- (g) the following provisions remain in effect until Friday, June 19, 2020:
- (i) paragraphs (m) to (o) of the order adopted on Friday, March 13, 2020,
- (ii) paragraphs (i), (j) and (m) of the order adopted on Tuesday, March 24, 2020, provided that in paragraph (i), the words "until April 20, 2020, or any date to which the adjournment period is extended pursuant to paragraph (f)" shall be deemed to refer to June 19, 2020,
- (iii) paragraph (k) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020,
- (iv) paragraphs (g), (i) and (j) of the order adopted on Monday, April 20, 2020, provided that, in paragraph (j), the reference to paragraph (l) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020 be deemed to refer to paragraph (e) of this order,
- (h) the Special Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic, composed of all members of the House, be continued provided that the committee meet for the purposes of
- (i) considering ministerial announcements,
- (ii) allowing members to present petitions,
- (iii) allowing members to make statements,

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- (iv) questioning ministers of the Crown, including the Prime Minister, in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters, and provided that
- (v) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order at noon every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, provided that the committee shall not meet on a day referred to in Standing Order 28(1),
- (vi) the committee shall meet in the chamber and members may participate either in person or by videoconference,
- (vii) the Speaker shall continue to be the chair of the committee,
- (viii) seven members shall constitute a quorum,
- (ix) ministerial announcements shall be considered at the opening of the meeting and the proceedings shall be conducted in the same manner as Statements by Ministers under Standing Order 33(1), provided that a member of the Green Party also be permitted to reply to the statement,
- (x) after any ministerial announcements, any member desiring to present a petition may do so during a period not exceeding 15 minutes, provided that the provisions of Standing Order 36 shall apply, except for Standing Order 36(5), and any petition presented shall be deemed for all purposes to have been presented to the House,
- (xi) after the presentation of petitions, members may make statements in a manner similar to those made pursuant to Standing Order 31 for a period not exceeding 15 minutes,
- (xii) after members' statements, proceedings on questioning ministers shall be conducted, for not more than 95 minutes, in the same manner as provided for in paragraph (d) of the order adopted on Monday, April 20, 2020, provided that the rotation used for questions pursuant to this subparagraph be the one used by the committee on Tuesdays and Thursdays prior to the adoption of this order and that questions shall be answered by ministers,
- (xiii) upon the conclusion of proceedings on questioning ministers the committee shall adjourn to the next day provided for in subparagraph (v),
- (xiv) if the Speaker receives a notice from the House leaders of all four recognized parties indicating that it is in the public interest that the committee remain adjourned until a future date or until future notice is given to the Speaker, the committee will remain adjourned accordingly,
- (xv) meetings of the committee shall continue to be televised, following the usual practices observed for sittings of the House,
- (xvi) any document may be presented by a minister of the Crown, or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of a minister, at any time during a meeting of the committee and shall be deemed for all purposes to have been presented to or laid before the House,
- (xvii) the committee shall have the power to sit while the House stands adjourned and to print, from day to day, such papers and evidence as may be ordered by them,
- (xviii) the committee shall cease to exist upon its adjournment on Thursday, June 18, 2020;
- (i) until Monday, September 21, 2020, documents deposited pursuant to Standing Order 32(1) shall be deposited with the Clerk of the House electronically.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we are gathered here today at a time of great uncertainty and anxiety. We live in a world that is gripped by the greatest public health care crisis of our lifetime. Canadians are worried about their own health and the health of the people they love. They are anxious about the economic fallout from this crisis, whether they will keep their jobs and what will happen to them if they should lose their jobs. Quite simply, Canadians are worried about how they will pay the bills and feed their families in the months ahead.

[Translation]

It is a spring that we will never forget, a season in which COVID-19 completely changed our lives. Canadians acted responsibly. They listened to the advice of our public health experts. They stayed home as much as possible. They learned the importance of physical distancing to protect themselves, as well as their families, relatives, friends and community. In other words, Canadians did

what they needed to do and continue to do so. As they grapple with the unknown aspects of this pandemic and all of its effects, they are asking us, as parliamentarians, to also do what we need to do.

As parliamentarians, this spring, we had to adapt our practices. Both the government and the opposition parties had to adapt to everything that is happening. We have a role to play, and I think that we played that role together. Despite all of the challenges associated with these unprecedented times, I believe that we proved to our voters that we can find ways to adapt, to give voice to their concerns, worries, questions and needs and to take action.

Our government has been transparent about everything we have done. We have taken responsibility for our decisions. It might not have been perfect, but the government and the opposition parties have done some good work together. As a member of the House of Commons, I can say that we have done and are continuing to do our job. We can and we must keep doing our job on behalf of all Canadians.

Our government firmly believes in this institution's central and fundamental role and in the fundamental role of democracy in our society. That is why the motion we are moving today is reasonable, ensures accountability and transparency, and follows public health guidelines. This motion strikes a good balance. Finding that balance is essential, especially at a time when Canadians are turning toward us with the expectation that their government and their elected representatives provide non-partisan, constructive, accountable leadership. That is exactly what our government is committed to doing.

[English]

For many weeks, we have been working day and night to respond to the concerns of Canadians who have been impacted by this pandemic. We have worked closely with our public health officials to develop and put into action the many responses needed to limit the spread of COVID-19.

We have worked hand in hand with provinces, territories and municipalities as they battle the virus on the front lines of their communities. We have worked with the opposition parties and our colleagues from everywhere in this country, and we have come forward with economic and financial assistance measures that are unprecedented in this country's history. Simply put, we recognized that Canadian employees and businesses were in jeopardy. They needed the government to provide help quickly, and that is exactly what we have done. That is exactly what we have delivered.

We chose to stand by Canadians in their time of need. That meant support for Canadians who are not working because of COVID-19, for students who cannot find jobs and for seniors who are concerned about the impact of the crisis on their fixed incomes. It also meant support for employers who want to retain their employees, as the economic shutdown has created great uncertainty. It meant support for businesses to help them through the unsteady waters of this storm so they can emerge into a brighter economy.

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• (1110)

[*Translation*]

These are the actions of a government that cares deeply about its citizens. The Prime Minister has shown strong leadership throughout this crisis. He has never forgotten our top priority, which is to look after the people of this country, in every region and every province.

It was crucial, and it remains crucial, that we be there for every Canadian. My government colleagues and I have been working very hard to come up with the answers Canadians need as this pandemic changes their lives. We have often reached out to the opposition parties and have been working closely with them. Often, they have even improved upon the solutions proposed by the government, and I thank them for that.

In hundreds of ridings across the country, members from all parties and political stripes continue to do their jobs, despite the limitations of physical distancing. One only has to look at all the questions members have to answer regarding the various programs. There are many programs, because our main priority was to help Canadians and businesses and not leave anyone behind. It has presented a challenge for all members, but they have risen to it brilliantly. Fundamentally, regardless of their political stripes, members from across the country work here, but they also work in their constituencies.

I want to take a second to express my sincere gratitude to the public servants who have done amazing work day and night, seven days a week, so the government can provide these programs and services to the people. I thank them for their dedication and their hard work. None of this would have been possible without them.

Ever since March 13, the House of Commons has, for the most part, not held the normal sittings we were used to pre-crisis. We were not here for the usual five days a week. The 338 men and women from across the country who are usually here were not. Unfortunately, because of that, some people said Parliament was shut down. That is completely false. It could not be further from the truth. The truth is that parliamentarians have been doing their work this whole time. Members on both sides of the House have been doing their work, and they are doing it well.

• (1115)

[*English*]

In these extraordinary times of physical distancing, the House has now met six days since the middle of March to discuss the priorities of the country, and that has included time to debate and pass important legislation to quickly provide financial assistance to Canadians who need it. Also during this period, dozens of members on eight standing committees have been holding public hearings virtually. They have called cabinet ministers to testify at their hearings to explain and justify their decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The numbers tell the story. Since mid-March, those committees have held 74 meetings and heard from 580 witnesses. There have been 23 appearances by ministers to answer questions. Clearly our committees are working hard, and I thank them. I thank all MPs on

those committees for the work they are doing for Parliament and all Canadians.

Of course, we have seen the unprecedented work of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic, which has met 11 times. All MPs are members of this committee, whatever region they come from. It has been a success. It is not perfect, but it has been a success.

The committee has made history by holding virtual meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays that have seen participation by hundreds of members through video conferences. In seven of those meetings, ministers had to answer many questions. There have also been four in-person meetings of the committee on the floor of this chamber, on Wednesdays, and many questions were asked and answered.

Again, the numbers tell the story. In a typical week, when the House sits five days, members ask 190 questions in 45 minutes. Recently, when the special committee met Tuesday through Thursday, there were, on average, more than 300 questions asked over three days. We can see that the committee has been a very good place for accountability, with hundreds of questions. The motion we have put forward proposes to continue the work of this committee and strengthen the work of the House.

[*Translation*]

I will go over a few elements of this motion.

The Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic would meet more often. We would be here four days a week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in a hybrid format. It is a genius solution that would allow several MPs who are unable to be here to participate in the democratic process and be a part of it. They could participate via video conference and ask the government all questions they want.

This guarantees that all MPs can participate regardless of where they live and without the restrictions associated with travelling and having to quarantine. During these meetings, MPs will have a host of opportunities to ask their questions. In fact, out of the four days that we are proposing, there will be the equivalent of eight question periods. I do not know why anyone would be against that.

We are talking about eight question periods instead of five, which means more time to ask questions. This motion would provide more hours for that than if the House were having normal sittings, to allow MPs to ask all the questions they want. It adds up to more than six hours of questions, when in a regular week we would have just about 3.75 hours of questions.

This hybrid model, therefore, allows much more time for question period, for those who want to participate here in the House and also for our Conservative colleagues from the west and our Bloc and NDP colleagues from across Canada. This is a tremendous expression of democracy that will enable parliamentarians from all corners of the country to ask questions because they were elected, not just because they live near Ottawa. That is fundamental.

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Furthermore, this motion would have the House hold summer sittings so that members could question ministers about all issues, as well as the possibility of debating the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, when we come back here this summer, we will obviously be open to answering any and all questions about the pandemic, but we will also debate other issues and answer other questions that are important to the opposition parties.

We are going to continue the virtual committee meetings with committees that will be free to study any topic in accordance with their normal powers. The committees will get to conduct their business as they see fit, to do their job of examining important policy matters and any other matters that the committee members consider to be important and necessary to debate. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs would study potential changes that could be made to the rules of the House to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as hybrid House sittings and electronic voting. This study would build on the critical work that the committee accomplished this spring on the subject of a virtual Parliament.

• (1120)

[*English*]

We believe that this motion strikes the right balance between ensuring that MPs can hold the government to account and protecting the health and safety of everyone during this pandemic. I would ask my colleagues, all members, to consider the many merits of this motion and support it.

[*Translation*]

Canadians are watching us and want us to work for them. I pledge to work in collaboration with all my colleagues in the House. Once again, I am reaching out to them.

[*English*]

We will all face this challenge together, and we will all get through this together.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the government House leader for his comments and for his expressions of gratitude to all of us. I would agree with much of what he said, but there are a few things we do not agree with.

My question is very simple. First of all, I think we need to state for the record that Motion No. 7 does not reconvene Parliament. It reconvenes, establishes and continues a committee.

My question is twofold. First, does the government House leader believe that Parliament, not a committee, is essential to Canadians? Second, if we can meet here face to face four days a week, as this committee is going to be doing should this motion pass, why can Parliament not meet here face to face four days a week?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the questions, and for all the work she does and all the discussions we have had and keep having, which are contributing to the important work we are doing here as parliamentarians. I agree with her that the work of parliamentarians is absolutely fundamental. That is why we are here, and we are proposing that we come here four days a week—not one, not two, not three, but four—and the opposition gets more time for questions.

I think it is a great balance between making sure parliamentarians do their important work and respecting all the directives from the Public Health Agency. We are here to debate. That is what we are doing today. I am really glad that we will still be debating and answering questions from the opposition, because that is fundamental for us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, the government's motion was a proposal and, like every proposal, it is subject to negotiation.

We have often negotiated with the government, as we did on April 29 when we created the Canada emergency student benefit, the CESB. During the negotiations, the Bloc Québécois was of the opinion that a student who works more hours must automatically earn more money, no matter the circumstances. The government made a commitment to act on this proposal. The Deputy Prime Minister personally confirmed the government's commitment and agreed to follow up with the Bloc Québécois. Three weeks later, we have heard nothing more—it has been radio silence.

I like to negotiate with people of good faith who keep their word. Is it possible to negotiate agreements with a government that does not keep its word?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, my colleague knows very well that I have always acted in good faith and kept my word, as he does.

With regard to students, we have ensured that when they apply for the CESB they can check off a box to confirm they are looking for work. We have also established links with job banks. We could do many other things.

If my Bloc colleague wishes to put forward his party's ideas, he must be seated at the table. We have not had any discussions with the Bloc recently because that party decided it would not come to the table with us. This is a bit like asking a hockey player to score a goal while sitting on the bench.

I continue to reach out and I am always ready to speak with my colleague. I very much enjoy our discussions because they are frank. I am convinced that we can continue to have these types of discussions to improve the lives of Quebeckers and Canadians.

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• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, for over 15 years, I have seen all kinds of political shenanigans and engaged in all kinds of partisan debates, but I have never seen a crisis that has damaged our country to the extent COVID has. The role of parliamentarians here is about speaking for the people who need us, not an attempt by some politicians to give themselves more airtime. It is about coming here to negotiate, to figure out how we get through this together. We came here as New Democrats to try to find a solution so that we have accountability mechanisms. We should never forget that the reason we are here is for the people back home who are falling through the economic abyss.

I know the Conservatives are already saying that there are slackers who do not want to work. We are here to defend people, so I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. We are more than willing to work with the government, but we still have serious shortfalls. For example, we are sending many people back to work who do not have proper sick benefits. That is why we are here, for them, not to score partisan points. We are asking if the government is willing to work with the New Democratic Party to put Canadians first at this unprecedented time and show that this Parliament can rise above the normal partisan bric-a-brac and actually do something to get us through this crisis.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I totally agree with my colleague that this is no time for partisan politics. Canadians do not want that. I am sure all my colleagues across the aisle agree on this. This is the time to work together. I understand how important the question of sick leave is for the NDP members and how hard they have been working on this. Of course, we agree with them on the importance of working on this, on the sick benefits, to make a difference for all Canadians.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am really pleased to be here today in the chamber because this is a very important debate. One of the things I have found absolutely important as a parliamentarian, which I take particular interest in, is looking at the estimates in committee. We have a minority government. The committee I am on, which is the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, is not sitting. The government is spending \$250 billion more, which is the anticipated deficit, and there will be no scrutiny of the government's spending by departments.

Why is the natural resources committee not going to be sitting, and why is it not going to be able to do what it needs to do, especially in a minority Parliament, where we might need to make adjustments to the government's spending plans? That is one of our fundamental roles, and it is not included in the motion.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, there are many committees sitting and I made reference to that. There have been dozens and dozens of MPs on different committees meeting regularly, and hundreds of witnesses. Those committees were agreed upon by the parties. Which committees would be sitting was agreed upon by the parties through motions, over and over again.

There is one thing I ask my colleague not to forget: We are here. We are here debating. The member is asking questions and I am answering the questions. We will be doing this four days a week, and also our colleagues who cannot be here. Any MP who has been elected should be able to answer questions, not just an MP who lives in Ottawa, Montreal or Toronto.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, on April 20, we discussed the \$73-billion wage subsidy. The program is so big that even the two richest parties in Canada used it. Imagine that. In a motion that we negotiated with the government, we said that we wanted a program to help people and businesses through the crisis by subsidizing fixed costs. We all agreed that this important program was needed. Almost nothing was done. The government implemented a weak, poorly designed program. We asked the Liberals to keep the promise they made on April 20. Before we even started the latest negotiation, the government said that it had kept its word, even though that is not the case.

I have a question for the government House leader. How can I negotiate with someone who does not keep their word?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I will not take that personally, since I do not think my colleague was talking about me specifically.

We completely agree with the Bloc Québécois that it is important to help businesses cover their fixed costs. We have taken a first step by providing assistance for rent. There are a thousand and one things going on. We are working on these different issues. We are working on helping businesses. We did some things, and we will do some more. We will continue to work in the interests of all of our SMEs and in the interests of Quebecers and Canadians.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I understand I have unlimited time. However, I would like to split my time with the member for Kelowna—Lake Country. I would ask for unanimous consent from the House to do that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise to speak to Motion No. 7. The hon. House leader gave a very impassioned speech about how we all worked together when this crisis first hit. We worked together immediately so that we would have a safe situation here in Ottawa, whereby the House was suspended on March 13 and we all went back to our ridings and began the hard work of dealing with this pandemic.

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However, when the House was suspended at that time, I do not think any of us thought that the government would use that opportunity to circumvent democracy and shut Parliament down for this long a period of time. That was never what Conservatives wanted.

Motion No. 7 would continue the shutdown of democracy. It would continue the shutdown of Parliament. It would continue the shutdown of all members of Parliament who do the work that Canadians elected us to do. What Motion No. 7 would do is re-establish the special committee. Although the special committee is one in which questions can be asked, we certainly are not seeing questions answered. There are many things that the opposition can do when Parliament is actually sitting in order to try to get answers and hold the government to account. That is not going to be happening if this motion passes.

I want to remind Canadians that there are a number of things that we can do as opposition members, including opposition days where we can have full days to debate issues that members of the opposition parties feel are important. Private members' business is allowed to come forward when Parliament is sitting. Under this motion, no private members' business would come forward until probably the end of September. There are questions on the Order Paper that can be posed, whereby very specific and detailed questions are answered, and we have seen so much information come out over the years from questions on the Order Paper. The opposition is not going to be allowed to do that. There are debates and discussions around important committee reports that happen when Parliament is sitting. That will not be happening under this special committee.

Let us be very clear. For all Canadians, for everyone in the House, Parliament would not be resuming. A committee would be resuming and it would be resuming in this place, face to face. This begs the question: If we can resume here four days a week as a committee, why in the world can we not resume as parliamentarians and as a full Parliament?

We had a study done just recently by the PROC committee. It was a good study, but it was probably too short. The committee probably will need more time, and I think it will be getting more time, to do some work that it is doing. There was some fantastic testimony given on why Parliament is essential. Some might suggest this is just about people getting media coverage. What an insult that is to what every single one of us does every single day when Parliament has been sitting and has sat for the last 150 years. We are here to do a job, whether it is in government or in opposition; whether it is the main opposition party, the second opposition party or even that third opposition party over there. Those members are here to do a job as well, and I do not think any of us are going to insult the third party there, even though its numbers are reduced, by saying that the members are here just to get attention.

Let me quote Marc Bosc, former acting clerk of the House. He articulated Parliament's place. Here is what he said:

In too many countries around the world, dominant executive branches of government eclipse parliament. This makes parliaments weaker and less relevant. That imbalance needs to be addressed, especially in a time of crisis.

That is what we are in, Madam Speaker. He continued:

The House of Commons [not committee] needs to be functioning and needs to be seen by Canadians as functioning. I want to be clear. Parliament, particularly the

House of Commons [not committee] is an essential service to the country, and members of Parliament are also essential workers.

These views are not just academic concerns. Veteran observers of Canadian politics have made similar points. John Ibbitson, for example, wrote:

Everything that is being debated on Twitter and Facebook and in the news media needs to be debated on the floor of the House [of Commons] and in Question Period.

Again, that is not a committee. He is talking about being in Parliament in the House of Commons and on the floor of the House of Commons. He continued:

● (1135)

Canada is a parliamentary democracy, health emergency or no health emergency....The opposition parties have every right to raise these issues, and the governing party has every right to defend its record. The place to do that is in Parliament, not just once a day in front of a microphone.

Who has been doing that every day in front of a microphone, getting out in front of his cottage, answering a few questions, smiling, telling everybody how he feels and that is it? That is not Parliament. That is not the way our democracy works.

Manon Cornellier, a Quebec journalist, said in *Le Devoir*, "The Conservatives...are right to require the government to be more accountable. Constant speeches and press conferences cannot replace the duty of ministers and the Prime Minister to be accountable before elected representatives. In a British type of Parliament, the existence of the government depends on the trust of the House": not a committee but the House, Parliament. "Ultimately, the government must answer for its actions and decisions..."

A lot of academics and media ask this, but more importantly every day my constituents ask me why Parliament is not sitting. They say we are in a middle of a crisis and they have elected me to sit in Parliament. I have had to tell them that the government, together with the help of some of the other parties, has tied our hands behind our backs. We have still been able to do a lot of good work here in opposition. We have seen the work we have done. The government House leader has even acknowledged that pretty well every one of the programs that the government introduced, we as opposition made better, because we did not allow anyone to shut our voice down and we used every tool available.

That is why we want Parliament to sit. We want to deliver better results for Canadians. We know that in a democracy when the government is challenged, when it has to defend what it is doing and maybe improve it, when it has to listen to us on our opposition days and take a position, it is better for Canadians. That is the whole reason Conservatives want Parliament to sit.

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That, then, comes to the question of why the government would not want Parliament to sit. Why would the Liberal government prefer to stand up every day, as the Prime Minister does in front of his cottage, answer a few questions and announce some programs for people, but not come back to Parliament? For a long time, the government was saying it was concerned about the health and safety of people in the precinct and members of Parliament. That wears very thin because its own motion calls us all back here four days a week.

Four days a week we are going to be here in the committee, face to face, practising physical distancing and being very responsible, which is what Conservatives have advocated for. However, the Prime Minister does not want Parliament. Therefore, the whole argument of safety is actually pretty thin. I would say it is a thin excuse and not a real reason.

I would suggest the real reason Liberals do not want Parliament to sit is because they do not want the full accountability, the full scrutiny and the full responsibility that will come when Parliament does sit. Make no mistake: We will sit again. Conservatives will stand ready any time to come back as Parliament and hold the government to account for its response to this pandemic, for its lack of response, for its lack of dealing with things in a timely way, for its lack of supporting and providing protection for Canadians.

Make no mistake: The day of reckoning will come for the Prime Minister. He may think he is going to escape Parliament now, but the day will come. Conservatives will hold the government to account. We will do our job. Conservatives stand ready, willing and able to do the job for Canadians that it seems nobody else in this place wants to do.

• (1140)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been a parliamentarian for almost 30 years at the provincial and national levels. As the Prime Minister and government House leader have said, Liberals understand the importance of Parliament, and we understand the issue of accountability and transparency. This is one of the reasons we have been working so closely with the member opposite, opposition parties and government members. It is to ensure that there are opportunities to hold the executive branch of government accountable. All in all, I think we have been successful in doing that.

We are talking about the past three months with a pandemic that is truly unique. When we take all of this into consideration, and based upon my experience over the last 30 years, what we are seeing today is in fact a good, balanced approach. This motion would ensure that members of Parliament could hold government accountable and serve our constituents, which is so critically important given the circumstances and needs of our constituents.

Would the member agree that the needs of our constituents are that much greater today than they were even two months ago?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, yes, definitely, I agree. I think all of us are working in our constituencies dealing with people who are going through so much stress and loss. Small businesses are on the verge of closing, if they have not already closed. I know in my riding, farmers feel very abandoned by this govern-

ment. However, I would say that the needs of our constituents have definitely grown, and we are all there responding to that.

I would say that if the government had put this motion forward six weeks ago, it probably would have gotten unanimous support, at least from us on this. As with everything, it is always about two months too late. What we need now is Parliament resumed. A few weeks ago, we would have been satisfied with this face-to-face committee meeting even three days a week. However, what we need now at this point in this pandemic, and with Parliament having been shut down for so long, is for Parliament to resume and not a continued committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, the \$73-billion wage subsidy was negotiated about a month ago. I was surprised that the Conservatives were on board with that. Typically, when it comes to public finances, they are very careful and quite sanctimonious. However, they agreed to the \$73-billion wage subsidy for workers.

My question is simple. Did the Conservative Party plan to use that program to pad its coffers?

• (1145)

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, one of the problems that we have had, and in some cases it has been necessary, is dealing with government legislation in such a speedy and accelerated way that we have not been able to hear from witnesses. This is a huge gap, and it is lacking right now, because Parliament is not sitting.

Legislation is passed. After the fact, we are finding out about gaps in the legislation and where there are problems. Whether it is the wage subsidy, support for farmers, which I know is sorely lacking, or support for small businesses, there is always an after-the-fact gap. We have seen the government try to fix it, or in some cases again play catch-up. It is just another reason why we need full Parliament to sit and not just the special committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

That said, I am a little offended by her comments suggesting that we come back to the House as though it were business as usual. There have been some 4,000 deaths in Quebec.

Is it not the responsibility of elected officials, the representatives of the people, to lead by example, to listen to public health advice, to avoid bringing 300 or 330 MPs together in the House, and instead adapt our behaviour and our work to the current crisis? I do not understand the Conservative Party's position on this.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, I am very happy to clarify for that member.

We absolutely agree that we should not resume sitting business as usual. We should not have 338 of us here. We need to have a very much reduced setting. However, I think my colleague, who has been here for a while, understands the difference between the roles and powers of a committee and the roles and powers of Parliament.

We are calling for Parliament in a very reduced number to return in a responsible way. If the NDP members want to abdicate and sit on committee their whole careers, that is their choice, but we do not want to do that.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House of Commons today on behalf of my constituents in Kelowna—Lake Country, as we debate an important motion, which will set the path of Parliament for the upcoming months and potentially years. I also want to take the time to thank my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country for doing their part in helping to flatten the curve in Okanagan and British Columbia and, in fact, all Canadians for helping in their communities.

It was over 70 days ago when the House had its last regular meeting. It was on that day, Friday the 13, that our Canadian democracy was put to the test, and it is once again.

Since then, we have lost over 6,300 of our friends and relatives. Millions of Canadians have lost their jobs and livelihood and every one of us has had our lives affected in such a profound way that when we talk about getting back to normal, we are not really sure what that is or what it will look like. We do know it will not be exactly the same. We are seeing it already: Plexiglas everywhere and human touch discouraged.

The committees matter. Each and every committee in the House of Commons has a role to play in studying their area of mandate and how it has been effected. It is absolutely essential that all standing and special committees begin to meet virtually immediately and for all committees to have their normal powers restored.

As provinces and territories begin to open, Parliament has an important role to be present and sitting as this happens. The federal government also has a key role in ensuring the reopening goes effectively.

For example, I have been speaking with many business owners in my riding. In the sectors that are opening, they have raised concerns about not having enough PPE and cleaning supplies and not being able to safely reopen. These are important concerns.

This motion is misleading. What is being proposed is not Parliament. There are no opposition motions, no private members' bills and no emergency debates. It is not only about asking questions, al-

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though that is important. Let us be clear that what is being proposed today is not Parliament; it is a committee with limited functions.

Opposition day motions have value. The Liberals have 157 seats out of 338 and opposition parties can bring forth good ideas.

I have a list of some successful Conservative Party opposition motions we have had so far in this Parliament. First, we created a Canada-China committee. This was voted against by the Liberals. Second was auditing government infrastructure plans. This was also voted against by the Liberals. Third was a review of the Parole Board nomination process. Fourth was the tabling of economic downturn documents. Fifth was additional supply days, more opposition motions.

Why would the government not want Parliament to sit at this time and have regular opposition days? Is it because the Conservatives have good ideas and the Liberals feel we will upstage them? Is it because the Liberals feel a lack of control? All I know is that the opposition days are part of our democratic institution that the government has taken away for now and it will be at least four to six months before it will be returning based on what has been proposed.

In a time of crisis such as this, what we are facing now in the role of Parliament is fundamental and essential. Greg Tardi, a former lawyer for the House of Commons, told the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that if there was no Parliament, if there was no give and take, if there was no communication between the government and the people, essentially, in his view, democracy would break down.

I would also like to share a quote from my colleague, the member for Vancouver Quadra and Minister of Digital Government, which I feel effectively sums up the importance of having Parliament return. She said, "There is an economic crisis that needs us to band together and think about why we are here as members of Parliament. We are not here to spend government money. We are here to serve taxpayers and think about their well-being."

Thinking about the well-being of our constituents during this pandemic is important, and I hear it every day. I have a few comments from my constituents on why they believe Parliament should return with full authority and functions.

Teresa from my riding emailed in saying, "I believe [the Prime Minister] has forgotten that a politician is there to serve the people of the country in a democratic way....I do not understand why the Conservatives are on their own as the other opposition parties are siding with the Liberals."

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Donna emailed me to inquire, “I would like to know why parliament is presently not in session and why PM...is making decisions without parliamentary input.”

Lloyd from my riding says, “The level of despair and frustration in my heart grows daily and I see no help on the horizon. Are there no checks and balances in our institutions? If there are, they are not apparent, at least not to me.”

Canada must be governed through Parliament, not from a podium in front of a cottage or in a committee. Questions are important, but they are not enough. Our institutions must have the tools and resources to scrutinize the decisions made during a time of crisis. This includes institutions such as the Office of the Auditor General. It concerns me greatly the lack of sufficient funding for that office, with outdated technology and insufficient staffing to effectively scrutinize government spending.

• (1150)

We are in a minority government. No political party, no caucus, has majority control of the House of Commons. Let us not forget the government called Parliament back in March to approve of its economic response plan. It added to the bill, at the last minute, the ability for itself to have the power to raise taxes, debt and spending without any parliamentary approval until January 1, 2022.

This is the same government that use an order in council to amend firearms legislation in the middle of a pandemic. One of the questions my constituents ask me often is what other orders in council the minority government is planning.

Crisis management 101 is identifying the crisis. The official opposition members were asking tough questions of the government in the House back in January. One has to put a plan together, and it has become evident the government did not put any kinds of plans together.

We were in a weakened economic position prior to the declaration of the pandemic. Our forestry and oil and gas sectors have been hit hard, mostly due to policies of the government; farmers are coming off a very financially challenging 2019; and we have had four years of deficits at a time when we should have been putting money away to weather uncertain times such as this.

Uncertainty causes a lot of stress for people, and yet the government has failed to address many of the concerns the Conservatives have raised. We have to create substantial plans to give business and our citizens certainty, and the official opposition has made very good recommendations. Are we simply wanting to get by or are we laying the foundation so in the coming months and years we can confidently say yes we will be getting ahead?

To quote a friend, “We need courage, strength and endurance to lead our country, Canada.” The decisions we make today will affect our future generations. This is important. While we follow safety protocols, we must allow all committees to sit fully and we must allow Parliament to sit with its full functions. Our democracy depends on it.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, we agreed ahead of time that the \$73-billion wage subsidy program would be for SMEs, to help their employees keep their jobs. That is the mandate we collectively gave ourselves, so that these SMEs, which are enduring unbelievable hardship, could survive the crisis without going bankrupt. However, it has now emerged that the richest party in Canada made use of this wage subsidy program.

Does my colleague have no qualms? She is a Conservative Party member who is applying for money from a program that was originally intended for business owners with financing problems that are facing bankruptcy.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, we have been talking to small businesses across the country. The amount of correspondence I have been getting in my constituency office has been absolutely unprecedented. Therefore, as the official opposition, we were doing a lot of hard work behind the scenes, such as having a lot of meetings and virtual calls, to bring forth all those issues so we could make recommendations to the government on a whole number of programs. We continue to do that.

Our focus is on small businesses and on their livelihoods for which they have worked so hard, so they do not fall through the cracks and can still sustain as small businesses.

Hon. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am a little confused by the argument from the member opposite. The problem is that the Conservatives have indicated in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that they are opposed to virtual voting. They are against the House of Commons being able to sit and vote virtually.

Is it the Conservatives' position, because we cannot fill the chamber with 338 people in the middle of a pandemic, that members are unable to vote in the House if we have a hybridized system? They are against virtual voting, so are they suggesting that members in different regions of the country, who cannot come here because of the pandemic, cannot vote and cannot represent their constituents?

Would it not make sense that in PROC, where we are having these discussions, to talk about what is the most expeditious way to get the House back and to be able to vote and work together? I am confused. What exactly is the Conservatives' model? Who and how would that voting work if Parliament were to come back in their conception?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, we have never said that we want to have 338 people back in this room. I want to be very clear about this. The member is twisting that information. Clearly, we have people in the House right now who are from coast to coast. I am from British Columbia. A fellow member here is from across the country. We are here responsibly right now.

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The point is that what the government is proposing today is exactly what we see here. However, instead of it being Parliament, it is a committee. That is the issue. We are here anyway and we can debate. We can do all the functions of Parliament. We are physically here in a limited number and we can operate under that. It does not have to be under a committee; it can be as Parliament.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the very passionate speech of the member opposite. My questions are in follow-up to the previous member's question. How is it decided which members are able to participate? How was it decided what members from her caucus would be here today?

I am very curious as to what the deliberations look like.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, I think every caucus may be a little different, but we like to have representation from across the country. We want to ensure that we have representation from all provinces and that we have a good mix of people. We want to ensure we have good representation from across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, when I was a little boy, my father used to do something that impressed me immensely. He would take a chicken out of the chicken coop, tuck its head under its wing, and swing it back and forth. The chicken would go to sleep, he would put it back on its perch, and it would stay right where he put it. I have grown up a lot since then, and I am not so easy to impress. The Liberals may have a harder time hoodwinking me nowadays.

It seems to me that we are going to have to shift from a vigilant collaboration to a guarded collaboration. It is accurate to say that, over a certain number of weeks, there was a collaboration that turned out to be reasonably effective. The public knows very little about the role that the Bloc Québécois played in developing crucial programs. The wage subsidy program, which is clearly getting so much love from the Liberals and now from the Conservatives, was implemented by other countries before we suggested it. The Minister of Finance was not too keen on the idea, but the Liberals eventually adopted it, and it is a terrific idea.

There have been unforeseen knock-on effects, but now people are coming to realize that the government does not necessarily do what it tells Parliament it will do. Sure, it is never too late to do the right thing, but facts are facts, and the fact is that the Deputy Prime Minister and our leader's office agreed on a question and an answer whereby the government promised everyone in Canada and Quebec that it would give students and CERB beneficiaries an incentive to work. That is crucial to the necessary next steps of recovery and re-opening. We need to connect workers and businesses, not widen the gap between them. The Liberals made that promise, but now they are no longer interested, so they are not doing it.

Similarly, the government voted in favour of a motion calling on it to help small businesses with fixed costs. If members talk to any chamber of commerce in Quebec, they will see that it is not working.

The parliamentary leader said this was a first step. I look forward to moving toward a sprint, in other words, taking several steps in very little time because we are in great need of that. Beyond all this

dithering, there are businesses saying that they will not survive, that they will close. That seems quite serious to me.

We have to be ever more vigilant because, as it stands, instead of keeping the promises it makes in Parliament, which should be solemn, the government rigged an agreement to move forward without keeping its word.

The Bloc Québécois did not say that we would prevent the government from doing that. We said that we would not take part in the discussion because our priorities are seniors in Quebec, small businesses, CERB claimants who want to and must return to work, fishing and tourism businesses, and more.

Journalists are doing a great job, but what struck me at the press conference is that most of the questions were on the negotiations, on what is happening behind the scenes, what we thought and what was in the email. Unfortunately, that is time that is not being devoted to the good of Quebecers and Canadians. That is what we want to focus on, but if every party agrees on one thing and the Bloc Québécois does not, we will not stand in the way.

We will share what we hear and call for what we believe that Quebec workers, seniors and businesses need whenever and wherever we can. That is our job, and we must always keep health concerns in mind when doing it, since it is beginning to seem like this situation could last for a long time. We cannot let anyone fall through the cracks. Every day and every week counts for businesses.

When I am not here, I participate in video conferences with commercial development groups, chambers of commerce and RCMs, among others. We are hearing things that are very worrisome from all of the regions of Quebec. I am talking about the regions in the broader sense because, just a few days ago, I met with people from Hochelaga in Montreal who have some serious concerns.

● (1200)

The government wants to hold consultations. That is very noble. However, this morning, I read in *The Globe and Mail* that the Prime Minister consulted six banks; indeed, just because a person does not speak a certain language as much does not mean that he does not read in that language. What a great idea. It was so wonderful to hear. I am ready to sit down with the Prime Minister any time. I will give him all kinds of ideas. He went and consulted with institutions that are richer by far than the Liberals and the Conservatives. These institutions are so rich that it is a major financial advantage to them to put their money in tax havens and to not pay their fair share of taxes in the country led by the Prime Minister, so that is convenient.

I do not know if it is necessary to consult the banks. Of course, there are expert economists working in banks, but I think that there are economists working for the federal government who are just as qualified. To me, it seems rather callous toward people in difficulty to consult with the banks.

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The Bloc Québécois will continue to focus on the real issues for Quebecers. In general, these issues are also good for Canadians, so we will keep the course. We get all kinds of messages from across Canada. Sure, some are not very polite, but many people tell us that we are not doing a bad job. To do a “not bad” job today, we need to point out a few facts. It is good that we have the time to address this, because the planned formats chip away at people's right to speak. I strongly believe that the people who are receiving the CERB or the CESB want to work. The proof is that they have to have lost income in order to be eligible. These are people who want to work.

We know that a lot of businesses need workers and are wondering where they are. The problem is that the recipients can get their \$1,250, \$1,750 or \$2,000 cheque and still earn \$1,000. With current wages, this is equivalent to 12 or 15 hours of work, but if recipients earn one dollar more, they lose their \$2,000 in benefits. They may want to be good, engaged citizens, but they are not crazy. Clearly, this problem needs to be fixed.

We proposed that those who work more would always keep more of their money, and we ensured that this principle was accepted. That is an incentive to find employment. That is an incentive to work. The Deputy Prime Minister responded to this proposal by stating “certainly”, which I believe means “yes”. That is my opinion. They could and should have done so. The argument that it is too complicated does not hold water because that is what happens with employment insurance. This is a real and serious concern. Workers need to work and businesses need labour. We have to reconnect them.

Seniors need answers. One measure was announced in a strange way. Seniors found out that they would receive a cheque representing a temporary increase in their old age security pension. The government decided to send a separate cheque so that seniors would not get the impression that it is a permanent increase. This created a lot of confusion. Seniors wondered about the \$300 amount compared to the \$2,000 benefit.

Major communication fails like that aside, seniors may still have some questions. For example, they may wonder when the three-month period starts and ends. That amount is for three months. It seems like it should have started in mid-March like the other programs, which would mean that the first three-month period for which seniors receive \$300—and potentially an additional \$200—would end in mid-June, but we do not have a clear answer on that. Instead of answering, the government is cutting deals to make Parliament work without talking to the Bloc. Imagine that.

What happens after the three-month period? We were all really hoping the crisis would last three months, but it is going to last longer than that. No matter how long it goes on, we must not leave anyone behind. What are the consequences? A senior who gets the pension top-up and who also receives the guaranteed income supplement will have a higher income and could get bumped into the next tax bracket, which would mean losing part or all of the guaranteed income supplement.

• (1205)

Is that the case or not? We do not know. When will the cheques go out? This is a fairly basic question. I was originally told it would

take up to eight weeks. It makes no sense to think that a crisis could last three months, to provide a measure two months after the crisis begins, and to have the cheque arrive two months after that. Obviously, that is just wrong.

When will they get their cheques? A few weeks have already passed since the measure was announced, and we still do not know when the cheques will arrive. This is a basic, straightforward question. We do not have any answers. This issue must be addressed.

We have also raised a number of questions about the tourism industry and seasonal industries. We need to address the arts, cultural and event sectors. The stakes are enormous in all those sectors, and, I repeat, we must not leave anyone behind.

The parliamentary cafeteria is closed, but we have little brown-bag lunches prepared for us. It occurred to me that maybe I should save my lunch and offer it to the Conservatives and the Liberals, since they seem to be having serious financial difficulties. They are having such serious financial problems that they have to dip into a program created to protect individuals and businesses from bankruptcy. They figure they might as well take advantage of it themselves. This is despicable and entirely unacceptable. Members here have replied on social media that these are Canadian workers who are entitled to the program. No, the program is there for workers who need it. The question then becomes: Who really needs it?

Does the Liberal Party, which took in \$2 million in the first three months of the year, need to seek hundreds of thousands more? Does the Conservative Party, which took in \$3.9 million in the first quarter, need to go looking for hundreds of thousands more? Come on. The Liberals are presenting a united front, but I know they have had time to prepare. First they create a program that they qualify for, and then they apply for money from the program that they themselves created. It is worth pointing out that this was the political party that pledged, on its leader's honour, to restore public funding for political parties. They are not restoring public funding for political parties, but when a program with public money comes along, they are right there with their hand out.

To top it off, the Liberals are applying for \$200,000 from this program. That money is going into the Liberal Party's war chest. Come election time, they will have an extra \$200,000. They will spend \$200,000 more, and Elections Canada will reimburse half of the extra \$200,000 that they got from the Canada emergency wage subsidy program. Could they be more shameless?

To be generous and fair, I do not want to leave out our Conservative friends. They must have meetings among themselves. They want a full Parliament because they do not want committees. I hope that they will have a small meeting among themselves because there are two candidates who are ahead of the others in the Conservative leadership race. That being said, I do not mean any disrespect to the other candidates.

Mr. MacKay said that he would never allow the Conservative Party to take money from the emergency wage subsidy program and the member for Durham said the same thing. However, the Conservative Party leader—leader being a very flexible notion—is in favour of doing just that and so the Conservative Party is too. They will have to come to an agreement among themselves, which I am sure will be a very enjoyable way for them to spend a few hours.

That does not bother me because I am very clearly against that practice. However, I am not completely against the principle. On a good day, I would be willing to discuss the principle. However, in their case, they cut public funding for political parties. They go on and on about the merits of carefully controlling the public purse, but when they see a bag full of cash, they stick their hand in it. Enough is enough. They do not even discuss it among themselves before doing it, but that is something that must be done. I want to qualify my remarks a little because I do not have access to the Green Party's or the NDP's books. Perhaps they need that money.

• (1210)

Programs are designed for those who need it; conversely, programs are not designed for those who do not need it. It is possible that the NDP needs it; it is possible that the Green Party needs it; it is possible that others will need it in future. As for us, we will be getting more love from our donors because we do not need it. This year is similar to previous years. We believe that we will move forward. In fact, we never even considered the possibility of getting more money by applying to this program.

Before it is too late, I believe that the parties that do not need it but are using it should reconsider. In any case, it is likely that the next Conservative leader will want to return the money. At least that is what they have committed to doing. It is possible. It is not too late to say that we are right. It is not too late to acknowledge that they should not be using it because otherwise we will not stop calling them out on it. They will be right: We will not stop calling them out on it. They should perhaps reconsider while they still can. They should acknowledge that they will not take the wage subsidy and that those who need it will get it.

That dulls the shine. As everyone knows, the image gets a good shine. Every morning, at 11 o'clock, in front of a big house, the image gets polished. At some point people are going to wonder what is going on. In the history of the Liberal Party, there have been two or three cases, and I am not just talking about calling the banks in the morning. There have been a couple of situations involving the public purse. I would not draw attention to that if I were them because we are used to seeing that sort of thing and calling it out rather loudly.

The ultimate challenge in a crisis is trust. Is the government behaving in every way it can to earn the trust of Quebeckers and

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Canadians? I am not claiming that we are perfect, far from it. If I ever made such a claim there are a lot of people who would set me straight, but we are trying to be worthy of the trust of Quebeckers.

Is the government doing everything it can to be worthy of the trust of Quebeckers and Canadians? In a time of crisis when people need to feel reassured by the measures put in place, the government cannot afford to compromise, to chip away at the trust that people have in their institutions. This seems like a major issue here. I invite the government to do a number of things. I invite it to ensure that the formula it is negotiating with its friends from the other parties will guarantee the most accountability and openness on the maximum amount of topics.

I read the paper, and there is something there. We want to come back this summer. We would have liked to make up the days that the House did not sit, but this is a start. We would not be too unhappy if some things passed. That is not ideal. Ninety-five minutes a day is rather short. We already have such little time to speak in this chamber, designed for exactly that purpose. There are some parts that are not too bad, but let us move on.

Over here, we will perhaps use a few minutes of this debate to talk about issues, seniors, tourism, the fisheries, or small businesses that will shut down. We may use this time to discuss those topics, but we will make full use of our time to advocate for Quebec.

In the meantime, I call upon the two largest parties in this Parliament to do the moral and the ethical thing, to forgo money from a program they do not need and to call Parliament back to study the real issues.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments that leader of the Bloc has put on the record. There is no doubt that the goal of the government is to hit that 100% through all regions of our country. Like all parliamentarians, we care about what is taking place in our communities. We want to be there for our people and businesses. For those things that need the government to be there, we want to be there and get as close to that 100% as possible.

Having said that, in listening to the leader, the question that comes to my mind is this. Is the Bloc prepared to support the motion? In listening to what the leader had to say, it seems he is very sympathetic to it. He talks about some of its benefits. Does he see his party voting in favour of the motion?

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• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, as I said this morning, the government has found a way to get around having to seek the unanimous consent of the House. All it needs is a majority. To get one, it cozied up to the NDP. The Liberals no longer need the Bloc Québécois's vote to get their proposals adopted. In any case, we had said we would not oppose this proposal. We will see about other issues.

The hon. member raised another issue. The government says it wants to help everyone, 100% of people. I do not think any company or worker in Quebec or Canada is responsible for COVID-19. That being so, no company or worker should have to go bankrupt due to the pandemic. That is what 100% of people means. It means not leaving anyone behind, even if the pandemic continues for another six, eight or 10 months.

How many companies could be saved with the hundreds of thousands of dollars that the Liberals and Conservatives will be getting from the wage subsidy program?

How many fishers in eastern Quebec would be able to save their fisheries with some of that money?

How many stores on Ontario Street, in Hochelaga, could stay in business?

I think these are very important questions, and I hope the government will answer them.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Saint-Hubert—sorry, for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): It is indeed the riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, Madam Speaker, named for the Prime Minister of Canada in the 1950s who balanced the budget after the Second World War, which is why he is such an important figure.

It is always interesting to listen to the leader of the Bloc Québécois, but it is a bit strange to hear him talk about morals when it comes to public funds and political party financing. Does the leader of the Bloc Québécois remember how the former director general of his party, Gilbert Gardner, was illegally paid using public funds from the House of Commons?

Does the leader of the Bloc Québécois remember how, when he was a member of the Parti Québécois, the Moisan report was extremely critical of how the Parti Québécois, particularly Ginette Boivin, acquired illegal funding for the political party? Obviously, people living in glass houses need to be prepared to be criticized about that. That being said, it just happened once.

We agree on the issue that brought us together in the House today, but we do not agree with the government's proposal. The Bloc Québécois also disagrees. It is a good thing that the Bloc Québécois is finally playing an opposition role again since it was showing a little too much enthusiasm for the current government.

I would remind members that the Bloc Québécois readily supported the throne speech even though it denied the seven requests made by the Government of Quebec. The Bloc Québécois voted

with the Liberal government to prevent the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner from testifying before a parliamentary committee. That is no small thing.

If by chance, the government decides to review its position on the fact that a parliamentary committee will meet rather than the House, what issues would the member want to debate before the House rather than before a parliamentary committee?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, had I known how long the question was going to be, I would have brought my sleeping bag. I will answer it very quickly.

It is very appropriate for the member to refer to former Prime Minister St. Laurent, since his references to the Bloc Québécois also reach quite far into the past; meanwhile, people will not get their wage subsidy cheques until sometime in the future.

I understand that the member, whom I have always known to be extremely diligent, agrees with his party's decision to dip into the cookie jar and take out a little something. If he does not agree, I hope he will say so. I am quite curious as to whether there will be a discussion within the Conservative Party regarding that decision.

I already talked about what needs to be addressed, namely seniors and small and medium-sized businesses. The very fabric of SMEs, which are the hallmark of Quebec, is threatened by the weakening of businesses that could be vulnerable to corporate takeovers by larger, often foreign, companies. A lot is at stake. We will be happy to debate it with everyone once the behind-the-scenes negotiations are done.

• (1225)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pretty sure the member for Beloeil—Chambly must know the song by Dédé Fortin's band, the Colocs, that goes something like, "pass me the puck and I'll score some goals". You can only score if you are on the ice. Anyone who sits on the bench and sulks is probably not going to score. That is what the Bloc Québécois has decided to do; it is sulking in the corner, refusing to negotiate.

We in the NDP prefer a constructive approach. We got the government to commit to paying 10 days of sick leave annually to all workers.

Why does the member for Beloeil—Chambly not want to be in the game?

Why is he sulking in the corner?

Why is he so mad at the government?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, I am pretty sure my esteemed colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie knows exactly what I look like when I am mad. It is a sight to see, for sure. Anyway, we could keep talking about the Colocs, but I am more interested in what happened when the main street McDonald's opened up and the street was immediately deserted. That is what I am afraid of. I am not in a bad mood. The member can even go wash the Liberals' cars if he wants. That is fine by me. I have no problem with that.

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I want to talk about other things. I want to talk about what matters to people, including the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, in all likelihood. What is going to happen to all the small local shops that will have to close while backroom deals that are not in Quebecers' interests are being struck?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my esteemed colleague.

What does he have to say to business owners who pay themselves dividends, to partnerships, to very small businesses that are not yet eligible for emergency benefit programs and to farmers, especially those in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, who do not have access to those benefits?

The support programs do not meet their needs, and one of the support programs even allows a certain political party to raise funds from a pot of money meant to help people who really need help.

What does my colleague have to say to those people when he sees what the Conservatives and the Liberals are getting up to?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, there are all kinds of things we want to discuss, but it always gets put off until the following week. Now we will likely be told that there are only four sitting weeks left in this reduced format with 15-minute periods of three five-minute questions for the Bloc Québécois people, provided others take an interest in the interests of Quebec.

We cannot get to all the things we want to talk about because something unforeseen happens every time, a negotiation on this or that, which means we can only ask questions on those negotiations. This creates an odd situation where the political parties realize that they cannot not denounce the situation and are forced to use their speaking time to denounce something that is simply unacceptable. For example, if people are interested in balancing the budget, I imagine they are already planning to pay back the money they got through a program to which they should not be entitled.

We have to quickly come back to our seniors, the survival of small businesses, protecting SMEs in Quebec and transitioning the Canadian economy from a dangerous oil-focused model to a much greener and more sustainable model. That is what we are concerned about.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the honour to take part in this debate.

[*English*]

I want to thank members for the opportunity to share my thoughts in this debate.

Throughout this pandemic we have been able to use the tools of Parliament to push for better for Canadians. In the negotiations about how we move forward, that should be our goal. For New Democrats, it is very clear: We are strictly focused on using the House to the benefit of people.

We have been able to fight for certain improvements that have helped the lives of Canadians. We fight to improve access to the CERB, to broaden its scope to include students who were ignored by the Liberal government, to include seniors who were also entirely neglected and to fight for commitments for Canadians living

with disabilities. We were able to raise the amount of support from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and were able to fight for an increase in the wage subsidy from 10% to 75%.

All of these specific fights were to improve the lives of Canadians and to make sure Canadians were connected to their employment, to make sure Canadians were receiving the help they needed and to ensure that people do not fall through the cracks. Sadly, there are still far too many people falling through cracks, and that is why we need to continue to use Parliament as a tool to push for better for Canadians.

When it comes to the way we come together in Parliament, we have laid out a number of criteria. First and foremost, we want to make sure that all members of Parliament have their voices heard. Because they are representing thousands of constituents, we want those concerns and those voices heard here in Parliament. To do that, we want to make sure that Parliament is accessible to those members of Parliament who cannot travel here, to those members of Parliament who may be more susceptible or more vulnerable to COVID-19, and we want to make sure that the MPs who are challenged right now with child care, like so many Canadians, also have access to Parliament.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Millions of Canadians are using technology to work from home.

To take care of their children and their health, MPs can do the same thing. It is also important that we do not go three weeks without holding the government to account.

[*English*]

The other parties' approach, particularly the Conservative Party's motion, did not allow for MPs to participate virtually, nor did it allow for summer sittings to hold the government to account. That is why we believe that the motion put forward with the work of our House leader—a big shout-out to our House leader—and our entire team is one which would allow us to continue to fight for Canadians.

What are we fighting for? Today we made it very clear that our support for the motion is contingent on two very specific things. First and foremost, we will only support the motion if the government, the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party commit clearly to paid sick days for all Canadians. We are happy and encouraged to see that the government has announced it will follow through with our request to see a minimum of two weeks' paid sick leave for all Canadians.

We know this is vitally important, and we have raised this before. For people to get back to work they need three things. They need to know their workplace is safe, and we are going to continue to push to make sure all workplaces are safe. They also need personal protective equipment, and they need workplace practices that will keep workers safe.

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Second, we know people have to have access to paid sick leave. No workers should be worried if they start to feel sick or have symptoms of COVID-19. If they are worried whether they have the illness or not, they should not for a moment hesitate about whether they should be able to stay home or not. Right now, if people do not have paid sick leave, it is really a stark choice. Do they go to work sick, not knowing if they have COVID-19 but having some symptoms, and risk the potential to infect colleagues, or do they stay at home, not knowing if they will be able to pay the bills at the end of the month because they do not have paid sick leave? That choice should not be a choice Canadians have to make.

We also know that the lack of paid sick leave will particularly impact lower-wage workers, those who are precariously employed and those who are already the most vulnerable, for example, those in the service sector. These folks on the front lines are often the highest risk for spreading the illness. This is not just the right thing to do for justice and fairness for workers, but it is also the right thing to do in a public health response.

Imagine a restaurant server who has been off work for months and, now that restaurants are opening up, goes back to work and has mild symptoms. This server is forced to decide between staying at home because of mild symptoms to wait for testing, all the while not getting paid, not receiving tips and not earning a living to pay the bills, and covering up or ignoring the symptoms and going into work.

This is not to suggest in any way that a worker would do the wrong thing, but it is an impossible choice to make for a worker. That is why paid sick leave is so important and why we have been pushing for this for so long. This is why we have said that as a starting point to getting back to work, we need paid sick leave.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

In order to recover and get back to work safely, people need to be encouraged to stay home when they are sick and to get tested. The lack of paid sick leave runs counter to this public health advisory.

[*English*]

We have laid out several ways with really clear paths for the federal government to do this. We are looking forward to hearing the details now that the Prime Minister has announced his commitment to paid sick leave. We want to see the ways in which this is going to happen.

I will lay out some of the potential options. We can make paid sick leave a condition of companies receiving the wage subsidy. This is a way to force them to ensure there is paid sick leave. We can also, and we must, work with provinces, starting with B.C. Premier John Horgan has been very clear in his support of this idea.

We can work on a federal-provincial plan to ensure there are supports that would allow for paid sick leave. We will continue to work with premiers in other provinces and territories to ensure that this is something we implement across Canada. We know that in a pandemic paid sick leave is the responsible thing to do, and I am confident that all leaders of provinces and territories will come onside with the idea of developing a long-term plan.

In the short term, the federal government has tools, such as the CERB, or using a modified version of employment insurance. There are ways we can ensure this is implemented immediately with federal support. However, the long-term goal, and the vision of New Democrats, is that today we lay the foundation for paid sick leave as a right across this country now and forever. That is the vision, and we are proud that we were able to take that first bold step towards a new national social program that is going to change the way we work.

No longer should it be a mark of courage to go into work sick. In fact, it should be the responsible thing for people to stay home when they are sick, and they can only do that when given the supports to do so.

We can also show some international and national leadership by amending the Canada Labour Code to provide, in legislation, two paid weeks of sick leave at the federal level as a piece of legislation, which would specifically apply to those workers who have a high rate of public exposure and public interaction, such as those who work in transportation, airlines and banks.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that we have used Parliament to push the government to do better for people. That meant that we followed up to ensure it actually delivered on its commitments. We had the commitment that students should not be excluded from supports, and the government followed up with the CESB after we had to push it, which is very important. The commitment alone has not been enough. We have had to continue to apply pressure. Other community activists and organizers have applied pressure, and we got the results.

However, we know that there are still a number of Canadians who are falling through the cracks. One group in particular is Canadians living with disabilities. The government committed weeks ago, in supporting the unanimous consent motion that we put forward, to help out Canadians living with disabilities. They are facing extra costs right now, and they are already faced with challenges because of a society that is not barrier-free.

In addition, the complications and challenges of COVID-19 have made life harder for Canadians with disabilities, so they need support as well. We are committed to ensuring the government follows through on its promise to deliver that help. We are hopeful that help will come soon for Canadians living with disabilities.

While we have been going through this crisis we have talked about its various stages and phases. The first is the immediate emergency of making sure that we tackle the spread of COVID-19. We have to do everything we can to limit its spread by physically distancing and following the advice of public health experts.

As we return to work, I again want to reiterate that we need paid sick leave so that workers can go to work and, if they do ever exhibit any symptoms, they can be confident that they can return home, stay at home and still have their bills paid while they are recovering or getting tested.

Child care has become more and more of a major issue and a major area of concern. While Canadians are faced with different jurisdictions in terms of the return to school, parents are struggling with child care. They are trying to figure out how they can go to work and, at the same time, care for their children. We need to see commitments and investments at the federal level to support child care.

Finally, safety in the workplace is something that should be obvious, but is not. We are going to continue to put pressure on the government to ensure that all workplaces are safe, have access to the right personal protective equipment and have policies to ensure that workers are safe. The truth is that these three things are not in place yet. We heard a positive announcement today by the Prime Minister, but it is not enough. We need to see action as well. We are hopeful, though, that that action will be coming.

We also know that to respond to COVID-19 we need to see far more testing and more contact tracing. These are things that other jurisdictions have done, that other countries have done, and we need to increase what we are doing here in Canada.

I want to just take a moment to talk about the sacrifices Canadians have made. Over these past few months the sacrifices have been tremendous. People have lost their jobs and people have lost loved ones.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge those who have been lost in this crisis and commit to those loved ones and their families that we are going to do everything possible to prevent those losses from ever happening again, particularly in long-term care. We know that long-term care has been ground zero for the losses from COVID-19. It is just inexcusable that seniors, those who are most vulnerable, are the ones who are bearing the brunt of COVID-19.

We know that, in addition to many people losing their jobs, many people have lost their businesses, businesses they have built over a lifetime. We acknowledge that, and we want to find ways to support those who are going through this difficult time.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Too many people have lost loved ones without being able to hug them or hold their hands one last time. These sacrifices will be in vain if we do not become better prepared to stop the spread of this disease.

[English]

In looking at those who have been impacted and those who have been missed, one of the impacts of COVID-19 has been that munic-

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ipalities are facing a massive blow to their revenue. That means that many cities are facing a funding shortfall. This funding shortfall will exhibit itself in two ways. The first is that workers are already losing their jobs in cities and municipalities. We are deeply concerned about that. In addition, the critical services municipalities provide, such as public transit, garbage pickup and water treatment, could be affected.

We have called on the federal government to provide some direct relief to cities. Our critic has also written direct letters to raise the question of how we can provide direct help to municipalities that are right now facing a very difficult challenge.

[Translation]

These are critical services that affect our daily lives. They transport people to work, keep our communities safe and offer recreational programs when life resumes.

The federal and provincial governments must support cities and municipalities now.

[English]

While many businesses have faced tough times, I want to point out that other businesses have enjoyed record profits, and some of these companies enjoying record profits are not even paying taxes in Canada. Here I think about Amazon, Netflix, Google and a number of others that have seen an increase in revenues, but we are not certain if they are even paying or contributing in Canada. In many cases, we know they are not.

[Translation]

Huge companies like Amazon, Netflix and Google are raking in huge profits and still do not pay their fair share of taxes. Netflix has gotten 16 million new subscribers since the beginning of the pandemic, but does not pay any taxes in Canada.

Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon, is on the verge of becoming the world's first trillionaire. That is not a good thing, because it means our policies have failed. It is not clear whether his company pays taxes in Canada. On top of that, the government is making Amazon even richer by giving it a contract.

• (1245)

[English]

We have seen that in crises, it is working people, regular people, real Canadians, who bear the brunt of the crisis and that those at the very top do not bear the brunt and in fact find ways to profit in this crisis.

A recent poll shows overwhelming support in Canada for increasing taxes on the super wealthy, making sure that we have the revenue we need to help people recover.

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I will close on this point. While we are talking about social programs, it is important to realize that there are those who are going to raise concerns about debt and deficits, and, of course, it is important for us to be fiscally responsible with where we spend money. However, in a crisis, if we do not invest in people, they are going to fall through the cracks and be worse off and the recovery is going to be more difficult. Those at the very top are going to find ways to make even greater profits, broadening the gap between the rich and the poor, making it even more difficult for others and making inequality even worse.

The right thing to do now is to invest in people, invest in programs that lift people up. Investing in and supporting social programs like health care and paid sick leave is the right thing to do. We also need to make sure that we are doing two things: one, that we are not giving money to public companies that cheat the system, such as those that use offshore tax havens and do not pay their fair share, and second, that we take a serious look at ensuring that those at the very top, the wealthiest companies, the wealthiest earners, those with the greatest fortunes, are paying their fair share. It is those at the very top who enjoy the loopholes and offshore tax havens that real people simply do not use, and we need to close down those offshore tax havens and loopholes to increase revenues and make sure that we tackle inequality in our society.

We have a terrible tragedy and crisis we are grappling with, but there is also an opportunity. If we make the right choices now, we can tackle inequality, lift people up and ensure that those at the very top pay their fair share, and we can build a brighter future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will continue referring to the Colocs to keep today's jovial mood going a little longer. What does the member for Burnaby South think of the Colocs' song entitled *Tassez-vous de d'là*? I am referring to the Canada emergency wage subsidy that a political party might turn to, as the Liberals and Conservatives seem inclined to do.

Does the member agree with the lyrics that “I have to go see my friend” and help myself, or does he believe that this money should go to small businesses and people who really need it rather than a political party that has to get its next election campaign ready?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. It is clear to me that the purpose of the Canada emergency wage subsidy is to help workers no matter where they work.

If a company, business or organization—even a political party—is experiencing difficulties and has fewer resources, that employer might cut the number of staff members. They will then have to turn to social programs like the Canadian emergency benefit.

We believe that it is better that people keep their jobs. That is why we support the Canada emergency wage subsidy to help workers, and that is why we support this approach.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the leader of the New

Democratic Party. When we talk about the working person, the individual who is often in that lower-income spectrum, it is one of the reasons I think the CERB program is such a critically important program. Governments are there, whether at the national, provincial or municipal level, to support their citizens. In good part, I think we are seeing that being addressed.

I like what the member has been talking about with respect to the options for workers. What I want him comment further on is the idea that Ottawa itself cannot necessarily do it alone. It can show strong national leadership, but it is also going to become very important that we work with the provinces. He referred to the province of British Columbia.

Could he pick up on how important it is that Ottawa work with the provinces and territories when it comes to defending the rights of workers?

• (1250)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, we absolutely believe that we need to work with the provinces to have long-term paid sick leave.

Let me clarify. Right now, what I am suggesting to the federal government is that it use the existing tools, like the CERB and employment insurance, to immediately deliver paid sick leave to all Canadians. The long-term goal, as I have stated before, is to see today as the starting point for paid sick leave as a right in Canada, now and forever. To do that, let us work with the provinces to develop a long-term program. It is something we have already seen some interest in. Premier Horgan in B.C. has indicated his interest. We have seen other premiers in territories exhibit interest in the idea of paid sick leave. Let us build on that and start with an immediate paid sick leave commitment. The Prime Minister has already made that commitment and we are going to make sure that it is followed up on. Then let us work with all provinces to develop a program that is permanent and will always be there so that we never again face a situation where workers have to make the impossible choice of either going to work sick or staying home and not knowing if they can pay the bills.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member rises to provide a most compelling and comprehensive list of all of the inefficiencies and inequalities that have been revealed during COVID, if not discovered.

We heard recently that CEOs have been named to lead Canada back into the economic recovery. It appears that there is always a deal on the table for big corporations and Bay Street bankers.

What, in the hon. member's view, is the new deal for the people that would represent a compelling and more compassionate alternative for the future of Canada?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, it is really a focus on people. Everything we do, and everything New Democrats have done so far, is to focus on what people need. Right now we have to counter some of the fear-mongering from the right and Conservatives about debt and deficits and instead make real investments in a brighter future for people. That means investing in health care that is head to toe. That means making sure that people have access to medications. During the pandemic, we have seen people lose their jobs and benefits, which means that even more Canadians are going without the medications they need. We need to make sure that we are investing in the future and making investments in infrastructure that builds more livable cities, that reduces our emissions and creates jobs here in Canada. We need to make sure that the wealthiest pay their fair share. We need to build a brighter future.

While this is a difficult and terrible time in a lot of ways for many families, businesses and people, it is an opportunity for us to chart a course forward for a brighter future. That is what we are discussing when we talk about health care and social safety net investments and the different way of approaching an economy that will be long-lasting and sustainable. That is what we hope to do together. That is what we hope to build on. I am confident we can come together and do what is right for Canada and our future.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I must admit that I did not hear all of the speech given by the member for Burnaby South. I did hear him talk about day care, sick leave and municipalities. However, I did not hear anything about federal jurisdiction. What he talked about falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. He never talks about the possibility of opting out with full compensation. When he talks about these things, he is just paying lip service because he always adds that it would be in Quebec's best interests to participate.

Could the member for Burnaby South be clear? What falls under Quebec's jurisdiction is Quebec's responsibility, and what falls under Ottawa's jurisdiction is Ottawa's responsibility.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, I want to begin by saying that, yes, the New Democrats support the right to opt out with full compensation.

However, during a pandemic, the job of MPs is not to follow every rule and to say that we cannot deal with an issue, because there is a pandemic, a crisis in which people are dying and seniors are facing major challenges. This is not the time to talk about and debate jurisdiction. It is the time to figure out how we can work together to build a brighter future. It is the time to talk about how we can work together to promote social justice and reduce inequality. That is exactly what I want to do. We can work together, but now is not the time to get caught up in discussions about jurisdiction. It is time to move forward to help people.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the ways we get through crises is remembering what happened in other crises. Do members remember 2008? It was the biggest economic crisis in memory, and Stephen Harper's big

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plan was to force through a massive austerity budget that would have crushed so many Canadians.

It was a minority government, and they panicked. What did they do? They shut Parliament down. Therefore, when we hear the Conservatives whining that we are meeting four days a week, I remember when we were not allowed to meet at all, because Stephen Harper refused to meet.

Then he came back and he blew through \$50 billion. How many tourist kiosks did we set up in Tony Clement's riding? There were no accountability mechanisms; they blew through money on gazebos, sunken boats and everything they could put into Muskoka.

We have come here and have just won the right to sick benefits for all Canadians. That is what we do in a crisis. We find ways to put people first, not the ideologies of the Conservative Party, not Muskoka sunken boats and the ShamWow scams they ran. We do not prorogue Parliament and stand and whine day after day that we are not being heard if we're not offering anything positive.

We came here to fight for workers. We came here to fight for health. We came here to fight for small business, and we will continue to do that in a minority Parliament.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the work he has done in actually showing some leadership in the House while having to go along with the knuckle-draggers.

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

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Could the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay maybe rephrase the comment, please?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, sorry, I did not mean it as a metaphor. I meant it as a simile that if people act like they are knuckle-dragging, they are not being helpful, but I would not suggest that they are knuckle-draggers. I am very glad I was corrected on that.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, we are very proud that in this Parliament, we have been doing everything we can to fight for people, and though I do acknowledge that the government has come along, it has taken a lot of pressure, a lot of pushing and a lot of fighting.

I want to highlight how important it is for us to have this opportunity to be in Parliament to continue to push the government to deliver better for Canadians. We pushed for the inclusion of more people in the CERB, such as students, those with disabilities and seniors, and we're going to fight for paid sick leave and more.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are many different resources that Canadians can check into to get updates and all sorts of incredible information. I always tell constituents and anyone who wants to know that it never hurts to get the applications that are there for smart phones as ways in which people can keep on top of the many changes that are taking place. I want to commend the individuals in the Government of Canada who are responsible for maintaining and putting that information on the web, and I want to thank them for the fantastic service they are providing to keep Canadians from coast to coast informed.

On that note, as of 11 o'clock this morning, 1,479,838 Canadians from all regions of our country have been tested. We can imagine the fear or concern of people that they might have the coronavirus, to such a degree that they felt it was important to get tested. Out of that, there are 85,103 total cases, and out of those there are 6,453 deaths. I would suggest that literally thousands, if not tens of thousands, of lives have been saved to date. They have been saved because of Canadians as a whole and because of the actions of the national government, the provincial governments, the municipal governments, and the many different stakeholders, including non-profit organizations and so forth, recognizing exactly what COVID-19 is and the dangers it poses to our society. As a direct result of that, we have saved tens of thousands of lives and taken a great deal of pressure off our health care system as we try to make the changes that are necessary in order to be able to provide the quality health care services that are absolutely essential in order for us, again, to save lives.

Let there be no doubt whatsoever that we as a government, working with the many different stakeholders, are doing the very best we can, day in and day out, to minimize the negative impacts of the coronavirus or COVID-19, whatever one prefers to call it. We have seen profound impacts in all regions of the country. When taking a walk in different communities, urban and rural, one can see individuals wearing masks, continually washing their hands, knowing what to do if they need to cough, and knowing what type of symptoms require making a call. In the province of Manitoba, we call it Health Links; no doubt other provinces call it different things.

There has been an educational curve upward on this particular issue. I would challenge anyone to demonstrate where we have seen such a stark increase in the uptake of education on a specific issue. As a result of people from across our country listening to health care experts and following, for the most part, the requests from the different levels of government and agencies, we have been able to minimize this and be as successful as we have been. When I say "we", I mean collectively, in the whole sense, not just the Government of Canada. We all have a very important role to play, each and every one of us.

As members of Parliament, we need to play a leading role. Who they are and the type of position they hold will often dictate the type of role people need to play. Canadians, in good part, have been very pleased with how the national government has responded to this epidemic.

• (1300)

The Prime Minister, with a very caring heart, has clearly demonstrated that he wants to see the national government do everything it possibly can to save lives and to condition our communities in the best way it can in order to fight this pandemic. We have initiated programs, virtually from ground zero, to the degree that we are now subsidizing a wide spectrum of people and organizations, both private and non-profit. We are talking about hundreds of millions, going into billions, of dollars that have been allocated in order to ensure that we continue to support Canadians in every possible way imaginable.

We talk about the 100%. I know it is important to the cabinet, to the Prime Minister and, I would suggest, to all members of the House that we not leave people behind. Unfortunately, we do not necessarily live in a perfect world, and we might not be able to achieve 100%, but that is our goal. If governments were not prepared to get engaged, one can only imagine what the outcome of this would have been. Hundreds of thousands of people would have died, businesses throughout the country would have gone bankrupt and the economy would have broken. I cannot imagine what it would have taken to get us out of that situation, which is why the government had to get engaged. I am very proud of the way members of the House, particularly our Prime Minister, have led the country to make sure that we are covering all the bases we possibly can. It is hard to imagine the many thousands of policy decisions that are being made in a relatively short period of time.

I always like to say to the constituents I represent that, as a parliamentarian, I believe in our democratic institutions. I do not think that, even in pandemics, we should forgo the issue of accountability and the important role of the House of Commons. I am very happy that we have a Prime Minister who believes in this institution. This is one of the reasons why the Prime Minister, leaders of opposition parties and members of the House have been fairly clear in wanting to ensure that the House has some level of interaction, some level of accountability, and we have seen that in a very real and tangible way. In fact, more questions are being asked now than when we were actually sitting, in terms of question period versus a virtual Parliament.

I take this issue seriously. I stood up on my first question since getting back, which was related to the motion we are debating today, whether or not the House should be sitting and in what format. I have been a parliamentarian for nearly 30 years now. I actually have more experience in opposition, by far, than I do on the government benches. I understand the important role that opposition members, and in fact all members, have inside the House in terms of holding government accountable. I really and truly do not believe that we have lost focus on that issue, which is why we have a motion today that would ensure ongoing sittings and accountability in regard to the government. However, as a parliamentarian, I would argue that our first responsibility is to serve and be there for the constituents we represent.

Government Orders

• (1305)

I know the types of questions we get, whether by email or phone calls. I am learning more about Zoom and Skype and using my telephone more than usual in communicating with constituents, trying to answer questions and, in many ways, trying the best I can to help them in this very trying situation.

Within the Liberal caucus, we have a priority for members of Parliament to work with their constituents and be there in whatever way they can to get a good understanding of what is happening in our communities. We are afforded the opportunity to communicate those messages, as opposition members are, about issues related to COVID-19 and ideas we might have that would assist Canadians overall. I am very happy with individuals like our deputy whip, who, several days every week, is fielding questions that members of our caucus have in regard to COVID-19 and constantly asking us what is happening at the ground level.

We have members of Parliament who are in tune with their constituents so that we know what we should feed back to the government to try to change policies where we can. With the amount of change we have seen in a relatively short time span and the billions of dollars being spent, we all have an important role. Not only have government members been able to influence and make successful changes to policy, but we have seen members of the opposition do likewise.

The leader of the Bloc party brought up how important it is that people have trust and confidence in their leaders, whether they are members of Parliament, members of provincial legislative assemblies, city councillors, community leaders or premiers. I want to focus attention on the Prime Minister, because I have heard a little bit of negative feedback from the opposition bench, particularly the Conservative Party.

I believe the Prime Minister is working every day of the week. I believe his mind is on the issue every waking hour. I have seen that through presentations, media, telephone discussions and through many organizations that have been reaching out to ensure that the government is responding to the needs of our society, whether it is the economy or our social needs.

I know that many people look forward every day to hearing what the Prime Minister has to say. As the leader of the Bloc party has correctly pointed out, it is about confidence and trust. One of the ways to build that is by not hiding behind things and being prepared to come forward. We have seen our Prime Minister do just that.

We have seen great participation in the virtual Parliament. When I participate on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from my home in Winnipeg or the sectioned-off corner in my office, there are well over 250 MPs participating.

• (1310)

MPs are afforded the opportunity to ask the government a number of questions related to COVID-19. All in all, I do not necessarily agree with all of the questions, even the manner in which they are posed, but I respect them because this is part of the process. Having opportunities to come back to the House in a limited way is a positive thing.

There are checks being put in place to ensure that our parliamentary institution is not being neglected. Some parliamentarians, like me, are comfortable with the way the House of Commons is proceeding during this pandemic. We need to demonstrate leadership. If we were to put 338 members of Parliament in their seats today, that would send the wrong message. Pulling MPs from all regions of the country, putting them in airports and on planes, trains and so forth, is not what health experts would recommend. We need to be respectful of our health experts, who have done a phenomenal job in providing the information and science for us to make good, solid decisions.

The same principle applies to the House of Commons. We have opportunities to be engaged, and individuals have the ability to look at ways for us to possibly expand. That is why the procedure and House affairs committee is attempting to deal with the issue of how we can change some of the rules. All members of Parliament should have the opportunity to vote. That is really important. I would like to see changes that would ensure that takes place.

What seems to be in dispute right now is that the official opposition wants to have opposition days. It misses having them. I would remind my friends across the way to look at the crisis situation. Given the other things taking place, whether it is the standing committees or virtual Parliament, we can forgo opposition days for the short term, the short term being a few months. Members should think of the impact that this pandemic is having on all Canadians and small businesses.

I could talk about the many different programs. Sometimes a program is direct; sometimes it is indirect. I will use the example of seniors. The one-time increases to GIS and OAS, the \$200 or \$300 to help seniors, are direct. As for the indirect programs, there are the investments in the United Way to support seniors in communities and the dollars going into health care and the many other things we invest in. When it comes to businesses, the government is providing loans. It is looking at ways to support people with their rent and is providing wage subsidies and so much more, not to mention the CERB, which is becoming the backbone for ensuring that people have disposable income, which is absolutely critical at this time. Taking all of the programs into account, we are ensuring that Canada will be able to come out of this into a situation that is equal to or better than that of other countries of a similar nature, economic performance-wise, socially and so forth.

I will conclude my comments by recognizing the incredible work of the individuals who have contributed to allowing us to get to where we are today. I will expand upon that possibly during the time for questions and answers.

Government Orders

• (1315)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, although we have an opportunity to debate today and hold the government to account in extended committees of the whole, this is still not a true functioning Parliament. We still are not at a point in time when all members have the ability, either virtually or in the House, to participate. I am sure the member realizes that even in our province of Manitoba there are some very bad connectivity issues with the Internet, especially in rural, northern and remote communities. Just last week in a virtual COVID-19 committee, my Internet gave out and I had to drive to the office. It took 40 minutes to get there and 40 minutes to get back. I spent more time on the road than I did participating in the committee meeting.

How does the member explain to his constituents where the budget is? Where is the ability for the government to set the path forward outside of the response to COVID-19 and the pandemic? Where are the financial plans and accountability that go along with presenting a budget so that the government can move ahead with all of the other programs and issues facing the country? Without all of the committees up and running, how am I, the vice-chair for the Standing Committee on National Defence, able to ask questions and have witnesses appear at committee to talk about the 29-plus members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have now become infected working in long-term care facilities as part of Operation Laser?

• (1320)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I am sure the member is aware that he can still ask those questions in many ways, and if not directly, then indirectly. There are opportunities, through virtual Parliament, to pose them.

We need to recognize that during the pandemic we cannot expect everything to be normal. Is it going to be perfect? I doubt it. I do believe, however, that whether through this particular motion or through motions that preceded it, we have been able to allow for accountability and transparency in the government. There have been more questions for the government in the last few weeks than there would have been had we been sitting inside the House. Things have been more focused, but at the end of the day there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that there is a very high sense of accountability through virtual Parliament. Once all is said and done, I am hopeful that PROC will come back with additional recommendations.

I do not believe that the concerns the member has raised have not been dealt with through the changes we have made to date to get us through this particularly difficult time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I just want to point out to my hon. colleague that this proposal would mean fewer questions overall for the Bloc Québécois. We would get more time, but fewer questions overall.

During last week's virtual and in-person meetings, I watched attentively as our Conservative colleagues asked the government questions about the fact that the measures taken so far did not include parameters for preventing freeloaders from exploiting them. It was clear that the Liberal government was having a hard time

creating parameters that would stop freeloaders from taking advantage of the programs it had implemented.

Now maybe we understand why it was struggling to define those parameters. We have seen freeloaders deciding to potentially exploit the programs that have been put in place. One notable example is the emergency wage subsidy. It is as if the Conservatives, astoundingly enough, and the Liberals had designed a program they just happened to qualify for.

I listened to my colleague's impassioned plea, claiming that the measures taken by the government had helped companies avoid bankruptcy. My question is perfectly simple: Did the Liberal Party apply for the emergency wage subsidy because it was on the verge of bankruptcy?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the programs were developed to support private companies, non-profit groups and individuals to minimize the negative impacts of the coronavirus. We have come forward with these programs because Canadians need them. Will there be individuals who will take advantage? I suspect there will be, and no doubt we will hear about that, but it would have been worse if a decision was made such that people who needed the program did not get the money, for whatever reason. There is no absolutely perfect system.

In regard to question period, as the member knows, there are 30 seconds for a question and 30 seconds for an answer. Through virtual Parliament, now we see more of a dialogue of questions and answers. As a parliamentarian, I would rather have five minutes with a minister, with differing amounts of time for questions and answers, than just have one question followed by one answer.

There are some good aspects to the virtual Parliament that our current Parliament does not have. There is a bit of a trade-off, in other words.

• (1325)

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about something very important that some Canadians want an answer to.

Last month, after getting unanimous consent, the government agreed that it was committed to implementing without delay some financial aid to seniors and people with disabilities. The government has come through with some aid for seniors, which was not enough, as we were hoping it would be a continued payment, not a one-time payment, but it omitted people with disabilities. We have always heard the Liberals say they have Canadians' backs and don't want to leave anybody behind.

Government Orders

My questions to the parliamentary secretary are very simple. Why did the Liberals omit people with disabilities? Why has the government not had their backs? Why did it leave them behind?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, there are direct and indirect ways that government programs assist individuals. I cited the example of seniors. The poorest of all the seniors in Winnipeg North are the ones collecting the guaranteed income supplement, and the seniors most challenged by the coronavirus are those receiving the guaranteed income supplement. We are giving those seniors the most money, and we are giving other seniors \$200. It is a significant amount of money, given what their annual income is.

We are trying the best we can to ensure that seniors have disposable income during this very difficult and trying time. There have been some additional costs. We recognize that. At the end of the day, however, the government is trying to support Canadians during this difficult time through a wide spectrum of programs both directly and indirectly, indirectly by using the United Way, for instance. United Way Winnipeg has been given millions of dollars to support our seniors. Disabled seniors would be included in that.

I cannot give more detail offhand, but I appreciate the question.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Madam Speaker, the role of the opposition is key to our system of parliamentary democracy. As Sir Wilfrid Laurier put it so succinctly, “it is indeed essential for the country that the shades of opinion which are represented on both sides of this House should be placed as far as possible on a footing of equality and that we should have a strong opposition to voice the views of those who do not think with the majority”.

Faced with the greatest crisis of our lifetime, we need to hear the voices of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Sadly, the other opposition parties are clearly showing that they do not feel the same way. When the next election rolls around, they will have to answer for their actions. Their supporters will wonder why a vote for the NDP or the Bloc has turned into a vote for the Liberals.

[*English*]

In my role as leader of the opposition, I have travelled the country and met Canadians from all walks of life: farmers, who feed our cities; veterans, who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice so we can live in peace and freedom; doctors and nurses, who provide comfort and care when we are at our most vulnerable; small business owners, who save and sacrifice to grow their businesses and, with them, the Canadian economy; new Canadians, whose fondest hope is to see their children avail themselves of opportunities they never had; and workers in essential service areas, bravely putting their communities first and ensuring we have access to the things we need most during this difficult time.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Whether in Ottawa, in Regina or in Quebec City, I see constant proof that Canadians are the most altruistic, most generous and

hardest-working people in the world. It is an honour to serve them in the House. I only hope the government and the other opposition parties will let us do the job we have been tasked to do.

[*English*]

As Canadians, we are keepers of a proud history. We have fought and defeated forces of tyranny, and helped to bring peace and freedom around the world. We are the stewards of breathtaking natural beauty, from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic. We are the protectors of a rich democracy, one rooted in a commitment to pluralism, personal freedom and individual responsibility.

Those ideals do not just happen, and we certainly cannot take them for granted.

[*Translation*]

It is here, in Parliament, that this important work is done. It is here that we ask difficult but necessary questions. It is here that we improve public policy by holding robust debates. It is here that we ensure that the government remains focused on the needs and priorities of Canadians.

[*English*]

The House traces its lineage back some 800 years to a water meadow along the River Thames in Surrey, where King John, faced with a rebellion of disenchanted barons, signed the Magna Carta in 1215. Almost 50 years later, in January 1265, the first example of something akin to the modern House of Commons sat in London.

While democracy has unquestionably evolved in the intervening centuries, one of the few constants amidst this change is that the House of Commons always meets in person. It met during the cataclysm of the First World War that violently ended a century of relative peace and prosperity. It met when the threat of Nazi Germany set fire to the world with its blood-soaked march through Europe, Russia and North Africa. It met when tensions between the two superpowers of the day threatened the world with nuclear annihilation. It met through other pandemics as well.

Abandoning meetings in person is no simple matter. The recent calls for the House to “just get on Zoom, already” bring to mind the words of Winston Churchill:

It is difficult to explain this to those who do not know our ways. They cannot easily be made to understand why we consider that the intensity, passion, intimacy, informality and spontaneity of our Debates constitute the personality of the House of Commons and endow it at once with its focus and its strength.

Government Orders

Parliament must meet. Its role and its place are fundamental. The House, our elected legislature, is the beating heart of our system of government. It is where the viewpoints from all corners of the country have their voice and where the executive government accounts for its choices, priorities and actions.

As political scientist Christian Leuprecht said in his testimony last month to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, this role is even more critical during times of crisis:

The underlying primary constitutional principle here is the principle of responsible government. It is about ministerial responsibility, first and foremost, during a crisis and an emergency.

Especially during a time of crisis, Parliament has a supreme duty to hold the executive to account. Canadians need continuous parliamentary audit of the executive and the bureaucracy's judgment.

The official opposition could not agree more. Canada's democratic institutions should never be treated as an inconvenience. The House of Commons needs to be functioning and needs to be seen to be functioning during this crisis. Contrary to what the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc may think, the House is an essential service to the country and we, its members, are essential workers.

I have never seen so many members of Parliament work so hard during an election campaign to get elected and then work hard to not have to work hard. They have spent the last few weeks making arguments, telling Canadians that they should not be doing their jobs during this time of crisis. Even this week, they are arguing against the return of Parliament. Even as more and more provincial health restrictions are lifted, they are still making the case that Parliament cannot do its job.

• (1335)

I have a friend who is going back to work at Mattress Mart today. People can take their pets to dog groomers in Ontario, but somehow Liberals, NDP and Bloc MPs are saying that we cannot do our job here. Conservatives disagree with that. We believe members of Parliament should be showing up to work in the House for a full return to parliamentary functions.

The simple act of asking questions, and of knowing that questions must be answered, requires a government to up its game. Asking questions and giving voice to concerns generates constructive solutions to policy shortcomings.

[*Translation*]

With respect to COVID-19, the opposition managed to increase the emergency wage subsidy and support for students, reduce penalties for part-time workers, prevent new parents from losing their benefits, authorize credit unions to provide loans, and connect employers and potential employees. These are important enhancements for Canadians and have all resulted from the questions that opposition members asked about government programs.

[*English*]

In the last few weeks, government scrutiny has largely been left to press conferences that the Prime Minister controls. The Prime Minister hosts a morning show at his doorstep, followed by a late show often hosted by the Deputy Prime Minister for ministers, mere feet from this chamber.

Unique circumstances may have made this a necessity in the pandemic's first few days, but we are long past that. The minority government seems to find it more comfortable to face the parliamentary press gallery than its parliamentary opposition. To their shame, the NDP and Bloc have so far meekly gone along.

[*Translation*]

I am especially disappointed with the leader of the Bloc Québécois. I served in the House with Gilles Duceppe for many years. We did not always agree. In fact, I believe the only thing we agreed on was that Quebeckers form a nation within a strong and united Canada.

Although we disagreed on many things, I had a certain degree of respect for Mr. Duceppe. He knew that his role in the House as the leader of an opposition party was to hold the government to account. Mr. Duceppe worked hard to ensure that successive governments faced real and sometimes brutal opposition. He was not afraid to ask difficult questions. He did not hesitate to expose the gaps in legislation and he never turned a blind eye to the Liberals' mistakes.

That is in contrast to the current Bloc leader who, during his first round of negotiations, went home for supper and gave the government free rein. The Conservatives stayed here all night and produced real results for Canadians.

[*English*]

Parliament has been getting results for Canadians thanks to the hard work of opposition parties and it should keep it up. Press conferences are not a substitute. Around the world, from the United Kingdom to Australia to New Zealand, other countries are resuscitating parliamentary life.

[*Translation*]

Every day, we see the Prime Minister emerge from his residence to announce yet another multi-million-dollar initiative. The Prime Minister says that his government's prudent management of Canada's finances enables us to spend that money. That is a false statement based on false information.

Government Orders

[English]

The government is not drawing money from a rainy day fund. We must remember that when the Liberal government was first elected, it told Canadians that the measure of its fiscal responsibility would be small and temporary deficits: just \$10 billion over four short years. How did that work out for them? Those small, temporary deficits turned into massive, permanent deficits. We went into this pandemic in a weakened state because of the government's wasteful spending.

The Liberals gave \$12 million to Loblaws and \$50 million to a credit card company, Mastercard. They gave \$50 million to a credit card company that makes its money off hard-working Canadians who cannot afford to pay their full balance. That is who the government showered with riches. That is where the money went. Wasteful spending by the Liberal government led to massive deficits, which meant we went into this pandemic in a weakened state.

● (1340)

After that, it became clear there was no way the Liberals were going to be able to hold to their solemn election promise. I remember the Prime Minister looking into the eyes of Canadians and saying he was being as honest as he possibly could be. We now know what that means. Once he knew there was no way he could hold to that promise, he started to move the goalposts.

Then it was all going to be about debt-to-GDP ratio: in other words, the percentage of the national debt as measured against the total economic output of the country. As long as that was under control, then everything would be okay. When signs of a made-in-Canada recession started to appear, even before this pandemic, the government abandoned that as well: "Never mind that debt-to-GDP ratio thing we were talking about just a few minutes ago. It is all about our credit rating. As long as we still have that credit rating, we will be okay." I remember a comedian who used to say, "How can I be broke if I still have cheques in my cheque book?" That is the example this Prime Minister is giving to Canadians.

What about that credit rating? We know that we have been in rough shape throughout this pandemic because of the extra pressures that have been put on the fiscal system. The government was borrowing and spending with abandon well before the pandemic hit. As the Parliamentary Budget Officer announced last week, the national debt could top \$1 trillion by the time this crisis ends. One trillion dollars. The Prime Minister added \$87 billion of debt during his first four years of power and this year, he will pile on at least a staggering \$252 billion. That is according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

This year's deficit could reach \$300 billion or \$400 billion. We do not know. The government refuses to give us an update. It refuses to give us even a fiscal update, never mind a full budget. The risks are enormous, and we are starting to see signs of a credit downgrade.

Normally, a government running a deficit equal to 12% of GDP or more would see a massive surge in borrowing costs. Normally, a government would have to outbid the private sector for those funds. It would have to borrow that money and compete with other people. Now we have a scenario in which the Bank of Canada is creating

digital money to buy up government debt, at least \$5 billion a week. The Bank of Canada is not just buying federal debt. It is buying corporate bonds, provincial government bonds, mortgage debt, commercial paper and bankers' acceptances.

The Bank of Canada has bought up so much of this that the total assets it holds increased from \$120 billion at the beginning of March to \$442 billion by last week. It has almost quadrupled its balance sheet in just two months. This is the biggest expansion of the money supply, in such a short period, in Canadian financial-system history.

However, this is nothing new. Governments have done this throughout history. We can look back to Roman times, when emperors would add more and more lead into the currency to keep up with government spending.

The actions of the Bank of Canada are going to have an impact. We would like to know what those impacts will be. We would like to know what the consequences will be. We have important questions in this chamber, in this Parliament, as the official opposition, so that Canadians can understand the consequences of all the options that the government is pursuing. How will the bank unwind all this stimulus? Will we see inflation or currency depreciation? We are deeply worried about the impacts this will have in the long term.

Are Canadians and businesses getting the help they need? Are we actually protecting jobs with these programs? Are we preparing the ground for the reopening and the revitalization of our economy? When we Conservatives ask hard questions, it is because the well-being of Canadians, their health, their jobs and our financial system depend on it. In a crisis, more than ever, those hard questions are critical.

I want to highlight several real examples. Clear-eyed foreign policy has real, tangible results. Conservatives see the world as it is, not the way we wish it were. We saw the real consequences of the Prime Minister's weakness on China: our citizens imprisoned and our trade interests and Canadian farmers hurt by unjustified import blockades.

● (1345)

Then the global pandemic began. Australia and New Zealand did not believe the false information coming out of the PRC, and repeated by the WHO, that there was no human-to-human transmission of COVID-19.

Government Orders

In early February, Australia banned visitors from mainland China. Similarly, New Zealand imposed a ban on foreign nationals entering the country from China as well. No one would characterize the prime minister of New Zealand as a conservative hard-liner or a foreign policy hawk, but she was rightly skeptical about information coming from a Communist authoritarian regime that imprisoned doctors for speaking out about the true nature of this virus.

Here in Canada, the Prime Minister sided with the PRC. There was to be no ban on travel from that country, no restrictions at all, and a full month later, he was still defending that decision. Despite opposition calls, the Liberals refused to impose mandatory quarantines. The Prime Minister and his ministers dodged questions and maintained that enhanced screening measures were in place. However, there were endless reports on social media about Canadians returning from the most affected countries without even being asked any questions.

By mid-March, Quebec, Alberta and Nova Scotia had all sent provincial health officials to airports because the federal government was not doing its job. By the time the federal government reversed course and finally announced a ban on international visitors, it was already too late.

Just last week, the country's chief public health officer said that quicker action could have been taken in responding to the global pandemic and that action might have saved lives. Today, New Zealand has zero new cases. It had a total of 21 deaths. Australia still has a few new cases and it has seen a total of 102 deaths. In Canada, more than 6,500 people have died to date.

Throughout this health crisis, the federal government has been either wrong or slow to act: wrong to dump medical supplies without replacing them; slow to close our borders; slow to advise Canadians that they should wear masks after being wrong about telling them not to; slow to roll out programs to help Canadians struggling; and still, so far, no fixes to the gaps that people are finding themselves falling through.

We have proposed concrete solutions to help those programs capture more people. So far, the government has been extremely slow to make those changes.

That is why parliamentary scrutiny is so important. We can get better results for Canadians, but to do so, the House must sit.

Provinces are now easing health restrictions and reopening, so where is the federal government's plan to support them and to do the same? Canadians are optimistic people and they want the federal government to show signs of that optimism by supporting provincial government plans. There is no plan to stimulate and attract business investment, to create jobs, to help restaurants and retailers reopen and to give entrepreneurs hope.

Clearly, we cannot just wish away the virus, but we can restart and re-energize our economy through adaptation. Through increased testing and contact tracing, through masking and through other adaptations, people can get back to work while staying safe.

When we emerge from this crisis, Canada will find itself at a crossroads. Will we continue down the Liberals' chosen path of government knows best, of ever-greater spending, even higher tax-

es and ever-growing government or will we rebuild civil society, revitalize our communities and recharge the economy by embracing the proven formula of liberty, personal responsibility and limited government? As former British prime minister David Cameron said: a bigger society, not a bigger government.

[*Translation*]

Other parties can talk about how much they love people, but they obviously do not really believe in people. In contrast, the Conservatives have great faith in people's ability to make responsible decisions and run their own lives. We believe in their future, and we have faith that Canadians' talent and ingenuity will carry us forward.

[*English*]

Canadians are an endlessly enterprising people. Perhaps it is a product of our immigrant society, where people leave the familiarity of a home for a shot at a better life on the other side of the world and then work hard to achieve it.

• (1350)

Perhaps it is the inspiration we take from indigenous peoples, resilient men and women who built Canada's first communities in some of the harshest conditions imaginable. Perhaps it is our spiritual inheritance that emphasizes individual sanctification, not the creation of a perfect system or utopia here on earth as the path to a better world.

[*Translation*]

No matter the reason, Canadians have consistently shown that, if they are freed from state control and regulation, they will find ways to keep themselves busy. They will not only meet their essential needs, but also create the kind of prosperity and well-being that previous generations could not even have imagined.

[*English*]

Again, we only need to look to our history for inspiration.

Freed from the top-down control and the high taxes of the national program, Canadian industry and society began to flourish, drawing immigrants and capital from around the world. In 1939 and 1940, freed from the regulation and government burden of the Great Depression, Canadians found ways to industrialize our economy and meet the needs of not only defeating tyranny, but then liberating Europe from want. Freed from the government's all-encompassing war effort following the defeat of the Axis powers, Canadians built one of the most prosperous and peaceful societies the world has ever known. In the mid-1980s, freed from the abusive and destructive regulation of Pierre Trudeau's national energy policy, Canada's energy sector embarked on 35 years of growth, innovation and environmental sustainability that was only ended by this government's heavy-handed intervention.

The free market is the greatest wealth creation enterprise ever developed. Individuals buying and selling freely, choosing what to exchange their goods and services for is the primary source of wealth and prosperity. That is what lifts people out of poverty. Voluntary exchange always enriches both the seller and the buyer, otherwise they would not do it.

As we contemplate how much faith to put into government to get us out of the economic crisis, I am reminded of a fantastic story that Yuval Noah Harari recounts in a book of his called the *Homo Deus*. It relates a story of officials coming from the Soviet Union to study the United Kingdom and its systems. This was during Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost period. The story goes something like this.

The British hosts were taking the Soviet officials around London. They were showing them different things, such as the London School of Economics and the Stock Exchange. This one official was getting more and more puzzled by something as they were driving around London. He finally stops and says, "Listen, I have a very important question. We've been going back and forth across London for a whole day now and there's one thing I can't understand. Back in Moscow, our finest minds are working on the bread supply system, and yet there are still such long queues in every bakery and grocery store. Please, take me to the person who's in charge of the bread supply in London. I want to meet the person and learn the secret of how a city this big, this vibrant, ensures that its people have bread every day."

Of course, the British officials were puzzled. There was no such person. There was no one person in charge of something as important as the bread supply in London. The free market did that. To someone, especially at that period of time, especially in a system where the state controlled everything, that was inconceivable. How could one leave to chance something so important as feeding the people of a city? That is what the free market does. The free market takes care of the needs of people instantaneously. The invisible hand ensuring that people who have particular skills employ those skills to the benefit of everyone else.

We are all far more better off from the work of individual producers than that person alone, with the clothes we wear, the tools we have, the iPhones we have. Our lives are enriched by the free market, by people buying and selling goods freely. In a free market, there is no overarching, central plan for the whole. The larger outcome, plentiful, affordable goods, is ordered seemingly out of chaos, but it is free people pursuing their enterprising natures that

Government Orders

provides for our needs. This is why it is so imperative that we embrace those principles as our economy reopens.

Once the COVID-19 crisis has passed and we have had time to reflect, I am confident we will better appreciate the importance of freedom in building safe and resilient societies.

• (1355)

Freedom does not just give space for the creation of a great economy; freedom creates space for the emergence of a great society.

Let us remember that it was the Chinese regime's oppression of freedom that led it to silence the doctors who tried to raise the alarm about a terrifying new virus in Wuhan. It was the PRC's regime of oppression of freedom that led it to intimidate the brave few doctors who were raising the alarm, who felt obliged to warn the rest of the world. It was the Communist regime's oppression of freedom that led it to put pressure on the World Health Organization, to repeat that government's talking points and to undermine the global response to the pandemic.

Countries around the world must never forget the corrosive effect the PRC's oppression of its own people has had on the entire world. Hundreds of thousands of people have died terrible deaths, often-times without the comfort of their loved ones at their bedside. The actions of the PRC have made that worse. The global economy has imploded, with hundreds of millions of people losing their jobs and savings. I hope no one ever expresses admiration for China's basic dictatorship ever again. I trust that those who do have learned the gravity of their mistake.

There is no secret formula to human advancement. We have a choice right now. As history has proven time and again, freedom, liberty and democratic governments are the surest path to humans flourishing and prosperity.

Let us look at the things for which the current government was directly responsible.

It left the borders open and refused to put in travel restrictions. It was so slow putting in airport screening. Dozens of plane-loads of people coming from a highly infected area were met with normal operations at those airports.

Statements by Members

The government was in charge of the pandemic stockpile and what did it do? It dumped millions of pieces in a dumpster. We only know this because in my hometown of Regina someone who owned a dumpster company put a bid in to get the contract to dispose of millions of pieces of personal protective equipment.

The programs the government has put in place have major gaps and impediments to people being able to survive this pandemic economically. People who earn \$1 more than \$1,000 lose their entire CERB benefit. Small businesses are unable to access programs like the wage subsidy or rent relief program.

What is that proven formula? It is lowering taxes. It is leaving money in the economy where it will always do more good than in the hands of a government official. A dollar left in the hands of a hard-working taxpayer who earned it is always better spent than in the hands of a politician who taxed it.

It means getting rid of duplicate regulations. The government has so many brakes on the economy that serve no public policy interest. There is duplication at federal and provincial levels. We need to get government out of the way to allow for dynamic growth to return.

Part of that includes the impediments that the current government has put on the energy sector. The energy sector, prior to this pandemic, had \$25 billion worth of applications sitting on government desks. This is money that was not being put to good use. Those are investments that were hanging in the balance.

The government likes to talk a lot about the overall debt-to-GDP burden, but let us remember there is only one economy in Canada. Our shadow minister for finance had a great metaphor the other day. He was talking about how the government focused on the overall debt-to-GDP ratio, which has ballooned. Also, the economy is shrinking during this time, so that proportion is changing.

Then we have to add to that all the provincial, municipal, individual and corporate debt. If we think of the economy as a horse and everyone is saddling more debt on that horse trying to pull everything up the mountain, at a certain point it cannot, especially when we stop feeding the horse.

At least in the last downturn, in the great global recession of 2008, our government, the previous Conservative government, recognized that we needed to strengthen the economy, pulling the cart up the hill, and that we could do that by ensuring the energy sector was vibrant.

● (1400)

In fact, if one looks at the statistics it is astounding that since 2018, Canada's oil and gas production industry has directly paid almost \$240 billion to provincial governments and \$66 billion to Ottawa. In addition, its employees paid nearly \$54 billion in federal and provincial taxes.

According to Statistics Canada, the energy industry has provided \$65.9 billion in federal corporate taxes alone, more than banking, more than construction and more than real estate. That was our low-tax plan. We kept taxes low. We eliminated wasteful and duplicative regulations.

I see that it is almost two o'clock and we are going to start Statements by Members, so I will stop here and resume after Oral Questions because I still have some more great points about the benefits of freedom and the free market bringing Canada out of this economic difficulty.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the essential workers who have kept us safe and who are continuing to do so: the nurses, the long-term care home workers, the paramedics, doctors, social workers, the people who work in grocery stores, the people who clean, the waste collectors and so many others.

Too often their work is in the shadows and some of them are not receiving the financial compensation they deserve. By working to keep us safe, they are making tremendous sacrifices, and for that we are grateful. If this pandemic is teaching us one thing, it is the true meaning of what is essential: our families, our health, our friends and the well-being of our planet.

We are getting through this by taking care of each other, and essential workers embody the hope and confidence we need to build a better tomorrow for all. We thank them for their courage, tenacity and persistence. I invite all members to join me in expressing our sincere gratitude.

* * *

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are reading stories about people in Fleetwood—Port Kells who are stepping up to help in these challenging times. One is Mr. Baldev Bath, the owner of Basant Motors in our Fleetwood neighbourhood. Baldev has kept all of the staff on the payroll, but instead of keeping them in the showroom, he has them packaging food and delivering it to vulnerable people around the neighbourhood.

A lady in her eighties was incredibly grateful. One day not long ago she mentioned that she had no family close by and that all her friends were shut-ins like her. It had been a long time since she had been able to celebrate her birthday, which was coming up. Instead of a hamper, she asked for a birthday cake. Her wish was Baldev's command. He picked up a nice birthday cake, took it over and celebrated with her, of course, at a distance.

Since the moment he arrived in Canada, Baldev has been so grateful for what our country stands for. In these times, he and so many others have become what Canada stands for.

* * *

RENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the Liberals' rent relief program is open for applications, but thousands of commercial landlords across the country still refuse to consider applying for it.

There is Tami's landlord, a foreign property owner who does not care about the wellness clinic in my riding and other neighbouring businesses around it. There are Laura's landlords who do not want to see two consignment stores stay open in Edmonton and are not applying for CECRA. There is Andrea who is running We Help in my riding and who personally invested her own money to keep that not-for-profit afloat and has been having trouble getting her landlord to apply for CECRA. There is also Jane in Ottawa who billionaire landlord just cannot be bothered about the physical therapy clinic Jane is running.

These female entrepreneurs and many other businesses across the country are suffering. I hope the Liberals revamp CECRA fast so that tenants will finally get the relief they have long been awaiting.

* * *

[Translation]

GLENGARRY—PRESCOTT—RUSSELL

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the people of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for their excellent work and generosity during this pandemic. Many businesses have pivoted to producing personal protective equipment.

I want to thank Tulmar Safety Systems and Innovation Tools, whose employees have produced thousands of face shields. Many people have started making non-medical masks to help their neighbours and even patients in our hospitals.

● (1405)

[English]

Through the generosity of sponsors, Canada Sews and its volunteers have delivered over 100,000 face coverings. Here I give a special shout-out to Canada Sews Ontario East, many of whose volunteer sewers reside in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Together they have sewed thousands of face coverings. They have all been a helping hand for our community through this pandemic.

On behalf of the residents of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, I thank everyone who is making a difference in these challenging times.

* * *

[Translation]

NICHOLAS JOHNSON

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment today to acknowledge Nicholas

Statements by Members

Johnson, the first black valedictorian in the 274-year history of prestigious Princeton University. The 22-year-old Montrealer, who was born in Gaspé, has had tremendous success studying applied mathematics in the area of health care.

Mr. Johnson distinguished himself at an institution that is the alma mater of three American presidents and First Lady Michelle Obama, where Nobel laureates such as Toni Morrison have gone to teach. He distinguished himself at an institution whose past has not necessarily been very distinguished, given that its first nine presidents were slave owners.

As he prepares to give his valedictory address to the class of 2020 this Sunday, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to extend my sincere congratulations to Nicholas Johnson.

Mr. Johnson, you are a role model for young Quebeckers and young black people. We wish you every success as you continue your studies and all the best for the remarkable journey that lies ahead.

* * *

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, humanity is currently facing an enormous challenge. COVID-19 has affected each and every one of us, one way or another. In nearly every country around the world, seniors are the ones most affected by the pandemic. I would be remiss if I failed to mention this tragedy and how they have suffered.

[English]

During this pandemic we have also seen a rise in anti-Asian racism. It is shameful when someone shoves a 92-year-old man with dementia to the ground. When I saw this image captured on CCTV and presented on the news, it brought tears to my eyes. It is up to each of us to denounce racism and racist attacks.

We also cannot forget for one moment the sacrifices that our health care and front-line workers are making in putting themselves in danger every single day. The least we can do to honour them is behave responsibly, continue social distancing and not gather in crowds. We will overcome this pandemic if we all work together in reducing the spread.

* * *

KELOWNA—LAKE COUNTRY

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is almost two-and-a-half months since the pandemic was declared that changed all of our lives. It became an immediate crisis. On Friday, March 13, just after Parliament agreed to recess, flying home through four airports was unnerving and people were visibly panicked.

Statements by Members

I have received an unprecedented amount of correspondence from residents. We estimate that our little office received over 6,000 emails and phone calls just in the first few weeks: parents fearful, trying to get their adult children home from other countries; genuine health concerns; Service Canada's closing of its local offices; businesses and schools closing; and from many people trying to stockpile to plan for the worst and to look out for their families. I am so proud of how my incredible team came together to serve our constituents in Kelowna—Lake Country.

People tragically lost their lives and we learned how fragile our agriculture industry, supply chains and care for seniors are. We are now in the recovery phase with new challenges ahead, but I know that we can tackle them together.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to represent Pontiac in the House and to say how pleased and proud we are of our constituents, who are resilient and supportive of people and businesses affected by COVID-19 throughout the Outaouais and Canada.

[English]

Suddenly Canada and the world have changed forever. The COVID-19 era is one of extremes and it is one for the ages. There is the loneliness of loved ones in long-term care, the selflessness of our front-line care providers and the optimism of our cure-hunting medical and scientific researchers. The unity of our governments is what I most appreciate right now, with all parties working together, because we know that Canadians count on us.

I applaud all members for their hard work for their constituents, because together we are going to get past this. Together we are going to be in solidarity with one another.

* * *

● (1410)

TOGETHER, APART

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, during this pandemic many residents are facing challenges and hardship.

On May 21, I had an extraordinary time co-hosting the virtual concert “Together, Apart” through Facebook with my elected colleagues, MPP Stephen Blais and councillors Laura Dudas and Matthew Luloff. I especially wanted to give my thanks to our very own incredibly talented musicians and councillor Matt Luloff and his team for organizing the show and for bringing these talented artists together to take part in our virtual concert.

[Translation]

I hope that all those who attended enjoyed the show. The funds raised during this event went to the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre and the Ottawa-East Community Resource Centre. I would like to thank those two centres for their extraordinary work.

[English]

We were able to raise more than \$1,500. I very much want to thank the artists and our community in Orléans for their generosity.

* * *

[Translation]

BELLECHASSE—LES ETCHEMINS—LÉVIS

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the courage and resilience of all Canadians, especially those from Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins working in our shops, our businesses, our residences and our hospitals.

I especially want to acknowledge our seniors and those who take care of them, like Frédérick Aubert from Royal St-Henri, his family and his team who are doing remarkable work to combat the virus.

Of course I want to thank the members of my team for the tremendous work they do to help people. I want to thank Richard, Marie-Christine, Julie, Jade, François and Renée.

Finally, I have a message for young people. People call me to tell me that they are looking for young people to fill full-time positions. Young people need to take the chance to have an exceptional experience that they will be able to draw on their entire lives. They have to seize the opportunity to work full time. We will get through this together.

Summer is around the corner. Things are reopening, but everything will get better if we remain vigilant.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back home in Outremont and across the country, small businesses are facing unprecedented challenges. After closing temporarily, they are now preparing to reopen responsibly and safely. When I speak to business owners, what I hear is tenacity and resilience. They are making their contribution.

Our government stood up for our SMEs and will continue to support them.

[English]

The relaunch of our economy will depend on our ingenuity, on our Canadian innovation. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will partner with the private sector and our small businesses in order to build back better, build back stronger. It is the resilience and determination of Canadians that is allowing us to weather this storm carefully and it is that same resilience that will allow us to build a better, more dynamic, more modern, more environmentally conscious, more progressive and stronger economy of the future.

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during this pandemic, community groups, including shelters, food banks, small businesses and others, are facing shortages of resources.

These groups have confirmed what statistics have already suggested: women are facing unique challenges in this pandemic. Rates of domestic violence and abuse have increased; sectors of the economy with an overrepresentation of women, including the tourism and travel sectors and part-time work, have been shut down and laid off.

All parties recognize these challenges. However, many issues remain unaddressed: a critical lack of funding to support front-line agencies to combat sexual exploitation, human trafficking and domestic violence; the absence of a plan to address the impact that this pandemic has had on women in the economy; the failure to apply the GBA+ on all the COVID-19 programs; and, finally, the urgent need for a plan to ensure women can return to the labour force quickly.

The government needs to take immediate steps to resolve these issues to get Canada back on track, and I urge it to come back to Parliament.

* * *

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has sent shock waves around the globe.

The health, economic and social fallout is great, but in times of crisis, there is always reason for hope and optimism. It is often when our humanity shines through the most.

Across the country, Canadians have stepped up to do their part and stories of kindness and generosity abound. I want to thank all of Canada's front-line health care workers for their commitment to our health, all essential workers for helping to keep our country running and all Canadians who are following public health guidelines.

Just as Canadians have stepped up and come together, we as parliamentarians cannot back down. In this time of crisis, we cannot abandon the bedrock of our democracy. Parliament is essential and it is essential that Parliament's power be restored, that we have the ability to debate, scrutinize and pass legislation. We must uphold our parliamentary duties and focus on getting the best results for all Canadians.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

PALESTINE

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Israel has a new coalition government led by Benjamin Netanyahu, and it wants nothing less than to annex the

Statements by Members

Palestinian territories currently occupied by the military. This is a clear violation of international law.

We have a responsibility to the Palestinian people under a military occupation that was condemned in UN Security Council resolution 2334. We are disappointed in the Liberal government's silence on this issue. It cannot simply say that Canada will not recognize the annexation of these territories and that such an action would be damaging to the peace process or security in the region. Canada has a responsibility to condemn this. A number of countries, including the United Kingdom, Ireland and Norway, have already done so.

We cannot stand by while a country steals someone else's territory by force. We took action when Russia invaded Crimea. What is the government waiting for in this case? A violation of international law must have consequences, and Canada needs to set an example. Canada cannot remain silent on this violation of human rights.

* * *

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all staff working in Quebec's health care system. I want to thank all of the women and men who are dealing with the worst health crisis in a century.

I would also like to give a special shout-out to the nearly 800 personal support workers on the front lines caring for our seniors in Quebec's long-term care facilities. They put their lives on the line to take care of our seniors, even though some are not even citizens of Quebec or Canada. Our guardian angels are often asylum seekers and often from Haiti. Their contribution to our society has proven that they deserve their place in Quebec. That is why the Bloc Québécois is calling on the government to prioritize and fast-track their applications through the assessment process in light of the essential work these people are doing for Quebec day after day. We need them and we thank them from the bottom of our hearts for taking care of our parents and grandparents.

* * *

[English]

JENNIFER CASEY

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Forces Snowbirds have thrilled and united Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We have watched them fly over our cities, towns and villages as they fulfill Operation Inspiration.

Like many in Kamloops, I watched from my deck as the Snowbirds flew into town. Seeing the best of the best in flight brought on a smile and a sense of pride.

Oral Questions

Tragically, last Sunday, our joy and thrill turned to horror as the news of the crash quickly spread through the community and the country. I would be remiss not to mention the extraordinary efforts of the community of Brocklehurst whose residents sprang into action in spite of the horrors of what they had just witnessed. This included front-line workers from Kamloops Fire Rescue to the RCMP, BC Ambulance Service, YKA crash truck, airport authorities and military representatives.

We all share our grief over the tragic death of Captain Jennifer Casey, and watched with heavy hearts as she arrived home in Halifax yesterday. In reading stories and tributes to honour Captain Casey, people cannot help but be inspired by what she accomplished in such a short life. Our nation mourns her loss.

When we needed it most, Operation Inspiration brought hope to a country weary of the impact of COVID-19, and for that we will remain forever grateful.

* * *

EID

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in these extraordinary times to share the experience of Muslim Canadians this Eid.

Muslim Canadians just observed Ramadan and what a Ramadan it was. At a time where families and friends usually gather for food or prayer, unprecedented adjustments had to be made. What was heartwarming was that even when many adopted new ways to uphold their religious and social customs, people did not forget their obligations to each other.

Muslim organizations stepped up to help fellow neighbours. Mosques and groups like the Canadian Muslim Response Network, Islamic Relief Canada, IDRF, Muslim Welfare Centre, Naseeha, Penny Appeal, Smile, Nisa Homes and countless others mobilized volunteers and donors to offer support to vulnerable Canadians.

Today, Muslim Canadians are celebrating Eid with pride and optimism.

Whether we celebrated Easter, Passover, Vaisakhi, Eid or any other special occasion, Canadians displayed a strong sense of unity, regardless of our background. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. We will get through this pandemic together.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are letting down Canadian farm families. Not only are they imposing higher carbon taxes and failing to defend them against actions by the government in China, but now the agriculture minister is claiming that farmers who are upset about being let down during this crisis just do not understand the programs her government is putting forward. She claims that the \$252 million of reannounced money for farmers is good enough.

When will the Prime Minister put forward programs that actually work for farmers instead of telling them to be happy with what they got?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, farmers across the country support us every day in the way they are putting food on our table with reliable quality, and we need to continue to support them.

We announced more than \$77 million to support food processors during this crisis. To help cattle and hog producers, we launched a \$125-million national AgriRecovery initiative to help them adapt as they process less meat. We are also launching a surplus food purchase program, starting with a \$50-million fund to ensure that farmers are being compensated for their hard work. For dairy producers, we will work to increase the Canadian Dairy Commission's line of credit by \$200 million.

We will continue to be there for our farmers.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada used to have a history of principled leadership on the world stage. The Government of China has launched an unprecedented attack on the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. Now the government should go beyond statements and act in concert with our allies to show the Government of China that it must abide by its commitments.

Will the Prime Minister unequivocally condemn the actions of the PRC, and will he propose a real plan for supporting the people of Hong Kong and our allies around the world who have already started to be targeted by Chinese retribution?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has always been very clear in standing up for human rights around the world, including in regard to the Chinese government. We support the over 300,000 Canadians who live in Hong Kong and support all people of Hong Kong, to continue the one country, two systems rule, which has been in place in Hong Kong and China for a couple of decades now.

We will continue to stand up strongly for human rights on the world stage, working with our allies and holding others to account. We call for a de-escalation of tensions and for the Chinese government to listen to citizens in Hong Kong who have important things to say.

Oral Questions

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a concrete way that the Prime Minister can actually support the people of Hong Kong is to unequivocally condemn the actions of the communist regime in Beijing. It is the one violating the one country, two systems principle, and the Prime Minister is refusing to condemn those actions and refusing to propose any kind of plan to support our allies across the world.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Canada, under a Conservative government, led the world in promoting a series of coordinated economic and political measures that punished and isolated the Putin regime and sent a clear message that violations of international law would not be tolerated.

Will the Prime Minister condemn the actions of the PRC and propose a meaningful plan to support the people of Hong Kong?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have expressed in no uncertain terms our deep concern over the measures proposed by the People's Republic of China in regard to Hong Kong. We stand with the people in Hong Kong who believe that freedom of expression and freedom of assembly continue to be an essential part of their way of life.

We will continue to work with our allies all around the world to stand up for human rights, including in Hong Kong.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why is it so hard for the Prime Minister to condemn the actions of the communist government in China? The Prime Minister has let Canada get bullied and pushed around on the world stage. Two Canadians are being held illegally. The government of China put blocks on Canadian exports. All the while, the Prime Minister has done nothing.

Now the PRC is violating the one country, two systems policy and violating the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. What is he so afraid of? Why is it so hard to stand up to the PRC? Why does he continue with the policy of appeasement?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my job as Prime Minister is to stand up for Canadians. It is to be there to defend the rights of Canadians and to protect Canadians, both at home and abroad. That is why we have been unequivocal in our defence of the two Michaels arbitrarily detained in China; we have continued to work to resolve that situation.

We will continue to stand up for Canadians' rights, for Canadian interests, including those of agricultural producers and exporters. We will continue to defend Canadian interests everywhere around the world, including with China.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Prime Minister has actually done nothing to stand up for Canadians.

What did he do after two Canadians were held illegally by the PRC? He still wrote that cheque to the Asian infrastructure bank and still gave that institution Canadian taxpayers' money to help further the advancements of the foreign policy of China.

Here we are today, and he refuses to condemn these actions. These are actions that have been condemned by governments

around the world, by public policy institutions. Why is it so hard for him to just call this out for what it is, an abuse of the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we put out a very strong statement alongside the governments of the U.K. and Australia with our deep disagreement over the measures proposed by China for Hong Kong. We will continue to defend the rights of people in Hong Kong, particularly the 300,000 Canadians who live there. We continue to defend Canadian interests around the world, including in regard to China.

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[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has a rather unique economic fabric because, over the past decades, it has built an amazing structure of small and medium-sized businesses owned by Quebecers.

Today, that economic fabric is threatened by the pandemic and the weakening of businesses in Quebec, which are at risk of being bought by larger businesses that are often located abroad. That is a serious problem. Injections of \$100,000, \$200,000 or \$300,000 could save some of those businesses, but that money is going to go into the coffers of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Will the Prime Minister commit right here and now to reversing the Liberal Party's participation in the wage subsidy program?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we implemented a wage subsidy program to help businesses, NPOs and charitable organizations keep their employees during the pandemic. We know that workers from all sorts of organizations and businesses need to continue to pay their rent and buy groceries. That is why we put the subsidy in place for all organizations and businesses that need it. We need our economy and our country to make a full recovery following this pandemic.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all of Quebec is listening to the Prime Minister's answers, or lack thereof. Let's be serious. A program is for those in need. A super-wealthy political party that raked in nearly \$3 million in the first quarter is not in need.

Instead of letting cash go to the Liberal Party of Canada, can we keep that money for Quebec's small retailers, 30% to 50% of which are worried they may go bust, according to the chambers of commerce?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have introduced programs to help workers across Canada, including the Canada emergency response benefit, which is helping eight million Canadians across the country, and the wage subsidy, which is helping countless workers.

We have made investments to offer credit to small businesses. We are going to keep making sure that businesses and workers in need get adequate support during this crisis.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen that in this country Canadians have to make an impossible choice when they are sick. Without paid sick leave, they have to choose between going to work and potentially risking infecting their co-workers or staying at home and not knowing if they can pay their bills.

Will the Prime Minister commit to immediately putting in place a guarantee that all Canadians can receive paid sick leave?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree that nobody should have to choose between staying home with COVID-19 symptoms and being able to afford rent or groceries. That is why the government will continue discussions with the provinces without delay on ensuring that, as we enter the recovery phase of the pandemic, every worker in Canada who needs it has access to 10 days of paid sick leave a year. We will also consider other mechanisms for the longer term to support workers with sick leave. We thank the leader of the NDP and the entire NDP caucus for working with us on this issue.

• (1430)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for that response.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister promised to help Canadians living with disabilities. He made that promise weeks ago, but he has yet to follow through.

When will the Prime Minister provide support for people with disabilities?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that people living with disabilities are more vulnerable in the economic context created by COVID-19 and have additional costs to cover. We need to help them.

We have taken several measures, including establishing an advisory group that will help us meet the needs of this community. However, we know we need to do more, and we are going to do just that. In fact, we are currently working on mechanisms for helping Canadians with disabilities.

[English]

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear: The plan the Liberals are presenting on how members of Parliament can do their job in this place does not include a return to Parliament. The Liberals want a glorified committee with stunted duties and limited powers. It is a fake Parliament, which is not a surprise coming from the Liberals.

If the Prime Minister thinks it is okay for us to be here four days a week, face to face, in a glorified committee, why is it not okay for us to be here, as we are today, having real Parliament?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are here today, and we will be here four days a week, taking questions from the opposition, as we did the week before and the week before that. Instead of having a normal sitting, with an average of 190 questions, last week and the week before we had over 300 questions, because we consider the role of parliamentarians fundamental. The opposition needs to play a role. The government plays its role. That is how democracy works.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very happy to ask questions. It would appear the Prime Minister does not really like to answer them, but we are very happy to continue to ask those questions.

As we are preparing to come out of this pandemic, we have an economic recovery that we need to see. We could see a possible second wave of the pandemic. Is it not more important than ever that Parliament, with all of its powers, including opposition days, private members' business and the business that Parliament does, happens in this place, and not just this so-called glorified committee, which is really the Liberals trying to pass off a fake Parliament, which it is not?

Does the government believe that Parliament is essential?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is essential is for the opposition to be able to ask questions. It is essential that committees can work. For example, in recent weeks, we had 74 meetings of different committees, 580 witnesses and 23 appearances by ministers. This is crucial, because this is our democracy. We will always defend our democracy at the same time that we respect the directions by our health experts. We are here to answer questions, and we are pleased to answer those questions.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an extraordinary situation calls for extraordinary measures. In the context of the pandemic that has hit Canada, we understand and accept that the government has to inject billions of dollars and that this results in a deficit. The fact remains that we need to know where this is heading. On April 30, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated the deficit to be \$252 billion.

Today, 25 days later, can the government tell us how much the deficit will be?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House and my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent that we are going through an extraordinarily serious crisis. Millions of Canadians have lost their jobs and are worried for their health and that of their loved ones.

Although this is a period of uncertainty and concern, we are doing everything we can to reassure Canadians and help them get through this crisis.

• (1435)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with what the President of the Treasury Board said 100%, but he did not answer my question. The President of the Treasury Board is the best person here, aside from the Prime Minister, to answer the following question. What will Canada's deficit be? Twenty-five days ago, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said \$252 billion, which is enormous.

With 25 more days of spending behind us, what is Canada's deficit now?

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no Canadian should have to worry about paying the bills, additional child care or putting food on the table at this time. Canada had a strong fiscal position. Canada is ready and able to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. The time to act is now. We will be unwavering in our support to families, our health care system and our economy. We are in this together, and our government is prepared to use whatever means are necessary to keep our economy strong and stable.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even before COVID-19, Canadian farm families were struggling. Farm revenues fell by 45% in 2018, the largest drop in Canadian history. During the pandemic, the Liberals increase the carbon tax on farmers and do not offer any assistance for an essential industry. The situation is dire. Planting is down 25% and 30,000 farms are at risk of bankruptcy.

During a financial crisis, why do the Liberals feel the best life-line for Canadian farmers is an online calculator?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to remind the House that Canada already has a suite of risk management programs available. These risk management programs are enhanced by various other complementary programs. Taken together, the programs make \$1.6 billion available to farmers during ordinary times. That is why I keep saying that is what they should turn to first.

Even so, we will keep adding funds and launching programs. AgriRecovery is a great example of that. In past years, the program made \$15 million available, but we have put \$125 million into it already.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously does not understand how dire and desperate the situation is for Canadian farmers and agri-food businesses. Her response to farmers is that they just do not understand the programs. What programs: an online calculator and more debt? How out of touch can the Liberals possibly be? The business risk management programs were never designed for a global pandemic.

Instead of insulting farmers, why will the minister not listen to them and design a program they can actually use?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would never, ever insult farmers. I have way too much respect for the farmers I have been spending a lot of time with lately. They are the beating heart of my riding. I have enormous respect for farmers, and I know they know it.

We are improving our programs. Let me share an example. The Canada emergency business account was already set up for the agricultural sector, but we heard from a lot of people that many small businesses could not access it. That is why we broadened the criteria. As of now, the account is available to small farmers too, who can access \$670 million in direct transfers through it.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to see why the Liberal Party prefers not to have real question periods. The Prime Minister said that they are going to take the subsidy and keep it. He told fishers in eastern Quebec that he is going to keep the money that they need. He told small businesses in Beloeil and in the Papineau riding that he is keeping for himself a chunk of the money that they need. He told hotel operators that he is keeping the money and that they should consult a website where they will find out they are not entitled to the money. That is absurd.

Oral Questions

Could the Prime Minister show a modicum of common sense, rise and tell the House that the Liberal Party is forgoing the wage subsidy?

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada emergency wage subsidy is there to help workers through this time. Workers deserve that assistance so that they do not have to worry about putting food on the table or weathering this difficult time. We want to support all employers, which is why the wage subsidy is available whether it is a not-for-profit or for-profit business. This is to help Canadian workers through this very difficult time, and we are going to continue supporting Canadian workers through this period.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals raised almost \$3 million in the first few months of 2020, while the Conservatives raised \$4 million. They are rolling in cash. They can pay their staff, but they are asking families to chip in and pay them. Why? It is partisanship. They are asking Quebeckers who lost their jobs to pay party staff because they do not want to dip into their election funds.

I will ask my question. I have wanted to ask it for a long time.

Why is it so difficult for the Liberals to keep their hands out of the cookie jar?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think everyone agrees that COVID-19 has been very hard on Canadians. We have asked Canadians to do something extraordinary through this period to fight COVID-19, and workers are at the very heart of this. The Canada emergency wage subsidy is there to help our hard-working Canadians so that they can be supported during this difficult time. We are going to continue to do that. Irrespective of what sector, irrespective of what size an organization is, we are going to help Canadian workers.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what is cynical is that the Conservatives abolished public funding for political parties. When the Bloc introduced a bill to re-establish the funding, the Liberals voted against it. They voted against democratic and transparent funding for parties based on votes received. Today, both millionaire parties are blatantly helping themselves to taxpayers' money.

We should consider the merit of public funding for political parties. In the meantime, will the Prime Minister ask his party to repay the money?

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during this difficult period of COVID-19, I think all of us have something to be very proud of, which is that we have all worked together. We have

banded together as Canadians to help support our businesses, organizations and, most importantly, Canadians and Canadian workers so that they do not have to think about where they are going to get their next meal or how they are going to pay for the roofs over their heads.

During this difficult period, we are going to continue to support Canadians and workers, and that is what the wage subsidy is doing for Canadians.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more than two months ago, the finance minister promised the energy sector a very important thing. That is, he said that help was on the way, that it would be there within hours, possibly days. Well, it is two months later, and there is still no help. Loans were promised, but those are not able to be accessed. Businesses are shutting down, jobs are being lost and workers are unable to provide for their families. We are talking about death by delay for one of Canada's key industries.

My question is very simple. Where is the help?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the oil sector and its workers continue to be affected by COVID-19 and the global surge in oil supply. We have taken action to create jobs through the remediation of orphaned and abandoned wells, a program that has seen tens of thousands of applications in Alberta and Saskatchewan. We are supporting the sector as well with a 75% wage subsidy to keep Canadians working. We have also provided access through the BCAP and LEEFF programs, which provide loans to the oil sector. We are doing everything to help the oil and gas sector.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commercial rent assistance program is letting down small business. Chris, in my riding of Kelowna, has a small women's clothing store, and she has just been handed an eviction notice. Chris says she has been paying her rent consistently for the last 10 years and has paid her portion under this program. Her Vancouver landlord does not want to participate in the rent assistance program.

The Liberals have put all of the onus on the land owners and left the tenants at their mercy. How are the Liberals going to fix this flawed program so that small business owners like Chris are not forced to close?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that business and every small business across the country is at the very heart of the programs and the support that we have put out to help them. The application today has gone up so that landlords can apply to this. We urge landlords to apply to this and work with their small business tenants so that the small businesses can get the 75% rent relief. We know how important this expense is. That is why we have a program that we worked with provinces and territories to design, so that our small businesses can weather this difficult time.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, weeks after they were first announced, the Liberals' small business relief programs still need effective changes. The CEBA loans can only be accessed with a business chequing account. The wage subsidy excludes consultants and contractors, punishes owner-operators and discourages revenue growth. The commercial rent relief program, opened today, further strains landlord relations through its design. These programs need changes, and they need to be changed fast.

When will the government listen to distressed small business owners and improve its flawed programs?

• (1445)

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, right from the very beginning, members will see, and I think the hon. member agrees, that we have put programs out to support our small businesses, and we have adapted by listening to them. This is why over 630,000 small businesses have seen a loan of \$40,000, and thousands more will be helped. The Canada emergency wage subsidy is helping them keep their employees with the 75% assistance. The emergency rent program is also going to help them with that important operating cost. With measure after measure, we are completely focused on helping Canada's small businesses get through this difficult time.

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HEALTH

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the SARS outbreak triggered preparations for a new global threat: pandemic influenza. The Public Health Agency was established to provide a focal point for federal leadership in public health emergencies and there was a national emergency strategic stockpiling of pandemic response supplies, including personal protective equipment.

On top of the two million N95 masks that were sent to landfills in Regina, how many other pieces of personal protective equipment were thrown out when the Liberal government shut down and consolidated three of Canada's 11 emergency warehouses?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we have been working together with the provinces and territories to make sure we can keep Canadians, including those on the front lines, safe from contracting COVID-19. That includes working with them to ensure we can supplement their own stockpiles of PPE and medical equipment. We have been able to so far fulfill all requests from provinces and territories, and the national emergency stockpile is still meeting its 24-hour delivery

target. As we have said before, we will review the national emergency stockpile, but right now our response is making sure Canadians have the equipment they need.

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PRIVACY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Palantir is a surveillance giant that is notorious in the United States for its work with the CIA and for deporting migrants. Now it has been cutting itself in on the business of tracing and tracking COVID patients. Palantir's head honcho in Canada is David MacNaughton, the Prime Minister's personal friend. He has been bragging about all his meetings with top Liberals, but he is not even registered to lobby.

The Prime Minister gave our medical supply chain to Amazon. Is he going to give the private medical information of Canadian citizens to a company with such a dubious human rights record as Palantir?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have put in place a number of relationships with suppliers, domestic and international, to make sure Canada has the personal protective equipment it needs. In addition, we are working with the domestic industry to make sure we have contact tracing and other assistance ready to ensure we are protecting Canadians and to make sure we will be able to identify the virus as it spreads.

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many marginalized communities exist beyond the reach of government and established charitable programs. These communities often create their own networks of non-profits, as well as community responses. This is the case for many black and African Canadian organizations in my riding of Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel and across the country. Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development provide information as to how these organizations are being supported during this pandemic?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by wishing you and all Canadians from coast to coast to coast a very happy Africa Day.

Oral Questions

Charities have always been there for Canadians in times of need, and we will be there for them. That is why we are investing \$350 million in an emergency community support fund that includes those serving black-led and black-serving non-profit organizations. We are also moving forward on our \$25 million black community initiative to help build capacity and invest in infrastructure to better serve black Canadian community organizations.

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WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been facing unique challenges during this pandemic. We know that rates of domestic violence and sexual assault have increased. Women have lost their jobs in multiple sectors, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors, and many of these women work part time. At a time when we need it most, money has been cut from human trafficking by the current government.

The government is failing on all fronts. When will the government fix these gaps to ensure Canadian women are protected from the fallout of this crisis and make its programs work for all women?

• (1450)

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that women are disproportionately affected during COVID-19, which is why we have invested \$50 million to support women's shelters and sexual assault centres. For the women entrepreneurs across the country who are wearing so many hats right now during COVID-19, we are also helping to support the ecosystems supporting those women-led businesses and entrepreneurs so they can access the programs and be supported during this difficult time, and the work continues.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because of the Prime Minister's flawed policies, wives, husbands and children of Canadians are being denied entry to Canada and are turned back at the border. These families have been separated for two months now while the Liberals refuse to fix their mistake. What is worse, the Liberal member for Spadina—Fort York is telling people to contact their MP to try to find a way to get an exemption. Here is a better idea. Why do they not change the directive and fix the problem?

Bad Liberal policy is causing undue hardship. When will these mothers, fathers and children finally be reunited with their families?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure everyone in this House is aware, in response to the COVID crisis we have taken a number of extraordinary measures as to the border. While Canadian citizens and permanent residents are at all times admissible and are required to quarantine upon entry, foreign nationals are subject to additional travel restrictions.

For individuals to be eligible to travel to Canada, their travel must be considered essential, consistent with the emergency order.

It is not our intention, ever, to separate families. Each situation is decided on a case-by-case basis, based on the information made available to our border services officers.

We are working very closely with our provincial and territorial partners on the concern raised by the member opposite.

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HEALTH

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in January, instead of saving PPE for our health care workers, the health minister decided to ship it off to communist China. This just added to Beijing's growing stockpile. Now the Liberals are desperately trying to procure millions of masks. Where from? China. When they actually get a shipment, they are defective and cannot be used.

Can the minister guarantee that her lack in ensuring the availability of N95 masks in no way contributed to the 29-plus cases in our armed forces personnel who are supporting our seniors in their homes?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is slightly misguided in terms of her understanding of our PPE acquisitions. We have multiple supply chains operating domestically and internationally. We have published our numbers on our website.

We are planning for the short term and the long term, making sure we leave no stone unturned to provide Canadians and Canadian front-line health care workers with the PPE they need to get Canada through this pandemic and beyond.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the 1,700-plus troops who have put themselves in harm's way on the COVID-19 front lines and who keep working in our long-term care facilities. We have to make sure that they have enough training and high-quality PPE not only to care for our loved ones during this pandemic, but also to protect themselves. This is hazardous work. At least 29 members of the Canadian Armed Forces have become infected with COVID-19.

Will the government guarantee danger pay for each and every one of our troops who are serving in Operation Laser?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to join the member in thanking our Canadian Armed Forces for the extraordinary work they are doing in both Quebec and Ontario. They are saving Canadian lives. We have also made extraordinary efforts to ensure that they have access to the personal protective equipment and the training they need to be safe while doing their job, but, as the member indicated, a number of them have fallen ill from this illness.

We have had discussions with the general responsible and he assures us that every effort is being made to acknowledge, recognize and support the members who are doing that work, and that their pay reflects that.

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[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when a business sells a service but later cannot provide that service, the customer gets a refund. Air Canada and the other airlines need to understand that. It is even enshrined in Quebec law. More than 25,000 people have signed a petition calling on the airlines to refund cancelled tickets. The petitioners are angry, and rightly so. Others continue to join the group. Air Canada has already received \$800 million from the government, and now it wants more money from taxpayers to save its own skin.

Will the government send a clear message that the airline will not get any more assistance until it offers refunds to its customers?

• (1455)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly understand the frustration felt by people who would have preferred a refund. The situation is far from ideal. At the same time, it is important to understand that if all the airlines had to provide immediate refunds for all the cancelled flights, this would have a devastating impact at a time when the industry has lost 90% of its income. That is why the Canadian Transportation Agency proposed a solution involving a credit that is good for up to two years.

When this pandemic is over, we want to still have a viable airline industry that can resume operations.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is funny; last week, when I asked the minister of Transport a question about the Canadian Transportation Agency, he did not want to comment on a decision the agency had made. Maybe he does not know this, or maybe he does, but I want to remind him that in Europe and the United States, airlines are refunding passengers.

Take, for example, Air Canada, which is not on the brink of bankruptcy. It has \$6 billion in its accounts, and \$2.6 billion of that belongs to its passengers. It has enough money to tough it out for a year—not to mention that the government is allowing the airline to take advantage of the wage subsidy and has offered it \$800 million through EDC.

Will he finally make the airlines refund their customers?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what my colleague said, the situation in Europe and the United States is not as clear-cut as he is claiming today.

This situation is very difficult for all airlines. The Canadian Transportation Agency is a quasi-judicial agency that is responsible for consumers. It made that very difficult decision, which is not mandatory. It is recommending vouchers that would be valid for two years.

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OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the role of the Auditor General is very important to Canadians. An auditor general provides information based on facts and expert advice on government programs and activities. Never before has an auditor general said that his or her budget was insufficient because of the increased workload caused by the additional audits required to review the Liberal government's out-of-control spending.

When will the minister fully fund the Auditor General's budget?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

First, his question gives me the opportunity to congratulate the new Auditor General. Second, it gives me an opportunity to assure her of our full co-operation. Third, it gives me the opportunity to remind all members of the House of the importance of the Auditor General, access to information, follow-up measures and analyses, particularly in a context as difficult as that of COVID-19. In closing, I want to assure the member that we will take note of all the information and recommendations that the Auditor General would like to share with us.

[English]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite honestly, the answer says, "We are going to look at it, but we are not necessarily going to do it."

No auditor general has ever had to cut audits under any prime minister until now. The government should be ashamed of that. We know that Liberals are not fans of auditors general. Who could forget when Sheila Fraser blew the whistle on the Liberal sponsorship scandal?

It is clear that the work of the Auditor General is critical to the functioning of our democracy. When will the government give the Office of the Auditor General the money it needs to audit Liberal spending?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that allows me to say in English what I said briefly in French, which is that we are congratulating a new Auditor General. We are fully supportive of her important role.

Oral Questions

However, there is something that the member unfortunately said incorrectly. The member may remember that what happened in terms of cuts was previous to 2015, when indeed the former government cut the budget of the Auditor General. We increased it in 2018.

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• (1500)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well aware that the Prime Minister and his government have a troubled relationship with transparency. Now Canada's Information Commissioner is calling the limitations departments face to fill access to information requests "ridiculous".

Information requests have ground to a halt. A pandemic is not really an excuse to hide information from Canadians. If anything, it is a reason to be more transparent. When will the Liberals restart the processing of access to information requests?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I want to tell him that I had the opportunity to speak with the Information Commissioner of Canada several times. We agreed on the importance of information in general and particularly during this time of crisis.

In the current context, Canadians sometimes need to be informed, guided and reassured. We are aware of the professional and personal challenges that public servants are facing. We are working extremely hard with the public service to ensure that all Canadians have access to the information that they need.

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[*English*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that indigenous people who live off reserve in urban centres often face very different and unique challenges. I would like to ask the Minister of Indigenous Services what the government is doing to help indigenous people who live off reserve during this time of pandemic.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indigenous people living in urban centres do indeed face a unique set of needs and challenges. We heard loud and clear that more support would be needed for indigenous organizations working and operating in urban centres. That is why last week's announcement by the Prime Minister of an additional \$75 million for organizations supporting first nations, Inuit and Métis living and working in urban areas off reserve marks a fivefold increase in that initial funding.

This new funding will support indigenous community-based solutions that address critical needs during this crisis to fight COVID-19 and to serve indigenous populations living off reserve, principally in urban areas.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Prime Minister has set his sights on law-abiding firearms owners. With the stroke of a pen, the Liberal ban takes firearms out of the hands of law-abiding hunters, sport shooters and farmers while doing nothing to tackle crime. The buyback program is a colossal waste of taxpayer dollars. That is money that would be better spent on fighting gangs and stopping gun smuggling operations.

When will the government stop punishing law-abiding firearms owners and crack down on criminals?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by repeating that the weapons we have prohibited are not weapons for hunting and sport shooting, but rather weapons that were designed for soldiers to kill other soldiers in combat.

I am interested in the member opposite's comments about support for the police and their gun and gang investigations. When we brought forward a program with \$347 million to support those investigations, the member opposite's party voted against it. When we brought forward measures to strengthen our border response with additional officers, technologies and resources, once again that party voted against it.

We will be bringing forward strong new gun control legislation, and I look forward to the support from the member who now seems concerned about gun violence in our communities.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada already has one of the most restrictive gun registration and control systems in the world. However, in the midst of a pandemic, the Liberals are going after law-abiding gun owners, including hunters and sport shooters, instead of tackling the source of the problem, namely criminal street gangs and illegal arms trafficking, as the friends of the former public safety minister say.

Why does the minister not tackle the real problem head-on instead of harassing law-abiding Canadians and a recreation and tourism sector that needs support, not a kick in the pants from the government?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, to be very clear, I have nothing but respect for law-abiding hunters and farmers in this country and for people engaged in sport shooting. We know that many of the firearms that end up on our streets are smuggled across the border, but a very significant number of the people using these guns for crimes are also getting their guns in Canada. Those guns are often stolen from lawful gun owners, and tragically some are also diverted by people who buy them legally and then sell them illegally.

We are going to bring in stronger gun control legislation after many Conservative efforts to weaken gun control legislation. We are also going to invest in law enforcement and bring in new authorities with respect to the border, with respect to theft and with respect to the diversion of guns into the hands of criminals.

* * *

● (1505)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' secret deal with a handful of hereditary chiefs has split the Wet'suwet'en community. The situation has become so dire, indigenous leaders are now calling for the resignation of the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Knowing full well that the Wet'suwet'en had not been properly consulted, knowing there were governance challenges within the community, and hearing the call of elected chiefs to delay, not cancel, the announcement, why did the minister circumvent the Wet'suwet'en people and abandon her duty to consult?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, the memorandum of understanding establishes a path forward for subsequent discussions toward final agreements describing future governance and implementation of the Wet'suwet'en rights and titles. This is not an agreement on the implementation and crystallization of those rights, but a shared commitment to begin that work.

Once reached, any such agreement would be taken back to all Wet'suwet'en people for approval through a process that must clearly demonstrate the consent of the members of that nation.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question regards the plan the government has in place to support families struggling because of COVID-19. Across the country families, and especially parents with children, have had to deal with the challenges that arise from uncertainty about the future. I have heard from many parents in my riding who are in need of additional support.

My question is for the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. Could he inform us of any specific action the government has taken to directly support parents with children during this difficult time?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a really important question.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed immense pressure on Canadian families. That is why we made the decision as a government to increase the May payment under the Canada child benefit.

I am happy to announce to the House that last week millions of Canadian parents received an additional \$300 per child under the Canada child benefit. In addition to that, in July, we will be increasing the Canada child benefit once again to take into consideration the increase in the cost of living.

As long as parents are facing these pressures, our government will be there for them and will take care of them.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of organizations across the country, including Climate Action Network Canada, have sent a clear message: Things cannot go back to normal after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NDP has consistently advocated for major investments, including investments in public transit. We need a just recovery, one that confronts the climate emergency and inequality in this country. There is no question of going backwards. We need a green new deal.

Will this government commit to building a greener, more just society for all?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a time when we are contending with the greatest global challenge in modern history, the COVID-19 pandemic, we are doing everything we can to help the vast majority of Canadians.

That being said, we know that there is another global challenge, namely the environment. We are not losing sight of the importance of continuing to defend the environment, because we are committed to doing our part in a responsible way.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, municipalities are the decision-making level that is closest to the people that we serve. They are key to maintaining safe communities and ensuring essential services for one's quality of life. However, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities sounded the alarm more than a month ago. The pandemic is pushing municipalities to the brink of financial crisis. Critical services are at risk.

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Could the minister confirm if and when municipalities across this country will receive emergency federal support to face the impact of this pandemic? When will they be given the means to recover and rebuild?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for mentioning the important role of municipalities not only in the current crisis but, of course, when we exit from it. Municipalities have the responsibilities, and they need the tools to reinvest in our communities. We will be there to help them, of course always in collaboration and with the full support of provinces and territories.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you will find unanimous consent of the House to adopt the following motion: that this House recognize the contribution of hundreds of essential workers, particularly in the health care sector, in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, who are asylum seekers, and call on the government to work with the Government of Quebec in order to quickly regularize their immigration status as well as that of their family in recognition of the work done during the current health crisis.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Jean on a point of order.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I seek the consent of the House to move the following motion: that this House recognize the contribution of hundreds of essential workers, particularly in the health care sector, in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, who are asylum seekers, and call on the government to work with the Government of Quebec and the rest of Canada in order to prioritize and fast-track their file as well as that of their family in recognition of the work done during the current health crisis.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 24 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, April 20, the House will now proceed to the putting of the question, without debate or amendment, on the motion to ratify the appointment of Karen Hogan for the position of Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That, in accordance with subsection 3(1) of the Auditor General Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. A-17, and pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, this House approve the appointment of Karen Hogan as Auditor General of Canada for a term of 10 years.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, since the House just approved the motion for a permanent Auditor General, I hope that in that spirit I will get unanimous consent for the following motion: That the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to audit all federal programs associated with Canada's COVID-19 response and to complete all previously scheduled audits and all audits requested by the House; and call on the government to provide the Office of the Auditor General all the funding it needs to carry out these audits and any other work it deems appropriate.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I know question period is over, but there are a lot of discussions going on behind the scenes as to how the House will operate in the next few days. I would be happy to amend my motion if the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader could tell us exactly which part of it he disagreed with.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I will let the parties work on that outside the chamber.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, presented on Wednesday, March 11, 2020, be concurred in.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

It is critically important that we have this opportunity to discuss the horrific developments taking place in Hong Kong as we speak. However, before I get into the substance of my remarks, I would like to address a few words directly to the Chinese-Canadian community.

May is Asian Heritage Month, an opportunity to celebrate the rich contributions of Canadians of Asian origin. During this pandemic, we have seen how Asian community organizations and indeed a broad range of cultural organizations have stepped up to support people within and outside their communities. I want to particularly thank Friends of Hong Kong Edmonton for delivering a large quantity of masks to my constituency.

Asian Canadians were among the first to call for a stronger response to this pandemic. We should have listened. In the midst of important and necessary conversations about holding the Chinese government and specifically the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP, accountable for this global outbreak, some Asian Canadians are feeling pressure associated with increasing racism and even hate crimes. Some have tried to use this pandemic as an excuse to justify anti-Asian racism. Others have tried to use this racism as an excuse to demand that we dial back criticism of the CCP. Extremists on both sides, xenophobes on the one hand and CCP apologists on the other, seek to falsely conflate the oppressive political structures in China with Chinese people, culture and values. These two seemingly opposite evils, xenophobia and CCP support, can have a common intellectual root: the effort to associate Chinese people, culture and values with the political system of their oppressors.

Unfortunately, Dominic Barton, the Prime Minister's hand-picked ambassador to China, gave credence to this false conflation when he told the special committee on Canada-China Relations, "They place an importance on the values of collectivism and harmony, owing to a Confucian heritage. Understanding the extent to which China values unity and the needs of society at large, rather than freedom of individual choice...we just have to understand that."

Ambassador Barton is wrong. He is wrong about Confucius, wrong about China and wrong about Chinese people. As an alternative to this distorted frame, we must advance a decoupling of these ideas, a recognition that Marxism's dehumanizing materialism is deeply alien to China's rich and ancient traditions of personal responsibility, reverence for beauty, continuity with the past and respect for the non-material aspects of life.

It is no contradiction, and in fact it is quite a natural combination, to love China and hate communism. Chinese people desire freedom at least as much as the rest of us. Former British prime minister Tony Blair said it best when he said, "Anywhere, anytime ordinary people are given the chance to choose, the choice is the same: freedom, not tyranny; democracy, not dictatorship; the rule of law, not the rule of the secret police." We know in the particular case of the Chinese people that this is true, not just through general reasoning or abstract philosophy, but through the direct observation of events, including events in Hong Kong.

Last week, the member for Steveston—Richmond East and I co-hosted a webinar with leading figures in Hong Kong's democracy movement, under the title *Why Hong Kong Matters*. That is a good

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question for us to consider: What exactly is the particular importance of Hong Kong?

During the webinar, we discussed Hong Kong's commercial significance, both to China and to the rest of the world, and how efforts by the CCP to undermine its unique legal status will damage China's economy. We discussed how the new law imposed by the CPP violates China's international commitments under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. We discussed our obligations to defend human rights and our particular obligations toward the many Canadian citizens living in Hong Kong.

However, all these critical points undersell the most important answer to the question. Why does Hong Kong matter? It matters because Hong Kong provides the key to the whole world in terms of the challenges and conflicts that now confront us in the 21st century. It is because we have a competition between two irreconcilable political systems, between, on the one hand, the freest societies in human history, and on the other hand, the most serious attempt in human history to turn George Orwell's *1984* technology-enabled dystopia into reality. The 21st century will provide the world with an emerging choice between these two options, with both seeing themselves as the culmination of our social and technological evolution.

Why does Hong Kong hold the key?

Hong Kongers have given so much to defend their freedoms, not only because those freedoms were promised in the Sino-British Joint Declaration, but also because these freedoms accord deeply with China's own history, culture and values. Hong Kong is no less Chinese than the mainland, no less informed by China's Confucian heritage, yet its people love their freedom with an electrifying and inspiring passion. Just like the brave protesters killed in the Tiananmen Square massacre, just like the people of Taiwan, just like the members of China's rapidly growing faith communities, these are Chinese women and men who love and defend their freedom.

● (1520)

When extremists on both sides of the spectrum try to conflate China with the darkness of communism, the reality of Hong Kong and its defence of its freedom shines its beacon of light to prove them wrong.

The CCP is trying to use this pandemic, a pandemic of its own making, to snuff out Hong Kong's light and to suppress this great city, and thus to hide the desire of Hong Kongers, and of all Chinese people, to be free. The CCP understands why Hong Kong matters and so must we.

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Today, we are considering a motion of the special committee on Canada-China relations, moved by the member for New Brunswick Southwest, objecting to the arrest of pro-democracy leaders in Hong Kong. The shocking arbitrary arrest of heroes of freedom and democracy appears now to have marked the beginning of a coordinated plan to end the effective meaning of the “one country, two systems” concept and replace it with direct rule from Beijing in the name of so-called national security.

Hong Kong's political system, though characterized by relative economic and personal freedom, is not a proper democracy. The presence in its legislature of representatives of so-called functional constituencies distorts results and limits popular control of the territory's government. These problems have led to growing calls for proper universal suffrage democracy, calls which I strongly support but which Liberal ministers in Canada have failed to support.

Hong Kong's undemocratic government has attempted to advance various security-related laws which would dramatically undermine Hong Kong's freedoms. These attempts have always been met by strong opposition. The latest protest movement, sparked by a proposed extradition law, expanded into a strong and sustained call for real democracy. In the midst of these protests, the Hong Kong government withdrew the extradition bill and pro-democracy parties won a historic victory in local elections.

In the face of opposition in the territory to their draconian plans, the government in Beijing now intends to eliminate even the pretense of respecting local decision-making by putting in place new sweeping security measures without even consulting Hong Kong's compromised institutions. These new measures imposed by Beijing contain no limitations on the ability of the CCP to invoke national security as an excuse to pursue whatever arbitrary measures it wants. This new law imposes a de facto single system on the whole of China decisively ending Hong Kong's freedom.

A recent article in Chinese state media openly declares that Jimmy Lai could be prosecuted for pro-democracy tweets under this new security law. It is making up crimes in order to prosecute those who it has already arrested. These measures are bad for China, bad for its economy and bad for its international reputation. However, the CCP has always shown that it is willing to put its desire for control ahead of the national interest and ahead of the people of China.

The CCP believes that any case in which Chinese people live in freedom is a threat to its system's survival because freedom is more contagious than any virus. When people have it, they do not want to give it up. When they see others have it, they want to get it themselves. Hong Kong reminds us that China, in all its beauty and complexity, is made up of women and men who desire and who deserve freedom, who stood in front of tanks because they did not want to live in a basic dictatorship.

The Canadian government in response to these events thus far has lacked the strength and moral clarity that is needed. Our foreign affairs minister chose to take a wait-and-see approach, while the Prime Minister simply called for de-escalation of tensions and genuine dialogue. It is disgraceful that we have such a mealy-mouthed response from the government on a clear-cut moral issue, which also involves the violation of international law. One wonders if after reading about the American civil rights movement, the Prime Min-

ister reflected that what was really needed was just de-escalation of tensions.

There is no honour in trying to play the disinterested and neutral broker between the oppressor and the oppressed. There is only honour in championing the cause of the oppressed and working to advance the cause of justice.

That is what Canada did after Putin's invasion of Ukraine. We drove an international consensus which isolated the Kremlin, punished it for its actions and supported the Ukrainian people. We used a combination of economic and political measures to support victims of violence and to deter future aggression. A government with a principled foreign policy would be doing the same today.

In the last five years, we have seen a rapid slide away from principled foreign policy leadership to a policy of accommodation and appeasement that betrays our fundamental values and prioritizes the interests of a few well-connected companies and UN Security Council politics over questions of human rights and fundamental justice.

In the absence of government leadership, we have and we must continue to use the tools of this minority Parliament to compel the government to do better. We need to resume meetings of the special committee on Canada-China relations as soon as possible. The government opposed the creation of that committee, but all opposition parties stood together to advance what was right. In this perilous time for Hong Kong, and for the whole world, we must do so again.

● (1525)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before Canada was even a nation, people of Chinese heritage called Canada home. Anything that has an impact in China obviously is an issue that concerns Canadians of not only Chinese heritage but Canadians as a whole. This government has addressed, and continues to address, the many issues in that special relationship between Canada and China.

Today people will die because of the coronavirus. We are fighting an epidemic. Governments of all levels are coming to the table wanting to see strong leadership on this file. Today, prior to the member standing, his own leader was talking about the importance of Parliament in relation to, in good part, the coronavirus.

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Why would the Conservatives feel that today would be the best opportunity to bring up this issue when there are other means to do so? We are debating the House rules and trying to figure out the best place to ultimately land, in particular, on the motion before us today, which the member is preventing us from debating because he has introduced this report.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, that is a bizarre and disgraceful intervention from that member. This is the motions rubric. This is when we put forward motions to concur in committee reports, which is exactly what I did, according to the parliamentary rules. The member should know better.

His insinuation is that we should not be talking about what is happening in Hong Kong right now, the urgent human rights and international law situation that is under way. I think Canadians want our Parliament to be here, active and engaged with all of the issues, including the attempt by authoritarian powers all over the world to use and abuse the coronavirus as an excuse to abuse fundamental human rights. We see this happening in every corner of the world.

Because of COVID-19, authoritarian governments are using this moment to crack down on fundamental human rights and hope that we do not notice. The Conservatives refuse to notice. We will pay attention and we will hold them accountable whether the government comes with us or not.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of very simple questions for my colleague.

I thought he made a very eloquent point about how human beings yearn for freedom. They undergo great risk to achieve that freedom.

We all remember, at least those of us who grew up as the Iron Curtain was falling, the footage of people jubilantly celebrating the end of the separation between East and West Berlin. It was remarked at the time that for the decades that wall stood, no one was ever shot trying to jump into East Berlin. No one has ever paddled a raft to get to Cuba. Human beings will go through tremendous hardship to get that freedom, and Hong Kong people had it. They had it for 100 years or more and now it is being taken away by the PRC.

First, would my colleague agree that the hopes of reform under the previous Chinese governments have dissipated? Ten or 15 years ago the western world was very hopeful that China might be embracing these types of reforms.

Second, was he as dismayed as I was that the Prime Minister, during question period today, refused to condemn the actions of the PRC?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his leadership on this issue. I will go in reverse order through his questions.

Yes, I was dismayed, but not surprised. We raised these issues last week when the government initially made its statements and we raised these issues on the weekend. However, the government has refused to condemn this abusive international law of fundamental human rights. It was not a surprise question from the Leader of the

Opposition, and yet the Prime Minister was still unwilling to condemn these terrible actions.

The member is right to point out that we see a hardening of the system under Xi Jinping. There were maybe hopes for the possibility of gradual reform and maybe those hopes were misplaced, maybe they were too optimistic, but well-intentioned people hoped that some reform was possible. However, it is clear that under Xi Jinping things are moving dramatically in the opposite direction.

Finally, the member spoke well about the great error of this cultural argument for authoritarianism. There are some, the moral relativists, who want to use this cultural argument to justify authoritarianism. It is always wrong, because the people of any of these countries that are under authoritarianism always want freedom.

● (1530)

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Chinese people are kind and gentle people with a deep respect for family, tradition, faith and caring for the elderly. These are among the many fine qualities of their character, but they are an oppressed people, oppressed by the Chinese People's Party's communist regime in Beijing.

I make this important distinction up front. While I will be speaking today about the many alarming human rights violations committed by the Chinese Communist Party, this should never ever be mistaken for criticism of Chinese people and the many hard-working Canadians of Chinese ethnicity in my home town and across the country. It is the regime they suffer under.

Canadians have become keenly aware and increasingly concerned by the actions of the Chinese communist regime. Today, it is probably the issue I hear most from my constituents. That is why the House voted in December to strike a Special Committee on Canada-China Relations on a motion from my colleague, the hon. member for Durham. This committee has done good work. I would like to acknowledge the work of members of all parties toward the report of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations.

I want to draw the House's attention to the abysmal human rights record of the Chinese communist regime by touching on five examples. Each could be a speech unto its own. However, these five examples underscore the long, consistent and deliberate pattern of the CCP in flouting any acceptable international standards of human rights. Simply put, the Chinese Communist Party, particularly under Xi Jinping, is a ruthless, totalitarian regime that tightly controls its people and inflicts brutal oppression on its ethnic and religious minorities.

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First is the Uighur Muslim minority in China. While reports of numbers vary from 1.5 to 3 million who have been detained in re-education camps by the CCP, that is one out of every 10 Uighurs in China. The accounts of life in the camps range from brainwashing to forced labour to inhumane cruelty. The very notion of concentration camps in our day should be reprehensible. How can the world turn a blind eye? During the recent coronavirus outbreak in China, the Chinese Communist Party kept the Uighurs locked up, risking certain widespread virus outbreaks and death in the very camps. Do we even have the full story on this yet?

Maybe the longest persecution of an ethnic and religious minority by the CCP are Tibetans. I have spoken on this in this chamber and at the subcommittee on international human rights for as long as I have been elected. Again, Tibetans have a long, proud history, one that the CCP regime does not recognize and has done its best to crush. They are an impediment to the regime's goals. As a result, the CCP brutally cracks down on any behaviour that it believes promotes Tibetan culture. So brutal are its measures, that Tibetans are self-immolating in protest of the regime. It is reported that since 2009, 128 men and 28 women have set themselves on fire to protest this regime.

What have we become, that we do not shout from the rooftops and take sanctioning measures against the perpetrators of these heinous human rights violations that are so abhorrent, people will set themselves on fire?

Christians are another favourite target of the officially-atheist Communist Party. Why? Because any organized group of people is a threat to the iron grip the CCP has and wants to maintain over its citizenry. Under Xi Xi Jinping, that grip has grown even tighter. Churches are being closed, pastors are being jailed at an alarming rate and there are ever-increasing random arrests and questioning by state police.

A fourth human rights abuse is the plight of the practitioners of Falun Gong, a peaceful ancient spiritual practice. Those who practise Falun Gong in China face harsh persecution at the hands of the CCP and its police forces. If arbitrary arrests, forced labour and torture were not enough, we have had witness testimony at the subcommittee on international human rights of organ harvesting. Our former distinguished colleagues, the Hon. David Kilgour, as well as well-know human rights lawyer, David Matas, have given compelling evidence repeatedly on this practice by the CCP. Let us think about that: detaining Falun Gong, imprisoning them arbitrarily, torturing them to death and then harvesting their organs for sale.

• (1535)

The fifth point I would like to make is about the CCP's treatment of its own people. Even the Han Chinese, the majority of the Chinese people, live under a totalitarian regime that tightly controls everything: the Internet, the content of their conversations, the education system, everything. There is no freedom of the press. There is no freedom of religion. There is no consistent rule of law. All that is needed to be arrested is trumped up charges. The police answer only to the Chinese Communist Party apparatus.

Since Tiananmen Square in 1989, political prisoners have been detained or have disappeared at an alarming rate. Xi Jinping has extended the crackdown on dissidents and has targeted lawyers, jour-

nalists, bloggers and women's and minority advocates, from house arrest to jail time, to those who are detained and then never heard of again.

Even in plain sight, the Chinese Communist Party regime in Beijing cares little for its own people. I was struck by a heart-wrenching story of a father whose disabled son died of starvation while he was in quarantine over the coronavirus. It is but one example of that heartless regime.

In addition to these five examples of flagrant human rights abuses by the Chinese Communist Party, we have recent and direct cause for concern as Canadians. As has been noted, two Canadians, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, have been held in Chinese prisons for more than a year with the lights turned on 24-7. Moreover, the CCP has consistently weaponized its trade with Canada and other countries, consistently bullied countries in its own hemisphere and manipulated others like the DRC and Burma. It is no wonder that more and more I am hearing from Canadians who are fed up with how Canada is being treated by the CCP. They have every right to be outraged.

All that I have talked about for the last number of minutes brings me to this point. The Chinese Communist Party has a long history of persecution and cracking down on dissent. That is why the developments in Hong Kong, really since the one country, two systems agreement was signed but now at a boiling point this week, have to be of major concern to us. My colleague, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, has already spoken eloquently about this. While the world has been preoccupied by COVID-19, China has been cracking down on Hong Kong, hoping no one will notice. On Friday, the National Congress of the Communist Party of China unilaterally instituted a national security law on Hong Kong. In response, thousands upon thousands of Hong Kongers took to the streets this week in a protest amid COVID-19. Under the watchful eye of the police, they risked everything. We are witnessing the end of the one country, two systems agreement. We are witnessing the end of Hong Kong.

The response from the Liberal government has been acquiescence and naïveté. Canada must do more than just hope for dialogue; we have a duty to the 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong. We have a duty to the 554 fallen Canadians whose blood was spilled in defence of Hong Kong against the Japanese army in December 1941. They fought against overwhelming odds. There are 283 Canadians from that battle who remain in the Sai Wan War Cemetery. We have a duty to them. We are a leading democracy in the world. We stand up for human rights, democracy and freedom. What have we become? How can Canada just stand by? On behalf of 300,000 Canadians, out of respect for the Canadian blood that has been spilled in Hong Kong, and for all those who believe in human rights and freedom, having not forgotten how the CCP, under Xi Jinping, has treated Uighurs, Tibetans, minority Christians, practitioners of Falun Gong and self-respecting democracies around the world, we must act now.

I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following: “the First Report of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, presented on March 11, 2020, be not now concurred in, but that it be recommitted to the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations with instruction

(a) to amend the same so as to make recommendations reflecting a broader assessment of the evolving situation facing pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong; and

(b) to meet within one week of the adoption of this order in order to consider this matter, provided that, if the House stands adjourned at the time the committee meets and certain standing committees have been empowered to meet by video or teleconference during that adjournment period, the shared and relevant provisions applying to those standing committees shall also apply to the committee and during the same timeframe, the committee may continue to meet for the same from time to time.”

• (1540)

The Speaker: The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my friend across the way will recall, when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, Canadians got to witness his travel to China. When he came back, I know there was a lot of attention given to the fact that he was able to acquire panda bears to visit for a while, but he was also able to do reach trade agreements that were signed off on, from what I understand. Those agreements, no doubt, took a lot of dialogue.

Can my friend from across the way indicate to the House, and through the House to Canadians, how the former prime minister, Stephen Harper, conveyed a type of messaging at that time unlike what the Conservatives are saying today about China? Would he not agree that at times in very difficult situations, strong leaders will come to the table and try to work things through the best way they can, much like what Stephen Harper did when he was the prime minister?

• (1545)

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member in his eloquence really juxtaposes the profound difference between the

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two parties and how we should deal with the Chinese Communist Party. We are not dealing with panda bears here. We are dealing with human lives. We are dealing with lives who have been persecuted all over China themselves.

Now we are dealing with lives on the brink in Hong Kong where the Chinese regime is now turning over an agreement that it promised to abide by some decades ago and is taking over, as it does on its own soil, as a ham-fisted communist regime that wants to take away the freedom and democracy that Hong Kongers have enjoyed. Frankly, the Canadian Forces, back in the 1940s, paid with their own blood for that freedom, human rights and democracy in Hong Kong.

I am never going to retract any statement in regard to speaking directly to the issue. I think for too long we have soft-peddled the CCP. They have weaponized their trade with us. The member was talking about trade agreements. Too often they have tried to punish us by saying no to our pork and saying no to our canola whenever we do not appease them. Enough is enough. It is time to have a whole new adult conversation about how we deal with this Chinese regime.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which I found very interesting.

Obviously, every democracy embraces the concept of liberty and its value. I was pleased to hear him talk about not only the protests in Hong Kong, but also the plight of Tibetans and Uighurs, who are being oppressed by the government in Beijing. However, given how we embrace the idea of liberty and human rights, I would like to hear his thoughts on the rights of the Palestinian people, who have been under military occupation for decades now.

What does he think of the Palestinian people’s right to dignity and liberty?

[*English*]

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, all the member has to do is check the record for what I have said in regard to Israelis and Palestinians and the continuing conflict by the Palestinian regimes that subjugate their people. The corruption of Palestinian Authority has been proven over and over again. Hamas is a recognized terrorist organization.

We hope that individual Palestinians of good will who want freedom will one day see their freedom observed. Of course, we continually defend the rights of Israelis to safety and security and their own democracy in Israel.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to note that during the excellent speech by the member, who is well known as a champion of human rights, I heard some members heckling about the “second coming” in response to the last question. I certainly hope a member’s personal faith would not be used as a basis for insulting heckles during an important debate in a conversation like this, so I expect members of the NDP in particular could do better in terms of decorum and respect.

Routine Proceedings

I wonder if the member could talk about why it is important to get the Canada-China committee up and running again very soon, so we can delve further into these questions under that format.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, first off, the Canada-China committee needs to be meeting for all of the reasons I articulated in my speech. It is profoundly necessary.

I am not really concerned about any heckling. My faith is secure in Jesus Christ, and I am quite confident in that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I freely admit that I was surprised at the motion moved by our Conservative Party friends even though the Conservatives are always full of surprises. For example, they are taking full advantage of the Canada emergency wage subsidy even though they asked the government to make sure nobody undeserving could benefit from the government's measures. Few things the Conservative Party does should surprise us.

When I read the motion carefully, it does not seem particularly objectionable at first glance. In recent months, we have all watched as the People's Republic of China used the Hong Kong administration to repress the pro-democracy movement. We were all appalled. Before the pandemic, the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations had plans to examine this issue and study the situation in Hong Kong.

The previous speaker talked about what is happening with the Uighurs, Taiwan and Tibet. The Special Committee on Canada-China Relations was supposed to look at those issues too.

Ignoring the fact that the committee intended to address the issue suggests some degree of intellectual dishonesty. One wonders why the motion denouncing the imprisonment of human rights advocates was referred to the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations under the guise of examining the security legislation the People's Republic of China is seeking to impose on Hong Kong.

We agree that we must address the deeply worrisome law introduced by the Communist Party of China during its congress. We must insist that the People's Republic of China respect the one country, two systems agreement and that it keep the promises it made to the United Kingdom when the U.K. handed the territory over.

We expect the People's Republic of China to keep its commitments. We can demand nothing less given its thinly veiled threats against the territory's independence. After the crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong, we would have expected the situation to de-escalate, but such was not the case, since the People's Republic of China is taking advantage of the current pandemic to tighten its hold on the territory.

I agree with our Conservative Party friends that the Minister of Foreign Affairs must remind authorities from the People's Republic of China that the blood of Canadian soldiers was shed to defend Hong Kong and that we will not tolerate the violation of the rights of those citizens.

That being said, let us come back to the text of the amendment to today's motion. I must say that, as in the case of the December mo-

tion that instituted the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, this proposed amendment to the motion regarding the committee's interim report reeks of crass partisanship. In fact, the Conservatives are not even trying to hide the fact that their only objective is to make the Liberal government look bad.

● (1550)

Their motion seems motivated by a preconceived idea. I would like to know what the Conservatives have to say about the objective that was very clearly announced by the Israeli government, that of annexing new Palestinian territories, namely, the colonies, the Jordan Valley and the area north of the Dead Sea.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That is irrelevant.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It is relevant, Mr. Member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. When one has principles based on respect—

● (1555)

The Speaker: Order.

I would like to remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair rather than directly to their colleagues. I would also ask them not to shout when someone is speaking.

The hon. member for Montarville.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed relevant, because when it comes to respect for human rights, that is not something that applies only when it suits our ideology.

There are clear human rights violations happening elsewhere in the world, too. It is interesting that the Conservatives speak out less on certain situations. Furthermore, according to the Conservatives, the very laudable purpose of the motion moved last December creating the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations was to improve the relationship between the People's Republic of China and Canada.

Did anyone hear the inflammatory speeches from our Conservative colleagues? How are comments like the ones we are hearing from the Conservatives supposed to improve in any way the relationship between the People's Republic of China and Canada?

Personally, I seriously wonder about the motivations of the members of the official opposition. They have once again moved a surprise motion. They want the work of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations to be subjected to a motion adopted in the House. They pulled this stunt back in December and they are doing it again today.

I completely agree that the subcommittee has to look at the human rights violations in Hong Kong, the human rights violations against the Uighur people, the tense situation with Taiwan and the situation in Tibet. These are topics the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations was going to address anyway.

Why are the Conservatives putting on this show?

It was something we were going to study anyway. The Conservatives' current motivations seem questionable, to me. At the very least they are odd, if not malicious.

As I said, I have no objection on the substance of the issue. Obviously, we can only agree with taking a closer look at the human rights violations and the looming threat of the People's Republic of China over the territory's autonomy. We must reiterate Canada's position: defence of human rights and the autonomy of Hong Kong. Why is this motion worded this way today?

If every member of the House agrees, then why this partisan theatre in the House? I find this to be quite appalling and I do not mind saying so.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my friend across the way. One thing that is important to recognize is that, as the government and even when we were in opposition, we often talked about the importance of freedoms. I have given many speeches in regard to the charter and how proud I am. Canadians have adopted the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we understand how important it is that we have freedoms.

Where we can, we should be promoting our Canadian values throughout the world. There could be a time when we are debating that issue more than others in the House, but today I thought we were going to be talking about the important issue of the coronavirus and the impact it is having on Canadians, particularly workers and small businesses. What are the member's thoughts on what today was going to be about?

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, a question about how the House would operate in the coming days and weeks was raised during the negotiations that took place in recent days. There were questions about whether our debates should focus solely on the current situation, as was the case with the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic. This pandemic obviously requires all our attention, but the world is still turning. Other concerns demand our attention.

I understand what our colleague is saying, but that is precisely what is at issue in the debate we are holding today regarding what form parliamentary work will take in the next few days. Will parliamentarians be free to address questions other than this important and vital issue of the fight against the coronavirus pandemic? Will we be limited to discussing only this pandemic? I understand what my colleague is saying. I completely agree that we must focus on this crisis that has claimed thousands of lives in Canada. It is a tragedy, and we must curb and stop the spread to limit the number of deaths.

However, this must not prevent parliamentarians from addressing other current issues that are just as important. The people of Hong Kong are currently experiencing repression. As they see the anti-riot police being deployed by the territory's government, which is

Routine Proceedings

funded and supported by the People's Republic of China, they believe that what they are going through is just as important as the coronavirus crisis.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy serving with my friend on the Canada-China special committee.

I just want to respond to some of the things he said, and maybe he can then respond to that. He raised the issue of the situation in Israel and the Palestinians. That would be a very interesting subject for an opposition day motion from the Bloc, if and when the Bloc is able to have that opportunity. It is an important issue. I will not try to get into my views on that subject, because I would like to have at least five to 10 minutes to do so. It is an important issue for discussion, perhaps in a different context.

The member is not sure about our motives. I think my motives are very pure. However, at the end of the day, he does not have to vote on my motives; he just has to vote on what is in the motion.

The critical piece of this amendment that is unique is that it would actually allow the committee to meet digitally. Right now, the Canada-China special committee might wish to meet, but it cannot meet because it does not have the special permission to meet through video conference. Therefore, if the members support this amendment, they will be empowering the committee to undertake its important work but to do so using video conferencing. If the member thinks the committee should be able to get back to work and meet remotely, given how critical the Canada-China relationship is in the midst of all the things that are going on, then I suggest he support the amendment to allow that to happen.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saluting my colleague for his temperate response to my intervention. I would have expected him to make these remarks in his speech on the committee's report.

As I said, I have no objection to the substance. My problem is with the form. The speeches my colleagues just made were rather fiery. I have a very simple question: What is the point of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations if the Conservatives have already made up their minds? That is the problem. They seem to have already decided what the conclusions of this committee's work should be. If the Conservatives have already made up their minds anyway, regardless of what they are going to hear, I see no point in resuming our meetings.

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That being said, I completely agree with the substance, as I said earlier. What is happening right now is extremely troubling, and we cannot stay silent. If we need to allow the committee to resume its work, I am all for it. I am very concerned about the fact that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has not yet been authorized to resume sitting. I am just as concerned about the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. I have no problem with the idea of getting the committee back on track. That is not the issue. The issue is that I do not know why the Conservatives are so eager to resume the committee meetings other than to play political games that I do not approve of. My objective is to have us genuinely work together to find ways of improving relations between the People's Republic of China and Canada, which, it should be noted, have deteriorated considerably over the past few months under the Liberal government. However, the Conservatives' remarks do not seem to be aimed at improving anything.

• (1605)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Montarville for his speech.

I think we agree that we stand with the protesters in Hong Kong, and also with the Tibetan and Uighur peoples. I would like to ask him about something he brought up, because the Conservatives like to pick and choose whose rights to stand up for, based on their ideological or political interests.

Are human rights universal and should they apply to Palestinians?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, of course, and I said so during my speech. I do not think that you can pick and choose when it comes to human rights. You cannot defend the rights of the people of Hong Kong and then deny fundamental rights to Palestinians, as is currently being done by Israel.

It is particularly concerning that we are now talking about a bill brought in by the People's Republic of China on domestic security that will also have an impact on Hong Kong. However, at nearly the same time, the Government of Israel has a plan to annex settlements in the Jordan Valley and areas north of the Dead Sea.

Earlier a Conservative colleague said that it was the Palestinians' fault that they were under Israeli occupation. Comments like that are completely unacceptable. Human rights are being violated, and we must protect human rights everywhere.

I hear some people saying that the Bloc Québécois foreign affairs critic has taken an anti-Israel stance. That is not at all the case. We completely agree with a solution that would preserve peace and security in the region. However, we know that, if Israel annexes new territories, the possibility of lasting peace and security for Israel and Palestine will be even more remote. We therefore need to work to promote peace, and that goal will not be achieved through Israel's annexation of territories that do not belong to it.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois is just demonstrating the value of having discussions about foreign affairs issues in Parliament and in parliamentary committees. I would love to see the foreign affairs committee back

in action. I would love to see the Canada-China committee back in action. I would love to see the Bloc, as well as the Conservatives, able to propose opposition days again, and again we can have these conversations about the Canadian response to events in the Middle East, the human rights issues in Africa and in parts of Europe and beyond.

We have an opportunity to get the China-Canada committee—

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Montarville in 20 seconds or less, please.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I will simply say that, in principle, I would love for the committee to resume its work.

All these matters concerning the rights of the Uighurs and the rights of the people of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tibet have been put on hold because of the situation in Parliament since the beginning of the health crisis. We therefore need to get back to work to study these issues. My problem has to do with our Conservative colleagues' heated rhetoric against the People's Republic of China, when we want to improve relations.

[English]

The Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1615)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 23)

YEAS

Members

Barlow	Bergen
Bergeron	Bezan
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Cumming
Deltell	d'Entremont
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Genuis
Harder	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Michaud	Perron
Scheer	Schmale
Sweet	Therrien
Trudel	Vecchio
Waugh— 21	

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Amos
Anand	Angus
Atwin	Bendayan
Bibeau	Dhillon
Drouin	Duclos
Duvall	Garneau
Green	Hajdu
Hardie	Holland
Hussen	Iacono
Lalonde	Lamoureux
Mathyssen	McCrimmon
Mendès	Miller
Ng	Rodriguez
Romanado	Scarpaleggia
Vandenbeld— 29	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[English]

The Speaker: The question is on the main motion.

[Translation]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table two petitions today.

The first petition is with respect to Bill S-204 currently before the Senate. It deals with forced organ harvesting and trafficking. It would make it a criminal offence for someone to go abroad to receive an organ without consent. It would also make someone inadmissible to Canada if they had been involved in forced organ harvesting and trafficking. The petitioners are in support of that piece of legislation.

Routine Proceedings

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from the Pakistani Christian community.

The petitioners are raising concerns about the blasphemy law in Pakistan and the perverse impact it has on minorities in particular. They also highlight the plight of various asylum seekers, many from the Pakistani Christian community and other communities as well. Asylum seekers are in very challenging conditions in Thailand right now, and we know that these kinds of human rights situations can often be exacerbated in the context of COVID-19, especially for those who are in detention.

The petitioners encourage members of the House to remain engaged with human rights issues, and in particular with these issues in Pakistan and Thailand.

The Speaker: I would remind hon. members to sign the backs of their petitions and present them to the table themselves. Unfortunately, we do not have the pages here with us for safety reasons due to COVID-19.

* * *

• (1620)

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 380 to 424 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 380—**Mrs. Carol Hughes:**

With regard to the trip of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to Madrid, Spain, for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December 2019: (a) who travelled with the minister, excluding security personnel and journalists, broken down by (i) name, (ii) title; (b) what is the total cost of the trip to taxpayers, and, if the final cost is not available, what is the best estimate of the cost of the trip to taxpayers; (c) what were the costs for (i) accommodation, (ii) food, (iii) anything else, including a description of each expense; (d) what are the details of all the meetings attended by the minister and those on the trip, including the (i) date, (ii) summary or description, (iii) participants, (iv) topics discussed; and (e) did any advocates, consultant lobbyists or business representatives accompany the minister, and, if so, what are their names, and on behalf of which firms did they accompany the minister?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 381—**Mrs. Carol Hughes:**

With regard to recommendation 3.30 in Report 3 on fossil fuel tax subsidies of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development: (a) has the Department of Finance established criteria to determine whether a fossil fuel tax subsidy is inefficient, and, if so, what are these criteria and what is the department's definition of "inefficient"; and (b) does the Department of Finance still refuse to implement this recommendation?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 382—Mrs. Carol Hughes:**

With regard to the notice and order sent by a railway safety inspector from Transport Canada to the Central Maine and Quebec Railway dated May 7, 2019: (a) how many ultrasonic rail tests were done on the Sherbrooke subdivision between mileage point 0 and mileage point 125.46, broken down by inspection period (i) between May 1 and June 30, (ii) between September 1 and October 31, (iii) between January 1 and February 28; (b) are the inspection frequencies in (a) still in force, and, if not, why; (c) for each inspection period in (a), what findings were sent to Transport Canada; (d) how many rails are currently faulty; and (e) how many faulty rails does Transport Canada believe are satisfactory for railway safety?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 383—Mrs. Carol Hughes:

With regard to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) and his performance agreement with the CIB Board of Directors, broken down by performance cycle since the inception of the CIB: (a) what are the objectives based on the corporate business plan and related performance measures; (b) what are the objectives that reflect the government's priority areas of focus and related performance measures; (c) what are the objectives based on financial management priorities and related performance measures; (d) which objectives are based on risk management priorities and any other management objectives set by the Board of Directors (infrastructure, marketing, governance, public affairs, etc.); (e) which objectives are based on the government's priorities for financial management and related performance measures (infrastructure, marketing, governance, public affairs, etc.); (f) what are the detailed results of the performance measures for each of the objectives in (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e); (g) what were the details of the CEO's compensation, including salary and performance-based variable compensation; (h) how many times was the performance agreement amended during each performance cycle and what was the rationale for each amendment; (i) what was the CEO's performance rating as recommended to the responsible minister by the Board of Directors; (j) which performance objectives were met; (k) which performance objectives could not be assessed and why; (l) which performance objectives were not met; (m) did the CEO receive an economic increase, and, if so, why; (n) did the CEO receive a salary range progression, and, if so, what is the rationale; and (o) did the CEO receive a lump sum payment, and, if so, what was the rationale?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 384—Mr. Damien C. Kurek:

With regard to the Canada Revenue Agency: what is the number of audits performed on small businesses since 2015, broken down by year and by province or territory?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 385—Mr. John Nater:

With regard to the usage of the government's Challenger aircraft fleet, since December 1, 2019: what are the details of the legs of each flight, including (i) date, (ii) point of departure, (iii) destination, (iv) number of passengers, (v) names and titles of passengers, excluding security or Canadian Armed Forces members, (vi) total catering bill related to the flight?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 386—Mr. Ted Falk:

With regard to the commitment made in budget 2017 to invest \$5 billion over 10 years for home care, including palliative care: (a) what is the total amount of allocated funding not yet spent; (b) what is the total amount of allocated funding transferred to provinces and territories, broken down by recipient province or territory; (c) what is the complete list of projects which have received funding; and (d) for each project identified in (c), what are the details, including (i) overall funding committed, (ii) amount of federal funding provided to date, (iii) description of services funded, (iv) province or territory in which the project is located?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 387—Mr. Ted Falk:

With regard to the commitment made in budget 2017 to invest \$184.6 million over five years for home and palliative care for First Nations and Inuit: (a) what is the total amount of allocated funding not yet spent; (b) what is the complete list of projects which have received funding; and (c) for each project identified in (b), what are the details, including (i) overall funding committed, (ii) amount of federal funding provided to date, (iii) description of services funded, (iv) province or territory in which the project is located?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 388—Mr. Matthew Green:

With regard to the Paradise Papers case, the fight against tax non-compliance abroad and abusive tax planning: (a) how many taxpayer or Canadian business files are currently open with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA); (b) how many taxpayer or Canadian business files have been referred to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada; (c) what is the number of employees assigned to the Paradise Papers files; (d) how many audits have been conducted since the Paradise Papers were disclosed; (e) how many notices of assessment have been issued by the CRA; and (f) what is the total amount recovered so far by the CRA?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 389—Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:

With regard to the consultations that the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations is currently holding in order to develop an action plan to implement the 231 calls for justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: (a) has the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations established a committee to develop this action plan; (b) if so, what mechanisms have been put in place to consult the Government of Quebec about the development of this action plan, including the implementation of the 21 Quebec-specific calls for justice in the report; and (c) if a committee has been established, will the Government of Quebec participate in its work?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 390—Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:

With regard to the drinking water situation in Kitigan Zibi: has the Department of Indigenous Services (i) analyzed the plans that were submitted by the band council to connect to the Maniwaki water system, (ii) decided whether it will proceed with the connection, (iii) released the funding necessary to complete the connection work, (iv) set a timeline so that the community has access to running water within a reasonable time?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 391—Mr. Pierre Poilievre:

With regard to forms used by the Government of Canada, broken down by year for the last 10 years: (a) how many forms does the government use; (b) to how many pages do the forms add up; (c) how many person-hours a year do Canadians spend filling out forms for the government; and (d) how many person-hours do government employees spend processing forms filled out by Canadians?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 392—Mr. Matthew Green:

With regard to the call centres of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), for the fiscal years 2017-18 and 2018-19, broken down by business and by individual: (a) what is the number of calls received by the CRA; (b) what is the number of calls that were neither answered by an agent nor transferred to the automated self-service system; (c) what is the number of calls received by the automated self-service system; (d) what is the number of calls answered by an agent; (e) what is the number of calls not answered, broken down by (i) the number of callers who did not choose to use self-service through the automated service, (ii) the number of callers who got a busy signal; (f) what is the average time spent waiting to speak to an agent; (g) what is the change in the number of agents, broken down by (i) month, (ii) call centre; (h) what is the error rate for call centre agents, broken down by (i) National Quality and Accuracy Learning Program, (ii) Audit, Evaluation and Risk Branch; and (j) what is the number of call centres that have completed the transition to the new telephony platform as part of the Government of Canada Contact Centre Transformation Initiative?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 393—Mr. Matthew Green:**

With regard to the sales tax system between 2011 and 2019, broken down by year: (a) how many compliance audits have been conducted by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to determine whether suppliers of digital goods and services are domestic or foreign and whether they are required to register for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST); (b) for the compliance audits in (a), how many additional revenue assessments were issued as a result of these audits and what was the total amount; (c) how many GST and HST forms had been submitted by consumers to the CRA for digital goods and services purchased in Canada from foreign suppliers not carrying on business in Canada or not having a permanent establishment in Canada; (d) how many compliance audits have been conducted by the CRA to determine whether taxpayers in Canada who rent their housing for short periods of time are required to register for the GST and HST; (e) for audits in (d), how many additional income assessments have been issued as a result of these audits and what is the total amount of these assessments; and (f) has the CRA finalized the development of a specific compliance strategy to better detect and address GST and HST non-compliance in the e-commerce sector, and, if so, what are the details of this strategy?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 394—Mr. Arnold Viersen:

With regard to the Canadian Passport Order, since November 4, 2015, in order to prevent the commission of any act or omission referred to in subsection 7(4.1) of the Criminal Code, broken down by month: how many passports has the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (i) refused, (ii) revoked, (iii) cancelled?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 395—Mr. Brad Vis:

With regard to Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying): what is the government's definition of "reasonably foreseeable" in relation to the context of the bill?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 396—Mr. Bob Saroya:

With regard to the finding published in the 2018-19 Departmental Results Report of the Privy Council Office (PCO) that only 75% of ministers were satisfied with the service and advice provided by the PCO: (a) how was that number determined; (b) which ministers were among the 25% who were not satisfied; and (c) did any of those ministers indicate why they were not satisfied, and, if so, what were the reasons?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 397—Mr. Mel Arnold:

With regard to sole sourced contracts over \$10,000 issued by the Canadian Coast Guard since November 4, 2015: what are the details of all such contracts, including the (i) date, (ii) amount, (iii) vendor name, (iv) vendor location, including city or municipality, province or territory, country, and federal riding, if applicable, (v) start and end date of contract, (vi) description of goods or services provided, including quantity, if applicable?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 398—Mr. Dave MacKenzie:

With regard to the finding published in the 2018-19 Departmental Results Report of the Privy Council Office (PCO) that 93% of cabinet documents distributed to ministers met the PCO's standards: (a) in what ways did the other 7% of documents fail to meet the PCO's standards; (b) why were the non-compliant documents circulated to ministers despite not complying with the standards; and (c) how many of the non-compliant documents were circulated as a result of the direction of (i) the Prime Minister, (ii) his exempt staff?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 399—Mr. Tom Kmiec:

With regard to the mortgage insurance and securitization activities carried out by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) on behalf of the government in the fiscal years 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19: (a) what was the CMHC's total annual authorization from the government to provide new guarantees on National Housing Act Mortgage Backed Securities (NHA MBS), broken down by fiscal year; (b) what was the CMHC's total annual authorization from the government to provide new

guarantees on Canada Mortgage Bonds (CMB), broken down by year; (c) what was the CMHC's total annual limit for the issuance of portfolio insurance (non transactional), broken down by year; (d) for the portfolio insurance issued in each fiscal year, what was the lender allocation methodology for portfolio insurance and what was the total value allocated to each of the largest six Canadian lenders; (e) for the NHA MBS issued in each fiscal year, was there a lender allocation methodology and what was the total value of NHA MBS, broken down by the largest six Canadian lenders; (f) for the CMB issued in each fiscal year, was there a lender allocation methodology and what was the total value of NHA MBS purchased from each of the largest six Canadian lenders for the purpose of converting the MBS into CMB; (g) for the CMB auctioned in each fiscal year, what percentage were purchased by Canadian investors compared to international investors; (h) for the CMB auctioned in each fiscal year, what percentage were purchased by the Bank of Canada and other investors for which the government is the sole or majority shareholder; (i) for the CMB auctioned in each fiscal year, what was the value purchased by the Bank of Canada and other investors for which the government is the sole or majority shareholder; (j) for the NHA MBS issued in each fiscal year, what percentage were retained by the issuing financial institution for their own balance sheet management purposes; and (k) what is the position of the government on increasing the covered bond issuance limit for federally regulated financial institutions?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 400—Mr. Tim Uppal:

With regard to the government preparations in relation to the coronavirus (COVID-19): (a) what specific procedures are in place at each department and agency to ensure the continuity of government operations and that government services remain available during a pandemic; (b) what specific procedures are in place to ensure the safety and protection of government employees during a pandemic, including any procedures aimed at preventing employees from being exposed to coronavirus; and (c) what is the government's remuneration, leave or benefit policy for (i) full-time employees, (ii) part-time employees, (iii) casual employees, who are required to be quarantined or otherwise away from the workplace as a result of coronavirus?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 401—Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:

With regard to the criminal charges the government laid in December 2019 against the Volkswagen Group concerning the approximately 120,000 diesel vehicles whose nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions exceeded the standards allowed, broken down by the German companies of the Volkswagen Group, the Canadian companies of the Volkswagen Group, the U.S. companies of the Volkswagen Group, and directors, executives and employees: (a) why did the government file charges for 58 counts of importing non-compliant vehicles instead of one count for each of the 120,000 offences; (b) why did the government file charges for two counts of misleading information instead of one count for each of the 120,000 offences; (c) why did the government not file any charges against the Canadian companies of the Volkswagen Group; (d) why did the government not file any charges against the U.S. companies of the Volkswagen Group that took part in the illegal acts that affected Canada; (e) why did the government not file any charges against the directors, executives and employees who were involved in these offences; (f) why did the government not file any charges regarding the 120,000 offences for selling, renting or distributing these non-compliant vehicles; (g) why did the government not file any charges of fraud concerning the 120,000 pieces of software that prevented the non-compliance from being detected; and (h) why did the government not file any charges regarding the illegal pollution caused by these 120,000 vehicles in Canada?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 402—Mr. Randall Garrison:

With regard to the Industrial and Technological Benefits (ITB) Policy: for each defence procurement project, what projects or transactions have been approved as meeting the contractor's obligations under the ITB Policy, broken down by (i) contractor, (ii) procurement project, (iii) fiscal year since 2016-17?

(Return tabled)

Routine Proceedings

Question No. 403—Mr. Colin Carrie:

With regard to government funding for the Scarborough Subway Extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension: (a) what will be the total amount of government funding for each of the projects; and (b) what is the yearly breakdown of when the funding in (a) will be delivered for each year between 2020 and 2030?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 404—Mrs. Kelly Block:

With regard to search and rescue military operations, since January 1, 2018: what are the details of all instances where a call for emergency assistance was received but personnel were either delayed or unable to provide the emergency assistance requested, including the (i) date of the call, (ii) nature of the incident, (iii) response provided, (iv) length of delay between the call being received and assistance being deployed, if applicable, (v) location of the incident, (vi) reason for the delay, (vii) reason assistance was not provided, if applicable?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 405—Mr. Martin Shields:

With regard to the government's Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel: why are there not any panel members from a province other than Ontario or Quebec?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 406—Mr. Peter Kent:

With regard to the 4,710 individuals who were admitted to Canada in 2019 via humanitarian, compassionate, and other grounds: how many of them were admitted by ministerial exemption, in total and broken down by federal riding?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 407—Mr. Tom Kmiec:

With regard to visas issued by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada since May 1, 2019: (a) how many Cuban citizens have applied for Canadian visitor visas (temporary resident visas); (b) how many Cuban citizens have applied for Canadian study permits; (c) how many Cuban citizens have applied for Canadian work permits; (d) how many Cuban citizens have been approved for Canadian visitor visas (temporary resident visas); (e) how many Cuban citizens have been approved for Canadian study permits; (f) how many Cuban citizens have been approved for Canadian work permits; (g) how many Cuban citizens have been denied Canadian visitor visas (temporary resident visas); (h) how many Cuban citizens have been denied Canadian study permits; (i) how many Cuban citizens have been denied Canadian work permits; (j) for the visas in (d), (e) and (f), how many visas were issued to single adult men; (k) for the visas in (d), (e) and (f), how many visas were issued to single adult women; (l) for the visas in (d), (e) and (f), how many visas were issued to married men; (m) for the visas in (d), (e) and (f), how many visas were issued to married women; (n) for the visas in (g), (h) and (i), how many visas were denied to single adult men; (o) for the visas in (g), (h) and (i), how many visas were denied to single adult women; (p) for the visas in (g), (h) and (i), how many visas were denied to married men; and (q) for the visas in (g), (h) and (i), how many visas were denied to married women?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 408—Mr. Alistair MacGregor:

With regard to judicial nominations, broken down by year, since 2016, and by province and territory: (a) how many judicial candidates assessed as "highly recommended" by a judicial appointments advisory committee were appointed as judges; (b) how many judicial candidates assessed as "recommended" by a judicial appointments advisory committee were appointed as judges; and (c) how many judicial candidates assessed as "unable to recommend" by a judicial appointments advisory committee were appointed as judges?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 409—Mr. Alistair MacGregor:

With regard to the Panama Papers case, the fight against tax non-compliance abroad and abusive tax planning: (a) how many taxpayer or Canadian business files are currently open with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA); (b) how many taxpayer or Canadian business files have been referred to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada; (c) what is the number of employees assigned to the Panama Papers files; (d) how many audits have been conducted since the Panama Papers were dis-

closed; (e) how many notices of assessment have been issued by the CRA; and (f) what is the total amount recovered so far by the CRA?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 410—Mr. Brad Redekopp:

With regard to the decision to award SAP the contract to replace the Phoenix pay system: (a) what will the differences be between the SAP replacement system and the current Phoenix pay system; (b) what are the details of any financial agreements or contracts the government has with SAP in relation to the replacement pay system (e.g. value, start date, rate, scope, etc.); and (c) when does the government expect the current Phoenix pay system to be transferred to the replacement SAP system?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 411—Mr. Philip Lawrence:

With regard to the government response to the rail blockades in February and March of 2020: (a) what was the total estimated economic impact of the blockades; (b) what is the breakdown of (a) by industry and province; and (c) what are the details of any financial assistance provided by the government for individuals or businesses impacted by the blockades?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 412—Mr. Tom Lukiwski:

With regard to the administration of the 2019 federal general election: (a) has the Chief Electoral Officer, pursuant to subsection 477.72(4) of the Canada Elections Act, informed the Speaker of the House of Commons of any candidates elected as members of the House that were not entitled to continue to sit or vote as members, and, if so, who were these candidates; and (b) with respect to each candidate in (a), (i) on what date did the entitlement to sit or vote become suspended, (ii) on what date did the Chief Electoral Officer inform the Speaker, (iii) which requirement of the act was not satisfied, (iv) has the requirement in (b)(iii) been subsequently satisfied, and, if so, on what date was it satisfied?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 413—Ms. Nelly Shin:

With regard to information requests received by departments or agencies from the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) since January 1, 2016: (a) what are the details of all requests and responses, including the (i) request, (ii) date it was received, (iii) date when the information was provided; and (b) what are the details, including the reasons, for all instances where the information was either delayed or not provided to the PBO?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 414—Mr. Jagmeet Singh:

With regard to the three tax provisions proposed in the Fall Economic Statement 2018 to accelerate business investment for the 2018-19 fiscal year: (a) what is the estimated number of businesses that have benefited, broken down by (i) tax provision, (ii) size of business, (iii) economic sector; (b) what is the estimated increase in total business investment since the three tax provisions came into force; (c) what is the estimate of the number of jobs created by businesses in Canada since the coming into force of these three tax provisions; and (d) what is the estimate of the number of businesses that have chosen to continue operating in Canada rather than relocate abroad since the coming into force of these three tax provisions?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 415—Ms. Niki Ashton:

With regard to claimed stock option deductions, between the 2012 and 2019 tax years inclusively, broken down by tax years: (a) what is the number of individuals who claimed the stock option deduction whose total annual income is (i) less than \$60,000, (ii) less than \$100,000, (iii) less than \$200,000, (iv) between \$200,000 and \$1 million, (v) more than \$1 million; (b) what is the average amount claimed by an individual whose total annual income is (i) less than \$60,000, (ii) less than \$100,000, (iii) less than \$200,000, (iv) between \$200,000 and \$1 million, (v) more than \$1 million; (c) what is the total amount claimed by individuals whose total annual income is (i) less than \$60,000, (ii) less than \$100,000, (iii) less than \$200,000, (iv) between \$200,000 and \$1 million, (v) more than \$1 million; and (d) what is the percentage of the total amount claimed by individuals whose total annual income is more than \$1 million?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 416—Mr. Colin Carrie:**

With regard to the government's commitment to return the \$1.3 billion in surtax assessed on U.S. steel, aluminum, and other products to affected industries between the 2018-19 and the 2023-24 fiscal years: (a) how does the government explain the discrepancy with the estimate from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the government will return \$105 million less than it assessed in surtax and related revenues over the period; (b) how does the government plan to return the \$1.3 billion; and (c) what is the breakdown of the \$1.3 billion by industry and recipient?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 417—Mr. Brad Vis:

With regard to the \$180.4 million listed in Supplementary Estimates (B) 2019-20 under Department of Employment and Social Development (ESDC) to write off 33,098 debts from the Canada Student Loan Program: (a) what information was shared between ESDC and the Canada Revenue Agency to determine which loans would be written off; (b) what specific measures are being taken to ensure that none of the written off loans are from individuals who have the income or means to pay back the loans; and (c) what was the threshold or criteria used to determine which loans would be written off?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 418—Mrs. Cathy McLeod:

With regard to the \$17.6 million contract awarded to Peter Kiewit Sons ULC for the Big Bar Landslide Fish Passage Remediation Project on the Fraser River: (a) how many bids were received for the project; (b) of the bids received, how many bids met the criteria for qualification; (c) who made the decision to award the contract to Peter Kiewit Sons ULC; (d) when was the decision made; (e) what is the start date and end date of the contract; (f) what is the specific work expected to be completed as a result of the contract; and (g) was the fact that the company is currently facing criminal negligence causing death charges considered during the evaluation of the bid, and, if not, why not?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 419—Mrs. Cathy McLeod:

With regard to investments in Budget 2019 for the Forest Innovation Program, the Investments in Forestry Industry Transformation Program, the Expanding Market Opportunities program, and the Indigenous Forestry Initiative: (a) how many proposals have been received for each program to date; (b) how much of the funding has been delivered to date; (c) what are the proposal criteria for each program; and (d) what are the details of the allocated funding, including the (i) organization, (ii) location, (iii) date of allocation, (iv) amount of funding, (v) project description or purpose of funding?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 420—Mr. Todd Doherty:

With regard to Transport Canada Concern Paper C-FT-03 (Boeing 737-8 MAX) (file number 5010-A268): (a) on what date did the Minister of Transport, or his office receive or become aware of the document; (b) what action, if any, did the minister take in response to the concerns raised in the document; (c) on what date was the Minister of Transport, or his office, first notified of the concerns raised the document; (d) what action, if any did the minister take in response to the concern; (e) when did deputy minister's office receive the document; (f) on what date was the Minister of Transport, or his office, made aware of Transport Canada's concerns regarding the nose down pitch not readily arrested behaviour in relation to the aerodynamic stall of the 737-8 MAX; (g) was a briefing note on the concern paper provided to the minister or his staff, and, if so, what are the details of the briefing note, including the (i) date, (ii) title, (iii) summary of contents, (iv) sender, (v) recipient, (vi) file number; and (h) what was the Minister of Transport's response to the briefing note in (g)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 421—Mr. Taylor Bachrach:

With regard to the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA), since July 15, 2018: (a) how many air passenger complaints have been received, broken down by the subject matter of the complaint; (b) of the complaints received in (a), how many have been resolved, broken down by (i) facilitation process, (ii) mediation process, (iii) adjudication; (c) how many air passenger complaints were dismissed, withdrawn and declined, broken down by (i) subject matter of the complaint, (ii) mediation process, (iii) adjudication; (d) for each complaint in (a), how many cases were resolved by a settlement; (e) how many full-time equivalent agency case officers

are assigned to deal with air travel complaints, broken down by agency case officers dealing with (i) the facilitation process, (ii) the mediation process, (iii) adjudication; (f) what is the average number of air travel complaints handled by an agency case officer, broken down by agency case officers dealing with (i) the facilitation process, (ii) the mediation process, (iii) adjudication; (g) what is the number of air travel complaints received but not yet handled by an agency case officer, broken down by agency case officers dealing with (i) the facilitation process, (ii) the mediation process, (iii) adjudication; (h) in how many cases were passengers told by CTA facilitators that they were not entitled to compensation, broken down by rejection category; (i) among cases in (h), what was the reason for CTA facilitators not to refer the passengers and the airlines to the Montreal Convention that is incorporated in the international tariff (terms and conditions) of the airlines; (j) how does the CTA define a "resolved" complaint for the purposes of reporting it in its statistics; (k) when a complainant chooses not to pursue a complaint, does it count as "resolved"; (l) how many business days on average does it effectively take from the filing of a complaint to an officer to be assigned to the case, broken down by (i) facilitation process, (ii) mediation process, (iii) adjudication; (m) how many business days on average does it effectively take from the filing of a complaint to reaching a settlement, broken down by (i) facilitation process, (ii) mediation process, (iii) adjudication; and (n) for complaints in (a), what is the percentage of complaints that were not resolved in accordance with the service standards?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 422—Mr. Taylor Bachrach:

With regard to aviation safety: (a) what was the annual failure rate from 2005 to 2019 for the Pilot Proficiency Check (PPC) conducted by Transport Canada inspectors for pilots working for 705 operators under the Canadian Aviation Regulations (CARs); (b) what was the annual failure rate from 2005 to 2019 for the PPC in cases where industry-approved check pilots conducted the PPC for pilots working for Subpart 705 operators; (c) how many annual verification inspections did Transport Canada inspectors conduct between 2007 and 2019; (d) how many annual Safety Management System assessments, program validation inspections and process inspections of 705, 704, 703 and 702 operators were conducted between 2008 and 2019; (e) how many annual inspections and audits of 705, 704, 703 and 702 system operators were carried out pursuant to Transport Canada manual TP8606 between 2008 and 2019; (f) how many aircraft operator group inspectors did Transport Canada have from 2011 to 2019, broken down by year; (g) what discrepancies has Transport Canada identified between its pilot qualification policies and the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) since 2005; (h) what are the ICAO requirements for pilot proficiency checks and what are the Canadian PPC requirements for subparts 705, 704, 703 and 604 of CARs; (i) does Transport Canada plan to hire new inspectors, and, if so, what target has it set for hiring new inspectors, broken down by category of inspectors; (j) what is the current number of air safety inspectors at Transport Canada; (k) for each fiscal year from 2010-11 to 2018-19, broken down by fiscal year (i) how many air safety inspectors were there, (ii) what was the training budget for air safety inspectors, (iii) how many hours were allocated to air safety inspector training; and (l) how many air safety inspectors are anticipated for (i) 2019-20, (ii) 2020-21, (iii) 2021-22?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 423—Mr. Taylor Bachrach:

With regard to the National Housing Strategy: what is the total amount of funding provided by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for each year since 2017, broken down by province, for (i) the National Housing Co-Investment Fund, (ii) the Rental Construction Financing Initiative, (iii) the Housing Partnership Framework, (iv) the Federal Lands Initiative?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders***Question No. 424—Mr. Taylor Bachrach:**

With regard to the government's plan to introduce a new fund to help municipalities and school boards purchase 5,000 zero-emission buses over the next five years: (a) has the government undertaken any forecasting on the total cost of this commitment, and, if so, (i) how much is this commitment forecasted to cost municipalities and school boards, (ii) what is the expected cost of associated charging infrastructure; (b) how much will be provided by the federal government annually in this new fund; (c) what proportion of the total cost to municipalities will be provided by the federal government through this new fund; (d) what will be the application process for municipalities and school boards; (e) will funding be based on ridership in line with existing transit funding; and (f) how does the government plan on ensuring that transit agencies are not forced to delay or forego other transit expansions to purchase zero-emission buses in line with this target?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just before question period I was talking about the effect of all the accumulated debt. I would like to go back to that, but I want to touch on a few things that came out of question period and in the debate we have had today.

As it relates to the global reaction to the coronavirus COVID-19, there are a lot of questions about the role of the communist government of China, how it suppressed information in the early days, how it punished whistleblowers. Doctors who were uploading videos warning the world about the dangers of this virus suddenly disappeared. Those are people's spouses, brothers, sisters, children. They are gone. We know what happens to people who disappear in communist countries. We can only hope and pray that those individuals will be unharmed and freed soon.

What happened today in question period was very upsetting. I put it to the Prime Minister several times that this would be an opportunity for him to condemn the actions of the communist government of China, violating the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, not to express concerns, not to issue a statement calling for a de-escalation but calling out wrong as it exists, calling out evil as it exists. The refusal to do so diminishes and downplays the egregious attack on the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong in which the PRC has engaged. It makes it seem like this is a normal dispute.

Canada raises concerns all the time about things that are going on around the world. Raising concern is a very polite diplomatic expression. Condemning the actions of the PRC is what is required to send a clear signal around the world that freedom-loving countries will stand together against this aggressive act. The Prime Minister refused to do so.

The government talks a good game often, but when the chips are down, when real action is required, this is what we saw today. It was an opportunity to send a clear condemnation. It would also send a signal to the people of Hong Kong that they were not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of Canadian citizens in Hong Kong who are now having their rights and freedoms infringed. They are looking to the government to be their voice, and the government has failed to do so.

Therefore, I hope that in the coming days, the pressure that the opposition party puts on the government will reluctantly force it to do the bad thing. We know that is one thing which the Liberals pay attention to, when public attention starts to shift, the Liberals say, "You didn't like our principles before, well how about these ones."

The Liberals are now claiming that they have been raising some of these concerns about China. Let us not forget that for the past almost five years now, the government has pursued a policy of appeasement as it relates to the PRC. The Prime Minister went over to China in pursuit of a free trade deal, despite the fact that many people were warning about a free trade deal with a country that has so many state-owned enterprises, that subsidized, that used state-owned companies to pursue the political goals of the government of China; despite the fact that the companies that operated in China did not face the same environmental or labour standards as they did here; despite the fact that those companies were not subject to the same accountability and disclosure laws that we had in Canada. Of course, the Prime Minister, who was given a loving nickname of "little potato" by the PRC, came home empty-handed. Therefore, he even failed to achieve his own objective. We disagreed with the objective, so we were glad he came home without a deal, but it displayed the little respect that other world leaders had for the current Prime Minister.

We are going to keep it up, but remember the Liberals started out trying to pursue that free trade deal and then along the way the government of China put blocks on our exports. The Chinese blocked our canola exports and they threatened to take similar action. All the while, two Canadian citizens are being held illegally. We would think the Prime Minister would do something.

• (1625)

I wish we were having a debate on whether the reaction of the Liberal government was appropriate. I wish I could say that these are our ideas, that they have their ideas and let us have a debate about whose ideas are better to stand up for Canada to show the government of China that there are consequences for violating international rules of law.

Government Orders

The Liberals have done nothing. We cannot debate their ideas versus our ideas because their idea is to continue to do absolutely nothing. Worse than that, they are continuing to pursue the policy of appeasement, which includes taking over \$250 million out of the Canadian economy, out of the pockets of Canadian taxpayers, to build roads and bridges in other countries to further the interests of the PRC.

The communist government of China has a belt and road policy. It is expanding its reach. It has a game plan that has been put to use where it builds critical infrastructure in developing countries. When those countries face any kind of financial difficulty or are unable to pay, it freezes those assets and now it has footholds in different regions around the world. We are very concerned about the string of pearls policy of the government, which is aimed at encircling another democratic country in the region, India.

The Conservatives are going to keep up the pressure. We hope the government will listen to us. In the next election there will be a clear contrast before the Canadian people, the continue to do nothing approach of the Liberal government and letting farmers, exporters of canola and other products down, letting down the two Canadians who are being held illegally and letting down people in our country who want to see Canada be that champion for human rights and freedoms around the world. We are going to keep up the pressure on our end.

When I was speaking to the motion before, I was talking about the fallacy of the Liberal government's usage of the debt-to-GDP ratio as a way of assuring Canadians not to worry. Just before question period I was talking about how the federal government debt was just but one small part of that debt-to-GDP ratio. The federal government debt is just one saddle on that horse, the engine of our economy that has to pull everything along.

In addition to federal government debt, we have provincial debt and we have corporate debt. We also have individual debt. At the very least, we should stop saddling the horse with more debt. We should stop putting more and more weight on it.

In the meantime, when we are thinking of how we emerge out from this downturn, we need to be thinking about how we can supercharge the economy, how we can really tap into the entrepreneurship and hard work of Canadians, freeing them to do what they do best and have done best through history. That is where we really get into a debate over the role of government.

That is fundamentally the biggest difference between Conservatives and Liberals, whatever we call ourselves at any particular moment in time. In Canada, it is Liberals and Conservatives. In other countries, the political parties have different names. However, throughout human history, the role of government has been the essential question.

The problem is there are so many people who confuse society and government. They blend them together. They think that if we want society to be a certain way or to do a certain thing that it is the government's job to do that. In reality, the two could not be more different. Not only are they different in substance, in nature, but their origins are different. Where society comes from is diametrically opposed to where government comes from.

Society comes from the positive elements of human nature, the good aspects of human nature. Society is built around human beings interacting in a positive way: a buyer and a seller, friends getting together, a group of people with common interests creating a club or a society to enjoy music, literature or the arts. That is what society is. Society is people coming together in a positive way.

Government comes out of our fallen nature. Because we are fallen beings, government is created to address that aspect of human nature. It is there to protect people from the negative aspects of human nature. Therefore, we have a police, we have courts and we have institutions to ensure nobody falls through the cracks. If individuals themselves are not able or willing to be generous to look after those who cannot help themselves, then government steps in to provide for those gaps in society. However, by definition, it is a creature of our fallen state.

● (1630)

Therefore, we should not put all our faith in that government, or in any government, because the nature of government is so much different than society.

I was walking down the steps here and I saw a book that I read a few years ago. It is a fantastic book and I wish more people in government offices read the book. It is called *Economics in One Lesson*. Some of my colleagues may have read it. I will go into that in a moment, but I want to make a further point about the role of government.

We know that perfection is not for this side of eternity. We know that. Because of human nature, we are never going to create a perfect society. We can always try to do better. We can always try to improve upon ourselves and challenge ourselves individually and collectively to do that. I often get asked to participate in the National Prayer Breakfast, and I have. When I was Speaker, I enjoyed being the honorary chair of the National Prayer Breakfast. As the leader of the opposition, I have been honoured to participate as well.

I used to always tell the organizers of the National Prayer Breakfast that there really was no bad time to pray. The start for the National Prayer Breakfast was at 7:00 a.m. I used to always make the point that we could have a national prayer afternoon tea, we could have a national prayer brunch or we could even do it in the evening, a national prayer cocktail hour, but they never took me up on my suggestions.

When I was asked to give a talk this year, I found a passage in scripture that I think best illustrates this point about the role of government and how government itself comes out of our inability to be perfect beings, that because of that, government is a necessary evil. If we look at the first book of Samuel, chapter 8 to the end of 18, we see that the Israelites ask the Lord for a king. They want to be like other nations. They ask God to choose one of them to be king so they can be like other countries and they will have all the majesty that comes with having a worldly king. Samuel goes and tells this to God and this is what happens next.

This is the first book of Samuel, chapter 8, verse 10:

Government Orders

Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants...He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

I would take 10%. That sounds like a steal. That is a bargain compared to what the government has imposed upon Canadians.

I will conclude, and I know that probably brings a lot of joy to those on the opposite side, who do not want freedom as much as we do. I heard a member for the NDP say something a few minutes ago, talking about being on the side of people, but he misses a massive point here.

The NDP and the Liberals always say, and Margaret Thatcher summed this up perfectly, their slogan is "Power to the People", but what they really mean is "Power to the State". They really mean power to the government. They do not actually mean to empower people. To empower people is to give them freedom, to give them choices and to give them options. That is what real power to the people means. It means getting the government out of the way. If people have a better widget or a better mousetrap, let them innovate, expand and excel and take their ideas, combine it with their industry and combine it with the capital they may have raised from their friends and family or the public. That is what creates wealth and prosperity. That is what true freedom is.

● (1635)

Let us never forget that free markets are just as much a democratic institution as other aspects of our society. When I was Speaker, I met President Sarkozy in Paris, France, at the height of the financial crisis. He talked about an irony: Before the financial collapse of 2008, a lot of corporate executives were not trying to see him, but in the aftermath of the downturn, there was a path beaten in the lawn from their offices to his office. He told them that if they wanted support from the government, they had to recognize that the government was there on behalf of the people. I remember saying to him that the free market itself is an expression of intent and an expression of what the people want. When people are free to choose for themselves, when they have the ability to go about their business with minimal government impact, they can express themselves in many different ways.

That is what we have lost in this country. The Liberals are so good at forcing the conversation so that it always includes an expansion of government control and government power. We have seen it time and time again.

There is a great quote in a movie I am very fond of, *The Usual Suspects*, from Kevin Spacey. Near the end of the movie, he says, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." There is a kind of parallel there to big-government Liberals. Once the government provides a good or a service, they trick people into thinking that if the government did not provide it, it would not get done.

However, we know the history of human beings is exactly the opposite of that. It is almost always the case that society comes up with solutions to challenges and then government comes along, gets in the way and taxes and regulates them to the point that it has to step in in many situations. It then tells people that if the government was not doing it, it would never get done.

We know that is not true. When we look back at the course of human history and at the quality of life we have today, would my colleagues rather live at any other time in history? Was there ever a time when every single human being had it so good? We have the ability to get fresh fruits and vegetables in the winter. We have the ability to communicate with people around the world instantaneously. Modern medicine is curing diseases that took out millions of people just two or three generations ago.

My wife's grandmother is still alive, and she tells stories about digging a hole in the backyard and putting a block of ice on a little shelf. That is where she would store fruits and vegetables for as long as they would last. Almost everything was pickled or preserved for the winter. That was her quality of life. I can speak to someone who lived that lifestyle just a short while ago, but because of free market capitalism, we have seen a massive expansion, a massive increase in our quality of life. That is what the Conservatives will be arguing for in the future to get us out of the negative consequences of this pandemic.

Under the previous Conservative government, when we adopted a low-tax strategy, we lowered taxes every way the government collected it. We left more and more money in the economy. We had a one-for-one rule for government regulations. For every rule that was drawn up in boardrooms in Ottawa that had to apply across the country, many of which were outdated or duplicates of provincial regulations, one had to go out, to prune the growth of government, to leave more of our economy to the free market. We invested in critical infrastructure that had the potential to, and even did, open up new markets, like bridges, roads and ports. All across the country there are concrete examples of the previous Conservative government's strategic investments to maximize the growth that would come along with the tax cuts and the reduction in regulations.

● (1640)

What about the results? Under the previous Conservative government, the number of children living in poverty fell by 31%, the biggest reduction on record. Our tax cuts helped lower-income Canadians. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and financial experts agreed that the overwhelming beneficiaries of our economic policy were low-income Canadians. The real median wage went up by 8.6% and 12% for women, meaning a person earning a median income saw an increase of over \$3,800.

Government Orders

Under the current Liberal government, wages have barely budged, up just 2%. What does that say about its economic policies? That is one of the biggest problems about the government: It hurts the very people that it claims it tries to help. That is always the problem with big-government leftist programs.

With the carbon tax, not only did emissions go up under a program that was supposed to reduce them, but it hurt rural people the most and people with lower incomes. Cancelling popular tax credits made it harder for parents to keep their children in activities and sports. After the Liberals changed the tax code, the richest Canadians actually ended up paying less. They have raised CPP premiums. That is a payroll tax. The percentage of that increase hits those with lower incomes more than it hits those with higher incomes because of the ceiling on CPP taxable benefits.

Remember the Prime Minister's attack on small business owners? I heard from so many women entrepreneurs who said that every legitimate tax tool that they were trying to use to grow their businesses or take over from their families demonized them. The Prime Minister called them tax cheats. Of course, all that borrowed money comes with a massive cost.

There is a difference between the two approaches. On the Conservative side, we put our faith in people, recognizing that society is bigger than government. I hope members opposite can appreciate this. Look at the calamity that has happened with just three months' worth of lockdown in Canada. Look at the economic consequences. I hope this allows the Liberals to realize that no amount of government spending can ever replace the power of the free market private sector in this country or anywhere else around the world. As history has proven time and time again, freedom, liberty and democratic government are the surest path to prosperity.

In the days ahead, other opposition parties may want to shirk their duties, but my colleagues and I were elected to do a job and we are going to continue doing that.

Remember the first time this House came together after March 15? The very first thing the Liberals tried to do, effectively, was to sideline Parliament, giving themselves unprecedented powers to tax, borrow and spend. No other government in Canadian history had tried to do what the Liberals did. Their reaction when they were caught was telling. They said it was fine; it is how this is supposed to work. They are supposed to try for unprecedented power grabs. Then the opposition should rap their knuckles and they should come up with a compromise that may not give them everything that was being asked for but has more than they had before.

The Liberals have used this crisis to benefit themselves politically, and that is what they are doing again today. Sideline Parliament is a similar move, reducing the effectiveness of elected representatives during a time when we need more oversight and accountability. Every single time the House has been together, the Conservatives have improved government programs. We have improved their legislation, we have identified gaps and weaknesses and we have gotten better results for the Canadian people. Ultimately, that is what this exercise is about.

Even if it may not be in the House, should the Liberals get their way, the Conservatives will continue opposing the government's

destructive taxes, reckless spending and dangerous borrowing. We will continue to stand up for the most vulnerable among us. We will continue to fight for a strong, united Canada that is a force for good in the world. We will respect the sacred trust and this institution.

• (1645)

We will work on behalf of Canadians. We will do everything we can to defend this democratic institution that has served this country so well through so many challenges in the past.

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Public Service Renewal) and to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I almost enjoyed the speech from the Leader of the Opposition. With his philosophical meandering, it almost felt like a farewell speech, but it was really interesting.

I want to get back to the point. I agree with him that Parliament is an essential service for Canadians. One of the first committees that convened during the pandemic was the procedure and House affairs committee. My colleagues and I consulted experts and presented a report that outlines a road map that would allow Parliament to be fully functional.

How does the opposition leader reconcile saying, on one hand, that he does not want 338 MPs here with saying, on the other, that he is not willing to consider any other option? How does he suggest giving all MPs the ability to vote if Parliament becomes fully functional without asking all MPs to be here?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an issue that we identified, as early as April, as one of the things we could all be working together to solve if we agreed on the principle that Parliament should sit. We could have spent the last few weeks on this. Instead of arguing as to whether Parliament should sit, we should say, yes, we will sit.

How do we tackle that? How do we make sure that a member who cannot come to Ottawa because of a health concern or because of a travel concern—

Hon. Omar Alhabra: That is what PROC did.

Government Orders

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, we have not been doing that. What the member forgets is that the government drew a line in the sand the last time we were trying to get parliamentary sittings. It found complicit parties in the Bloc and the NDP, and was able to sideline Parliament so that it did not need to tackle these types of issues.

There are a number of options we could look at to satisfy that, but we do not believe the solution should be no parliamentary sittings.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his wonderful speech. It is interesting to hear him quote the Bible and talk about the most vulnerable in the House.

Since we are talking about the most vulnerable in this crisis, I have a few interesting figures on the situation in Quebec. We recently learned that, in the past two months, 300,000 people in Quebec used a food bank for the first time in their lives. In April, 150,000 households in Quebec could not pay their rent, and that is after getting the CERB. In May, 10% of Quebecers could not pay their rent, including 15% in Montreal. Those are the most vulnerable people in our society. Those are the ones left behind in this pandemic.

Unfortunately, I do not see either the Liberals or the Conservatives on the list of the most vulnerable in this pandemic, and yet we learned that the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have availed themselves of the wage subsidy.

Does my hon. colleague really think that the Conservative Party needs that money, which should go to those most in need?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I will take no lessons from a party that fought to keep the subsidy for every vote received in an election. The Bloc Québécois fought very hard to keep that.

As for the wage subsidy, we identified ways the government could eliminate barriers for other businesses. Many business owners cannot access that program because of useless criteria. We proposed specific measures to ensure that more businesses and workers could access jobs. We will continue to improve government programs.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listen to the Liberals, what they keep saying is that we can ask all sorts of questions. I think it is important for us to again clarify the difference between a committee and the power of Parliament that we are asking for, which is so much needed. If we can sit for four days as a committee in the House in a modified way, why can Parliament not sit? We really should be sitting.

I would appreciate some clarification for people who might be wondering what is happening today.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, that is a very pertinent question.

Quite simply, what we have been using this chamber for in virtual sittings over the past few weeks is not Parliament; it is a special committee. It is a special committee with very specific constraints.

You yourself, Mr. Speaker, ruled a question out of order because it was not related to the subject matter of that special order. We respect your decision, but the problem is in the constraints that the special committee puts on you, Mr. Speaker, and on other members here, including the inability of the opposition to raise important issues using our opposition day motions to identify the gaps in the Liberals' programs.

We have told the government that a very small technicality in its wage subsidy program prevents companies that have acquired another company from accessing the wage subsidy. I have an example in my riding. We have been calling on the Liberals for weeks to fix this. There are multiple similar cases around the country.

Opposition parties in the past have used their opposition days to force government to take action. We have a Canada-China committee because of an opposition day motion. The Auditor General is going to audit the government's infrastructure programs because of an opposition day motion.

Questions on the Order Paper would provide us with vital information to understand the blunders that the government made in the early days of this pandemic. Canadian people have a right to know all that.

Again, if we can meet here, if 50 of us can come into this chamber and participate in a committee of the whole, why can 50 of us not come here and participate in a way that respects public health guidelines and fully brings back the powers that Parliament should have during this pandemic?

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have known my colleague for many years and I have never heard him speak as long. I actually thought that maybe it would all start to make sense, this bizarre cacophony that we are seeing from the Conservatives.

We heard the member tell us about the beauty of the free market, about the magical, mystical hidden hand that fixes everything, when we have been talking about the fact that there was no PPE in Canada and our front-line health workers had to crowdsource, but no, the magical, mystical market is going to make it better. He told us how we can get government out of everybody's way, at a time when millions of Canadians could not pay their rent and have looked to this House to get them support, but he is telling us that if we get government out of the way it will be great.

Government Orders

Why is it going to be great? Let me see. He gave us the fall of the Soviet Union. We were back in the 1970s. He had to start off with Winston Churchill. We know that whenever the Conservatives start off with Winston Churchill, we are back in the 1940s. Then of course he had to talk about China again and again, and the evil communist regime. China's human rights abuses are certainly serious, but we had to send the army into for-profit care homes to keep our seniors alive, and we heard nothing from the Conservatives about what is happening to our seniors. However, we heard about everything else.

Then the member tried to tell us that the economy was a horse. I have heard a lot of crazy economic theories, almost as crazy as the magical, mystical hand, but I had never heard that the economy was a horse.

We are in the biggest economic crisis in our history, and what we have heard from this member is a hodgepodge of right-wing gobbledeygook. I am suggesting that the member is not the man for the time. He is not even yesterday's man; he is a decades-old man. I know he does not have a long time left, but he had a long time to speak. I thought he would have at least given us some kind of coherent explanation of the bizarre strategy of the Conservatives to deny action on fighting to get decent help for people in the middle of this crisis.

• (1655)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I know it drives the hon. member crazy when Conservatives quote Margaret Thatcher, Winston Churchill and Adam Smith. I have no doubt he is harkening back to decades-old arguments.

The fact is that, in these decades-old arguments, he would have been arguing on the side of the Soviets. It is his economic policies that create the bread lines. Every country that has instituted the policies this member advocates for creates untold misery on its population. Those people who can, flee the countries that this member idolizes.

As for yesterday's man, it is true. Our party will select a new leader soon, and we will support that new leader.

I will say this. This member used to be a lot closer to the Speaker's chair. However, after the last election, because of the policies the New Democrats were advocating for, they are now the fourth party in this chamber.

The Speaker: 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, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence; the hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, Public Safety.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I will be sharing my time with the member for York South—Weston.

It is an honour to take part in this debate today on how we can keep Parliament functioning in a reasonable and responsible way. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has tested Canadians right across the country. Physical distancing has kept us apart from loved ones and from getting together in our favourite restaur-

ants and festivals. It has tested businesses that rely on direct contact with customers, causing lost revenue and lost income for workers.

If there is something that this pandemic has reminded us of, it is that Canadians are a resilient people. We can and are adapting to this difficult situation. Canadians are creatively using video conferencing for everything from birthday parties to live streaming concerts and for doctor's appointments and job interviews. Small retailers are opening up web stores for the first time and many restaurants are adapting their menus for takeout. Many organizations are showing that their employees can work from home where it is safe, while continuing to collaborate with colleagues virtually.

Parliament must also adapt and parliamentarians must lead by example by continuing to fulfill our duties while respecting public health advice on how to stop the transmission of COVID-19. Canadians deserve a functioning House of Commons where their elected representatives can ask their questions and ensure that their concerns are heard. They want members on all sides of the House to work together to find solutions to this exceptional situation that we are all in together.

The government has put forward a motion that is reasonable, it ensures accountability and transparency and respects public health advice. The motion proposes that the Special Committee on COVID-19 will meet four days a week, from Monday to Thursday. This is an increase from the previous three days a week. The committee would meet in a hybrid format with some members present in this chamber and others participating by video conference. This will ensure that everyone can participate no matter where they live and what travel and quarantine restrictions exist. Members will be able to question the government on any matter they wish, not just matters related to COVID-19.

Through this special committee, all members can continue to perform one of their core functions, which is to hold the government accountable. In fact, this motion will provide more hours for members to question the government than what is provided during regular sitting weeks. There will be more than six hours of questioning compared to the 3.75 hours question period takes up during a regular week.

The Special Committee on COVID-19 has already proven to be an effective forum where rigorous parliamentary debate occurs, while respecting physical distancing and other public health advice. From its first meeting on April 28 to May 21, the committee has met for a total of 30.5 hours and 200 members spoke during this three-week period, most on multiple occasions. This includes the leader of each opposition party represented in the House.

Government Orders

Under this proposal, important parliamentary business can also be transacted when the special committee on COVID-19 meets. Ministers and members can make statements and present petitions on behalf of their constituents. The government will continue to table documents such as annual reports, which is an important source of transparency. To provide for parliamentary debate and approval of the funding for government initiatives and operations, the motion scheduled a four-hour debate on any supplementary estimates and a vote on June 17.

As the pandemic continues, the government recognizes that it may need to continue to put forward for consideration by the House emergency legislation to get Canadians the help and support they urgently need. For this reason, the motion will continue to allow the House to be recalled on Wednesday to consider additional measures to address the pandemic.

● (1700)

I think all members of this House are united in hoping that the spread of COVID-19 is significantly reduced, if not eliminated, quickly, but our medical experts cannot predict with certainty how long this pandemic will last. We do know that the adverse economic impacts caused by the pandemic are likely to continue for some time.

For this reason, the motion schedules four sittings of the House during the summer to discuss the pandemic and measures taken by the government, on July 8 and 22 and on August 12 and 26. On these days, members may question ministers for up to 95 minutes on any matter, followed by a take-note debate on the pandemic for two hours and 20 minutes. Aside from receiving messages about bills passed by the Senate and royal assent, the House has not met during July and August in decades. However, 2020 is an exceptional year, requiring exceptional measures.

As all members of this House know, standing committees are where we conduct the most detailed examination of public policy and other issues of importance to members and Canadians. They play a vital role in the oversight of government initiatives. Since the House adjourned its regular proceedings on March 13 because of the pandemic, 74 committee meetings have been held, for a total of approximately 195 hours of deliberations.

As the government maintains a specific focus on helping Canadians get through this pandemic, the motion will provide for nine standing committees to study and report on COVID-19 issues and the government's response to it. They may also choose to study and report on any other issue they wish with their normal powers. This includes the eight standing committees that have been meeting over the past few weeks, as well as the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. When studying COVID-19 issues, committees will have expanded powers to receive evidence that might otherwise exceed their mandate. Committee members will attend and witnesses will participate in meetings by either video conference or teleconference, allowing for the safe conduct of meetings.

Canadians have been learning how to effectively use video conferencing. So have members of Parliament. Technology is not perfect, and our Standing Orders were not designed with video conferencing in mind. For this reason, the motion provides that:

(f) the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to review and make recommendations on how to modify the Standing Orders for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of an incremental approach beginning with hybrid sittings of the House as outlined by the report provided to the committee by the Speaker on Monday, May 11, 2020, including how to enact remote voting....

The great work of our colleagues on the procedure and House affairs committee is helping our Parliament modernize in a thoughtful, incremental way. It will also leave it better prepared for future crises. This is what Canadians expect.

Parliament is essential to our democracy, but even essential services like hospitals, grocery stores and gas stations have changed the way they operate because of the pandemic. Parliament is no different. We must also change the way we operate, and we believe the motion strikes the right balance between ensuring that the members can hold the government to account and protecting the health and safety of everyone who works here during this pandemic. It is vital that Canadians have faith in our public institutions, especially during this challenging time.

Acting responsibly and caring for the health and well-being of each other is a point of pride for Canadians. Canadians are enterprising, innovative and flexible in adjusting to new realities. Parliament should be, too.

● (1705)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Kanata—Carleton and I both work on the defence committee: She is the chair of defence and I am the vice-chair. The Standing Committee on National Defence has not met since the week of March 9.

Even though she was talking about how much extra time we have, in this special COVID committee, to ask questions, and how it is so much better than what was offered through question period, would she admit that there is much more to work in the House of Commons than what occurs in question period?

As we have witnessed today, we are having a full day of debate, and we have this opportunity to present ideas and question each other's presentations in the House on the various motions we are dealing with.

Would she admit that, with some of our committees not reconstituted, such as national defence, we are missing out on great opportunities to not only talk about the number of troops who have become infected during Operation LASER, in their service in long-term care facilities, but also the other operations that have been changed because of the impact of COVID-19 and the global pandemic?

As much as the Liberals want Canadians to believe that this special committee we are going to hold using a virtual or hybrid system is still a better way to do accountability, will she admit that there is just so much more that is involved in Parliament than one special committee?

Government Orders

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I have worked together on many issues in the past. All things being equal, if we were not in the middle of a global pandemic, if Canadians were not afraid, if we did not have the significant public health dictates in place, I could agree. However, we have to set the example for Canadians, and if all other Canadians are adapting and being flexible in order to protect each other's health and well-being, I believe we can do it effectively here in Parliament as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, but I would like a clear answer. We asked a question throughout the day, but we never got a clear answer.

We are in a state of crisis, and the government has made considerable sums of money available. Now the two richest parties in the House will benefit from the Canada emergency wage subsidy, a measure designed not to achieve partisan aims but to save small businesses from bankruptcy because they drive our economy.

I would like to know how my colleague can be okay with that. When will the Liberals admit that this is a bad idea and backtrack? That money should go to businesses that really need it.

• (1710)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, we have tried to find a balanced approach. We need to support businesses and employers, but we also need to support employees. Each of our political parties has employees: That is true. Should they not be eligible for support? Should we not include them in our calculations? It is something we need to make sure we do correctly, I agree, but I think that all employees, all who make contributions to this country, should be eligible for the kind of support programs that the government is currently putting in place.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House 16 years and I have fought every government on every issue, but we are in a crisis that is unprecedented. I think that the move to go to a committee of the whole was an extraordinary decision for this Parliament to make, and I am actually shocked the government agreed to it, because it allows members the opportunity to really drill down on questions that need answering. We need answering of these questions in a much more detailed and clear way than we get in the normal House.

The normal work of Parliament is important, and it must return, but I want to say that I think the work of the committee of the whole at this time gives confidence to the Canadian people that we are all here, putting on the interests of the people we represent, to try to figure out solutions together to make Canada come through this crisis.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. I think we can find a way to work together and come up with solutions that best serve Canadians. We can do it virtually. Canadians are smart people. They are talented and innovative. We can do it. I am confident.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my col-

leagues today to participate in this important debate on how we can do business as the elected representatives of Canadians in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we know, Canadians are experiencing unprecedented disruptions to ordinary life. Across the country people have lost their jobs, or have had to temporarily step away to take care of loved ones. They face an uncertain future. How we work together as parliamentarians during this time of crisis will not only shape our present, but our future.

It is thanks to the spirit of joint work that we have been able to put in place so many emergency measures so quickly and help support Canadians during this crisis. In two short months we managed to pass legislation and publish interim orders. We also implemented measures to support temporary foreign workers and other vulnerable Canadians, such as students and persons with disabilities.

I would like to spend my time today talking about these laws and measures. I would like to begin with the Canada emergency response benefit. Through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit Act, our government is providing direct support to workers who have stopped working for reasons related to COVID-19 and is helping stabilize the economy. For eligible workers, the CERB provides temporary income support of \$500 a week for up to 16 weeks and it is available from March 15, 2020, to October 3, 2020.

The sole purpose of this legislation is to benefit Canadians. The CERB was created directly in response to this immediate and extraordinary public health situation. The reality is that our EI system was simply not created to handle the effects of a global pandemic. It was not designed to cover all of the various situations that Canadian workers face.

Service Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency joined forces, and in just a few weeks we developed a fast and simple service delivery approach. The result is that we are getting urgent help out to Canadians and adjusting our policies as we identify gaps. For example, after we launched the CERB on April 6, we quickly recognized that some people were not getting the help they needed the most. We listened to Canadians.

Before going on, I would like to quickly share the latest CERB numbers. As of May 22, we have received applications from 8.1 million people and dedicated public servants have processed over 99.7% of those applications. We are already considering the next steps, with the initial CERB period coming to an end in early July. The pandemic continues to create uncertainty in our economy, and we understand that many Canadians may still be out of work at that time.

Government Orders

A word now about students and youth. We recognized very quickly that students and youth were facing unique challenges and that many were not eligible for the CERB. That is why we announced comprehensive support for post-secondary students and recent graduates, representing an investment of approximately \$9 billion. An act respecting Canada emergency student benefits has enabled the four-month Canada emergency student benefit. Students who are not eligible for the CERB can receive \$1,250 a month between May and August. Students with disabilities and those with dependants can receive an additional \$750 a month.

We have heard a lot in the past month about how these payments might disincentivize students to work. This is not the Government of Canada's understanding of the effects of the benefit. We have heard very clearly from students, from coast to coast to coast, that they want to work and want to serve in their communities in this time of crisis. That is why our measures do not end with the Canada emergency student benefit. We also announced the creation of tens of thousands of additional jobs, including jobs in the agricultural and processing sectors through mechanisms such as our youth employment and skills strategy and the Canada summer jobs program.

Other important measures to help students during the COVID-19 pandemic include our changes to the Canada student loans program. We are expanding eligibility for this program for September. We are also increasing the value of the Canada student grants by 60% and increasing the cap on Canada student loans from \$210 to \$350 per week of study. These new measures come in addition to earlier measures to pause the repayment of student and apprentice loans interest-free until September 30, 2020.

● (1715)

If Canadians want more information on what kind of support is out there for them, we now have a new tool online called “Find financial help during COVID-19”. The tool was launched on Friday, May 22, and is helping people figure out which government benefit program best meets their needs based on their specific circumstances. For example, the tool provides people with information on the CERB and the CESB, as well as the Canada child benefit top-up, and it will be updated if or when the Government of Canada adds new measures to support Canadians during this unprecedented time. The tool is a great example of collaboration across government between the Canadian Digital Service, Employment and Social Development Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency, with the result that Canadians are receiving accurate and timely information about the supports available to them.

Before I close, I would like to briefly speak about what the Government of Canada is doing to address the concerns of persons with disabilities during this pandemic.

We recognize that some groups are significantly and disproportionately impacted by this crisis. For some persons with disabilities, underlying medical conditions put them at greater risk of serious complications related to COVID-19. Others face discrimination and barriers to accessing information, social services and health care. In the spirit of “nothing without us”, the Accessible Canada Act and to support Canadians with disabilities, we established the COVID-19 disability advisory group. This group is currently offering advice to the government on the real-time lived experiences of persons with

disabilities during this crisis. As the Prime Minister has said, our government is committed to supporting Canadians with disabilities. We will have more to say about further steps we are taking to support them shortly.

We undertook the noted measures in legislation collectively, as a Parliament, with the sole aim of helping Canadians and supporting the economy. As the situation evolves, we are ready to take further action as needed. Canada's elected representatives are up to the task.

● (1720)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciated many of the comments by the minister. He articulated many of the things the government has done in response to the COVID crisis. What he really did not focus in on is what the debate is today, so I will take some of the examples.

He might acknowledge we had to rush through legislation, because we have only had a couple of sittings to deal with emergency legislation, where there was no proper review of the legislation, and then there were flaws in the legislation that had to be corrected later. If you recall, we came for a 10% worker subsidy and of course got called back because the Liberals found out that it really had to be larger, at 75%. That was because they did not have parliamentary process. What we have here today is a debate about continuing with a COVID committee. Yes, it is better than what we have been doing, but it is not due and proper parliamentary process. If they have an idea with respect to disabilities, we have a committee that does a phenomenal job. It would be able to analyze that legislation with some proper witnesses. It could expedite it and we would have better legislation, but they do not want that to happen.

I would ask my colleague this. What is his reluctance to have a modified Parliament as opposed to continuing as we are, which is a committee, not Parliament, and will not have the impact and effect of making legislation and decisions of government better for Canadians?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Speaker, we have to keep two things in mind about the return of the House during this extraordinary environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. We need Parliament to fulfill its role, and we also need to follow the advice of our world-class public health officials. We need a plan that respects both. That is exactly what we have been doing. Reports from both the procedure and House affairs committee and the Speaker of the House of Commons are very clear that virtual Parliament works.

Canadians are finding new ways to adapt to this pandemic, and so should we. Parliamentarians should set an example for Canadians, as has been mentioned by my parliamentary colleague. We now have an action plan for the House that both increases parliamentary accountability and respects the advice that we have been given by our public health officials. I would urge my colleague opposite to follow that advice from our public health officials.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for naming all the measures that the government has put in place over the past two months. I believe that these are targeted measures. There is more work to be done. Seniors, children with disabilities and workers have been taken care of.

Over the past two months, the government has announced measures totalling between \$250 billion and \$300 billion. That is fine. As I mentioned earlier, 150,000 Quebec households were unable to pay their rent in April despite the CERB. In May, 10% of renters were unable to pay their rent. In Montreal, 15% were unable to pay their rent.

In a few days, the government managed to put together and enact a law that will send \$73 billion to workers. That is fine. However, in the past three years, it has not managed to pay the \$1.4 billion that would help Quebec with its housing crisis. In Quebec, 10 major cities have been asking for the government's help for years and telling it that they need the \$1.4 billion now.

In Quebec, not-for-profit housing organizations, co-operatives, tenant associations, engineers and urban planners have been united during the pandemic in asking for the \$1.4 billion needed to house the most vulnerable during this crisis.

• (1725)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Speaker, we want Quebecers to receive their fair share of our historic investment in housing. We hope to enter into a bilateral agreement with the Government of Quebec and with the other provinces and territories. We made a commitment to enter into a bilateral agreement with Quebec based on the principles of partnership, collaboration, consensus and responsibility.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, four weeks ago it was agreed, and all the parties were told, that the government would implement without delay some financial help for people with disabilities. A lot of people with disabilities are suffering and they have limited income, just like our seniors, and their costs have gone up.

When is this financial help coming and why have they been left out?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Speaker, I disagree with the hon. member. Canadians with disabilities have certainly not been left out. There is more to come, but we have already partially responded through the \$350-million emergency community support fund to support vulnerable Canadians, and that certainly includes Canadians with disabilities.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak in this debate. I am very pleased to speak here in Parliament and I am very pleased to speak during a so-called normal sitting of the House.

I wish to inform the House that I will have the pleasure of sharing my time with my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis. He is a distinguished and honourable colleague who was once a cabinet minister.

We are meeting to debate this motion that seeks to determine whether we will continue as we are today or whether, starting tomorrow, we will use a new parliamentary hybrid approach where some members are here and others would be at home in their riding, taking part in the debates through the magic of the Internet. Those are the two options before us.

On this side, we believe we can do all this parliamentary work the way we are today, here in the House. Today, we had a debate, motions were moved, we heard presentations by members who had things to say on behalf of their constituents, what we in the business refer to as S.O. 31s. We also had debates on motions, heated debates, and that is exactly what the House is for. Every parliamentarian needs to be able to express points of view on which we agree and others on which we disagree. Such is democracy. Such is parliamentary business.

Today is proof that Parliament can indeed convene. The first version of the agreement was to bring in 31 out of 338 MPs. That was not a lot. It is barely one in 10. Take, for example, the Quebec National Assembly, where I had the honour to serve the people of Chauveau, who put their trust in my three times. I thank them. The National Assembly has 125 members and around 30 of them participate in the debates. That represents one in four members. The first version of the agreement presented here in the House of Commons was one in 10. I remind members that there are quite a few more than 31 of us here in the House. It is clear that more than 31 of us can be here, while complying with public health measures.

I remind members that contrary to what some, including the Prime Minister, have said, the Conservatives never wanted to bring all 338 MPs back to the House. That is not true. We always wanted to comply with social distancing measures.

Today was a normal day, and it works. There will be votes, and there will be debates. We are able to do it. It is unfortunate that others do not want to continue, because tomorrow we will learn about a new hybrid meeting format, in which there are members in the House and others participating virtually at home.

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I remind members that the House of Commons in England did this experiment and concluded over the weekend that it may not have been a good idea. They have resumed a so-called traditional Parliament. We cannot deny that the House of Commons in London has historically served as a great inspiration for our sittings here in the House.

• (1730)

[*English*]

Let me remind members that in World War II when London was under fierce attack by the Nazis and being destroyed by the Luftwaffe, and when the House of Commons was attacked by those planes, the members stayed in the House of Commons. This is a clear demonstration for the House of Commons that, yes, if the English people were able to do that years ago, we can have our House of Commons here in Ottawa in 2020.

[*Translation*]

It is important to remember that, if there is a place that can inspire us, it is England. Despite the storm, the affronts and the attacks by the Luftwaffe during the Second World War, the House of Commons continued to sit and Churchill could go to the House and give his great speeches that were so inspiring to the entire human race at that time.

We have already tried the online approach.

I want to heartily congratulate and sincerely thank all of the House of Commons staff who accomplished a fairly impressive technological feat in very little time, that of being able to hold a virtual House of Commons in 338 locations.

It is clear that the virtual House does not operate at exactly the same pace as a real parliamentary sitting in the House. Yesterday, in an interview with Radio-Canada and this morning with LCN, I said the same thing: There is nothing better than debating in the House and being face to face with one's opponent. There is nothing better than discussing, debating and talking directly to the person, asking the person a question and seeing that person's reaction. Talking to some type of computer using this or that program is not really the same thing. There is nothing better than a real parliamentary debate in person, and that is what we want.

Debates still have to produce results. When we have question period, I understand that it is question period and not answer period. However, it would be good to get answers when we ask questions.

[*English*]

In question period today, I asked two clear and simple questions of the government. One was what the deficit would be this year, and the government was not able to give a clear answer.

I have a lot of respect for the President of the Treasury Board, because the gentleman is my neighbour in Quebec City and I appreciate him a lot, but if the President of the Treasury Board cannot answer a clear question about what the deficit will be, then who can?

This could be a real economic tragedy for this country if we continue to spend without any control. The guy who is responsible for

making sure that we control spending is the President of the Treasury Board and he was not able to answer this simple question.

[*Translation*]

On April 30, nearly a month ago now, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a document stating that Canada was heading for a deficit of \$252 billion. That was true 25 days ago. Today, 25 days later, we are asking the same question again, because we know the government is spending a lot of money these days. However, the President of the Treasury Board has no idea what the answer is and is incapable of putting a number on the deficit.

It is great to be able to ask questions, and I can already hear the Liberals telling us later that we will be able to ask a lot more questions and get a lot more time. However, what matters is not the amount of time, but the quality of debate.

[*English*]

This is what the House of Commons is all about. We have different points of view, which is democracy and part of being a parliamentarian. This is why we have been elected.

[*Translation*]

We want to hold proper discussions and debates, but we obviously want to get answers.

We have another concern, and that is parliamentary committees. We know that the experiment was a success, that it works and that the parliamentary committees can meet virtually. That is good, but we would like to do more.

Ms. Levesque's killing in Quebec City was a tragedy that raised many questions about public safety, especially with regard to parole. As my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles so aptly stated in an interview this weekend, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security needs to meet to study this issue. Sadly, in the system that this government is presenting us with, we will not get that opportunity, and yet, this is something we need and want to do.

We also need to debate legislation. My colleague from Belchasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis will have a chance to elaborate on that later on. It is not true that democracy can be done by decree or through an 11:15 a.m. press conference. It is not true that democracy can be shelved for so long. We need to have real debates here in the House.

Our most important duty is to be accountable, to ask the government questions and to have the government answer. The problem is not whether we agree or disagree, because that is democracy. However, we must go about it the right way.

This is why we want the government to at least review its proposal. If not, at least we can see that two weeks ago, a single hybrid sitting day in the House was proposed. After that, two days were proposed. Last Friday, four days were proposed. This is nevertheless a step in the right direction and is proof that we have done well in the past few days to get more time in the House.

Government Orders

• (1735)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government has had a great deal of discussion in terms of where we should be going in regards to ensuring there is a high sense of accountability. That has been a high priority for the Prime Minister from day one.

When we talk about the importance of this institution, we have to recognize the institution, do the right thing, and at the same time respect what the health experts are saying. I think it is virtually unanimous amongst the members of the House that we could not have 338 MPs here.

The best way to accommodate 338 MPs would be to have some sort of a hybrid system that would enable MPs who choose to engage through the Internet, if I can put it that way, to be afforded that opportunity, while others could come down here. There could be rotations. Who knows?

The bottom line is that we are seeing the institution continue with a high sense of accountability and transparency. In fact, because of the changes to the rules that we are looking at today, we would, for the first time, actually be sitting some days in July and August. This is a first for the House of Commons, at least, from what I understand, in recent history.

My colleague and friend across the way has been recognized with a Parliamentarian of the Year award. Would he acknowledge that there are some positive things in our suggestion, and there is a high sense of accountability and transparency with this government?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, the proof of why we would like to have the House sitting is that I enjoy being in front of my colleague from Winnipeg North.

I agree with a lot of things the member said, and I agree with the fact that a few months ago I did get the award, but I disagree with some other things. I agree with him that it would be impossible to have 338 people in the House. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has said that the Conservatives would like to have 338 people in the House. That is not true. We always have in mind a respect for health procedures, and we will respect them, but I can assure the member that I enjoy being in the House in July, August, December, January, or any time. I love that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his remarks, and I would like to revisit some of the questions that came up earlier today. I am sure that will come as no surprise to my esteemed colleague.

We asked questions about the Liberal Party's and especially the Conservative Party's use of the Canada emergency wage subsidy. My colleague can correct me if I am wrong, but unless I am mistaken, this year the Conservative Party has the most money in its coffers and therefore does not need the subsidy. The point of the subsidy is to make money available to businesses that need it.

Members have pointed out that our party wanted political parties to keep getting public funding. Of course we wanted to keep getting it; it is a cornerstone of democracy, not a so-called misuse of funds, contrary to what I believe is going on now.

Personally, I do not think political parties, the very institutions that adopted these measures, should be able to milk the subsidy to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars more.

I would like my colleague to answer the question without dredging up 15-year-old scandals. We all know what happened, and those involved accepted responsibility. What is important is what is happening right now. How can you be okay with that?

• (1740)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge his election to the House of Commons. I appreciated his comments and the remarks he made.

On the LCN network this morning, I had to admit that I did not agree with my party's position. It was a decision made by the party, not the caucus. I have expressed my dissent publicly. I am quite happy to repeat that, but not without reminding everyone that the two front-runners in the Conservative Party leadership race, the member for Durham and the Hon. Peter MacKay, have also indicated that they did not agree with that position and they would pay back those amounts if they won the leadership. This matter is therefore settled, more or less, since it will be resolved at a later date.

I would like to clarify one other thing. This morning, I did indeed talk about scandals that have happened in the past. I mentioned the former general director of the Bloc Québécois, and I want to point out that the Board of Internal Economy found that public funds had been used inappropriately but not illegally.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his excellent argument in favour of this important institution that is our Parliament, where we have the privilege of sitting. It is not for nothing that he won the orator of the year award in 2018. He is the first francophone to earn that title. There is another title that he must certainly be proud of right now, that of grandfather. I congratulate the hon. member on becoming a grandfather.

My colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent mentioned that Parliament is one of the pillars of the House of Commons. Today, we are debating a motion moved by the government proposing a committee that would hold a question period four times a week. I would say that is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. A committee of the whole is just one of the tools of Parliament. The role of Parliament is fundamental to our democracy. As everyone knows, there are three pillars to our democracy, the executive, or the government, the legislative, or the House, and the judiciary. A democracy works when there is a balance of power, or checks and balances.

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To date, Parliament has not been sitting for an obvious reason, and that is the pandemic. We are now in the process of “reopening” and activities are resuming gradually. The role of Parliament is legislative. It must review the legislation that the government proposes to implement. As the official opposition, we decided to let the government act more quickly during this crisis. The downside is that acting quickly and doing things well sometimes do not go hand in hand. We are doing our best. We appreciate it because we realize that Canadians are going through some very demanding times. That is why we have worked together with the government and we will continue to do so.

As my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent mentioned, people must be reminded of one thing. When the Prime Minister comes down the stairs and makes announcements worth billions of dollars, it is not his money. It is Canadians' money. Unfortunately, we know that this is borrowed money. That is one more reason to ensure that the money that is raining down on us is invested wisely and will help us support the economy during the pandemic and ensure its recovery.

In our opinion, that is the reason why it is important that Parliament fully assume its role. We are showing that we can do it with a small group of parliamentarians while respecting public health guidelines. Obviously, the Liberals enjoy trying to get us to say that we want us all to be crammed in here like sardines, one right next to the other. That is not necessary. We can be flexible when it comes time to sit, because we believe that Parliament is an essential service, particularly during a pandemic and particularly at a time when the government has thrown open the floodgates.

Sometimes, the way in which the government opens the floodgates has negative effects. That is precisely when it is important that the opposition play its role. Today, I would like to give a concrete example of the government putting the cart before the horse, as the saying goes. I am talking about the Canada emergency student benefit. We are aware that we need to help all Canadians. I will talk about a reality in my riding, which goes from Lévis, near the river, to Bellechasse and all the way to Etchemins. I would venture to say that, before the pandemic, my riding was at full employment. Of course, the unemployment rate has gone up, but we need people. There is a shortage of workers in my area of the country. In fact, businesses are currently hiring workers.

The government is supporting our economy by maintaining the employer-employee relationship. That is fundamental. Of course, summer is around the corner. That is the season when young people are looking for a job. I am sure that every member in the House knows young people who have found a job, are looking for a job or have already started working. I have had a young university student working in my riding office for two weeks.

• (1745)

This Université Laval student is doing a great job, and her work is related to her field of study. She is gaining experience while lending us a hand.

As my colleagues all know, the pandemic is creating a lot of work for our riding offices, what with workers not receiving their EI benefits, companies seeking to apply for various measures and families wanting to know how we can help them out. Naturally,

there are also all the usual situations that individuals such as immigrant workers and foreign workers may be going through. Since we have a lot of work on our hands, we are happy to have this student's help.

This brings me back to what I was saying. Why did the government put the cart before the horse?

The first thing we can offer a student is a job. The first assistance the government should offer is support for hiring students. There are plenty of companies in Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis that are interested in hiring students.

Day camps are one example. We know that public health guidelines mean day camps will have to hire more counsellors. We also know they will have to implement special measures to clean equipment. They will have to adapt their practices, and they will need much more space. They will need more counsellors, more space, and more young people to clean and disinfect equipment. They will need more staff. There will not necessarily be more children. In fact, ratios will go down as costs go up.

Day camps need a helping hand. They need a government program that has been around for years. They need Canada summer jobs, a fantastic program that works well.

In my riding this year, we can barely handle half the applications. We have received almost 300 applications, but our budget will cover only 150. Unfortunately, the government was in a hurry to broaden certain criteria and, as a result, we are able to support fewer positions.

There is a pandemic. Our businesses need staff. The government has a program that can help businesses hire young people. However, rather than invest more money in a program that puts our young people to work, the government changed the program in such a way that fewer of them can work. That is a problem.

Some young people did apply. At this very moment, businesses are waiting to find out whether they will get any federal funds. At the same time, the federal government also brought in the Canada emergency student benefit. This sends a message to young people that, if they do not find work, there is a tool that can bail them out. Young people are not applying because jobs are not yet available and because they are getting the Canada emergency student benefit.

Instead of introducing incentives to encourage our young people to work, the government brings in a program that does the opposite. This will be a significant factor in our economic recovery and it will be very important to how we do now, in the summer. After enduring these really tough few months, businesses need some help, because customers might not be so quick to return once things open up. This new reality is also leading to additional expenses.

The role of the opposition and of Parliament is to make sure the government does things properly and in the right order. In this case, I think more money needs to be invested in the Canada summer jobs program.

Where can a parliamentarian engage with another parliamentarian? Where can he have the public's attention to raise awareness about these issues instead of having an individual come down some stairs to hand out billions of dollars without any real sense of how it will be used?

That is the role of Parliament. That is why we are asking that Parliament be restored to its full capacity to the extent that public health rules allow. We want Parliament to play its role in the interest of Canadians and the government, since we are here to improve its policies.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, members of the opposition actually worked with the government to ultimately come up with what we believe is a good package. At the end of the day, members of Parliament from all sides will be able to be engaged in a hybrid model that will allow us to have adequate numbers here while respecting physical distancing and enable MPs to stay in their communities where they can continue to serve other constituents.

Would my colleague not agree that, given today's pandemic and the things happening in our communities, it is the best way to go? One of the issues that is being suggested is that we look at ways in which we could also incorporate electronic voting as an option.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, the member has actually described, quite appropriately, the work of Parliament.

This is exactly what we are seeking. Unfortunately, in the Liberal motion, they limit this whole array of activities to committees only, which have no power whereby we could properly try apply our influence, as any citizens, because we do not have the tools. The perfect tool is Parliament, so why do we not to use the full extent the tool that has been working for centuries, Parliament?

Restore Parliament in all its capacity.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I was also concerned about the issue of day camps. I totally agree with my colleague on the fact that the government should invest more in the Canada summer jobs program.

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There is another solution: make the Canada emergency wage subsidy more flexible. Day camps are often non-profits. For many reasons they are not eligible for the different programs the government has put in place. For example, the 30% payroll and seasonal work of the counsellors do not necessarily meet the criteria.

Does my colleague agree that the government should also make this emergency program more flexible to allow day camps to run this summer and allow parents to send their children there so they can return to work?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

During my speech, I mentioned that Parliament is an essential service. Similarly, day camps are an essential service in Canada this summer. They make it possible for parents to return to their professional activities.

My colleague has submitted an interesting proposal. I am certain that had we had the benefit of Parliament's efforts over the past two months, we would have been able, as she just highlighted, to improve programs and change measures implemented by the government to achieve even better results.

I would say to my colleague that that is the reason why, in the context of the motion, we are quite open to proposals such as hers. We are open to debating them in Parliament rather than in the strict confines of a plenary committee because it would allow us to make laws, change the criteria and, as we have been doing in the most efficient way possible over the course of recent months, ensure the effective use of the money injected by the government.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Speaker, one item that has not been addressed here is private members' bills. This is all about Parliament. For a number of us, this is the most important thing that we have for our constituents, a private member's bill, and the current government has shut us down.

When we left on March 13, we had a number of first readings of private members' bills, including mine. It won the lottery at number seven, but now it cannot come forward. This is a committee of the whole; this is not democracy. The private member's bill is one of the most important privileges we have as members of Parliament, and it has been taken away by the Liberal government.

I wonder if the hon. member from Quebec would like to comment on that. A number of us who won the lottery have been shut out.

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Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, we need those private members' bills. I am waiting to have a real debate in Parliament on a private member's bill that would impact farmers and business owners in my riding so that they would be able to transfer their own businesses to their kids without extra fees. That is an example of how a private member's bill can change Canadians' lives for the better, and for this we need Parliament.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I start, I would like to greet my colleagues and also mention that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Ottawa West—Nepean.

[English]

I am very pleased to join today's debate on the motion that sets out how Parliament will once again adapt to the unparalleled circumstances that we face with the COVID-19 pandemic. This motion will help ensure that the important work of parliamentary democracy is maintained and carried out in a way that is both responsible and safe.

I would like to use my time today to focus on three of the motions that we have previously adopted that progressively changed how Parliament would operate during the pandemic. The first was on March 13, the second on April 11 and the third on April 20. Looking at the steps these motions took will clearly demonstrate how today's motion marks a logical evolutionary step forward in restoring the daily activities of this place while still ensuring the safety of all of the people who make this place work, and demonstrating leadership to Canadians who have had to make sacrifices and adapt their lives as well.

On March 13, the final day of our regular sittings, all parties unanimously adopted a motion, based on significant discussions and negotiations, to adjourn the House until April 20. It was clear at that time that having 338 parliamentarians and their staff working in close proximity and travelling between Ottawa and their constituencies would be dangerous and irresponsible given what we knew about the disease, which was quickly spreading throughout the world. We were asking Canadians to stay home, to cancel their travel plans and to physically distance themselves from each other. We had to take a leadership role in demonstrating the serious dangers that COVID posed at a time when governments around the world were being faced with similar decisions.

Parliament agreed that our government should be laser focused on the task of getting help to Canadians who were facing job losses and changes to their way of life, as well as dealing with the psychological impact of social and physical distancing and isolation. The motion that we adopted when we adjourned the House also required that any recall of this place would have to be for the purposes of considering measures to address the economic impact of COVID-19 and the impact on the lives of Canadians. With that in mind, we all left and returned to support our constituents back in our ridings, hoping, albeit with a certain measure of uncertainty, that by the time Parliament was set to resume on April 20, we might be in a position to resume normal sittings.

We were able to use the processes put in place by this initial motion to recall Parliament twice during this period to urgently pass two COVID-19 emergency response acts, which provided important financial supports to Canadians in their time of need, including the creation of the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB. This was thanks to the co-operative and collegial support of all members of Parliament to be flexible and adjust the regular parliamentary rules as needed to allow this to happen.

The second motion I would like to focus on was adopted on April 11 as Parliament met to consider the second COVID-19 emergency response act, which brought the wage subsidy program into being. What I would like to highlight in that motion were the changes that were made with respect to committees.

Very importantly, the motion adopted that day allowed certain committees, including the Standing Committee on Health; the Standing Committee on Finance; the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates; the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities; and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, to meet either by video conference or teleconference while the House was adjourned in order to receive evidence related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

● (1800)

It also enabled the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to undertake a study on how parliamentarians could fulfill their duties even when Parliament was adjourned. It is a report which I am sure many members have reviewed, and it was recently tabled.

The report raises important issues that we will need to consider as we move forward with alternative and virtual sittings of the House. Furthermore, we have added other committees to the list of active committees, allowing members yet another venue to gather information and raise issues with the government.

The motion we are discussing today would even further empower committees to continue their important work. We saw an incremental return to some of the types of activities that normally took place in Parliament, using technology to allow ourselves to do so while continuing social and physical distancing guidelines. These early committee meetings provided an opportunity to test our meeting virtually, which helped us to learn how eventually this technology could be used to allow for virtual sittings of the House.

As we came closer to the date when Parliament was set to return, as prescribed by the motion on March 13, it became clear that we would not be able to safely return to full sittings. Instead, we would be able to make use of technology to help take small but safe steps toward reopening Parliament.

This led us to the third motion. On April 20, I returned to Parliament and after many hours of negotiation, a new motion was adopted by Parliament. This one recognized that there was a need for Parliament to return in some form to provide a regular forum for MPs to question the government, while still ensuring the safety of all members. A unique solution was put forward to adapt to the challenging global circumstances that we faced.

We agreed to a special committee on the COVID-19 pandemic, which would serve as a temporary replacement for what would normally have been daily question period. That committee would start meeting two days a week, beginning on April 28, with a virtual sitting on Tuesdays and an in-person sitting on Wednesdays, with a reduced agreed upon number of us in the chamber. The next week, as our Parliament became more comfortable with the technological requirements of holding virtual meetings, a third sitting began, being held virtually on Thursdays.

While not considered a regular sitting of Parliament, this committee provided more time for opposition parties to question the government than they would have had during regular sittings. While there have been some minor technical challenges, we have overcome many of them.

The motion not only reinforces all the work that has been done, but also brings us closer. When I reflect on today and all of us, we work in a safe manner. When I look at question period and the way the government has proposed it, I would certainly appreciate that all my colleagues would have equal opportunity to represent their ridings the same way we do. This is what we are proposing in the motion, to sit four days.

• (1805)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is wonderful to see you in the chair and back in Parliament today.

I am from southwestern Ontario. I have access to the Internet, which is wonderful. However, when I hold a staff meeting in my riding, and there are six of us, Cathy, who lives off Highway 73, 10 minutes south of the 401, cannot get Internet and we cannot use Zoom for our meetings. In many parts of Canada, this is not an option. When I am speaking to the member for Sarnia—Lambton, it could be in and out all the time. This past week when I was on the Internet, I missed most of Parliament because the Internet froze on a lot of people.

I look at the issues and the Status of Women is something I take with great pride. Through this pandemic, we are seeing increased abuse. We sent out \$50,000, but we do not know exactly where it has gone. The human trafficking funding has been cut and is not going to be re-established until 2021. When the CERB program was established, it did not apply to GBA+, a mandatory program of the government. Therefore, I believe the problem applies to any of the COVID response plans.

When we know that women are having a totally awful experience through this pandemic, why is it okay that only some committees need to meet and not others? If our job is not important, why are we here five days a week? Should we only be here for one hour a day? We have a lot to contribute. We all bring so much personal ex-

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perience to contribute. Why can we not also provide the answers with our expertise and background?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Speaker, the member is asking a very important question, but at the same time, what we are proposing is a hybrid model, a place where parliamentarians will be able to sit in the comfort of their homes or in here. I would venture to say that each Canadian, as this unique situation occurred, had challenges with technology.

I realize that in certain parts of Canada and across Ontario that we do have challenges with the Internet. However, I would not want to be the member of Parliament who is far away and not able to come to the House and represent their constituents. I am privileged, as it takes me 20 minutes to drive here. However, I would like to think that the proposed motion by the government would allow every one of us, in a safe and measured way, to represent our constituents.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She spoke a lot about the importance of debates and democracy. However, democracy also involves respecting motions that are passed in Parliament. This is the fourth time since the beginning of the crisis that I have been repeating the message about seniors, among others.

I also want to speak on behalf of businesses in my riding. During the summer, they would have students come help them. However, since the CERB does not include any incentives to work, which is what the government should do, the problem has not been fixed. The same goes for seniors. In the motion, the government committed to looking for a way to provide tangible assistance to seniors in the long term. Seniors are among the most disadvantaged during this crisis.

I would like to hear my colleague speak about the importance of keeping one's word and respecting motions passed in the House.

• (1810)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raised some very good points.

I worked with seniors for 17 years. Their situation is unique. We have certainly provided assistance to the most vulnerable seniors. This population is most affected across Canada and has seen the most deaths. I want to take this opportunity to offer my condolences to the families of seniors who have died and to the families who were not able to attend funerals.

As for students, I have faith in them. Over the past few weeks, I have had the pleasure of interacting with students in Orleans. I can say that every one of them wants to find a job, but they are also looking to improve their chances of finding a job after school. I was a businesswoman and I can guarantee that Canadian students are looking for jobs.

Government Orders

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the consideration of Government Business No. 7 I wish to give notice that at the next sitting of the House I shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that debate be not further adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker: The House appreciates the notice.

Resuming debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

[*English*]

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak in this debate today. As my colleagues will agree, these are unprecedented times, which calls for a government response to match.

This is a situation unlike any we have ever experienced in our lifetimes, and I am proud of how our government has responded. When we looked at what was happening around the world and the terrifying effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in countries like Italy and Spain, it was clear that something drastic needed to be done.

Beginning on March 13, and in the following days and weeks, most of Canada was put on pause. In response, our government worked fervently to bring forward a package of measures that would allow Canada to survive while much of the economy was paused, to allow for the putting into place of public health measures needed to avoid the worst impacts of COVID-19.

On March 24, we introduced Bill C-13, which included a comprehensive suite of measures to ensure that individuals, families and businesses could withstand the shocks of a paused economy, such as we have never experienced. My colleagues and the members opposite will remember those negotiations, which spanned long into the night, to ensure that we could pass legislation with much-needed measures as quickly as possible.

Through Bill C-13, we introduced, among other measures, the now well-known Canada emergency response benefit, the CERB. Since this benefit was put in place, there have been more than eight million individuals, for a total of almost \$39 billion in benefits. These are the numbers as of May 21. Canadians who had lost their jobs and did not qualify for employment insurance, and who would not have had money for rent or food, are now receiving the CERB. Due to the CERB, a single mom of two who worked part time in a nail salon did not have to worry about putting food on the table when she lost her job because of COVID-19.

[*Translation*]

Thanks to the Canada emergency response benefit, many Canadians who were worried about their finances received the support they need to get through this period of uncertainty.

We also introduced measures to help the most vulnerable Canadians. We amended the Income Tax Act to issue a supplementary

GST/HST credit payment and an extra Canada child benefit payment.

Under these measures, a couple with one daughter will get an additional Canada child benefit payment of \$300, on top of an additional GST/HST credit payment of \$733, which is the maximum amount, given their lower income.

• (1815)

[*English*]

We saw that investment markets were being impacted by the pandemic. Seniors are worried about their savings. This is why we also reduced the amount that seniors are required to withdraw from the registered retirement income fund.

Knowing that students were facing particular worries of their own, we provided relief for students to receive federal student financial assistance, and we paused the requirement for paying back interest and capital on federal student loans.

Through Bill C-13, we introduced measures to allow for transfers of funds to provinces and territories for expenses related to COVID-19. We also allowed for certain exceptional regulatory powers, notably in relation to employment insurance, and removed the requirement for providing a medical certificate for sick leave.

We also introduced a 10% temporary wage subsidy for small employers for a period of three months. As we observed the number of CERB applicants and how the economic situation was unfolding, we introduced a new bill, Bill C-14, on April 11, with a new Canada emergency wage subsidy that allowed for a 75% wage subsidy for eligible employers. This helped ensure that companies could retain their employees, rather than be forced to lay them off. Due to the CEWS, Canadian business owners can apply for support to help them keep their employees on the payroll until business picks up again.

[*Translation*]

On March 24, when we tabled Bill C-13, we did not know how bad the situation would get, how long the public health measures would have to stay in place, or the exact impact on the economy and Canadians. On May 1, once it had become clear that the situation would continue through the summer, we tabled Bill C-15 to create the Canada emergency student benefit.

Many students depend on summer jobs to pay their tuition and cover their expenses, such as rent and groceries. In short, they need the money to meet their needs. It was becoming clear that many of them would not be able to get jobs this summer.

Finally, on May 15, we introduced Bill C-16 to support our dairy farmers.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Our government introduced four bills in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency in Canada. These bills contained unprecedented measures, several of which I mentioned earlier. They were all developed in exceptional time frames, with public servants working all hours to make them possible. I would like to thank those hard-working public servants, many of them my constituents, for working around the clock to serve Canadians.

Our government has been quick to act and has made adjustments where necessary, modifying or introducing new measures as the situation evolved. We have based our decisions on available evidence, looking for ways to get money to those who need it as soon as possible. We have also worked collaboratively with the members opposite. I recall being on phone calls every day with officials hearing how hard members from all parties were advocating for their constituents. We negotiated the content of the bills prior to their introduction.

[Translation]

It is difficult to predict all of the effects that the pandemic will have on the economy and the population. Some flexibility is required to be able to respond quickly. Given the circumstances, the government continues to ensure that it can respond quickly and appropriately. Many of the measures that have been put in place will expire by the end of October. Until then, we will continue to take all of the necessary measures to support the country.

In response to those who are comparing us to other countries around the world that are having the same problems, I want to say that every country's situation is different. We have our own regional challenges, distinct populations and programs that cannot necessarily be compared to those found elsewhere. Our unique context requires us to develop our own solutions, and that is what we have done.

• (1820)

[English]

It would be difficult for somebody to disagree with the fact that what the government has done through Bill C-13, Bill C-14, Bill C-15 and Bill C-16 has never been achieved before in the span of three months. During that time we have introduced and passed four distinct pieces of legislation. We have increased existing benefits, we have developed new benefits and we have given individuals financial breaks. Because of the measures the government has initiated, our constituents are being supported during these times of great uncertainty.

I believe our government has acted quickly and purposefully, with the best interests of Canadians and Canadian businesses being central to the measures we have advanced. We have demonstrated that Canadians can rely on the government to be there in times of need, in times of crisis.

As the effects of the pandemic continue to unfold, we will ensure that the measures put in place meet the needs of Canadians. If new gaps or problems emerge, we will do as we have done thus far and listen to all parliamentarians and all Canadians and bring forward measures as needed.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned all of the good things the government has been doing. Yes, I agree it has been doing some good things, especially with the CERB. However, if I were an auto worker, steel worker or a building tradesperson who was laid off on March 15, I would now be forced to go into a system in which I would lose \$72 a week and be denied the collective right to collect supplementary unemployment benefit from my company, which is about \$150 a week. That totals about \$900.

New Democrats have brought this to the government's attention, and I am hoping it was an honest mistake. Will the government correct this to make sure that people get the maximum benefit they are entitled to and worked all their lives for, instead of being denied it because the government has taken away their negotiated right?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, I would first say that the programs we have put in place, including the wage subsidy, are there because we actually want employers to keep their employees on the payroll, rather than laying them off. That is the preferred method.

We have had to very, very quickly put measures in place that would help the most people the quickest, because we are seeing unprecedented unemployment in this country. One of the things I talked about in my speech was that I have been on those phone calls every single day at 4:30 with members, like the members opposite, raising where the gaps are, where there are things that have not been addressed, because we are the ones who are on the front line hearing from our constituents every day, all across the country. I think that has been working very effectively because we have been able to address those gaps, and I thank my hon. colleague for doing so today.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary talked again about this new system, this hybrid system, that we are bringing in and that it is enough to deal with the issues at hand. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, she knows that there has been a number of tragedies recently in the Canadian Armed Forces with the recent Snowbirds crash and the crash of the Cyclone maritime helicopter in the Mediterranean off the coast of Greece. We have not had a chance, as parliamentarians, to discuss this. One of the things missing from this motion is that a number of standing committees are still not in operation, including the Standing Committee on National Defence.

What is the best way for parliamentarians to deal with this when we cannot call witnesses before standing committees to actually have these discussions and find out what is in the best interest of the Canadian Armed Forces?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to extend my condolences to the families of those we lost, as well as their shipmates, their friends, all members of the Canadian Armed Forces and all Canadians on the tragic losses we have experienced.

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I believe that we can and should be having these discussions and debates, but we do not necessarily have to do them right here in this chamber. Canadians across the country have been doing this in their own workplaces.

I am from Ottawa. I am 15 minutes away. I can drive here very easily. However, if there are MPs flying from all across the country, coming to Ottawa, using Uber, going out and getting food, getting in touch with pages, interpreters and other staff who are taking public transit in my own community, that is putting the constituents I represent at risk. They are potentially being vectors of the virus from all parts of the country to Ottawa. I think we can find a way to do this virtually.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I would like her to answer the question that I asked our Conservative colleagues earlier about the Canada emergency wage subsidy. Earlier, to my great surprise, I got a meaningful answer. I would like to see the same type of commitment from our friends across the way.

Will the government commit to take back the money being used to line the pockets of political parties for partisan purposes and use it to save SMEs, businesses, from bankruptcy?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

We have put the wage subsidy forward with the sole intent of keeping employees and employers tied to one another. What we do not want to see when this is over is huge unemployment. We want people to be able to remain employed.

I think it would be hypocritical if we did not do the same thing that we are encouraging private sector businesses to do, which is to keep their employees and maintain that link between employer and employee, because at the end of this we need to make sure that Canadians can get back to work very quickly.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. member for Foothills, I will let him know there are only five minutes remaining for government orders this afternoon, but he will, of course, have his remaining time when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Foothills.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my speech is going to change a little just because of what I heard this afternoon as part of this debate. I have to say that I am shocked and surprised that one of my colleagues would say that this building does not matter, that the House of Commons does not matter.

I think I am speaking for most of my colleagues in this room when I say that this is the greatest honour of my entire life to have been elected by my constituents three times to represent the residents of southern Alberta here in the House of Commons, whether it is in the Centre Block or here in West Block. I do not think there

is a greater honour as Canadians to represent our friends, neighbours and business owners here as members of Parliament. I am curious what the colleague who said it does not matter told her constituents at the doors during the election in 2019: “Send me there if you want, but it does not really matter to me if I represent you.” Certainly, that is a very different message than the one I am getting from my constituents in Foothills. They elected me to represent them and do a job that they sent me to Ottawa to do, which is to speak for them when they are unable to do so, and that includes speaking for them here, as I am right now, in the House of Commons.

I found it interesting when a minister earlier today said that we are having a virtual Parliament and everything is going as it should. We are not having a virtual Parliament. We are having a committee meeting. It is not a virtual Parliament. It has nothing to do with Parliament. The Liberals are misleading Canadians by saying that we are going to have four days of virtual Parliament. No we are not. We are going to have four days of committee meetings in a committee of the whole, which is not the same as Parliament.

My constituents sent me here to do a very specific and important job in my mind. The Liberal government, with the assistance of other opposition parties, is allowing democracy to be circumnavigated. We are seeing democracy or government by press conference rather than democracy by elected officials representing 338 ridings across this country.

I agreed with the government when the pandemic first started that having a group of parliamentarians here in Ottawa was probably not the safest thing to do. Again, the same member of Parliament said that we are asking Canadians to go back to work. We want to do the same thing we are asking other Canadians to do, which is absolutely right. When I go to the grocery store in my riding, I see 15-year-old kids in there working. Yet, for some reason, those members do not feel it is appropriate that I come here to work and represent my constituents as we are right now, safely, with 50 or 60 members of Parliament in here doing the job that we were elected to do.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is running out. I look forward to continuing this debate tomorrow.

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Foothills will have 16 and a half minutes remaining in his time and, of course, the usual 10 minutes for questions and comments, when the House next resumes debate on the question.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[English]*

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am back to talk about the Canada-China relationship, which, as we saw earlier today, the government has no interest in discussing in this chamber, shamefully, after giving no speeches during our special debate on the situation in Hong Kong. There have been no speeches from Liberal members, no speeches from NDP members. Both of those parties voted unanimously not to allow the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations to meet and do its work. They voted against allowing this committee to meet and do its important work during this time. That is shameful. It is a disgrace that the Liberals and the NDP refused to be involved in that conversation, and they worked together to shut down that possibility from happening. I know their constituents will hold them accountable for the shameful disregard for what is happening in Hong Kong, the disregard for the terrible human rights record of the Chinese government.

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader said that we are not supposed to be talking about this issue and that we should be talking, instead, about COVID-19. Let me say a couple of things about that.

First, the parliamentary secretary should know that various authoritarian countries around the world, in particular the Government of China, are using precisely these circumstances to crack down on fundamental human rights and violate international law. If we ignore the vital need to stand up for the international rules-based order during this time, things are going to be a heck of a lot worse after this crisis is over. If we put our heads in the sand and pretend things are not happening, things are going to be a lot worse when this is over.

Second, the government needs to understand that we have a global pandemic precisely because of the suppression of information that took place in Wuhan and in China more broadly as a result of the authoritarian politics of that system. If this had happened in a democratic country, there would have immediately been discussion, debate and questions, openly, but the Chinese government intentionally suppressed information and discussion about the outbreak of COVID-19. This is what has allowed the global pandemic to unroll in the way that it has.

At a time when information is coming out about the suppression of information related to COVID-19, at a time when there are important questions to be asked of the World Health Organization about the way it is beholden to the Government of China, it is vitally important that we ask questions about the actions of the Government of China. However, the government does not want those questions to be asked, because every time the opportunity comes up, it gives a weak statement. It refuses to condemn the violation of fundamental human rights that is happening in Hong Kong. It refused to support an investigation into the actions of the World Health Organization that includes meaningful investigation into what is going on, including what is happening on the ground in China.

At committee, Ambassador Dominic Barton praised the Chinese government's response to COVID-19. The question that I asked earlier of the government on this issue was about whether it has

confidence in Ambassador Barton, who praised the Chinese government's response to COVID-19, led a corporate retreat in Kashgar four miles from a Uighur concentration camp, and led McKinsey work to improve the image of pro-Kremlin Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich.

These are important questions about Ambassador Barton. These are questions that the government does not want to answer, because after giving no speeches, the Liberals voted not to allow the parliamentary committee on Canada-China relations to meet virtually and investigate these questions.

Why is the government refusing to answer questions and refusing to allow debates at committee on the Canada-China relationship?

• (1835)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was here earlier for the vote, and it was not just the government, but there were opposition members from two other political parties who agreed with what the government is saying on the issue.

It has been interesting to see the issue evolving over the last number of years. When Stephen Harper was the prime minister, he made reference to China on a number of different occasions. In fact, he flew to China, came back from China, and talked about how wonderful things were. He got a commitment from China to bring over a couple of panda bears. That is when I bought my panda bear necktie. I can recall it quite vividly. There were trade agreements of sorts that were signed off on but never debated here inside the House, agreements between the Harper Conservative government and China. Now, in opposition, the Conservatives seem to have taken a complete 180° turn in their approach to China.

We do not need to be lectured by the Conservatives on the importance of expressions of freedoms and rights, including to be able to speak freely. We are the party that came up with the Charter of Rights, which was presented by Pierre Elliott Trudeau back in the 1980s. The Charter of Rights is now a part of our Canadian values and we are very proud of it. We look at our values here in Canada and try to share them wherever we can throughout the world, trying to play a strong leadership role. I find it very interesting how the Conservatives continue to want to push that 180° turn, their road to Damascus approach, with respect to China.

There are some difficult situations that have to be overcome, just as there were when Stephen Harper was the prime minister. Yes, there has been a special committee. There have been numerous discussions. At the committee stage, there was a report. That report was adopted and concurred in by the House. No, the member did not get what he wanted specifically; there were both government and opposition members who said that there was no need.

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As somebody said earlier today, our Chinese heritage community in Canada predates our Confederation. Our Chinese heritage community was here before Canada was even a country as we know it today, so when things take place in China, Hong Kong and Asia, Canada is concerned. When I say “Canada”, I am talking of people in Canada, even people who are not of Chinese heritage. We have all sorts of human rights advocates. Winnipeg is home to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, one of the jewels of our city.

There are many parliamentarians who have been strong advocates of humanitarian rights and freedoms and are trying to ensure that Canada maintains its strong international leadership. Over the last number of years, with this Prime Minister and this government, we have continued to promote Canadian values throughout the world.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, that was a lot of baffle-gab, with no response to the question. I am glad to know that the member comes from the city where Canada's human rights museum is. I suggest he visit it sometime; he might learn something.

We had a choice and had an opportunity today to support a return of the Canada-China special committee. That would have allowed for hearings to happen online, just as other hearings are happening online. It would have allowed for hearings to actually get to the bottom of what is happening, and also put pressure on the government to take a stronger stance, because its stance so far on what is happening in Hong Kong has been very weak. If we compare it with the past, with Stephen Harper and the Conservatives' strong response to the Russian invasion of Crimea, the response by the current government to the violation of international law in the case of Hong Kong is not remotely comparable. That is why the Liberals do not want to have these conversations.

Why did the Liberals, along with their allies in the NDP, refuse to allow the committee to do its work to stand up for human rights?

• (1840)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the New Democratic Party. Nor can I speak for the Green Party member who I understand also voted not to proceed, as the member has suggested.

What I can say is that the Liberal members have been very strong advocates for human rights. We have been very strong. We have not been selective, but the Conservatives choose to be selective. We recognize many injustices take place all over the world. Even at a time when Canadians have been dealing with the situation of coronavirus and this government has been focused on helping them, that issue and other human rights violations have not been lost to us.

We have a caucus that is diverse, caring and wanting to ensure that the values we have in Canada are shared among the world, and we will continue to advocate for that.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I speak as the member of Parliament for the riding for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, home to Garrison Petawawa, training ground of the warriors, Canada's largest army base.

I am honoured to rise in this place on behalf of the women and men who serve in uniform in the Canadian Armed Forces. I appreciate the trust I have earned from our women and men in the forces. They know whenever I rise in this place to question the government, I have their backs.

During question period on March 9, two days before the pandemic was declared, I asked the Minister of National Defence when the military hospital at Garrison Petawawa would finally be operational. Canadians were disappointed to hear the minister of defence refuse to own up to the most recent \$247 million cut from military infrastructure funding by the Prime Minister. In the case of health services, the health and safety of our troops is at risk at the worst possible time.

Again, what is the minister doing about the unfinished military hospital at a time when we need it most?

I am pleased to recognize the nearly 1,700 soldiers, including those from 1 Canadian Field Hospital stationed at Garrison Petawawa, who are deployed on Operation Laser. To meet the unprecedented challenge caused by the pandemic, members of the Canadian Armed Forces have been supporting a request from civilian authorities in Quebec since April 20 and Ontario since April 28. In Operation Laser, Canadian soldiers have been deployed to long-term care facilities to maintain staffing and help with infection control and infection prevention. They are at 25 long-term care facilities in Quebec and five homes in Ontario. Those numbers of deployed soldiers fluctuate as circumstances dictate.

Canadians expect our soldiers to be equipped with the latest in protective gear, with the proper training and with what Canadians expect is medical-grade protective equipment. It would appear that training and equipment has not prevented 28 soldiers serving on the front line of the pandemic from contracting the respiratory illness. Our prayers are with each and every soldier to fully recover.

The women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces put their lives on the line to protect us every day. At the time I asked my question, before Canada was placed in lockdown, I warned the minister of defence our soldiers would be at a heightened risk of getting sick. I warned the Prime Minister.

Our soldiers need to know we have their backs with the proper resources, like a full operational hospital. In the case of the construction of the hospital in Garrison Petawawa, it must be behind by two years. The Prime Minister is such a big fan of China. China built two hospitals in less than two weeks.

Canadians have learned that 28 Canadian Armed Forces members have tested positive for the coronavirus after being deployed to long-term care homes, with 12 positives in Ontario and 16 in Quebec. That is a jump in soldiers testing positive for the virus from five last week to 28 this week. How many more years will it take the Liberal government to build just one hospital?

• (1845)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in times of crisis, the Canadian Armed Forces has always been there for Canadians. At this time, Canadians and members of the forces are mourning the tragic losses from the Cyclone helicopter and Snowbirds accidents. While these losses are painful, those who serve are continuing to step up for Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our government continues to make the necessary investments to ensure that the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces are well supported.

[Translation]

We know that there is no greater risk to Canadians right now than COVID-19.

[English]

Our medical personnel were critical in repatriating about 650 Canadians from China and Japan when COVID-19 first began to spread.

[Translation]

The health and protection of all Canadians are the top priorities of the Canadian Armed Forces during this pandemic. That is why the Canadian Rangers are supporting the First Nations community health authorities and providing their help to vulnerable populations in indigenous communities, remote communities and northern communities from coast to coast to coast.

[English]

The Canadian Armed Forces is also assisting the Public Health Agency of Canada with warehouse management of personal protective equipment and with contact tracing. Through the Canadian Armed Forces' response to COVID-19 called Operation Laser, we have deployed over 1,600 members to support long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario. As of May 24, 36 military personnel who were providing support in facilities in Quebec and Ontario have tested positive for COVID-19. They are putting their lives on the line. Because of that, the chief of the defence staff has stated, "To recognize this uniquely hazardous environment...I have tasked my staff to pursue Hazard Allowance for those directly engaged inside the facilities."

I want to assure my colleagues that prior to going in, all Canadian Armed Forces personnel have been trained in assisting long-term care residents and have been provided with personal protective equipment. Conditions at these facilities and others across the country are constantly being monitored.

That said, we also have to make sure that the women and men who serve and who are protecting us and our most vulnerable have the necessary critical health infrastructure to support them. This in-

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cludes investments to modernize existing military infrastructure and to build new health care facilities at bases and wings across the country. That is why we continue to advance the construction of the health services centre at CFB Petawawa. While the project has faced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we look forward to the completion of this centre in September.

[Translation]

What is more, we are still on track to start building a new military family resource centre at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa in order to support our soldiers and their families.

[English]

In addition to the ongoing work at CFB Petawawa, we have also completed jetty upgrades. We have a new armoury at the Saint-Hubert Garrison, a sports centre at the Saint-Jean Garrison, and we continue to modernize existing infrastructure. These investments help to ensure that the men and women in uniform have access to safe and modern facilities in which to work, train, live and receive care.

• (1850)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the health of the Canadian Armed Forces is a matter of national security. When will the government start to realize that Canadians cannot wait until 2037, until the end of the 20-year time frame set by the government, to properly fund our armed forces?

That includes funds to complete the hospital at Garrison Petawawa, started by our Conservative government. In January, the Liberals said it would be open in June. Now they are saying September, and it is already two years behind as of January. This hospital needs to get open. Why will the Liberals not do what is necessary to make it operational?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Speaker, we continue to ensure that military members are supported, both physically and mentally, and have access to safe and modern health care facilities. Our government continues to build new health care facilities at bases and wings all across the country, including at CFB Petawawa.

[Translation]

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also taking new, unprecedented measures to protect our members.

[English]

Members who are supporting essential operations have made social distancing and sanitization part of their routine, while non-essential tasks are paused.

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[Translation]

We have also interrupted certain training and other exercises and moved personnel both at home and abroad to ensure their ongoing safety.

[English]

Throughout this period, we have maintained health care services for our brave men and women in uniform. This includes mental health support services and maintaining operations for all 37 primary health care clinics for Canadian Armed Forces members.

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure those listening to us that we have one of the toughest and most effective firearms registration systems in the world. It includes two specific measures.

For instance, when people want to acquire a firearm in this country, they must follow mandatory training to possess what is called a non-restricted firearm. If they want to acquire a handgun or a more sophisticated gun, they have to take additional training. I should know, because this measure was introduced in 2014 by the Conservative government of the day, and I was the minister of public safety at the time.

We have a registration system that is simple and safe, complete with many guidelines and procedures. It would take too long to explain it all this evening, as the training takes several hours. What I can tell Canadians, however, is that people who own legal firearms in Canada have a lot of rules they must obey. Before taking that training myself, I was a total neophyte. I was very surprised to learn how law-abiding gun owners are. They know that a firearm must be used very carefully. These are often people who enjoy hunting or sport shooting, the two main categories of gun enthusiasts.

As I was saying, the system is very simple. There are unrestricted weapons, restricted weapons and prohibited weapons. For the average Canadian, prohibited weapons are automatic weapons, or machine guns. These machine guns include what are known as military assault-type weapons, which have been prohibited in this country since 1979. Canadians can rest assured that in the legal firearms world, automatic weapons and military assault-type weapons are prohibited. No one can own one, in any way, shape or form.

This is what led the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, a credible public safety agency, to declare that Canada has adequate laws and that it is perfectly legitimate to own firearms. Furthermore, the former commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police, Chris Lewis, who can be seen on English TV and who is an analyst on CTV, said that instead of targeting law-abiding gun owners, the government should deal effectively with the criminals who do not obey our existing laws.

I mentioned two police organizations during my four-minute speech because the current Liberal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is a former top cop. That makes me wonder why he did not heed the advice of his fellow officers.

Last week, he randomly and arbitrarily classified 1,600 firearms based on purely subjective criteria. One of my colleagues put it this way: Adding a skirt and spoiler combo to a Honda Civic does not make it a Formula 1 car. That is kind of what the minister is trying to do. He is using aesthetic and subjective criteria to classify firearms, and that is penalizing hundreds of thousands of honest citizens. He says he plans to buy back those firearms, which could cost a fortune and penalize what is clearly a highly legitimate industry, the recreation and tourism industry.

Why is the government not heeding the police's advice to go after illegal weapons, criminals and street gangs? Why is it going after scrupulously law-abiding people who are even more safety-oriented than the general population?

• (1855)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of firearms has been hotly debated for many years in the House of Commons. In the early nineties I was a member of the Manitoba legislative assembly, and Ottawa was debating the issue of firearms. The Conservative approach is to talk about law-abiding firearms owners. If the Government of Canada, or Liberals, New Democrats, Green Party and possibly the Bloc, propose anything that deals with any form of controls or red flags, Conservatives say the government is attacking those law-abiding firearms owners. It is unfortunate.

I have had many discussions over the years with individuals who are law-abiding firearms owners. I do not believe that what the government is advocating is irresponsible in any fashion. We have demonstrated a willingness to work with other jurisdictions, particularly municipalities. We are having discussions at different levels of government, listening to the different stakeholders and, for a majority of the political entities inside the House of Commons, we are moving forward on a very important issue.

The Conservative Party seems to want to take a hard-right approach by saying any change is bad. I was pleased when the member made reference to the fact that, while he was a minister, the Conservatives brought in some legislation. That is something that Conservative MPs do not talk about very much. I was pleased that the member made reference to the legislation, because those mandatory training programs are critically important. A good number of law-abiding firearms owners support having progressive actions taken on the issue of firearms.

I spoke with a law enforcement officer, and he talked about toy guns. Some toy guns that look like assault-type weapons have an orange cap identifying them as toys. The officer said it would be possible to spray paint these caps black and have them look very convincing.

The actions the government is taking are not on a whim. They are working and listening to what Canadians want the government to do. They want to see some action on this important file. It is about safety. It is about making our communities a better place. It is about working with others.

I would invite the Conservative Party to get on board and be part of the broader coalition that is looking to make our communities better places while still respecting law-abiding firearms owners.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that we should make our communities safer. That was our slogan in 2006.

I agree with him that firearms owners, whether they are sport shooters or hunters, are law-abiding citizens.

Why go after and harass them with costly and ineffective measures instead of examining the real problem of street gangs?

When will the government put in place measures to deal with street gangs and illegal firearms?

We will support the government. We even have proposals, such as strengthening the capacity of the CBSA at the border, putting in place a better information exchange system for police services and establishing harsher sentences for the possession of illegal firearms. We have proposals, but the Liberals' actions are designed to pander to the ill-informed for purely electoral and partisan reasons. They are intent on making hunters second-class citizens.

We will be there to represent and defend them.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. Our government recognizes that the vast majority of firearm owners are conscientious and law-abiding, and we have tremendous respect for them. However, when guns get into the hands of criminals with violent intent, the results can be tragic.

We also intend to take further action to prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands by strengthening safe storage laws and continuing to build a national system that will allow for the monitoring of bulk firearm purchases. The issue of gun and gang violence is complex and consistently evolving. It requires collaboration in partnership with all levels of government, law enforcement and community groups to get to the root of the problem and intervening where we know it will make a difference.

That is why the government has made unprecedented investments to support prevention, gang exiting and outreach and awareness programming through initiatives to take action on gun and gang violence. We are investing \$327.6 million to give police and prosecutors new resources and tools to fight gang-related violence and address gun smuggling.

I see the time is up, but I have appreciated, as always, the opportunity to say a few words.

[*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 7:03 p.m.)

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