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# House of Commons Debates

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Thursday, February 25, 2021

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



## **CONTENTS**

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 25, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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• (1000)

[*English*]

## POINTS OF ORDER

### CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I would like to ask for unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, this evening, after Private Members' Business, the House shall continue to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering a motion respecting Senate amendments to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), and when no member rises to speak or at 12 a.m., whichever is earlier, the debate be deemed adjourned and the House deemed adjourned until the next sitting day; and during the debate tonight, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

I was—

**The Speaker:** I will interrupt and then allow the member to either start over or continue.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Speaker, you ruled yesterday that a member repeatedly raising points of order for the purpose of unanimous consent on the same matter is out of order when there has not been any material change in the matter. The member is repeating a point of order, a request for unanimous consent, on a matter that he has very recently raised. I ask, following your ruling yesterday, that you rule on these repeated requests for unanimous consent on a matter the House has already pronounced itself on. They should not be raised.

**The Speaker:** Let me consult with the table.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to add to that point before you rule on it.

**The Speaker:** With the ruling I am going to give, I do not think the member is going to worry too much.

I want to clarify things for the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan regarding the point of order. If he recalls, after yesterday, when we had exactly the same request, there was a change. There was consultation, and if he checks Hansard, he will see there was a change in the request. I believe there have been some changes since the hon. member made this request, based on what I have heard so far.

I will let the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands continue.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, the material change here is that we are now 24 hours closer to a deadline induced by the Superior Court. There is a material change, and given that change, consideration should be given by all members to adopt the following motion. I move: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, this evening, after Private Members' Business, the House shall continue to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering a motion respecting Senate amendments to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)—

• (1005)

**The Speaker:** I will interrupt again for a second. Apparently there is a technical issue. I hope it is a technical issue.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Speaker, it is a technical issue. When I am trying to raise points of order, someone in the technical department is muting my microphone. That is a serious violation of my privileges as a member. I will always respect the direction of the Chair, but it is not up to technical staff to mute my microphone when I have a serious matter of order to raise. I ask that you take seriously the impact it has on the privileges of members when someone else takes it upon themselves to mute members' microphones.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member and will look into that.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has a point of order.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, it concerns me when we see members, like the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, use technology to interrupt people speaking in the House and continually interfere. We have a right, as members, to hear a motion before we decide whether we are going to support it or not, but we cannot have someone use technology to continually obstruct an effort to put a motion on the floor. The member has been obstructing this. He uses this tactic all the time and I think we should mute his microphone.

**The Speaker:** I think we have dealt with this issue.

*Routine Proceedings*

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroit has a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleagues.

I think that the rules of decorum in the House dictate that we listen when someone is speaking. If we want to rise on a point of order, we can do so afterward. It is disrespectful to continually interrupt a colleague when they are speaking.

I would ask you to remind the member of the rules of decorum in the House.

**The Speaker:** That is a very good point.

[*English*]

We have already dealt with this. I ask the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan to wait until the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has finished his point of order. Then we can continue from there.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I believe if you ask, you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, this evening, after Private Members' Business, the House shall continue to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering a motion respecting Senate amendments to Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), and when no member rises to speak or at 12 a.m., whichever is earlier, the debate be deemed adjourned and the House deemed adjourned until the next sitting day; and during the debate tonight, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As you mentioned, the big difference now is that 24 hours have passed. What if one minute has passed? Will that be deemed a sufficient change for a motion like this to be brought forward again?

**The Speaker:** The member mentioned that discussions had taken place. That is where the change is, not the time.

All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### MAIN ESTIMATES, 2021-22

A message from His Excellency the Administrator of the Government of Canada transmitting estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 2022, was presented on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

**Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Main Estimates, 2021-22.

Also, on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the departmental plans of 88 departments and agencies for 2021-22.

\* \* \*

● (1010)

### FEDERAL TAX EXPENDITURES

**Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, a document in both official languages entitled “Report on Federal Tax Expenditures”.

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### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (additional regular benefits), the Canada Recovery Benefits Act (restriction on eligibility) and another Act in response to COVID-19.

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

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### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### LIAISON

**Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 107(3), it is my pleasure to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Liaison Committee, entitled “Committee Activities and Expenditures—April 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020”. This report highlights the work and accomplishments of each one of our committees, as well as details the budgets that fund the activities approved by all committee members.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, two reports of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

The first is the third report of the committee, and it is on security in relation to C-228, An Act to establish a federal framework to reduce recidivism. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments. I want to congratulate the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac. It was a very informative and useful committee meeting, and I wish the member well in the legislative journey of this bill.

The second is the fourth report of the committee, adopted Monday, February 22, regarding its condemnation of the statements made by the National Firearms Association. It reads in part, “That...the National Firearms...statements made by Sheldon Clare, President, on February 16, 2021 in a video posted online with regards to the introduction of the Bill C-21 which states....”

I will not go on to state what the contents are, but it was clearly perceived by the members of the committee to be a threat. If it is a threat to one, it is a threat to all of us, and under no circumstances are these kinds of threats to be perpetrated. We have seen what happened on January 6 in the United States. We do not need that repeated here.

• (1015)

#### CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, entitled “The Breach of Hong Kong’s High Degree of Autonomy: A Situation of International Concern”.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters, the technical staff and all those who support the committee.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address this supplementary report. It is not a dissenting report. The Conservatives are very much in support of the report and of all of its recommendations. The report highlights the deteriorating situation in Hong Kong and the need for action by the government. We are pleased to see the report call for the universal suffrage of Hong Kongers, the application of sanctions by Canada, strong immigration measures, and two key measures to counter China’s foreign influence operations here that are threatening Canadians.

The supplementary report highlights two additional suggestions. One is with respect to stronger actions around foreign state interference in Canada following the adoption of a motion by the House of Commons on that issue on November 18. The other additional recommendation within our supplementary report calls for the government to begin discussions on when to review whether it continues to be appropriate for a Canadian judge to sit as a non-permanent judge on the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal.

I also want to thank the analysts and all the committee staff, as well as the members from other parties. This is a strong report. We endorse its recommendations, and we hope to see the government respond by taking up the calls of the committee and implementing them.

#### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled, “Respect in the Workplace”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

#### GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

**Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris-Moose Mountain, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates entitled, “Request for Government Response to the 9th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session.” Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

#### Routine Proceedings

I would also like to thank the clerk, the analysts and all committee staff who worked hard to facilitate the production of this report and who were instrumental in its execution, so much so that we are presenting it here again today. I would also like to thank all the MPs who participated in the initial study that led to the report back in June 2017, including those who were permanent members of the committee and those who may have only contributed to one or two meetings.

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#### CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION IMPLEMENTATION ACT

**Hon. Deb Schulte (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs)** moved that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Chemical Weapons Convention Implementation Act, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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#### OFFSHORE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (for the Minister of Natural Resources)** moved that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Offshore Health and Safety Act, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

\* \* \*

• (1020)

#### PETITIONS

##### EQUALIZATION

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition today.

Albertans have contributed a net \$600 billion to federal coffers in the last 40 years, and much of that largely funded equalization. The generosity of these Albertans is due to the resource revenues and their hard work and sweat. Due to the massive shift in policy from the current Liberal government against this resource sector, this necessitates a shift in equalization formulas to reflect that change.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the government to renegotiate the formula for equalization immediately.

##### OPIOIDS

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition was sent to me from Katherine Steinhoff. Like thousands of Canadians, Katherine’s life was forever changed when she lost her son to an accidental overdose. Tragically, the overdose epidemic has touched too many people in my riding of Hamilton Centre, in Katherine’s hometown of Ottawa, and in communities from coast to coast to coast.

*Routine Proceedings*

This petition calls for Canada to declare the overdose crisis a national health emergency, develop and properly fund an overdose action plan, decriminalize possession for personal use, and reform flawed drug laws and policing.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am presenting today is signed by concerned Canadians who are calling on the government to take meaningful action to combat catastrophic climate change by supporting a motion introduced by my colleague, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, Motion No. 1.

This motion is for a made-in-Canada green new deal, and calls on the government to implement a bold plan to tackle the climate crisis and invest in a just transition for workers as Canada shifts to a clean and renewable energy economy.

**The Speaker:** Before proceeding, I would like to remind the hon. members that we have a fixed amount of time of 15 minutes for petitions. I would like to ensure that everyone is as concise as possible, so we can get to the long list and complete it in a fashion that is acceptable to everyone.

We will now continue with the presenting of petitions. The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

## RESPONSIBLE ENTERPRISE

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from citizens and residents of Canada who are deeply concerned about the actions of a Canadian corporation, OceanaGold, which is operating in the Philippines with the support of the Philippine government. There are grave concerns about the degradation of human rights, particularly against indigenous people, and of the environment.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to strengthen the rules for Canadian businesses operating overseas; uphold human rights; make the Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise independent and empowered to compel evidence, witnesses and testimony, among other things; and end support to the Government of the Philippines, including socio-economic and financial programming.

## AGRICULTURE

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling two petitions on behalf of my constituents. Both are on the same topic, which is the Pickering federal lands. The first petition calls on the House of Commons to rescind all plans for an airport and for any non-agricultural uses on the remaining Pickering federal lands. They ask the House to take action to preserve the watersheds and the class 1 farmland on these lands.

The second petition also calls on the government to abandon any plans for a proposed Pickering airport and requests the House of Commons to designate Parks Canada as the custodian of the Pickering federal lands to preserve them for public use. They also ask the House to mandate the use of long-term leases to initiate support for the revitalization of these lands.

## PORNOGRAPHY

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present three petitions. The first petition is from constituents across Canada. They are concerned about the accessibility to and the impact of violent and degrading sexually explicit material online. They call on the government to do more to protect children. As noted, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires Canada to develop the means to protect children from forms of media that are injurious to their well-being.

## ALBERTA

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from Albertans who want to draw the attention of the House to a recent report from Statistics Canada that highlights how a disproportionate amount of young men die between May and October. The petitioners recognize that men are three times more likely to commit suicide.

Likewise, Albertans have suffered an energy downturn, an oil price war, and a federal government unwilling to support major pipeline and investment projects. Alberta has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada. The petitioners ask the House to approve shovel-ready projects across the country to get Albertans back to work.

## MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the last petition I am presenting today regarding Bill C-7 is of prime importance, especially given the bill's amendments concerning mental illness and protecting the disabled in Canada. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support measures to protect human life, as all human life should be regarded with a great deal of respect, from inception to natural death.

• (1025)

## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition on behalf of GTA residents who are concerned about the horrific shootings that are all too common in the GTA.

The petitioners call on the House to support my private member's bill, Bill C-238, a bill that would have made GTA residents safer by keeping dangerous offenders behind bars. Shamefully, the Liberals have already voted down my bill.

## HEALTH CANADA

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege today to rise and table a petition on behalf of residents from the Alberni Valley.

The petitioners cite that Health Canada has an open file to license a Walmart-sized medical marijuana facility directly across the street from Kackaamin, a first nations family trauma and addictions healing centre. The centre is doing important work around our shared history of colonialism and residential schools, but the people were never consulted in the initial planning of this facility and have requested that this facility be located elsewhere.

The petitioners call on the Minister of Health to acknowledge the implicit racism in the policy choices of Health Canada's cannabis licensing process and handling of this file and to adhere to the purpose of the Cannabis Act and principle of reconciliation. They call for an expedition of the review of this file and the cancellation of all cannabis licences and applications to 7827 Beaver Creek Road, under the Cannabis Act, in the public interest. They want an apology to Kackaamin and to reaffirm its commitment to UNDRIP and the TRC's calls to action.

#### CARBON PRICING

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the member for Timmins—James Bay for needing to hear me, yet again, speak in the House.

I have four petitions that I would like to raise.

The first is with respect to the carbon tax. The petitioners express their profound frustration that in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and all the fiscal and other challenges people are facing, the government would announce the decision to dramatically hike the carbon tax. They note that the carbon tax is not an effective way of responding to the environmental challenges that we face.

The petitioners call on the government to repeal the decision to increase the federal carbon tax to \$170 per tonne. They also call for having the carbon tax shown as a separate expense when buying products, so citizens are aware of exactly how much money they are paying in carbon tax at a given time.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to the ongoing genocide of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims.

The petitioners call on the government to take a step, which the House of Commons has already taken, and recognize that Uighurs are being subjected to ongoing genocide. They want to see not just recognition but action and response. They call on the government to impose targeted sanctions against those perpetrators of this horrific violence and this alliance, with the call by the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations for sanctions in the case of the situation in Hong Kong as well.

#### HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the third petition is with respect to forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

The petitioners call on the government in the House to support Bill S-204, which would combat organ harvesting and trafficking by making it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ without consent from the donor.

#### Routine Proceedings

##### MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the final petition expresses grave concern about Bill C-7, the government's decision to try to remove safeguards, to open the door to euthanasia for those who are facing mental health challenges and to do so in all these policy areas in ways that are completely unrelated to the Truchon decision.

The petitioners call on the government to amend or stop this bill and, in particular, to remove those aspects of the bill which are completely unrelated to the Truchon decision, which, frankly, is most of them.

I commend these four petitions to the consideration of the House.

● (1030)

#### NATURAL RESOURCES

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to once again present a petition that takes particular relevance this week after there were revelations from the U.S. State Department that former Prime Minister Trudeau was systematically using his authority to affect jobs in Quebec. Many of my constituents who have been around longer than I have will say, "Like father, like son."

Constituents therefore petition the government to do two things: have the current Prime Minister of Canada apologize for the actions of former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his government's destructive national energy program and affirm the rights of provinces to develop, manage and market their natural resources.

It is incredibly frustrating, the legacy that—

**The Speaker:** I am going to interrupt for a moment.

The member for Manicouagan is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, the interpreters are saying that the sound is not good enough for them to be able to do their job, so we no longer have interpretation.

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** There is a problem that the interpreters cannot make out what is being said.

We will set the clock back, if the member does not mind starting over. Maybe he can change the microphone a bit and ensure the pickup is coming from his headset and not from the microphone on the computer. We want to ensure everybody hears what the hon. member has to say. I am sure members are very interested.

*Points of Order*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. In reviewing what the member had said, I am concerned. During the presentation of petitions, members should be reflecting on the content of the petition and providing less political commentary, especially when we have a lengthy list of members who would like to present a petition. The other day, Mr. Speaker, you actually had to cut some members off because we ran out of time. Therefore, political commentary should actually be discouraged.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for that point. I would remind all members that they should be giving a concise description of what the petition is and not adding any kind of commentary that they might have.

We will return to presenting petitions. I will let the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot continue.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise and present a petition on behalf of constituents who have brought to my attention the disruptive actions of former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, specifically in regard to his national energy program, which had a disproportionate effect on the province of Alberta, made especially relevant with revelations from the U.S. State Department this week, with his actions regarding Quebec.

The petitioners call upon the government to have the current Prime Minister of Canada apologize for the actions of former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his government's destructive national energy program and to affirm the rights of provinces to develop, manage and market their natural resources.

I present this petition to the House of Commons for the consideration of it.

## FALUN GONG

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituent, Muhong Wang, and many other Canadians who are outraged over the atrocities carried out by the Chinese Communist Party against the practitioners of Falun Gong.

Falun Gong is a spiritual discipline promoting principles of truth, compassion and tolerance, but followers are shown anything but those principles and are instead killed, tortured and made victims of organ harvesting.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to apply Magnitsky sanctions to the Chinese officials responsible for those gross human rights violations.

\* \* \*

• (1035)

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**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 ask the all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## POINTS OF ORDER

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. First, from the bottom of my heart and on behalf of all my colleagues, we cannot imagine the stress you are under in regards to a live sitting as well as technology. I want to thank you and all our deputy Speakers for accepting the challenge to wrestle with that.

Also, this is my 16th year, and sometimes it takes a little to reflect on what has just happened to bring my concerns. This is with respect to the point of order from my colleagues for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Langley City, my friend for Timmins—James Bay as well as a Bloc member, whose riding I do not recall, in regard to the point of order from the member for Kingston and the Islands.

I just watched two points of order, one on the floor, technical, and one on technology that was germane to the petition that was being presented. Mr. Speaker, you have quite a challenge. However, may I suggest that whatever rules you have for a member inside the chamber interrupting someone who is moving a point of order should be consistent with technology. I have noticed that people can actually interrupt a member who is moving a point of order in the chamber. It is a matter of consistency. Again, I cannot imagine the challenge you face, and we are glad for your service to the chamber.

Finally, the point I would like to make is that I have no idea whether the member for Kingston and the Islands actually did any consultations. He certainly did not talk to me. In moving forward, for all my colleagues, everything in this chamber is based on the honour system in that we always trust that members bring about those things which are relevant and true. If someone gets up on a point of order and says that there were consultations and that has not occurred, that erodes your capability, Mr. Speaker, of trust in the honour of members.

I wanted to share with my colleagues the point that if that is the case, then fine. If it is not, then please do not posit a point of order or any other claim in that fashion.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order only because the question came up about whether discussions had taken place. I assure this House that I would not come before the House and present a motion suggesting that discussions had happened had they not actually happened.

As we know, when unanimous consent motions are discussed, quite often it is the House leadership and the whips' teams that have the discussions. They are the ones who have the discussions.

I agree that I did not go and talk to every one of the 337 members of the House, but discussions certainly did take place. When motions like this come forward, they are based on the fact that discussions had taken place among House leadership teams and not with each individual member. I can assure you that these discussions did occur.

**The Speaker:** I want to thank both members for their input.

I will start off by responding to something that I was going to say anyway. That works out well. Thank you for the segue.

As to the fact that hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe was concerned about being muted, the technology people do mute people who have their microphones on if it is not their turn. I want to point out that it is to avoid embarrassment more than anything else, because we have had situations of people speaking without knowing that their microphone was on. If it is not their turn, it is very awkward for everyone. Just for the good functioning of the House, we have instructed the technicians that if someone is not speaking, they should please mute them.

The other thing is the matter of rising on a point of order. By all means, we want to be as close as possible to what is going on in the chamber. Usually the person stands and claims a point of order. I would ask anyone who is bringing up a point of order to please raise their hand, as well as bringing up the point of order verbally. When they push on the unmute button to speak and then get muted again or mute themselves, it gives a nice clear signal to the Chair, making it easy for everyone. For that, thank you to all of you.

Regarding what was done yesterday, it was certainly an interesting time in the chamber, but what happens is that the Chair is in the hands of the House and how the members would like the Chair to conduct business. We have to go by the rules that are in place. There is flexibility to respond to the changes in motions following discussions among parties, and that is where the Chair has to use judgment as to whether there was a certain amount of discussion that had taken place and if there was something that has changed within the chamber or within the members' understanding of what is there. A lot of it has to do with the Chair's trust in the honour of the members in the chamber. Without that honour, I am not sure we will go very far in this chamber. I really do rely on the hon. members being as honourable as humanly possible.

Finally, there were proceedings intervening between the requests made yesterday and today. Something went on between what happened yesterday in the chamber and today. That was my understanding. That is just to clarify what has happened.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has raised his hand. Go ahead, please, a point of order.

• (1040)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up to seek further clarification about what you just said.

I think that in the case of members who are inadvertently unmuted and are having side conversations, it clearly would be helpful for the technicians to take steps to mute them. That situation is different from a member trying to raise a point of order, trying to intervene or exercising their right to offer a side comment, all of which are part of the traditions of this place. These things are certainly part of what happens in the House of Commons, and it would be a very different case if technicians were muting them or repeatedly muting them in that case.

This is important, because every week members are making a decision about whether to participate virtually or to come to Ottawa. From a health and safety perspective, it is easier if many members

### *Points of Order*

are able to participate virtually, but if their virtual participation is in any way different from what it is in the House of Commons, it creates a serious problem, I think, for managing the numbers that can be in the House. Many more members may feel they need to be physically present in the House if they feel their opportunity for an intervention may potentially be limited by being muted.

I believe I heard you say that technicians are empowered to mute people who seem to be unmuted by error. I think that is very reasonable, but if members are repeatedly trying to unmute themselves and they are repeatedly being muted, it raises issues about whether there is inequality between members participating virtually and members who are participating in person.

**The Speaker:** We have more points of order right now, and I want to clarify that situation. I have asked hon. members who have a point of order to make sure their hand is raised, just as the hon. member did now, so that I can see it, to let me know what is going on or to let me know that they would like to raise a point of order.

As far as the comments go, heckling is frowned upon in the chamber, as well as online. It is just that much more evident online.

**Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order on the discussion that has been going on.

You, Mr. Speaker, along with the staff, have been very much trying to replicate, as much as possible, the procedures in the House. We have to recognize that when members are in the House, you choose when someone has the microphone. When members are at home and working remotely, I am hearing the argument that we should have control of our microphones, but I would like to say, as you reflect on this, that we should follow the House procedure as closely as possible. Members have the ability to raise their hands and be recognized as if they were standing in the House, which is better than continuously interrupting and disrespecting those who are speaking and have the right to speak because the Speaker has recognized them and given them the right to speak.

That is what I would like to be considered as you are deliberating on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is really important. I rarely agree with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, but I would agree that similar rules are not being applied to those online and those in the House.

*Business of Supply*

When I rise on a point of order in the House when someone else is speaking, my microphone does not turn on until you recognize me. I could shout or do anything to get your attention, but the person with the microphone who has the floor gets heard. What we see online is that certain members, including particularly the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, use technology to obstruct and to interfere, and then attack the House technical staff, which I find very concerning, because they are trying to do their job for you.

Mr. Speaker, if you did not hear the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan after his first, second or third attempt to intervene, it would be hard to believe. You would have allowed the member speaking to finish and then recognized him. We have to have a rule about people like the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan who use the online power to attempt to obstruct and shut down the right of other members to be heard. You are the Speaker and you can put that person on mute and hear him afterward, but members have to be able to finish their statements without interruption.

• (1045)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, I am rising to add to what the member just indicated. I have great concern when I hear other members criticizing the work of the people who are making this process happen for us. I know that another member did it when he was introducing a petition. He said he would prefer that he was not unmuted in this way. We have to respect the fact that these people are working under trying circumstances as well. They deserve our utmost respect for the work that they do, and by all means, we should never insinuate that they are intentionally trying to do something to restrict our ability to participate in this chamber. We must give them the benefit of the doubt that they are working to their utmost ability on our behalf.

**The Speaker:** I believe that is all. I want to thank all members for their input. I will take this matter under advisement.

I also want to thank hon. members for recognizing the work that is being done by the table officers and the technicians. They are doing their best to make this work and to make sure we have a democracy that works for the benefit of all Canadians. I thank all of them for their co-operation and participation in the system.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE ELDERLY

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ)** moved:

That the House: (a) recognize that the elderly were most directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; (b) recall that too many of the elderly live in a financially precarious position; (c) acknowledge the collective debt that we owe to those who built Quebec and Canada; and (d) ask the government, in the next budget, to increase the Old Age Security benefit by \$110 a month for those aged 65 and more.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Th r se-De Blainville.

It is with considerable emotion that I rise on this supply day to speak to the Bloc Qu b cois motion. We hope that the House will “(a) recognize that the elderly were most directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; (b) recall that too many of the elderly live in a financially precarious position; (c) acknowledge the collective debt that we owe to those who built Quebec and Canada; and (d) ask the government, in the next budget, to increase the Old Age Security benefit by \$110 a month for those aged 65 and more.”

I would like to remind the House that the reason I am so passionate about this morning's topic is that, before I was elected, I spent two years as a project manager, raising awareness of elder abuse and intimidation. Every day I looked for ways to improve the living conditions of seniors in my region and, taking things one step further, advocate for well-treatment. It did not take me long to realize that there is a direct and, sadly, all-too-frequent connection between financial precarity and vulnerability.

As the first member to speak to this important motion, I would like to focus on three issues. I will start by discussing the precarious financial situation that prevailed long before the pandemic. Then I will explain how the crisis made things even worse for seniors. Finally, I will talk about how the Bloc Qu b cois has spent years working to improve seniors' buying power.

First, I would like to point out that the Bloc Qu b cois is not the only party to have recognized that we need to shrink this huge economic gap. During the 2019 election campaign, the Liberals themselves looked seniors straight in the eye and promised to increase old age security benefits by 10% for seniors 75 and up. They reiterated their intent to increase the OAS in the September 2020 throne speech, but it has been radio silence since then and nothing has been done yet. Regardless, we feel that their proposal is just not good enough and that it unfairly creates two classes of seniors, because poverty does not wait until people turn 75.

Now let us take a moment to debunk a few myths. The old age security program is the federal government's principal means of supporting seniors. The two major components of the program are old age security, or OAS, and the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS. The OAS is a taxable monthly pension available to people aged 65 and over. The GIS, meanwhile, is a tax-free monthly benefit available to OAS recipients with an annual income under \$18,648, despite the OAS.

The OAS is regulated by the Old Age Security Act and aims to provide a minimum income for people aged 65 and over. This program is not based on benefit funding. In other words, seniors do not need to have paid into it in order to qualify. The OAS provides seniors with a basic income to which they can add income from other sources like the Quebec pension plan or an employer's pension plan, depending on their specific financial situation.

*Business of Supply*

Let us look at some revealing figures. When, despite old age security benefits, income is below \$18,648 for a single, widowed, or divorced person, \$24,624 when the person's spouse receives the full OAS pension, or still \$44,688 when the spouse does not get OAS, the person has access to an additional benefit through the OAS program called the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS.

That is a lot of figures, but the point I am trying to make is that the problem is twofold. Since the pension amounts for seniors are so low, people for whom this is the only source of income are condemned to live below the poverty line.

As of October 2020, people whose only income is old age security and the maximum guaranteed income supplement receive an annual income of \$18,358.92, or barely the equivalent of the subsistence level established by the market basket measure, which is between \$17,370 and \$18,821. In the last quarter of 2020, the federal government increased monthly payments by \$1.52 for a total of \$18 a year. That is the anemic increase given to the least fortunate who receive the maximum of both benefits.

- (1050)

That is ridiculous. Many seniors who contacted us were outraged because they felt that the Liberals were blatantly laughing at them.

The indexation of benefits is insufficient to cover the increase in the cost of living because seniors spend money on items different from those used to calculate inflation.

Recently, we talked about the Internet, which should also be considered essential because it lets them stay in contact with their loved ones during the pandemic.

The current crisis has created serious financial difficulties for a great number of people, including many seniors. Some seem to think that the economic shutdown does not affect seniors because they are no longer working, but that is not true. First, a good number of them are working, especially older women. In my opinion, this shows the urgency of the measures that are being called for. If they are receiving a pension and feel that they must work, they must not have enough income support.

I am the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and since the summer I have had the opportunity to study the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, especially older women. Many seniors want to continue working even if they have reached retirement age.

Some seniors were affected by fluctuations in their investments or retirement savings. They live on a fixed income, and most of them receive a pension. However, the cost of living is going up for them, as it is for everyone, on expenses such as rent, groceries, medication and services. Rent and food prices have gone up because of the pandemic.

Prices in Quebec are estimated to rise by about 4% in 2021, which would surpass general inflation. Prices have also increased because pandemic-related delivery fees have been introduced, there is a shortage of some products and some chains have adopted so-called COVID fees.

The indexation of benefits for the last quarter of 2020 speaks for itself. According to the consumer price index, benefits increased by 0.1% in the quarter from October to December 2020. As I just pointed out, this means that the poorest seniors receiving the maximum amounts of the two benefits get an increase of \$1.52. That is not even enough to buy a Tim Hortons coffee. I am in regular contact with representatives from FADOQ, and they have rightly pointed out that this indexation is insulting.

Let us summarize the support measures the government has proposed. We realize that the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, was introduced to help people during the pandemic and that it has proven helpful. This \$2,000 monthly benefit was deemed adequate for allowing people to live decently during the pandemic. Meanwhile, old age security benefits do not even reach this amount.

In 1975, the old age pension covered 20% of the average industrial wage. Today, it covers about 13%. With our proposal, we aim to raise that coverage to at least 15%. In the end, old age pensions often do not even manage to lift seniors out of poverty.

Increasing seniors' income would not only afford them a better quality of life, which they have long deserved, but also help them face the current crisis and participate in our economic recovery. This has been a priority for the Bloc since well before the pandemic, when we were already asking for a \$50 increase to the monthly guaranteed income supplement for people living alone and a \$70 increase for couples.

Yes, there was a one-time payment of \$300 for those who receive the old age security pension and \$200 for those who receive the guaranteed income supplement. There was also an extra GST/HST payment. These additional measures are welcome in the very specific context of the pandemic, but they were just one-off payments. That is the problem. The insufficient indexing of benefits for seniors was already a problem before the pandemic. It is still a problem and it will continue after the pandemic.

Moreover, here is a little comparison that is quite striking. Former Governor General Julie Payette gets a pension for life of almost \$150,000, plus an expense account. Seniors would be quite happy with much less. A rise of \$110 per month would not change their lives, but it would help. Seniors really feel the impact of the pandemic, and we must look after them because they are also very much isolated and more at risk.

To conclude, I would like to talk about the importance of increasing health transfers. It is also part of what seniors are asking for. They are not interested in national standards. They do not think that will get them a vaccine. There is also a concern about vaccine procurement. We learned that seniors 85 and over would start to be vaccinated, but when will vaccines be available for all seniors who have been living in isolation for much too long?

*Business of Supply*

Finally, I will simply say that we must act for our seniors. They must have a decent income. They must be able to have a much more dignified life. They built Quebec, and they deserve our concern. Their purchasing power must be increased. We have left them in poverty for too long.

• (1055)

[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, since day one, we have seen the Government of Canada supporting seniors. We can go back to the time immediately after the 2015 election to see this, when we put emphasis on increasing the GIS, or to the most recent 12 months during the pandemic, when the minister representing seniors came out strongly that we were going to support the OAS and people on GIS. We have also talked a great deal about enhancements for seniors over 75 and how we can do even more.

Does the Bloc recognize any sort of difference in the economic hardships between seniors who are, say, age 65 or 66 versus seniors who are over 75?

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, there are lots of reasons why the seniors we have heard from do not understand the government's determination to do that at some point. I said "at some point", because the Liberals say they plan to increase OAS. They made that promise during the 2019 campaign and reiterated it in the throne speech when we came back to work in 2020, but there has been no news yet. We still do not know what is going to happen with that. That is one thing. We are really eager to see if they do it, but their plan is for people 75 and up. I want to make that point because OAS starts at 65. At 65, people who retire bring in less income. Isolation, lockdown and rising prices are affecting all seniors, not just 75-year-olds. This is affecting people 65 and up too. OAS starts at 65, so the logical thing to do is to boost it for those 65 and up.

• (1100)

[English]

**Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Shefford for her speech today and her advocacy on this issue. Definitely, in my riding, the number-one email I get is from seniors who are falling behind. In fact, I had one last night from a constituent who said that he and his wife, the two of them, got \$1.84 from last year to this year. They joked they could get a cup of coffee with it.

We need to do more for seniors; that is number one. The other thing we need to do is to cut costs as well. What does the hon. member think of the backlash I am getting about the carbon tax, as people are having a hard time paying for their heat?

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, one of the costs that seniors talk to us about is the cost of Internet services. Seniors also tell me about the rising cost of prescription drugs and groceries. They do not talk as much about the tax increase associated

with the carbon tax. That is not what seniors need. However, my colleague is right: The increase based on an absurd indexing system meant that seniors did not even have enough money to buy an extra cup of coffee.

I had some calls from seniors over the holidays. They are being forced to make tough choices at the end of the month. Seniors are saying it is difficult for them to put healthy food on the table and find adequate housing. As we know, many seniors want to stay in their homes. That is important to them. Seniors tell us that they need to stay in touch with their families, but Internet services are expensive, and some have had to buy tablets or computers. When you add it all up, you wonder how they manage to stay in touch with their loved ones. These are the kinds of costs that seniors talk to me about.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member for Shefford's bringing this motion forward. It is a very, very important issue. I hear lots about it from seniors in Hamilton Mountain, and I have heard a lot of people reaching out across the country. They need help.

This motion would basically recognize and appreciate all of the work they do, but we have to start taking care and making sure that seniors live in dignity, with all of the high costs they are encountering.

If the proposed increase of \$110 goes through, would it be clawed back from the GIS? Is that the intention, or is the intention to give people a raise on the OAS?

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, as I have already said, we want old age security to be increased by \$110 a month. That is the part that is taxable. For wealthier seniors OAS will be clawed back anyway. By contrast, for the most disadvantaged seniors, we have already asked to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$50, or \$70 for a couple.

Yes, there will be some improvement in that regard, since we are aware that this measure will help the most disadvantaged seniors. We want an increase to old age security on the one hand, but yes, as mentioned, we also want an increase to the guaranteed income supplement.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Th r se-De Blainville, BQ):** Madam Speaker, the motion we are debating today is important, and I commend my colleague from Shefford. As she pointed out, she was already actively involved with these groups before she became our colleague, and that makes us proud. I think that seniors can once again count on her unwavering commitment to their cause. Seniors deserve to be recognized for their contribution to our society. That sums up the point of our motion.

I also want to acknowledge the thousands of seniors and thank all the seniors advocacy organizations for their work, both in Quebec and in Canada.

*Business of Supply*

What seniors are asking us parliamentarians to do today is to stand up for what they are going through. One of their pressing issues is rising poverty. That is the basis of the motion we are moving today. We hope it will be adopted unanimously.

I will focus my comments on rising poverty levels among seniors; the impact of that poverty on physical health, but also on mental health; the ineffective existing measures; and above all, possible solutions. There are indeed solutions to this issue, and we must ensure once and for all that seniors can have a decent retirement. That is our goal.

If there is one thing I think we should recognize today, and should have recognized long ago, it is that seniors are getting poorer.

One in five seniors in Quebec were living in poverty in 2017, based on a poverty threshold of 50% of median income. If we look at Canada as a whole, 15.4% of seniors were living in poverty in 2017.

The majority of these seniors are people who, upon retirement, have no income other than the guaranteed income supplement and old age security benefits. I want to emphasize that these benefits are not nearly enough to cover seniors' everyday needs. Sadly, seniors are often forced to continue working long past retirement age. Between 2002 and 2014, the employment rate among seniors aged 65 and over increased by 50%, rising from 12% to 19%. Figures show that more than three in 10 seniors aged 65 to 70 choose to continue working. Do my colleagues think it is right that seniors who worked their entire lives are forced to continue working because their pension income is not enough?

I am happy that some seniors are still working, but that should be their choice and not be dictated by a lack of income.

Furthermore, poverty has an impact, especially on seniors' mental health. Poverty causes stress, worry and anxiety. It is stressful to be struggling to make ends meet, to be afraid of not being able to meet current and future needs, and to have only enough money for necessities and nothing more. For seniors to stay healthy as they age and to have a decent retirement, they must have enough income to not only meet their basic needs, but also to pay for activities and hobbies. They must be able to afford to visit and host their loved ones. They must be able to afford to actively participate in their community.

• (1105)

Aging already brings with it a lot of changes, which can lead to illness. People need to adapt to those changes, and that can be stressful. We, as parliamentarians, must ensure that a lack of income is not an additional stressor. At the risk of repeating myself, the existing measures are not meeting those needs and not alleviating that stress.

As my colleague said, in June 2020, an individual whose only income was old age security and the guaranteed income supplement had an annual income of barely \$18,000. For a single, divorced or widowed senior, that is about \$1,500 a month. In Quebec, public pensions are the sole source of income for approximately 60% of

seniors, meaning that they do not have a supplementary plan. Most of those seniors are women.

It is no secret that this amount barely covers an individual's basic needs, as calculated using the market basket measure. That is not nearly enough. In fact, that measure is also something that should be reviewed. Instead of the market basket measure, we should establish a livable income measure.

Does it seem right that, over the past 10 years, old age security benefits have increased by only \$91 a month?

Successive governments, both Conservative and Liberal, have failed on that front. They let seniors down.

The current government promised that it would take the situation seriously. However, the most recent announcements lead me to believe otherwise.

Does it seem right that the latest adjustment only represents an increase of \$1.50 a month? Does it seem right that benefits only increased by 0.1% in the quarter from October to December 2020?

The FADOQ has called this increase an insult, and rightly so. As my colleague said, it would not even buy a cup of coffee. Is the well-being of our seniors not worth more than the price of a cup of coffee per month? I think that in asking the question, we have our answer.

The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly called on the government to help low-income seniors and has proposed concrete measures for doing so. We propose boosting the retirement income of all Canadians aged 65 or older by \$110 a month. I remind members that 60% of the population relies solely on pension income as their basic income. We propose increasing the guaranteed income supplement by \$50 a month for single seniors and by \$70 a month for senior couples. We also propose continuing to pay guaranteed income supplement benefits to the deceased's estate or to their surviving spouse for three months after the death.

These are simple, effective solutions for addressing senior poverty right now.

In conclusion, there are three things I would like our colleagues to take away from our speeches today. First, seniors worked all their lives and deserve a sufficient income for a decent retirement. Second, rising senior poverty is not an intellectual conceit but a reality. Third, the pandemic has aggravated seniors' poverty levels. Today, thousands of seniors are in need and worried about their future, even after the pandemic.

As parliamentarians, we have a duty to take the situation seriously, to take action and to do everything in our power to fight senior poverty. That is why I urge my colleagues to support our motion, and I urge the government to act quickly by implementing meaningful measures to make sure that seniors can have a decent retirement now. There is nothing to gain from making seniors poorer.

*Business of Supply*

• (1110)

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank our two colleagues for their speeches. They both mentioned their discussions with the FADOQ. One of them even said that she was having discussions with the FADOQ regularly and that it was not happy.

Let me ask you the following question: In your regular discussions with the FADOQ, did you talk about the non-taxable one-time payment of \$500 for single seniors or \$1,500 for senior couples that was provided during the pandemic?

Did you talk about the additional \$20 million allocated to the New Horizons for Seniors program, which we put in place especially for seniors?

Did you talk about the \$350 million to support creative non-profit organizations?

Did you talk about the \$9 million for Centraide United Way Canada or the \$100 million for food banks?

Did you talk about everything that each of your ridings received through the New Horizons for Seniors program, in order to break the isolation you were talking about—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I must interrupt the parliamentary secretary, since a number of members wish to ask questions.

In addition, I would like to remind him that he is to address his questions and comments to the Chair.

The hon. member from Thérèse-De Blainville.

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Madam Speaker, the member's question is part of a conversation we have already had.

We speak regularly with FADOQ and with several retirees' associations, such as the AQDR Laval-Laurentides.

In my opinion, he is mixing things up. The assistance provided by the government is a bit like interest or health care assistance. These are non-recurring costs. They are one-time payments, and not always direct. For example, support programs for seniors do nothing to prevent seniors from getting poorer.

We are talking about rising senior poverty and their retirement income. They need a decent income for retirement—

• (1115)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Other members would like to ask questions, and time is running out.

The hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member and I see a lot of each other virtually in committee. It is nice to interact in the House with her, as well.

I had a question, as my previous Conservative colleague did earlier today, regarding tax increases. We know the Prime Minister increased the carbon tax during the pandemic. I live in and represent

a rural riding, and I have had lots of seniors comment to me that they are on fixed incomes. Now the prices of home heating, groceries and fuel for their vehicles, which they have to use to get to doctors' appointments, etc., have gone up.

I am wondering this. Does the member support the tax increases of the Liberal government, and does she see the need for lower taxes?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to answer my colleague, although her question is not directly related to my speech.

In my opinion, no one is against paying tax. I personally am not against it, since that is what allows us to have social programs and redistribute wealth. It is precisely this issue that is at stake. How do we give a fair share to seniors, whose taxes have helped create the social safety net that should be helping them?

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville for her speech.

Her Bloc Québécois colleague, the hon. member for Shefford, spoke at length about the rising cost of medications for seniors. As everyone knows, a true public, universal pharmacare plan would lower drug costs. All the unions in Quebec, including the FTQ, the CSN and the CSQ, are calling for such a plan.

Why did my colleague vote against a public, universal pharmacare plan yesterday?

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Madam Speaker, that question has nothing to do with today's topic, but I will answer anyway.

If there is one area where the federal government should be taking action, it is the cost of prescription drugs. That said, it will be up to the provinces to establish their own plans. As a Quebecker and a union activist, I am proud to have fought for so many years to have that kind of plan in Quebec.

[*English*]

**Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would first like to respectfully acknowledge that I am situated on traditional territories and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, the Anishinabe of the Williams Treaties First Nations, the Huron-Wendat and the Métis nation.

Second, I will be splitting my time with my parliamentary secretary, the member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

I thank the Bloc Québécois and my hon. colleagues for their shared interest in discussing how we can best support seniors in Quebec and across Canada. I appreciate their speeches so far today, although I disagree with some of their assertions regarding the support the government has provided for seniors, confusing the indexing of pensions with the extra COVID-19 support that was provided.

*Business of Supply*

I always appreciate opportunities to discuss what we are doing for seniors and to have parliamentarians recognize the challenges they are facing, especially during the pandemic. The Bloc Québécois has pointed out some challenges that seniors face in its motion today. Since day one, we have been working to address those challenges with action. We, as a government, have long seen that seniors need an active federal government working closely with provincial, territorial and local governments to deliver important benefits and programs for them.

Our Liberal government is committed to strengthening Canadian seniors' financial security and health care, and improving their quality of life. Some of our first actions as a government were restoring the age of eligibility for old age security to 65 years of age from 67 years of age, increasing the guaranteed income supplement for nearly 900,000 low-income single seniors, and enhancing the Canada pension plan by 50% for future retirees. That increase was matched in the Quebec pension plan.

Since the pandemic hit early last year, we have been busy supporting Canadians, including seniors. More than four million seniors received an extra GST credit. We provided a one-time payment to seniors eligible for OAS, plus extra support for those eligible for the GIS. For a low-income couple, it added up to over \$1,500 in tax-free support. Altogether, we delivered over twice as much direct financial assistance to seniors as we committed to in our platform. That provided \$3.8 billion of direct financial support to seniors, and that work continues.

In the last election, we committed to Canadians that we would increase old age security by 10% for seniors aged 75 and up. Our proposal recognizes that as seniors age, their financial security decreases and their needs increase. They are more likely to outlive their savings, have disabilities, be unable to work and be widowed, all while their health care costs are rising. For seniors over 75, few work, and those who do have a median employment income of only \$720; half have a disability, and half of these are severe; 57% are women, and four in 10 of these are widows; 59% have incomes below \$30,000 and 39% receive the guaranteed income supplement. These are real pressures on older seniors' quality of life.

Our government recognizes their needs and will help address them by increasing the old age security amount by 10% for seniors aged 75 and up. This will be the first permanent increase to the OAS pension since 1973, other than adjustments due to inflation. We developed these initiatives by listening to seniors; however, the Bloc fails to recognize the actions that we have been taking since the beginning of the pandemic to support seniors.

The member for Beloeil—Chambly, the Bloc leader, has made comments that mislead seniors. We heard that again today, in speeches about what the government has been doing to support seniors with regard to their personal finances. He told seniors that they got practically nothing in support during the pandemic. In fact, a low-income senior got over \$1,500 in tax-free support. That is far from nothing, and provided a significant boost to the most vulnerable seniors struggling with added costs during the pandemic.

The Bloc has also told seniors that their pensions are constantly losing their buying power. In fact, their public pensions are indexed to protect their buying power against inflation. The Bloc should not

be trying to mislead seniors when they are the most vulnerable during the pandemic. I welcome good debates about how to best support seniors, but they need to be based on facts.

● (1120)

The Bloc has also failed to recognize seniors' broader needs during the pandemic and how the federal government has been stepping up to address those needs. Let us start with the public health.

We have provided provinces and territories billions of dollars to help protect Canadians' health during the pandemic. We have procured billions of pieces of personal protective equipment. Seniors have suffered the most from the effects of COVID-19 and have paid the highest price with their lives, none more so than those living in long-term care. While many of these facilities have been able to keep their residents safe, others have revealed the weaknesses in the system and have shocked the nation. There is clearly a call for action to address these issues and our government has stepped up to help.

Provinces and territories have the jurisdiction for long-term care and we are working together with them to better protect seniors and staff in the long-term care system. We recently added \$1 billion to the funding to assist with infection prevention in long-term care. We have expanded eligibility for federal infrastructure funds so they can be used to modernize and renovate long-term care facilities. We are also working to set new national standards with the provinces and territories, and we will establish new offences and penalties in the Criminal Code related to elder abuse and neglect.

To help address acute labour shortages in long-term care and home care, we are funding training and work placements for 4,000 new personal support worker interns. We have provided \$3 billion to the provinces and territories to increase the wages of long-term care workers and other low-income essential workers. Furthermore, we have provided the provinces with over 22 million rapid tests, with more on the way. We know that rapid tests are an important way to protect seniors in long-term care homes, according to a federal expert panel. By strengthening screening, rapid tests can save lives and give worried families greater confidence that their loved ones are safe.

*Business of Supply*

Another tool to help keep seniors safe in Canada is our vaccine plan. Canada has distributed over 1.8 million doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to provinces and territories. By the end of March, we are on track to receive six million doses. Following that, we will be receiving millions of doses in April. We will be seeing seniors and essential workers getting vaccinated as we move into spring.

The hard work that is being done in the provinces, cities and by Canadians over the last few months has worked. Cases are down, hospitalizations are down and the number of deaths is down. However, the threat from variants is real, so we have to keep going with strong public health measures; otherwise, we could see a third wave that is worse than the second before vaccines have been rolled out and our seniors can be protected.

Our government will always be there as a partner with provinces to keep people safe, working together with a team Canada approach, and that is what will get us through this crisis.

I would like to say a few words about seniors' mental health. We cannot let physical distancing become social distancing. We need to find new ways to help seniors stay connected while they are staying safe. Through the New Horizons for Seniors program, we added an additional \$20 million in support. The federal government has funded over 2,000 community projects across Canada. Many of these projects have helped seniors connect online for the first time by providing tablets and help on how to use them, and group activities like exercise classes. Others helped seniors continue to access critical services like medical appointments, food and crisis support.

Looking ahead, our government has an ambitious agenda for seniors. That includes increasing old-age security by 10% once a senior turns 75, taking additional action to help people stay in their homes longer, providing a new Canadians disability benefit modelled after the GIS, ensuring that everyone has access to a family doctor or primary care team, continuing to support Canadians with mental illness and substance-use challenges, and further increasing access to mental health resources. We are also accelerating work to achieve national universal pharmacare.

We know there is more to do and, as a government, we are doing that work. I look forward to the debate today and to answering some questions now.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ):** Madam Speaker, a number of things my hon. colleague mentioned in his speech were very interesting.

However, when it comes time to put food on the table and buy winter clothing, these things do not help seniors take out their debit cards and pay for the necessities of life. Yes, we should help people 75 and over. However, seniors between the ages of 65 and 75 have the same needs.

I would like to know why the government is so reluctant to give seniors an appropriate amount starting at age 65 and to pay them directly rather than distribute the money all around them.

• (1130)

[*English*]

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for addressing the fact that all seniors aged 65 and up have been facing increased expenses and issues, especially during the pandemic. That is why the government stepped up to provide the additional \$300 for all seniors aged 65 who are on the OAS. Those who were on the guaranteed income supplement got an additional \$200. As has been mentioned, a low-income senior couple, those who are struggling the most, received over \$1,500 in direct tax-free support. That was significant support for our most vulnerable seniors, who definitely were struggling during the pandemic.

I want to make sure that we recognize that the government was and has been focused on the pandemic response and making sure that we are supporting seniors, not just with direct financial support but also with a full range of community support programs. Through New Horizons for Seniors and our emergency community support program, we have been actively engaged in supporting seniors now and—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** The minister will be able to add to that because there is a list of people who want to ask questions.

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the minister spoke about direct support payments of \$300, \$500 and roughly \$1,500. Many seniors in my riding find that woefully inadequate to support them during this crisis, especially when they found out that students between the ages of 15 and 17 were getting roughly \$8,000. That amounted to about \$700 million in support. Many of them were rightly upset by that, because they had contributed their whole lives to this country, yet 15- to 17-year-olds have their whole lives to contribute ahead of them.

What would the minister say to seniors in my riding who are upset by the disproportionate amount of money they receive compared with 15- to 17-year-olds?

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** Madam Speaker, obviously we did not see one group being supported at the expense of another; we were supporting all of the different needs of Canadians across the country. That is why we supported families with a Canada child benefit increase and a GST top-up for low and middle-income Canadians. We are helping our students who are having an incredibly difficult time getting jobs. We also provided seniors who were working the opportunity, even if they continued to get their pensions, to access our emergency support programs if they had lost their income.

I want to make sure that the member knows we are supporting all Canadians, and not one against the other.

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for the work she does.

My quick question is this. With all of the measures the Liberal government is boasting that it has brought in, why do we have so many seniors across Canada aged 65 and up who are pleading and crying for help?

**Hon. Deb Schulte:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his advocacy on behalf of seniors. I really enjoy the opportunity to work with him.

We are very aware of the concerns that seniors are raising about their financial security, their access to medical services and their access to services while they are isolating at home. This is a preoccupation of the government. As members can see, we have been bringing forward many programs to address those concerns.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors and as the member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, I am pleased to take the floor today and participate in this important discussion on seniors.

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

Our work to help seniors began in 2016, when our government's first act was to adopt a tax cut for the middle class in order to reduce personal income taxes. This allowed some single Canadians to save an average of \$330, and some couples to save \$540, per year.

Seniors depend on solid public pensions, and our government is committed to enhancing them. We eliminated the increase in the age of eligibility for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement proposed by the previous Conservative government, bringing it back down from 67 to 65. This put thousands of dollars back in the pockets of 65-year-old and 66-year-old seniors.

To help low-income seniors, we increased the guaranteed income supplement by \$947 and, to help low-income older workers keep a larger portion of their benefits, we increased the guaranteed income supplement earnings exemption, allowing them to earn up to \$5,000 without losing any of their benefits and to obtain a partial exemption for the next \$10,000 in earnings. Many seniors wish to continue working after age 65.

Many Canadian seniors have had to face serious health, economic and social challenges because of COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been helping seniors with non-taxable payments and enhanced community assistance.

These measures are based on the previous programs introduced in response to COVID-19, such as the GST supplement and investments in community organizations that provide essential services, such as food and drug delivery.

As we face this unprecedented challenge, our government continues to be there for Canadians and seniors every step of the way. Our government has provided seniors with twice as much financial assistance as we promised during the election. We were able to do so by issuing non-taxable one-time GST credits in April and old age security and guaranteed income security payments in July. We invested \$3.8 billion, which is far more than the \$1.56 billion we

### *Business of Supply*

campaigned on. This allowed us to help seniors of all ages earlier on by providing the more vulnerable with greater support.

In addition, we increased the basic personal amount twice. Once these increases are fully in place in 2023, 4.3 million seniors will benefit, and 465,000 of them will pay no federal income tax at all. Each year, single Canadians will save around \$300 and couples around \$600.

We know that COVID-19 has increased the cost of living and that seniors' lives have become more difficult. Because of the restrictions, many of them are grappling with higher costs for food and services. They pay more for the same prescription drugs plus an additional premium for delivery. Their savings have taken a hit.

Our announcement of the one-time tax-free payment in July provided direct assistance for the most vulnerable seniors of all ages, in particular those receiving the guaranteed income supplement and old age security, for up to \$500 extra for seniors receiving both. Combined with the GST credit payment, couples receiving the guaranteed income supplement will receive on average \$1,500 in non-taxable direct assistance.

Our government has provided seniors with financial support during this crisis, and we will continue to support seniors and all Canadians during the pandemic.

I would now like to set the record straight and address some of the points raised by my colleagues.

In recent months, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and certain members have made several misleading statements concerning the financial situation of seniors. The leader of the Bloc mentioned many times that seniors have received practically no financial support during the pandemic and that their purchasing power is shrinking.

● (1135)

That is not true. The leader of the Bloc Québécois is playing political games and frightening seniors by spreading false information.

Our role is to support seniors at their most vulnerable, and we know that they are the most vulnerable during this pandemic.

Let us set the record straight once and for all. The myth that has been spread is that we failed to take the necessary measures to protect seniors' purchasing power. That should never happen. They claim that seniors have received practically no help at all since the beginning of the pandemic. The leader of the Bloc Québécois said that on Radio-Canada.

*Business of Supply*

In fact, low-income couples received more than \$1,500 in support from the Government of Canada to cover additional costs during the pandemic, thanks to a supplementary GST credit payment in April and one-time old age security and guaranteed income security payments in July.

Under the law, public pensions, including old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan, are adjusted to protect seniors' purchasing power against inflation. The leader of the Bloc and my colleagues know that. Old age security benefits are adjusted in January, April, July and October, and Canada pension plan and Quebec pension plan benefits are adjusted once a year. It is a matter of accounting.

The Bloc Québécois has also been spreading another myth, to the effect that during the pandemic, seniors' purchasing power increased by a mere 61¢. I believe that my colleague used another number, specifically \$1.38. The leader of the Bloc said that in the House of Commons on December 1, 2020. In fact, to support seniors during the pandemic, our government made tax-free payments through GST credits in March and through old age security and guaranteed income supplement payments in July. For a low-income couple, that comes out to more than \$1,500. Old age security is adjusted on the basis of inflation four times a year in order to preserve seniors' purchasing power.

The leader of the Bloc is deliberately misleading seniors by presenting this adjustment as support during the pandemic and making the amount seem like an insult. He is playing politics at seniors' expense. That is why we will be voting against this motion.

Our government is determined to increase old age security by 10% for seniors aged 75 and over. We were already working on it when the pandemic hit. As seniors age, their needs increase. Our proposal for seniors 75 and up meets these needs, even if the Bloc has its own proposals. Our government's plan will raise tens of thousands of low-income seniors out of poverty.

I recall that the Bloc voted against our throne speech, which included our proposal to increase old age security by 10% for seniors aged 75 and over. Today they are saying that nothing was done. Seniors have earned our respect and admiration. They deserve the best quality of life possible.

I am eager to take questions.

● (1140)

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his speech, which gives me an opportunity to set the record straight about a few things. I am not sure seniors will be too pleased to hear him say they are doing fine and everything is okay.

I would like to point out that the measures the parliamentary secretary talked about are temporary. The emergency response benefit is \$2,000 per month, but OAS is less than that. In September 2019, the Prime Minister said that lots of seniors were still having trouble paying their bills as they got older. He said that was unacceptable.

I would like the parliamentary secretary to tell me why he is so reluctant to introduce permanent measures for seniors instead of temporary ones.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I doubt seniors will be pleased to hear you say things I never said. I never said that everything was okay and that seniors are doing fine. They are the most vulnerable people during this pandemic.

What I did say is that we should all work together to help seniors, that they must not be misled, and that they should be given the right numbers.

We also pledged to increase OAS by 10% for seniors 75 and up. That was reiterated in the throne speech.

Let us deal with the COVID-19 crisis and work together for our seniors.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I would remind the parliamentary secretary to address his comments to the Chair.

[*English*]

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Madam Speaker, in his remarks, the hon. parliamentary secretary referenced the struggles that seniors have gone through from isolation during the pandemic. We have all heard from our constituents about this, and we know that 96% of fatalities from COVID-19 have been among those 60 and older.

At the same time, his counterpart, the Minister of Seniors, has said in her remarks that the Liberal government's vaccination plan has "worked". We know the Prime Minister has said much the same.

Manitoba and other provinces are saying they may soon start vaccinating seniors who are 95 or over, hopefully. Ontario is predicting it will not vaccinate people who are 60 or over until July. However, our neighbours to the south have been vaccinating those 60 and older for weeks now.

Could the member confirm whether he believes the government's vaccination plan has "worked" for Canadian seniors?

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Seniors are a priority for our government, and that includes getting them vaccinated. Every province believes that seniors should be the first to be vaccinated.

We have an obligation to provide them with vaccines, and that is what we are doing. We are distributing to each province and territory the maximum number of doses necessary so that our seniors are priority vaccine recipients.

We are working with the provinces and territories so that our seniors are looked after in the best way possible, as quickly as possible.

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, one of the most difficult things I have had to experience is being at a door with a senior citizen who could not go out because she had no teeth. I cannot call the Liberal government and ask it to help a senior citizen who has given her best to this country her whole life. I have to call charities, asking for support. Is there a dental care plan from the government? No. Pharmacare is another broken promise.

The Conservatives tried to raise the age for old age pension to 67, and the Liberals did them one better and said that even though they love all seniors, they have to be over 75 to get an increase. We have seniors who continue to live in poverty, and the member voted against the national pharmacare plan, which has been on the books for the Liberals since 1993, when seniors in my riding were in their early thirties. I know seniors who have to break their pills in half or go without them because of the Liberals' indifference.

[Translation]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** We will have a brief answer from the hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauson:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Of course, the older seniors get, the more likely they are to run out of savings. There are also more widows aged 75 and over. That is not to mention the health care costs associated with the fact that their health is deteriorating and their homes need to be adapted to make them more accessible.

Very few seniors aged 75 and older are working. Half of the seniors in this age group have a disability and, in 50% of cases, a serious one. Women account for 50% of seniors with a disability.

Of course, seniors aged 65 and over are extremely important, but they are more independent, financially and otherwise, than seniors over the age of 75.

[English]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time this morning with the member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

I have a great respect for our seniors, who have helped build this country. It is my strong belief that we as Canadians and legislators owe a lot to our seniors. We don't have to look far to see their contributions in our families, our communities and all around us. They deserve not only our respect, but our support in their later years in life.

I am pleased to see that the motion recognizes the responsibility and duty we have to care for them. It also acknowledges some of

### *Business of Supply*

the immense challenges that our seniors have faced over this past year because of the pandemic. From social challenges to health and financial challenges, it has been without a doubt a very difficult year. It is our seniors who have been disproportionately affected by this crisis, and it is our seniors who are most vulnerable to the impacts of the government's failure to respond adequately to this crisis.

Too many seniors and their families know first-hand that delays in vaccine procurement have a real human life cost, just as delays in procuring PPE and rapid testing hindered our ability to better protect our seniors, specifically those living in long-term care homes. The crisis in long-term care demands action and collaboration from every level of government to improve the quality of care for our seniors.

The pandemic restrictions on seniors have had a significant impact on mental health. Separated and isolated from family and friends, our seniors have missed important milestones and social connections, even something as simple as sitting and holding someone's hand. We cannot ignore the significant impact of this pandemic on their quality of life.

We also know that seniors have not been immune to the financial implications of this pandemic. Seniors are facing many unanticipated costs because of the pandemic. Many are feeling the squeeze on their fixed income, and costs certainly have not decreased for our seniors during the pandemic.

In fact, the Prime Minister's own carbon tax is costing seniors more. Not only did he hike up the carbon tax during this crisis, he also made the announcement that he would be tripling it. It is a tax hike that is costing seniors more for essentials such as gas, groceries and even home heating. It is a punitive tax that is even costlier for rural seniors like those who live in my riding.

The impact of COVID on Canada's seniors is clearly immense, and for seniors who were already struggling pre-pandemic, the new challenges brought on by the pandemic have been an added layer of stress. While we know that Canada's seniors are a very broad demographic with diverse needs and differing priorities, the reality is that too many are struggling to make ends meet, and they are slipping through the cracks. We need to do better for those seniors.

The Conservatives support increasing financial support for low-income seniors. They should not have to make a difficult decision among home heating, groceries and other necessities.

*Business of Supply*

The proposed motion from our colleagues in the Bloc would achieve the goal of putting more money in the pockets of low-income seniors to spend on their own individual needs. However, it is important to acknowledge that the motion casts a wider net. It calls on the government to increase the old age security benefit for seniors. This benefit is delivered not only to low-income seniors, but also to higher-income seniors. The OAS benefit does not start to get clawed back until a senior's income threshold is around \$79,000, and the benefit is only fully clawed back once a senior's income is about \$128,000.

The proposed increase to old age security is not the most efficient use of taxpayers' dollars, if the intended goal is to support low-income seniors. That should be our driving force: getting money into the hands of those who need it the most.

• (1150)

This is particularly important in light of the reality of the government spending billions and billions of dollars, and it has done that while failing to deliver a budget in not just one year but two. Today, Canadians are still waiting on a real plan to restart the economy and to exit this crisis.

With all of that in mind, we have a responsibility to also be wise with taxpayer dollars. There need to be meaningful supports delivered to seniors whose budgets are already stretched further than they can manage. This needs to be done while also ensuring the long-term viability of our social programs. That is one reason we are disappointed to see that the motion uses old age security benefits instead of utilizing the guaranteed income supplement. With the maximum income of a single recipient at \$18,648, GIS would be a much more targeted approach to improving income security for low-income seniors. This would be the most fiscally responsible approach to getting money into the hands of those seniors who need it the most.

Ultimately, Conservatives do support ensuring that our seniors have income security. We have a proud record of putting money back into the pockets of low-income seniors and we remain committed to improving their well-being and financial security. We recognize that a dollar is better placed in the pockets of a low-income senior to spend on their individual needs and their individual priorities.

Greater direct financial supports will help low-income seniors keep their heads above water, and having the income security to spend on their individual needs will also give seniors greater autonomy. For some seniors, that autonomy could be the difference between aging in place or moving into a care home. I think of a senior who only needs help with lawn care or shovelling the snow to be able to stay in their own home, or a senior who needs some light housekeeping help. Giving seniors greater income security and autonomy also gives them a greater quality of life and a greater dignity in living.

That is why Conservatives support an increase in direct financial assistance for low-income seniors. We know that too many seniors are struggling, and we call on the government to deliver meaningful support to help seniors who are struggling to make ends meet. It is the time for seniors to be a greater priority for the Liberal government. Shamefully, it has been clear that seniors have never been a

priority for the Prime Minister. It is evident in the fact that it took him three years to appoint a seniors minister, and that was only done following sustained pressure from Conservatives, stakeholders and Canadians.

The government's failure to deliver on its election promise and its recycled throne speech promise to increase OAS also speaks to its priorities. It is yet another example of the Liberal government over-promising and under-delivering when it comes to our seniors. The government needs to move away from announcements and move toward meaningful action. Our seniors deserve to live in dignity. An announcement with no plan to deliver on it and no follow-through does nothing to put food on the table, nothing to put gas in the tank and nothing to keep the heat on. Seniors on a fixed income who are struggling to get by need more than empty words and empty promises: They need meaningful action from the Liberal government. They deserve income security. They need to be a priority.

This past year, COVID has revealed many shortcomings when it comes to support for our seniors. The pandemic has demanded that we make seniors a priority, but more important than that, our duty and our responsibility to care for our seniors demand it.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster for her speech, which was very interesting, especially the part on direct assistance. That is really what she focused on.

Earlier, I also listened to the speech by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, who seemed to be giving us a long list or ad about certain support measures provided by the government over the past year.

For the benefit of everyone, including the parliamentary secretary, I would like my colleague to further explain the difference between one-time measures and direct assistance to seniors, which she spoke about.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Mr. Speaker, my own thoughts on this are on how much longer we are going to be in this pandemic. The Prime Minister has increased the carbon tax, which will affect seniors on a fixed income. Their gas will be more expensive, their home heating will be more expensive, and ultimately even groceries will be more expensive. The essentials will be more expensive.

The government speaks for itself on the fact that it had a 2019 promise to increase OAS by 10% and failed to deliver it. It hashed that word salad in the throne speech, and we are still waiting to see what the Liberals are going to do for seniors.

*Business of Supply*

**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 member needs to step out of the Conservative spin room and into reality. The member is so wrong on so many points that there is just not enough time to allow me to correct her.

The reality is that this government, from day one, has been supporting seniors. I would love the opportunity, and I will probably will get it a little later today, to do a comparison of the way Stephen Harper did nothing for seniors to the way we have lifted tens of thousands of seniors from all regions of this country out of poverty.

Does the member not recall the increase to the GIS, the one-time payments or the many other positive things in the last few years this government has done for seniors across Canada?

• (1200)

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Mr. Speaker, that particular colleague is really good at mansplaining women in this place. He does that every time he has an opportunity to speak to me, which is very unfortunate.

Let us talk about priority. Who was it who created a spot at the cabinet table for a minister for seniors? I am pretty sure that was Stephen Harper. Who took three years into its majority to appoint a minister for seniors? That was this Liberal government.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have to express some deep frustration as I listen once again in this House to the Liberals and the Conservatives debate who has been worse for Canadians. The member spoke about the price of food, gas and heat for seniors. Does the member know another price seniors have to bear, particularly in Alberta, where our Conservative government has cut funds for dependents? It is the cost of medication.

Can the member please tell me why, if she is so concerned about the costs for seniors, she voted with the Liberals yesterday to stop pharmacare in Canada?

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Mr. Speaker, we have to realize as well that Canada is made up of many provinces and territories, and many provinces already have programs targeted for low-income seniors when it comes to pharmacare.

I am from Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewanians, particularly seniors who live in these rural and remote parts of the province, reject the carbon tax. The carbon tax is making everything more expensive, especially when seniors need to drive for doctors' appointments or even to get those prescriptions filled.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, recently we had a meeting with the Canadian Association of Retired Persons in Barrie, and Gwen Kavanagh came before us, a call the hon. member was on, to talk about options in housing and affordable housing for seniors, in particular co-housing.

What is the member's opinion on that?

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Mr. Speaker, we should not keep anything off the table, especially when it comes to co-housing. There are great opportunities for mental health for seniors and great social aspects for seniors, and it gives the autonomy that I also spoke

about in my speech. It is so important that we give seniors choice and that they have personal autonomy until the end.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate today and to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our seniors who have worked so hard to build the country that we have today.

The current pandemic deeply affects them because the virus has serious consequences for seniors in poor health. The reason we have been able to respond to this challenge with an array of economic measures is that those before us left Canada in an enviable position. We must do more for our seniors dealing with financial hardship. Not all of them had the same opportunities in life and today, unfortunately, too many seniors are living below the poverty line. That is unacceptable in Canada.

The cost of living is rising faster than seniors' incomes, forcing them to make difficult decisions, such as selling their home or valuables to make ends meet. All too often, when a spouse dies, the surviving spouse's financial circumstances change significantly. As MPs, we have all heard very compelling stories from seniors in our ridings.

I rise in the House today to point out that we can do more as a country to recognize the work that has been accomplished by our seniors. In my view, we should pay particular attention to the guaranteed income supplement, which provides seniors in precarious financial situations with a higher income than the basic guaranteed amount. The GIS is calculated based on other sources of income, and we can increase the amount of the supplement or adjust eligibility criteria to ensure a higher income.

That said, the Bloc Québécois is presenting us with a measure that it cannot implement on its own in this parliament or any future parliament.

Unlike the Liberals who have done nothing since being elected in 2015, we Conservatives have always acted. In 2006, our government created the position of minister of state for seniors within Employment and Social Development Canada, formerly Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. It was the Right Hon. Stephen Harper who initiated this idea. We already knew that, in 2012, nearly one in seven Canadians was a senior and that by 2030, this proportion would rise to almost one in four.

I must admit that the Bloc Québécois's motion is commendable, but we must remember that it cannot do anything in the House on its own, other than proposing ideas and not following through. This is a clear example of how we are the only ones who have remained committed to improving quality of life for our dear seniors.

*Business of Supply*

The Conservatives created and improved a number of measures for seniors in 22 federal departments, including the popular New Horizons program. This program helps seniors to both benefit from and contribute to the quality of life in their community through social participation and active living. It provides funding to support local projects, pan-Canadian projects and pilot projects that focus on issues like social isolation and intergenerational learning.

Previous Conservative governments have implemented other measures as well. In January 2012, the Conservative government starting providing direct support to people caring for a loved one with reduced mobility through the family caregiver tax credit. We were also the first to support Canadians who act as caregivers and also continue working.

● (1205)

We recognized the important contribution that caregivers make to their family members and their community by providing support and unpaid care, quite often while dealing with their responsibilities toward other family members and keeping their job. The 2014 economic action plan helped caregivers continue to participate in the workforce as fully as possible while caring for a loved one.

We also made changes to employment insurance and brought in caregiver leave and benefits. Still today, these benefits may be provided for a few weeks to people who temporarily have to leave work to care for a loved one who is seriously ill or who has a significant risk of dying within 26 weeks.

The previous Conservative government brought in a home accessibility tax credit through which eligible seniors and persons with disabilities are entitled to a 15% tax relief on eligible expenses up to \$10,000. To be eligible, the expenses have to be related to renovations that allow for greater mobility or functionality or reduce the risks of accident.

We doubled the pension income amount. Years ago, a non-refundable tax credit was created for the first \$1,000 in eligible pension income. A lot has changed since then. The previous Conservative government increased the eligible pension income amount to \$2,000. To this day, that is a real savings that really helps pensioners.

We introduced the age amount, which allows seniors to claim up to \$7,637 on their 2020 tax return.

We also introduced pension income splitting to reduce the tax burden on Canadian pensioners and make the system fairer. Generally speaking, every individual pays tax on their total income. Pension income splitting allows all Canadian residents who receive eligible pension income to split up to half of that income with a spouse or common-law partner if they live together. That means pensioners and their families can pay considerably less tax.

I am also thinking of the increase in the age limit for RRSP to RRIF conversions. The registered retirement savings plan is one of the best tools available to Canadians to save for their future. Since RRSP contributions are tax-free under the contribution limit, they are an ideal way to plan for retirement.

However, some Canadians were limited by the RRSP structure. Even if a person chose to work after the age of 69, they had to con-

vert their RRSPs into a registered retirement income fund and start making withdrawals. The previous Conservative government increased the age limit for RRSP to RRIF conversions from 69 to 71. Now more Canadians have the freedom to choose when they want to convert their RRSPs.

All of these measures and many others help to grow our economy. I am still very proud of them today, and I promote them every year in a tax guide that I send to all my constituents.

We understand the consequences that a precarious financial situation can have on people's lives, especially those of the aging population. We all have a duty to be part of the solution. If we have the will to do it, we can act relatively quickly to provide financial support to our seniors in the upcoming budget, if the Liberals get their act together and introduce one.

In addition to the effects of the pandemic, the government has created a lot of uncertainty for our seniors and the rest of the population. If the Liberals really intended to help seniors, they would have already done so, and we all know that the Bloc Québécois can never win the Prime Minister's seat. That leaves the Conservatives as the only option for helping seniors who are in a precarious financial situation.

● (1210)

I am sure that stakeholders will realize that we stand on our record and that our good intentions will become reality in the future Conservative Government of Canada. Together, we will tackle the challenge of repairing the damage caused by the Liberals and rebuilding the Canadian economy.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to what my colleague was saying, but I think he has forgotten his history a bit. The guaranteed income supplement was not widely known. When the Bloc found out about it, it toured the province to register seniors. I know that because my father benefited from it and lived a bit better as a result.

It was not until 2018 that people were finally automatically registered when they turned 65, without having to file an application. Who made that happen? I know, it was the Bloc Québécois, and it was my office in Repentigny that conducted the study. To say that the Bloc Québécois has not accomplished anything is to rewrite history. I just want to set the record straight.

I would like to ask the hon. member clearly whether he will support the Bloc Québécois motion.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Speaker, speaking of history, the Bloc Québécois has never voted for a financial measure or bill that helped Canadian seniors here in the House. That is the reality. The only bill it has managed to get passed was to change the name of a riding and create a national day. That is the reality.

The Conservative Party has very good intentions, and Canadians know very well that we have always taken action for seniors and we will act for seniors again.

We will prove it in the future.

• (1215)

[English]

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in relation to the hon. member's reference to tax credits, this has been a cruel Conservative shell game for a long time. To take advantage of a tax credit, people have to spend the money first, which means they need to have the money to put up front. The real beneficiaries of past Conservative tax credits have been those doing well enough to cover the upfront costs and have enough income to take advantage of the tax credit.

Would the hon. member not agree that putting cash in the bank accounts of seniors, as this government has done, is far more effective and far more helpful to seniors?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Speaker, that is why I spoke about the guaranteed income supplement in my speech.

This benefit is particularly important, because the seniors who receive it do not have many other income sources and have very limited total income. If we are going to give our most vulnerable seniors a substantial income boost, it should be done through the guaranteed income supplement.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of short memories and memory loss, my hon. colleague should remember that he was part of the Conservative government that wanted to increase the retirement age and the age to qualify for old age security from 65 to 67. This decision would have stripped all seniors in Quebec and Canada of tens of thousands of dollars. It was particularly cruel towards people who had no income other than old age security.

Does the Conservative member still want to increase the age of eligibility for old age security to 67, or has he come to his senses?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind my dear colleague that this measure was never implemented.

Not one Quebecker or Canadian lost a single cent because of such a measure. Today we are talking about increasing income for the most financially vulnerable seniors. The Liberals will not do it, but I think that with some goodwill, all the other parties will no doubt support us when we change sides in the House.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière for his speech, but I suggest that he read Noam Chomsky to learn the role of opposition parties in parliaments.

Fortunately, the opposition parties were there to oppose the move to increase the age from 65 to 67 when the Conservatives were in power. Today, before he comes to power, will he support the Bloc Québécois's motion to increase old age security by \$110 a month? It is quite simple.

### *Business of Supply*

If he has any influence in the House, he should clearly state that he will support our motion.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again tell my dear colleague that I very much appreciate that the Bloc is speaking on behalf of seniors.

We, the Conservatives, can act on behalf of seniors, and that is what we will do.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak to the opposition day motion on a very important subject to me and the rest of my colleagues, acknowledging our seniors and increasing their retirement benefit income. I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie today.

I would like to thank my Bloc colleague for bringing this motion forward.

As the NDP critic for seniors and pensions, I will be recommending full support for the motion. Given the pandemic that we are presently enduring, this motion is important, and I believe all members can agree that it is past the time to guarantee that our seniors live in dignity.

For the benefit of those watching at home today, I would like to lay out what this motion actually proposes.

The motion calls on the present government to increase the old age security benefit, or OAS, by \$110 a month for those aged 65 and older in the next budget. It asks the House of Commons:

(a) recognize that the elderly were most directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; (b) recall that too many of the elderly live in a financially precarious position; (c) acknowledge the collective debt that we owe to those who built Quebec and Canada...

Of course the House should recognize that our seniors have borne the brunt of the effects of COVID-19. Early in the pandemic, Statistics Canada reported that 60% of our seniors aged 65 and over stated that they were extremely concerned for their health and well-being. This is in contrast to the 20 to 34 age group, wherein only 28% had the same level of concern.

In a statement on this amplification of inequality as the result of the COVID-19 crisis, the Canadian Human Rights Commission singled out our elderly, warning that as they were likely either living in an institution or living at home alone, they were isolated during the pandemic more now than ever and had an elevated vulnerability to illness. The commission rightly pointed out that for the most part, family and friends were not allowed to visit them.

*Business of Supply*

When seniors do not have access to or the knowledge to use various methods of communication, we should continue to find more creative ways to reach out and support our seniors. We certainly saw that seniors, particularly in long-term care facilities, were being ravaged by the virus to an extent well beyond that of our demographics.

If we look at a snapshot of about two months ago of the pandemic in Canada, deaths due to COVID in long-term care facilities made up a staggering 81% of COVID deaths in the country. By comparison, the average among other countries around the globe of COVID deaths in long-term care homes was 42% of all deaths, compared to our 81%. This is unacceptable.

In response, the New Democrats announced a plan to offer a seniors care guarantee. We called on the government to take steps to eliminate profit from our long-term care and work with caregivers and provincial and territorial governments to develop national care standards for long-term and continuing care and to regulate these in step with the Canadian Health Act.

The other call to the House is to acknowledge the financial precarity of our seniors. In normal times, many seniors face high prices for rent, hydro, cable, gas and insurance as well as food, medical and pharmaceutical costs. Due to the pandemic, seniors have increased costs that they would normally not have. For example, statistics show that seniors use paid delivery services more than any other demographic during the pandemic for things like food and medicine.

As a result of the NDP pressure, the government finally announced a one-time payment of \$300 for old age security pensioners and an additional \$200 for guaranteed income supplement recipients. However, this one-off payment is not enough to compensate for the increase in the cost of living for the elderly now or in the future. The government recognized the higher costs for seniors and said that new legislation would come forward, but has since been silent.

COVID-19 has exposed the major gaps in our health care system and the cost of prescription drugs. A national pharmacare program is needed now more than ever. The majority of Canadians are in a support of a pharmacare program, yet the Liberals voted against our pharmacare bill yesterday. It is a matter of public record that the Liberals have been promising to implement a universal pharmacare program for more than 24 years, yet they have never acted on it.

The final call to the House in today's motion is in regard to the contributions of our seniors to the country.

● (1220)

Seniors in Canada have made endless contributions to our families, our communities and country, and to the nature of our society. An obvious truth is that each generation is built upon the work of its seniors. For that, we should be thankful and grateful to them.

We should be honouring our seniors by looking after them. I think we have a moral obligation to do so. Unfortunately, there remain too many signs that we are not there yet. Too often seniors do not have access to affordable housing. They must rely on food banks weekly and have to ration medication.

Seniors have done their part and should be able to live out their retirement years in dignity. For that reason, the New Democrats have promoted a national seniors strategy to ensure that measures and programs are in place to meet the needs of our retired and elderly.

Lastly, the motion is a call for the government to increase old age security. To properly speak to the merits of raising the OAS benefit, I would like to touch first on the Canada pension plan, or CPP. It should be noted that only those Canadians who have contributed to the Canada pension plan can qualify at the age of 60 for this monthly benefit and receive benefits for the rest of their lives.

Old age security is the retirement benefit at the centre of today's motion. OAS is a universal pension that does not depend on a retiree's previous labour force participation or whether they have registered pension or savings plans. One can qualify at the age of 65.

We have to remember that we need stability, and most of our private pension plans are now under attack because there is no support and no protection when companies go into bankruptcy.

The Conservatives, under Stephen Harper, put in a plan to raise the age of eligibility for old age security from 65 to 67. The NDP fought to end that discrimination and ensure that our seniors lived out their retirement with dignity.

The age threshold, in this motion to bump up the benefit, is 65 years of age, so all seniors who qualify would benefit from the raise. I believe it is extremely important that all seniors get the increase and not just some. The Liberals promised to increase the OAS, but only for those 75 years of age and over. I ask my Liberal colleagues this: How is it that they think seniors from age 65 to 74 do not have the same high costs, expensive bills and struggles to afford them?

It is beyond me why the government would establish a two-tier OAS. Either way, there has been no action. The labour community has also advocated for improvements to our retirement benefit and would support the increase to the OAS, as we do.

I will share a quote from Mark Hancock, national president of CUPE:

CUPE has long supported an expansion of our public pensions, including Old Age Security. Workplace pension plans continue to face cuts and closures, and rates of poverty among seniors are increasing again. The Old Age Security pension hasn't kept pace over the years and isn't worth what it was 40 years ago, but a boost to that benefit would restore some of that lost value and lift thousands of seniors out of poverty.

*Business of Supply*

In conclusion, the NDP believe that we must address the inadequacies of our public retirement supports and other supports for our seniors. As a start, we absolutely support an increase to OAS.

I want to conclude by saying thanks to all the members who are listening. I want to thank the Bloc again. I am hoping there will be no problems here, and that we all will support this important motion.

• (1225)

**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, it is important to recognize that, over the years, we have been providing substantial support. We have seen significant increases to the guaranteed income supplement. We have lifted literally tens of thousands of seniors, some of the poorest seniors in the country, out of poverty.

Whether it was at the beginning, in 2016, or in the last 12 months, through one-time payments and tax issues, we have been able to support seniors.

From an economic perspective, does the member see any difference between a senior who is 65 or 66 years old who may still be able, and want, to work and a senior who is 75 or older? Does he see any discrepancies in terms of economic impacts?

**Mr. Scott Duvall:** Mr. Speaker, there is a huge difference when we are forcing people to work from 65. That is what we have been doing. The GIS is for people who are at the poverty level. However, because the people who are near the poverty level have other basic incomes, they are now being attacked because there is no protection. The Liberal government has failed to protect them when their companies go bankrupt and take cuts to their pensions. It said it was going to fix it and it did not. That is my answer. All people should be included at 65. There should not be a two-tier system of 75 and over.

• (1230)

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have watched the hon. member in the House, and his on-going, relentless advocacy for seniors is stupendous and unparalleled.

As he knows, the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt disproportionately by seniors, whether that is in long-term care or in increased costs. Very early on in the pandemic after pushing the government, the NDP was able to get the CERB set at \$2,000 a month because we all acknowledged that Canadians needed a minimum of \$2,000 a month to live. However, despite the fact that seniors' costs went up, and despite the fact that they disproportionately had to pay the price of COVID-19, they received a one-time payment.

Seniors should not be receiving less and they do not deserve less than everyone else. Could the member comment on that?

**Mr. Scott Duvall:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague who works very hard and is always supportive of seniors. We are having a problem of seniors receiving less money to live on, yet doing a lot of community work. The volunteer system saves Canadians thousands and millions of dollars.

To me, everybody should be in it the same, whether one is a senior or a low-income earner. If it is going to be \$24,000 a year, then that is what everybody should receive. Our seniors are hurting. They are pleading and they are crying. I know the government thinks it has done much great work. Some of it has been great. However, that is what happened before. One-time funding will not correct the problems that we are facing now and in the future. What we need is stability for our pensioners to live in dignity.

**Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as we know, income is what determines the level of GIS a senior or couple may receive. By adding this increase, would that threshold be moved so they would not lose their GIS? Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, if one receives the GIS, they go on the provincial drug program. If that is lost, they have to pay for the drugs themselves or have insurance.

Would that threshold be moved, as well, to accommodate seniors being able to stay on provincial drug plans?

**Mr. Scott Duvall:** Mr. Speaker, I asked that question earlier to my Bloc colleague. We would anticipate that of the GIS threshold, so that none of this would be clawed back and the benefits would not be reduced. Basically, everything would have to be moved up a bit because there is no sense of giving an increase to the OAS when we are just going to claw back the money. It does not make sense. I would anticipate that, yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to be participating in this important debate today. I thank my NDP colleague from Hamilton Mountain for all the work he has been doing for years on behalf of seniors. It is much appreciated and is part of our fundamental values.

Before I actually begin my speech, I cannot help but point out the absurdity of the reply the Conservative member from Lévis—Lotbinière gave me a few minutes ago. I reminded him that the Conservatives wanted to increase the retirement age from 65 to 67, which was especially cruel towards low-to-no-income seniors and would have resulted in seniors forfeiting tens of thousands of dollars. The only reply we got was that it was very fortunate that this measure was never implemented. If he is pleased that the measure was never implemented, I wonder why he voted for it. I hope that everyone will remember that at the appropriate time.

*Business of Supply*

I thank my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois for moving today's motion about this fundamental issue of how we, as MPs or parliamentarians, must look after the men and women who built our society and left us and our children an absolutely fantastic legacy that allows us to enjoy security, prosperity, justice and solidarity. Hats off to the men and women who are seniors today and who worked so hard all their lives to leave our society so well off, both in Quebec and in Canada, compared to the rest of the world.

We in the NDP, being progressives, social democrats and left-leaning men and women, are particularly concerned about all issues related directly or indirectly to the quality of our social fabric and people's quality of life. Are people able to live and grow old in dignity? Can we work together to fight poverty and inequality? Let us remember that for the NDP, poverty is a form of violence, because it is abusive to prevent people from having a comfortable home, being able to buy groceries, having hobbies and living a truly enjoyable, fulfilling life without having to make absurd, difficult choices. Sadly, too many of our seniors are still living in poverty today. There are many things that we could do to help them get out of poverty and live in dignity, because they more than deserve it.

Increasing the old age security benefit by \$110 a month, as proposed in the motion we are debating today, is a measure that the NDP supports and has been championing for a long time. We are very proud of that, because it is a matter of justice, especially in a society as rich as ours in Quebec and Canada. It is the least we can do, but it is not the only thing. There is a lot more we can do to improve the lot of our seniors.

It bears repeating that this motion comes at a critical time, in the middle of a year-long national crisis caused by COVID-19. To put it bluntly, the spread of the virus took a heavy toll on our seniors, sadly. Many lost their lives, often in unspeakable circumstances, separated from their loved ones and denied even the possibility of holding someone's hand before passing. We all have to work together to make sure this does not happen again.

In order to do that, we have to learn from the current crisis. In our view, two major lessons stand out. First, we saw how important it is to have a strong and efficient public health care system that treats its workers, and therefore our seniors, well. The working conditions of our health care workers directly affect the quality of the care that seniors receive. Second, there are holes in our social safety net, and the shortcomings of the old age security program are just one of many examples.

● (1235)

However, there are several such holes. It is important to address all of them, but for us, it is really important that we reinforce our health care system. The NDP is suggesting a number of measures that need to be implemented. First, health transfers must be increased. The federal contribution in this area is really declining and is now almost anemic. We agree with the provincial premiers that transfers should be increased to at least 35%. The federal share of health transfers has a direct impact on the working conditions of our health care professionals, as well as the quality of care.

Speaking of quality of care, the federal and provincial governments need to enter into discussions to guarantee care for our seniors, especially in long-term care facilities, which have sadly been

absolutely devastated this past year. We cannot afford to look away when our seniors are being mistreated. We need to sit down together, discuss the matter and find solutions. The federal government cannot wash its hands of the issue. Government members need to ask themselves what they can do to improve the situation and prevent this kind of thing from ever happening again.

Also, the private sector should not be in charge of senior care, especially in long-term care facilities. We must agree on the fact that this is a fundamental value in our society, and that money should not be the deciding factor in whether a person receives quality care. Everyone is equal. In addition, no profit should be made on senior care because, obviously, in such cases, there is a tendency to do things by half measures and to prioritize shareholders over seniors.

I spoke about the pandemic and long-term care facilities, but I also want to mention all of the seniors who are active in our communities. As members of Parliament, we must help them, provide support and stand with them. Some older people are very active. They volunteer and are engaged in the community. They want to create a better society. Some of them help children with their homework, and others help solve environmental issues. There are also the people at FADOQ, who do an extraordinary job defending seniors' rights, among others, in Quebec. I commend them for their work.

The pandemic has also been very difficult for active and autonomous seniors. They have been unable to see their families and grandchildren. They are isolated. Many of them suffered from isolation before the pandemic, and the situation has only gotten worse. Community groups have been formed in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and here and there in Montreal and Quebec. People are urged to look in on seniors who were already known to be alone or isolated.

I have gone with some groups, including the La Petite-Patrie community resource centre, to bring baskets of food to seniors to avoid them having to go out to buy groceries. We have organized things and joined forces to give seniors a hand. I think that needs to be acknowledged.

Seniors often live on a fixed income. That is why it is so important to enhance the guaranteed income supplement and old age security, and why we must support this motion to increase old age security by \$110 a month. Prices are going up. The cost of groceries is increasing. Despite the fact that seniors live on a fixed income, the price of produce, meat and other groceries is constantly on the rise. Studies have shown that prices will increase by 3% to 5% over the next year. For a family, that could mean an additional \$700 a year.

*Business of Supply*

As my colleague from Hamilton Mountain put it, by pressuring the government, we managed to get one-time assistance, but that is not enough. We want permanent assistance to help seniors get out of poverty and face higher costs, in particular when it comes to groceries.

As my colleague from Shefford pointed out, there is a sharp increase in the cost of drugs also, which is a very heavy burden for many seniors. That is why I am scratching my head and wondering why the Bloc, the Liberals and the Conservatives teamed up against our proposal to create a universal public pharmacare program. Such a program would have the very tangible effect of lowering the cost of drugs. It could go forward. Liberals have been talking about it for 24 years, but they never do anything. Each time they have an opportunity to vote on that proposal, they choose to vote against it.

• (1240)

I have a hard time understanding why my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois did not vote in favour of that measure, which a large part of the Quebec society is calling for. A wide coalition including all major unions—the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, or FTQ, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, or CSN, la Centrale des syndicats du Québec, or CSQ, as well as the Union des consommateurs du Québec—has been asking for action, in collaboration with provinces. They want truly universal public pharmacare. That is one of the things we could do to help seniors directly.

• (1245)

**Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his speech.

I would like him to expand on his thoughts about women often being the most affected by the issue of insufficient income.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for her question, because it is particularly relevant. It is something we are currently facing.

Many seniors are alone and live on a single income. Most of them are women. The vast majority of these women did not have steady jobs or jobs with supplementary pension plans when they were younger. That means that they do not have a supplemental source of income from a pension plan to which they would have contributed through their employer.

More men had the opportunity to do so. Of course, this is because of sexism in the workplace and in the assignment of tasks in the past. It still exists, but it was perhaps more marked at the time. Unfortunately, all too often, a woman's only income comes from existing programs. If they do not have a supplementary pension plan, they also probably did not contribute to the Quebec pension plan consistently over a number of years. They have only their old age security, or maybe the guaranteed income supplement.

Poverty among seniors exists but, for social and historical reasons, it affects women more than men. That is why we must fight for pension plans everywhere, in every business, in every company, so that tomorrow, or the day after that, women do not find themselves in the same situation.

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was very happy that the member talked about the importance of recommitting to and reinvesting in a universally accessible publicly delivered health care system. He spoke of how that would help seniors in real, tangible ways. I was also happy he brought up long-term care. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

We know that the vast majority of deaths in long-term care as a result of COVID-19 happened in for-profit long-term care centres. Can the member explain why he believes the federal government is refusing to do the right thing and remove profit from long-term care to protect seniors?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona for her excellent comments concerning the need for a universal public pharmacare program that would make such a difference for our seniors, especially when it comes to the accessibility and cost of medications. Everyone would benefit. Unfortunately, yesterday, three parties joined forces against the NDP's proposal, which would have met such pressing needs.

I believe that the private sector has no place in long-term care facilities. As we saw yesterday, the Liberals often bow down to large private companies. Yesterday, it was big pharma, and we get the impression that they do not really want to bow down to large private companies when it comes to senior care.

We should not distinguish between credit cards and health insurance cards. Health insurance cards should give us access to quality care, and I think that we should all work together and figure out a way of avoiding such situations in the future.

The Herron long-term care residence on Montreal's West Island, a private institution, was utterly devastated. People were treated with contempt, ill-treated, malnourished; some were dehydrated, left to lie on the floor and in their beds for days on end. It is disgraceful and unacceptable in our society, and we, at every level of government, must do everything we can to work together to make sure that it does not happen again. The private sector has no place in health care.

• (1250)

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague from Manicouagan.

*Business of Supply*

I will start my speech on a serious note. I heard several people today talking about their party's achievements and saying that we, as an opposition party, are useless. They sound like they are in the middle of an election campaign. We are not in the middle of an election campaign and, today, we are talking about seniors.

I find it revolting that we have not taken decent care of our seniors in the past. It makes no sense. Which reminds me, I need to think before I speak to avoid using unparliamentary language.

In today's motion, our party proposes that the House "recognize that the elderly were most directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic". Seniors were the most directly affected, and the ones who received the least support. How does that make sense?

People think that seniors were not affected, but many of them work part-time because they are not making enough money. Others lost their sources of income, which were based on long-term investments or savings that have not paid out.

Now that I have spoken about savings, I will speak about income. We must realize that most seniors live on a fixed income, in other words, pension benefits that are either barely indexed or not indexed at all. Consider the ridiculous maximum increase of \$1.52 a month for those receiving the maximum amount this year.

Fixed incomes cannot absorb inflation as prices continue to rise. The rent increase is estimated at 4% this year. Food prices will likely rise because of shortages in the farming industry and the fact that farmers are not getting much support.

Consider, too, delivery fees that seniors did not have to pay before and the "COVID-19 fees" some merchants are charging, often out of necessity.

Isolated people are most at risk. Let us not forget that the majority of deaths occurred among seniors. These people are not only more at risk, but live with more fear.

What did we do to help them? Not much.

Our motion also asks the House to "recall that too many of the elderly live in a financially precarious position". I could quote statistics about the basket of consumer goods and services, but there is a very simple way to understand that the monthly amount of \$1,500 is utter nonsense.

When Canada found itself in a state of emergency and the government decided to grant a minimum amount to all those who lost their jobs or were unable to work because of the spread of the virus, we all know what the government decided to give them: \$2,000.

That is not what we are asking for today. What we are asking for is an additional \$110 for seniors. In 1975, old age security was 20% of the average industrial wage. Today, it is 13%. We have allowed this support measure to quietly peter out, bit by bit. Why?

Is it because we take seniors for granted? Is it because their voices are not strong enough to be heard? Is it because they don't have any friends in this government?

The government promised hand on heart, as usual, to help them. After pressuring the government again and again, we finally obtained a one-time payment of \$300 for every senior, with an ex-

tra \$200 for those who receive the guaranteed income supplement. Seniors were also granted a one-time GST and HST credit payment, and that is it.

Financial insecurity for seniors is not a one-time problem that can be addressed by a one-time payment. It requires a basic benefit increase.

I will go back to a word I frequently use when standing up for the agriculture sector: predictability. Seniors need predictability to pay their bills, have a budget and not feel anxious at the end of the month because they do not know if they will have enough money left to eat properly. We are not saying that seniors will run out and buy new cars next week; we are talking about \$110 a month.

• (1255)

Let us consider the obscene amounts this country spends on the British Crown. I will not open up that can of worms, and I will not waste time detailing the shameful amounts we give the Crown, but let us think about what \$110 a month could do for seniors living at home. I think that is very reasonable.

The problem has existed for a long time. It existed before the pandemic. The people at FADOQ are asking for stability and predictability.

The third part of our motion acknowledges the collective debt that we owe to those who built Quebec and Canada. On March 8, my father will turn 86. I do not want to get emotional, but I would like you to know that he was a lumberjack at 12 years old. How many of us could have done that? He did not have access to education, either. However, the work done by his generation created these opportunities for future generations. Thanks to my father's generation, Quebec is a better place. Do we not have the moral obligation to provide this generation with decent care?

Fortunately, my father had a good job and a good pension plan, and his finances are a lot easier to manage. However, I keep thinking of those who do not have any money. Every time my father has a major expense, I think how terrible it must be for those who cannot pay for a walker, a wheelchair or home adaptations.

I will stop here, because I am going to get even more emotional.

The fourth part of our motion asks the government, in the next budget, to increase the old age security benefit by \$110 a month for those aged 65 and more. I hope that no one in the Conservative Party will say that I cannot do anything for seniors, when they fully intended to increase the retirement age to 67. I await their questions.

*Business of Supply*

Our party is also proposing simple solutions, such as automatic income tax returns for people whose situation does not change. Can we help them instead of making it more difficult and making them fill out 28 forms? People are disadvantaged, and even more so during the pandemic. They are afraid to go out, or simply cannot go out. The community services that usually help them fill out their income tax returns are underfunded and not operating right now.

How about paying a deceased person's pension benefits to a spouse for three months after that person's death? I clearly remember having to repay my mother's benefits after she died. What a way to express condolences. Frankly, I think our society can do better.

We would like to see a tax credit for home adaptations that people can get once the work is done. I could share my own story about this. It can take up to a year for a subsidy to be approved, and people cannot always wait that long before adapting their homes. Sometimes they need it right away. How about making things easy and providing an automatic tax credit for home care?

My colleague from Manicouagan, who will be speaking next, has repeatedly proposed a bill to protect workers' pension plans when businesses go bankrupt. If we are talking about OAS, we also have to talk about protecting pension plans. That is important.

We are asking for a minimum token increase of \$110 per month. The Liberals intend to spend \$100 billion on their recovery plan, but they do not have the willingness or decency to increase old age pensions by \$110 a month. I will refrain from saying what I am really thinking and simply say that I find that appalling.

The government is preparing to spend \$100 billion. What will people with incomes of \$1,500 a month do with that additional \$110? Does the government think that they will put it in a savings account or keep it for later? No. They are going to spend it and help keep the economy running. That is what we need. We need to kick-start the economy. Let us give them the boost they need. The population is aging. This makes no sense.

I appeal to members of the House. Let us look beyond political partisanship. In the debate earlier, some were saying that the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of this or against that. Yesterday, the Bloc Québécois also voted in favour of a bill that does not affect Quebec because it was a sensible measure. We use good judgment. I do not have time to talk about all of the reasons why we voted for that bill right now, but I would like members to ask me about it later.

In the meantime, let us adopt this motion.

• (1300)

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his lively, personal speech.

[*English*]

In northern Manitoba, the poverty of elders and seniors is heard of in every single community. I have heard about the ways in which they have suffered and continue to suffer during this COVID crisis. We, as a society, have lost track of what matters. Having seniors and elders in our lives is sacred.

The motion put forward by the Bloc to increase the OAS and supports for seniors and elders is very important, but we need to do so much more. Would the member not agree that we need to change the way we think and, as government, act to ensure that seniors and elders in our lives have better lives than they have now?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thank the member for her question. I also want to thank her for her very nice French introduction. It was very well done. I encourage her to continue practising and speaking French.

Indeed, we cannot criticize efforts to improve the living conditions of seniors. Earlier, we were asked why we were opposed to the universal pharmacare program. It is because our National Assembly has moved motions to keep Quebec from being subject to a Canadian plan, since it already has its own system. We do not want to harm Canada, that is not why we are here. All we are asking for is to be able to withdraw from the plan with full compensation. That is how the next bid to introduce universal pharmacare will succeed.

[*English*]

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member touched on Conservatives raising the age from 65 to 67. During the 2015 election, I received hundreds of calls, and many people who opposed that came to see me. They told me that Conservatives were trying to push seniors into poverty for two more years.

Did the member see the same response in his riding, and in Quebec generally?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

It is important to preserve the gains already made for our seniors. Earlier on I was asked if I supported further improving seniors' living conditions. This is the same thing. We will not raise the age of eligibility.

It is my view that the Liberal proposal to increase the age of eligibility for old age security to 75 years is callous. People need it when they are 65. However, not everyone needs it. It is a matter of luck and of privilege.

I consider myself to be very lucky in life. I have had opportunities that others have not had. The government needs to be aware of these things. We need to support people.

Therefore, my answer is yes.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

**Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, many seniors are having a tough time in my riding. During COVID, it has been exacerbated, but in general, even before that, the number one issue was seniors falling behind. I mentioned before that one thing we definitely need to do is increase the help for seniors so they can get by.

However, another big part of it is finding ways to decrease the cost of the things they do, such as going to buy groceries, or going to the doctor or on any other trips. When costs increase because of something like a carbon tax, that applies to all products. That really needs to be said.

I am wondering what the thought process is, and if the member opposite thinks we should find ways to not increase things, such as the carbon tax, which make it more difficult for seniors to live day to day.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his interesting and very broad question.

My colleague is talking about two different problems.

Personally, I think we can provide adequate support to our seniors. There are some cost increases that we simply cannot control. For instance, we will not control the private market or indexing. However, one thing we can control is old age security. That is an important element.

As for the carbon tax, the Bloc has a very balanced position. We believe that pollution should definitely cost something, since this will help encourage the transition. However, this must happen when the transition is possible. There must be alternative options.

That is why we supported a private member's bill yesterday that tackles that very issue. Very few alternatives exist at this time. We must act intelligently so as not to increase food costs. However, the general principle will always remain: We want to protect the environment and take care of our seniors adequately. Meanwhile, we also have the duty and the important responsibility of leaving the planet in decent shape for our children. We are the sandwich generation. We are privileged, but we need to take care of those who came before us, while not forgetting to think about what we are leaving to those who come after us. This is fundamental.

• (1305)

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé for his speech. We could feel his emotion, but also his indignation, which I share. I have always said that I got into politics because I have a capacity for indignation, which I want to be constructive, of course. That is why I really understand the situation when we talk about how seniors are doing.

I would like to thank my colleague from Shefford for making a very good speech and for being behind this motion.

While I was listening to the news over the past few days, I heard a journalist ask a senior at what point one no longer counts. Regardless of where that came from, I must say that the question real-

ly surprised me and made me angry about the very issue of seniors, because we are letting such a dangerous discourse spread unchecked out there in society.

I have to say that I heard that on the national broadcaster, where I once heard a very serious discussion on the possibility of taking away seniors' right to vote at some point. These may not be major ideas, but those ideas are being floated nonetheless. That gravely worries me. I must say that a motion like the one being moved today, which "acknowledge[s] the collective debt that we owe" to seniors, must be taken seriously. There are good reasons for it.

I think that societal discourse is sometimes dismissive of seniors, when in fact they are an integral part of our society. Earlier I heard comments about age. Members talked about "starting at age 75", "from age 65 to 67", "after 67 years of age", and so on. We have to work with that sort of breakdown, to some degree, to make things easier, but at the same time we must never forget that seniors are an integral part of society.

I think we should follow the example of the first nations. I say this humbly, as the member of Parliament for Manicouagan, where the Inuit and the Naskapi peoples make up 15% of the population. As demographics change, these communities will become larger and larger. The way the first nations treat seniors is the polar opposite of what I have heard on Radio-Canada. First nations elders are served first at community meetings. They will have first choice of cuts of meat, such as caribou meat. That is a bigger deal than I make it sound.

These seniors are seen as assets in their communities and not as liabilities, as is the case here, as the government gives benefits to everyone except seniors during the pandemic. This shows that seniors are still being put in a separate class. In the first nations, seniors are seen as wise elders, memory keepers and knowledge keepers. I do not want to speak for the first nations, but elders are the most important members of their communities.

As a member of Parliament, a Quebecker and a human being, I am learning a great deal and I appreciate how the first nations see their seniors and their role in society. We should view seniors the same way.

Beyond these points and this lesson in humanity, which I wanted to talk about, I will say that my colleagues have made a number of suggestions that should be implemented for our seniors. I would like to mention them again.

• (1310)

There is a major issue that the Bloc Québécois has rallied behind for a long time, particularly during the last year and a half, and that is health transfers. It is the federal government's job to increase health transfers to help seniors.

During the pandemic, we have talked a lot about access to vaccines. I represent a huge riding with an area of 350,000 square kilometres. People often have to travel in the riding, and because of the distances seniors have a number of needs. We need more services and more local services. The request for more health transfers is especially pertinent to seniors. That is one of our demands. Naturally, we have been repeating this since this morning, and we hope that the government will make it happen. The government must agree to increase old age security by \$110 a month and it cannot be just a one-time increase. As several members have said, this must be recurring direct assistance. This assistance must not be provided solely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding shortfall was there well before the pandemic. That is what the Bloc Québécois is asking for, in addition to an increase in the guaranteed income supplement of \$50 to \$70, depending on whether the recipient is single or married. This assistance will help support seniors.

Due to the costs incurred by seniors during the pandemic and at the present time, their purchasing power is constantly getting lower. As I mentioned, there was already a shortfall before the pandemic, and it is now a huge gap. This must be addressed quickly.

The Bloc Québécois motion is a call for action, and I hope the government will answer the call. In the 2019 and 2020 throne speeches, the government said it would help seniors. It has been saying that for a year and a half. Earlier, I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors talk about the New Horizons for Seniors program and several other measures that may be beneficial, but that do not provide seniors with any immediate assistance or give them the freedom to choose for themselves. There is a huge difference between the New Horizons for Seniors program, which is a useful program, and having money put directly in their pockets. It is important to understand that.

I hope that the parliamentary secretary and the minister heard what we had to say on this topic. I hope they will adopt the Bloc Québécois motion in order to demonstrate swift and meaningful support for our seniors. Seniors must not be left out.

I referred to a daily shortfall because the old age security pension is too low. The pandemic is making life even more difficult for seniors, so it is all the more urgent to act.

I would like to conclude by encouraging the House to vote for another bill, which I tabled last November. I am talking about Bill C-253, which we will very likely debate in the spring. It is also aimed at helping seniors and retirees. When companies restructure or go bankrupt, retirement funds are cut, leading to disaster, devastation and tragedy. Group insurance plans are also cancelled.

Seniors themselves keep saying that what they want is stability and predictability. By protecting the deferred wages that seniors have earned and deserve, the government would be protecting their rights.

I will conclude by adding that it is also important to protect seniors' dignity.

### *Business of Supply*

• (1315)

[*English*]

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I really admire my colleague's public speaking abilities. They are fantastic.

My question concerns, of course, her motion. I have a concern that research has not been done on the impact the top-up will have on low-income seniors who receive GIS. My concern is that this top-up to OAS may kick a number of seniors off the GIS, making them ineligible to receive it, or that there may be a clawback of it.

Is the member aware of how many seniors may be impacted by the OAS top-up and kicked off the GIS? Is she aware of any data?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and her kind words.

The member will understand that the aim of our motion is to benefit every senior. Any number of adjustments can be made, since this is a motion and not a bill. Our goal is to make sure that no one is penalized, regardless of the method chosen to increase the benefit. The Bloc Québécois's position is that seniors' options should not be limited.

[*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 am wondering if my colleague could indicate what logic was used regarding the \$110. From her perspective, how many seniors does she believe that would affect?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I do not have the calculations that led to this specific amount with me, but I can certainly forward them to my hon. colleague.

Let us consider the underlying principle of the motion. We obviously consulted different groups. The \$110 a month is a good baseline, but it could be increased.

Numbers can be moved around a lot. We used an index to come up with the number of seniors living below the poverty line. However, this index can be modified to give the impression that the senior poverty rate is decreasing when that is not the case at all. We have to be careful with numbers.

About 30% of my constituents are seniors, so if I can help just one senior, I will have done my job.

[*English*]

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for all the work she has done on the restructuring bill, which is the same as mine. I think there will be a lot of support for it.

*Business of Supply*

This motion deals with an increase that would be in the next budget, but we do not know when that will be or when it will be enacted. It could be a year from now. Does she believe that, because of the hard times people are facing, there should be another one-time payment to help our seniors and people with disabilities alleviate some of the hardships they are facing at this time?

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois obviously likes that suggestion, but we are talking about two different things. We always think it is a good idea to help our seniors.

There have been a lot of delays though, including the fact that no budget has been tabled since the election. My colleague's idea about a one-time COVID-19 payment, which was done last summer, in no way detracts from the other measures we should bring in to provide permanent, ongoing support to our seniors.

I thank my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for supporting my bill. I know he is going to introduce a bill that we will agree with, so we will be working to improve seniors' quality of life.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She talked about first nations and the importance of respecting seniors. What impression are we giving of our society when we let older people suffer and live in poverty, when we disrespect and neglect them, especially during a pandemic?

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comment.

That is an excellent question. We have a social contract.

I see it this way. We live in a society. As a left-leaning social democrat woman, I want us to help that society as a whole. I want an equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity.

I certainly think our society lacks empathy, respect and even dignity when we decide not to help a huge segment of society to which we owe a debt, especially since it is something we are able to do.

[*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, it is a pleasure to be able to talk about our seniors.

Let us go back to 2010, and I could probably even go further back. I can recall being involved in a public meeting. It was a great atmosphere. There were a number of seniors present. I talked about the contributions people had made and cited those who were in the room with me. These were the people who built what we have today, in part, in the north end of Winnipeg.

When we talk about seniors in general, we often hear about how great they are. Then we continue on to other aspects. I do believe it is important to recognize that this wonderful, beautiful country that we all love today, Canada, including the provinces and territories within, is here because of the people who came before us and the many different efforts of seniors then and today.

Just because someone might be in a long-term care facility, it does not mean that they are not contributing to our economy or to our society. I think of grandparents who are passing on knowledge or wisdom, whatever one might want to call it, to a grandchild or a great-grandchild. Generally speaking, from birth to death, there is a contribution that can be made to our society, and all people need to be treated equally.

I know I share this belief with my colleagues in the Liberal caucus. We understand the importance of seniors. In fact, we have a seniors caucus group that spends a tremendous amount of time on the issue of seniors and how we, as a government, can provide the types of supports that seniors need and deserve.

The Prime Minister, even before he was Prime Minister, talked a great deal about how we need to be there to support Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it, but also recognizing the important role that our seniors have played in society and continue to play in society. In fact, I would suggest that members look at the actions this Liberal government has taken over the last number of years and the results.

When we talk about combatting poverty and look at seniors who are in poverty, through the policies we have put in place, we have reduced that number by 25%. That is 25% fewer seniors living in poverty today than back in 2015. This is in good part through the initiatives taken by the national government led by the Prime Minister.

As an example, one of the government's first actions was to substantially increase the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors. That is something Liberal members from coast to coast to coast advocated for, and we put into place literally months after winning the 2015 election. The impact that had on society is immeasurable. Quite frankly, even in my riding of Winnipeg North, hundreds of seniors were taken out of poverty, or were assisted out of poverty, because of that one initiative.

Someone made reference to what seniors do with the money. They spend that money. If the poorest seniors we have in Canada are given a dollar, they will spend that dollar. They are not spending it on trips. They usually spend it on the essentials, whether it is food or medication. I will get to pharmacare a little later.

• (1325)

The bottom line is that right from the get-go, we have had a Prime Minister and a government that have recognized the importance of our seniors and those who are going to be seniors too.

*Business of Supply*

We looked at CPP reforms. Stephen Harper, the former prime minister, did absolutely nothing on that front for 10 years. Prior to being prime minister, he was part of an advocacy group that would like to have seen the demise of the CPP. At the end of the day, we were able to bring provinces, territories and stakeholders together and see increases in the CPP. That is going to assist workers in the future in their retirement. Whether it is for those who are 55 plus today or 55 plus in the years ahead, we have demonstrated that we are prepared to do whatever we can to improve their living conditions in a very real way.

I find it interesting that the Bloc tried to distort this last fall. Members will recall that the Bloc was trying to give the impression that seniors had not been given anything during the pandemic. The Bloc said there was just minor increase only, that that was it, because we did not care for seniors. The Bloc was trying to mislead Canadians, particularly in the province of Quebec, about what the reality actually is. That was the behaviour we saw from the leader of the Bloc. Nothing could be further from the truth because we provided one-time payments to seniors. In fact, we even enhanced that payment for those who were collecting the guaranteed income supplement.

Did that stop the Bloc from spreading misinformation? No, it did not. We now have a Bloc motion saying that we should give \$110 to every senior and everyone who is over the age of 65. I suspect the Bloc sees it more as an election tool, as something it could use for propaganda. This is not something we are concerned about today only; we have been concerned about this since 2015 and have been effectively addressing that issue.

It is interesting. Think of the motion the Bloc wants us to vote in favour of and the fact that it also voted against the throne speech, which talked about giving a 10% increase to seniors over 75. To try to give an impression that a senior who is 75 is no different from a senior who is 65 is just wrong. There are more opportunities for seniors who are 65 to 75 than there are for seniors who are 75. If we had an unlimited pot of money, why would we give just \$110; maybe it could be \$510. I am somewhat surprised that my NDP colleagues have not already upped the \$110 to some other number. It is easy to say what they are saying, but it is another thing to actually do it.

I have listened to the Conservatives being critical of the government on this particular file. Some might suggest there is a lot of hypocrisy there. When I was in opposition and Stephen Harper was the prime minister, and some of my colleagues were in opposition longer than I was, they asked what he was doing for seniors. One member said that the Conservatives created the minister for seniors. That is true, yes, but did that result in anything tangible? Not at all, especially if we draw a comparison with what the Liberals have been able to do in less than half the time.

During that trying time of the COVID pandemic, we even stepped up more because there are different ways we can help seniors or those who are 55 plus. I was saying that even before my 59th birthday. I can tell members that whether directly or indirectly, this is a government that has worked with the different stakeholders and different levels of government, talking about how we can bring in the types of supports that are necessary for our seniors.

• (1330)

I believe that we have been very successful in providing those supports. Does that mean there are absolutely no issues out there, that every senior is happy and that there are no problems? No, I am not trying to say that at all, but I am saying that anyone who is trying to give the false impression that this is a government that has not been proactive on this file is misleading Canadians, because we can clearly demonstrate by facts that this government has been there for seniors, virtually from day one, let alone during the pandemic.

We talk a great deal about long-term care, and one of the reasons we have been talking about long-term care is that during the pandemic we have heard a lot about the long-term care system and many of its deficiencies. It was not that long ago that we asked the Canadian Forces to get engaged in provinces like Quebec and Ontario. My own province of Manitoba required the Canadian Red Cross to get involved, and it was all supported by the national government. Is there any surprise that Canadians are genuinely concerned? We can talk about the deaths as a direct result of the coronavirus and what percentages of deaths have occurred where. I represent the Maples Long Term Care Home in Winnipeg North. There were far too many seniors who passed away as a direct result, and I was glad that the Red Cross was able to go there and be a part of the solution, as an agency that is supported by the national government.

Those members of the Bloc and the Conservative Party are wrong, in my opinion, when they try to say that the federal government has no role to play. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that through this pandemic we can learn a lot and can build back better. Unlike the Conservatives and the Bloc, Liberal members of Parliament are prepared to look at ways in which we can do just that, to build back better. I believe that the long-term care facilities are a good example of that.

I respect jurisdictional responsibilities. I understand the lead role that provinces and territories play in health care delivery. Many years ago I was the health care critic in the province of Manitoba and asked the provincial minister of health many different questions. I sat for hours of health estimates at committees, so I understand the jurisdiction, but I also understand what my constituents want and the expectation that a national government has and should live up to. I am not going to bow to the Bloc or the Conservatives who say that we should just give the provinces money. I think that is a cowardly way of protecting the interests of our seniors from coast to coast to coast.

*Business of Supply*

I believe that we need to look at ways we can work with those who are willing to have national standards. That is something we learned from this process. When we talk about impacts on seniors, it is not only today. I have knocked on many doors in Winnipeg North, where a senior will tell me that they have a choice to make between getting their medications or proper food. Do members know how people actually leave a hospital? They can imagine they are in a hospital, and as long as they are in the hospital they are given the prescribed medicines. When they leave the hospital, some of them are no longer getting their prescriptions, because they cannot afford them.

• (1335)

Think of the consequences of that. On the one hand, the Conservatives and the Bloc say they do not want Ottawa involved in this because Ottawa has nothing to do with it. A majority of the constituents that I represent and, I believe, a majority of Canadians, based on what I hear from my colleagues within the Liberal caucus, are behind a national pharmacare program. Liberal members of Parliament are behind a national pharmacare program because they see the benefits of it and understand what our constituents are telling us. That is why the NDP bill yesterday was hogwash. It is not as if we can pass a bill and then we have the program. It is just not reality.

If we want to have a national pharmacare program that will be there to support our seniors, read what the throne speech said. We need to work with the provinces and territories. In order to have the very best optimal national pharmacare program, we have to work with the provinces and territories. To try to bring in legislation mandating it before any sort of real discussions take place is wrong.

I know that the Prime Minister feels very passionately about the need to address medication coverage for all Canadians. That issue is very important to me and my colleagues, because we recognize what Canadians are saying. When we look at the benefits, we should refer to groups or associations that indirectly also play a role. During the pandemic, for example, we invested close to half a billion dollars in essential services and supplies. New Horizons For Seniors, a program for community-based projects, got \$20 million. We allocated \$350 million to non-profit charities. What about United Way Canada? Almost \$10 million was allocated. We understand that many seniors turned to food banks and local food organizations. During the pandemic, close to \$100 million was allocated to them.

Those are all monies that have been put in place because we know that those organizations have the capability of doing so much to support seniors. Whether it is a direct contribution or an indirect tax break or a third-party organization, by working with interested stakeholders and other levels of government in many ways, we have been very successful in being there for seniors during this pandemic from coast to coast to coast.

I recognize that not every senior is going to be happy or has received what we would like to have provided. There is always room to improve. Improvement is something that we as a government have been very much open to and have encouraged, just as our caucus is constantly reminded to listen to our constituents and bring

back their thoughts and ideas to Ottawa. We take all of that very seriously.

I will leave it at that. We will continue to be there for our seniors in the days, weeks, months and, hopefully, years ahead.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, quite honestly, I am not sure where to begin. I have to wonder whether the parliamentary secretary really believes his own rhetoric accusing everyone of being incompetent.

To hear him tell it, the Liberals are the only ones who know how this works. He is saying that the Conservatives did nothing when they were in power and that the NDP is always asking for too much, and now all of a sudden, the Bloc Québécois is spreading misinformation. He says we are out in left field, when we are simply trying to get the government to recognize that seniors are living in precarious situations, which makes no sense, and that they definitely deserve to be treated better, including a decent increase in old age security. The Liberals see that as excessive.

On top of that, the parliamentary secretary is accusing the Bloc Québécois leader of misinforming the public by saying that the government is not treating seniors properly. Without the Bloc, I am not sure that the Liberals would have actually agreed, near the beginning of the pandemic, to give seniors the meagre \$300 a month. Quite frankly, \$300 a month for seniors is paltry.

I will try to be quick because there are so many things that I want to say to him.

The increase for seniors in 2020 that he is bragging about gives seniors a net amount of \$1.52 a month. Can he look seniors in the eye and tell them that his government did right by them?

In the throne speech, the government promised a 10% increase for seniors aged 75 and over, and it has not even given them that yet.

When does the parliamentary secretary think that the government will at least give them that?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the leader and other members of the Bloc continue to espouse misinformation by trying to give the impression that the government has not been there for seniors in Canada. I just went through a number of the initiatives that clearly explain how the government has been there for seniors in all regions of our beautiful country, and we will continue to be there to support our seniors.

• (1345)

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the parliamentary secretary that he should be able to clarify, because I cannot seem to get the answer out of the Minister of Seniors or her office. This is the question I am getting from all the seniors in my riding, and I am sure it is a question from seniors across Canada: When is the government going to deliver the 10% boost to old age security and the 25% increase to the Canada pension plan for widows?

It is a simple question: When?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the government made many different announcements related to seniors over the last 12 months. We are talking hundreds of millions, going into the billions, of dollars that have been there to support seniors. Like the member who posed the question, I too am very anxious to see the next federal budget. I anticipate that there will be a lot of good things in it for Canadians. We will have to wait until the day the budget comes forward.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I feel it is really important to reassure the Canadian people, who have just been subjected to another daily word salad from the member for Winnipeg North, that mindless verbiage is not what normally happens. One has to listen to him very carefully to understand how the minister of obfuscation is doing the job of the Prime Minister.

Do we remember the part in his very long speech when he talked about how much Liberals cared about seniors who could not pay for their medicine? Liberals used that line in 1993 under Jean Chrétien. They used it in 1997, in 2000, in 2004 and in 2008. In 2015, when the Prime Minister was elected and there were Liberal majorities across the country, they were going to establish national pharmacare. Last night, they stood up and shut it down. That is why they sent in the member for Winnipeg North today: to try to obfuscate the fact that year in, year out they make promises and then deny what they promised they would move forward on.

For folks back home, this is just another day in the Liberal tool box of misinformation.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, what we just witnessed was more grandstanding by a New Democratic member of Parliament, trying to take ownership of an issue that he is hoping will ultimately fly. The reality of it is that under this Prime Minister, one would have to look to the beginning of medicare to see when there was such a proactive national government trying to implement a national pharmacare program.

The NDP is incapable of drafting and participating in the negotiations that are necessary to allow us to move forward. One has to be in a government position to do those negotiations with different provinces and territories. My objective is to see the program implemented, as opposed to grandstanding on the issue, and I believe that we are on the right course.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to listen to the factual information the member is putting on the floor today for people to consider.

### *Business of Supply*

We hear continually, in particular from the NDP, about promises that were made when I was in grade 9. I do not remember any of them. I apologize. I was not really paying attention back then, but maybe I should have been, knowing I would be held accountable for them today.

Nonetheless, the reality of the situation is—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, it is very clear. I did not say that because he does not remember what happened 30 years ago, it is not on the record. Maybe he did not remember it, but Liberals made the promise. I am asking him to remember what happened now.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I think we are getting into debate on the matter before the House.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has the floor.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay made such an excellent point this morning about bringing a rational point of order forward in this House. He accused a Conservative member earlier this morning of using the point of order to intervene in proceedings, and that is exactly what he just did here. The hypocrisy in using other issues clearly falls into his interventions in this House.

Would the member from Winnipeg like to comment and set the record straight as to what our commitment has been regarding pharmacare, at least from recently elected Liberals, and what we have done to get to the point where we are today?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I trust I will get additional time because of the interruption of the point of order.

To be very clear, all one needs to do is take a look at the throne speech, where once again we put Canada into a great position. It is the first time in 40 or 50 years that we can actually realize a national pharmacare program. However, it has to be done in co-operation, working with the different provinces. If we can negotiate and do what we demonstrated in the past, we will continue to move forward and we will see a national program.

NDP members are often described as Liberals in a hurry, and that might be something one could apply in this particular case. The NDP just needs to be a little more patient and—

• (1350)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, what I understood from my colleague's speech is that his government wants to create two classes of seniors: those aged 65 to 75 and those aged 75 and over.

*Business of Supply*

I can tell him that the cost of rent stays the same whether a senior is 65 or 75 years old. The increase in the cost of drugs is also the same for seniors whether they are 65 or 75 years old. I do not know whether my colleague is the one who does the shopping in his household. If he is the one who does the shopping and who keeps track of the family finances, then he should know that the cost of food has increased by at least 20% in Quebec. Housing and services cost a senior \$2,000 a month.

Can my colleague tell me whether seniors today are able to pay for private accommodations with services and fulfill all of their responsibilities with the amount the government is currently giving them?

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, let me first make it very clear that the OAS is going nowhere. In fact, it was this Prime Minister and government that actually reversed the decision of Stephen Harper and allowed the retirement age to be 65 as opposed to 67, reinforcing the importance of having OAS at age 65.

The reality is also that we need to recognize that there is a difference between a senior who is 75 years old and one who is 65 years old, so we tried to get as much money as we could to the individuals who are really in need of that financial resource. It is a responsible approach to the issue. In no way does this take away from the OAS; rather, it reinforces the need to recognize that some seniors in our society need additional finances.

I would think the Bloc would also recognize that need and recognize that there is a difference as one gets older.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît.

First, I want to apologize to my colleagues who were offended when I spoke in the House a little while ago on this very subject. At the time, I referred to seniors as “old” people. I was told that I should not say that and should instead call them “seniors”. I therefore apologize to my colleagues who were offended by that and who are apparently more thin-skinned than the people I was referring to. Indeed, all the seniors I spoke with afterwards to tell them how sorry I was said that they realized that I used those words affectionately, like calling my father “my old man”. What I meant by that is that our “old” folks have thicker skin than today’s youngsters. They are made of sterner stuff, and they are proud. They are also quite ticked off, to remain within the realm of parliamentary language; I could have chosen a much stronger word. Even though they are as generous, available and active as they possibly can, they feel like what they get in return is not gratitude, only contempt.

In a way, that is what the motion from my colleague, the member for Shefford, is all about: recognizing the precarious situation that seniors are in and fixing it. We owe them that; they built our society.

Earlier, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons asked my colleague from Manicouagan how many people would benefit from the \$110 monthly increase. The answer is in fact that we will all benefit. The whole

society will because, in the secretary’s own words, none of the money that we give to seniors will end up in a savings account. Seniors will spend that money, reinvesting it in our society. Collectively, we will benefit from treating our seniors better.

If we want to look a bit closer at figures and give people an idea of how many people could benefit from the increase, I would say that 20 years ago, 13% of the Quebec population was 65 years of age or older. Today, it is estimated that the ratio is around 20%, and it keeps increasing. Five years from now, in 2026, it could reach around 24 or 25%.

Another shocking statistic is that in 2015, 50% of seniors had incomes so low that they were exempt from paying income tax. That figure was 20% in 1997. This means that, between 1997 and 2015, there was a 30% increase in the number of seniors whose income is too low to pay income tax. That gives you an idea of the number of people who will directly benefit from the Bloc’s proposed increase.

Life expectancies have been increasing for quite some time now, and needs will only continue to grow as well; those are established facts. The most irresponsible thing we could do right now is not to invest in the quality of life of our seniors. Health care is expensive and these costs will continue to rise. We would have to be pretty out of touch with reality to stand around and do nothing. Needs are evolving, as my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert can confirm, and there is a need for more social housing and for more services that meet the needs of seniors, especially in health care centres.

I want to talk a bit about seniors’ buying power. It is important because that is what this debate is all about. I also want to mention the Institut de recherche et d’informations socioéconomiques, or IRIS, who did a study a few years ago. The fairly recent data from that 2018 study show that single seniors aged 65 and up living in Montreal and whose sole income is derived from the public pension system fall considerably short of what could be considered a dignified retirement. According to the IRIS, the annual revenue threshold to ensure a basic level of comfort ranges from \$21,000 to \$28,000, depending on the city. We are not talking about a lavish lifestyle, merely a tiny step above the poverty line.

In 1975, the old age security benefit represented 20% of the average industrial wage. Today, it is only 13%. This might be viewed as a positive sign in a way, because it means that wages have gone up. That may be right, but it also has a downside, because workers’ buying power also increased, as did the cost of living. Seniors are left behind with their insufficient pension benefits, and we see the results today. Their pension is no longer enough to keep them out of poverty and free of debt.

Nowadays we use the market basket measure. The estimated annual revenue required in 2021 for Montreal residents to meet their basic needs like shelter, food and clothing is \$18,821. By adding together pension benefits, tax credits and the guaranteed income supplement, pensioners will receive about \$18,380.

• (1355)

These seniors are far from being able to spend money on entertainment, play bingo or go out to a restaurant from time to time. What is probably the most heartbreaking is that they are far from being able to spoil their grandchildren a little, something that every senior wants to be able to do in the autumn of their life.

I will say it again. By failing to invest in seniors, we are depriving ourselves of a great asset. These people may be retired but that does not mean that they are not full of ideas, projects, goodwill and, often, energy. What is more, they are an extraordinary source of knowledge that could benefit the younger generation that spends 18 hours a day glued to a screen. Our seniors are an extraordinary source of potential, as long as we keep them in good health, as long as we keep them in a position where they can contribute to society and as long as we ensure that they have a decent standard of living.

I want to give members an idea of what I have seen and experienced in my riding of Drummond.

Investing in our seniors means that we have more people like Réjeanne Comeau, who along with her friends at FADOQ, found a way to organize a massive blood drive in Notre-Dame-du-Bon-Conseil two weeks ago in the midst of a pandemic. It was a big success.

Francine Leroux from Saint-Lucien is an extraordinary woman. Her project to build a space for the Cercle des fermières in her community is nearing completion. This space will benefit the entire region. Community kitchens and activities to end isolation will be held there. This is a fantastic group.

I am also thinking of Francine Julien, who is working hard to improve the lives of seniors in Saint-Guillaume, and Marie-France Roberge of Brin de bonheur, who organizes activities to help senior women in Drummondville feel less isolated. The organization is doing such a great job that it has to turn people away because its space is too small.

I would be remiss if I did not mention Jean-Guy Moreau, who has made it his mission to help people 70 and up get moving by organizing pickleball leagues. Mr. Moreau is deeply committed to seniors. He is actually the son-in-law of James Price, whose 100th birthday I brought to the House's attention in December. I should also mention that the member for Cape Breton—Canso joined me for the occasion because Mr. Price is a native of Louisbourg, which is in his riding.

In short, the Liberal government sees the Bloc Québécois's proposal to increase monthly OAS payments by \$110 as an unnecessary expense. The Bloc, in contrast, sees it as an investment. As members have said, the Liberals have not yet kept their promise to increase the OAS by 10% for those 75 and up, and we do not know if they ever will.

### *Statements by Members*

As a society, we owe a debt to our seniors. This is not a frivolous thing. The bare minimum the government needs to do is ensure quality health care by increasing health transfers to the provinces and Quebec, as they have asked, and increasing the OAS for the people who built Quebec and Canada. This is about respect. We owe them respect, and I hope the House will adopt this motion.

• (1400)

**The Speaker:** I have to interrupt the hon. member, but he will have two and a half more minutes when we resume debate.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

### AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to subsection 7(5) of the Auditor General Act, it is my duty to lay upon the table the February 2021 reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Milton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, throughout the month of February, Canadians have been celebrating black excellence and honouring the many contributions Black Canadians have made in building this nation. It is so true that Black history is Canadian history. However, it is the future of this country we are focused on building.

Black leaders and Black-led organizations I have met with recently are asking for a more resilient, fair and just Canada. I met with the Foundation for Black Communities this week, an organization that exists to ensure every Black person in Canada can thrive and that all black communities have agency in deciding their own future.

Yesterday, I joined a virtual visit at my local library in Milton with The New York Times' best-selling author Ijeoma Oluo, who was discussing her book *So You Want to Talk About Race*, which is on how anti-racism is essential to creating connected and empathetic communities. The event in Milton, at the public library, was part of the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton's virtual Black History Month program entitled, "Our Legacy Guides Our Future".

I want to thank these organizations for their tireless efforts and advocacy. I wish Black Canadians a happy, righteous and constructive Black History Month.

*Statements by Members***COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's response to COVID-19 has been and remains incoherent, constantly changing and without a publicly shared plan. This failed response is due to the government choosing to ignore the basic principles of emergency management that are normally used during pandemics.

Canada's emergency management experts, who were unexplainably muted during this pandemic, have clear prewritten response plans based on hard-learned lessons from previous pandemics. These plans would have allowed leaders to rapidly minimize the impacts on our society, advise the public of the scope of the hazard and publicly issue a complete written plan to address it.

This failure to follow emergency management guidelines is resulting in massive collateral damage to our social fabrics, mental health and other health conditions, our children, our economy, and our civil liberties. Lockdowns and restrictions are short-term, not continuous, solutions to give the government time to get permanent solutions such as vaccines and rapid testing in place. Canadians are demanding to see the Liberal plan to end this perpetual pandemic.

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**CANADIAN POLISH CONGRESS**

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to virtually connect with the constituents of Orléans and a long-time leader of Ottawa's Polish community, Marek Kiejna. Mr. Kiejna has recently renewed his role as the regional director for eastern Canada in the Canadian Polish Congress, an organization that coordinates cultural events and community activities and promotes international co-operation between Canada and Poland.

I appreciated the chance to catch up on the goings-on of this vibrant community and hear how it has adjusted for the pandemic. Like so many of Canada's cultural organizations, it has had to make changes to many of its annual traditions and eagerly awaits the day its members can celebrate with each other once again.

I want to thank Marek Kiejna for his many years of leadership and volunteerism and congratulate him on his renewed role. Further, I want to thank the Canadian Polish Congress for its dedicated work to raise awareness of Polish history and heritage in Canada.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

[Translation]

**JACKIE VAUTOUR**

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour the memory of the Acadian activist Jackie Vautour, who passed away on February 7 at the age of 92.

Jackie Vautour spent his entire life fighting on behalf of the 228 families whose land was expropriated by Ottawa in 1969 to create Kouchibouguac National Park. What the federal government did to those Acadian families warrants an apology, at the very least. Depriving poor fishers and farmers of their fishing rights, their land and their homes was inhuman.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his minister responsible for national parks, Jean Chrétien, drove thousands of people from their homes in the 1960s and 1970s.

Fortunately, the federal government no longer has the right to expropriate land from families to create parks, and that is thanks to people like Jackie Vautour, who stood up for themselves.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I offer our deepest condolences to his loved ones, especially his wife, Yvonne.

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**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am so proud and pleased with the white paper on modernizing the Official Languages Act that we unveiled on Friday. This is the first time since the 1980s that the federal government has put a clear and precise vision for Canada's linguistic duality in writing.

As the only Liberal Acadian MP from Nova Scotia, I am proud to have contributed to advancing the vitality of our communities. I also know that my father would be proud to see a plan that reflects all Canadians. This plan will ensure the vitality of our institutions, francophone immigration, the promotion of French across Canada, including in Quebec, and much more.

I want to thank the Minister of Official Languages, the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the members of caucus from official language minority communities and all the stakeholders who worked on and contributed to this development.

We are now working on the bill in order to clarify our vision.

[English]

**The Speaker:** I would ask all members to please mute their microphones if they are not speaking. I am not sure what it is today, but they seem to be popping on all on their own.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, when the previous member was speaking, the French interpretation was overpowering the English, and I could not hear any of his speech in English.

**The Speaker:** We will have our technical people look into it.

The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

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**COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it has been a tough year for all Canadians, and for people in my riding it is no different. Today, I want to recognize a few initiatives that are helping those in need.

*Statements by Members*

A Hill Avenue florist ran a program that matched flower purchases and donated them to long-term care facilities, brightening the day of senior citizens who have been suffering through social isolation.

The Regina community fridge organizers are now building a second location in the Cathedral neighbourhood to provide donated fresh food to people in need.

Another local business, Wheat Queens and Prairie Things, generously donated 75 gift baskets to senior citizens who were victims of a fraud scam over the Christmas holidays.

I also want to highlight Sandeep and the volunteers of the Guru Nanak Free Kitchen, from which members of the Sikh community in Regina have generously been donating food every week for two years to those in need.

Whether donating their time or making financial contributions, the people of Regina continue to give back. Please join me in thanking the charities, businesses and individuals who have given so much and will continue to help those in need.

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● (1410)

[Translation]

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my riding, Etobicoke Centre, is in Toronto.

My family is not francophone, but we are francophiles. When I was growing up, my parents were determined that I would learn French. They believed that an appreciation of both official languages was part of who we are as Canadians. However, since my public school board did not offer a French immersion program, my family sent me to a private French school, the Toronto French School, where I received my education in French.

It is clear to our francophone communities that it will take much more than a symbol and the ability to speak French to make sure we achieve the most important thing, that is, true equality for our two official languages. For that reason, and to protect the French language and culture, we must take action to provide access to justice, services and education in French across Canada. The white paper tabled by our Minister of Official Languages presents a plan that does exactly that. Our government is proposing tangible measures to support our francophone communities and to support who we are as Canadians, today and in the future.

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[English]

**FRANCISCO PORTUGAL**

**Ms. Marci Ien (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this past week, Toronto Centre lost a beloved member of the St. James Town community, Dr. Francisco Portugal.

Dr. Portugal emigrated from Manila to Toronto in the 1970s, where he completed his medical studies and opened his own clinic. He was known for his infectious smile and his willingness to help,

a willingness that went way beyond his profession. He was a community worker, an entrepreneur and philanthropist.

Among his many notable achievements, Dr. Portugal advocated for Filipino caregivers in the 1980s. He was the former vice-president of the Filipino Centre Toronto and most recently founded CARP, which organizes medical professionals to bring health as well as dental care to those in need in the Philippines.

Toronto Centre has lost a legend who will be greatly missed by family, friends, patients and staff, but his legacy lives on. We thank Dr. Portugal for serving us so well.

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**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, here is the COVID vaccine rollout summed up: grand announcements, then failure; backroom deals with dictatorships; platitudes and promises with little substance; then constantly evolving deadlines.

Let me now explain what the Liberals are good at. They take failure and masterfully spin it to proclaim victory. We will eventually get vaccines, but we will not forget the lives lost, hundreds of billions of dollars of lost economic productivity and the months of uncertainty.

The sad reality is that this trend reflects every Liberal promise, announcement and tag line followed by incompetence and mismanagement. Then, finally, they either condemn the promise to eternal bureaucratic misery or a result that is only a shadow of what the initial promise was.

Canada deserves better; Canada deserves competence. The Conservatives are ready to form a government that will secure our future.

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**ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to recognize R. Paul Dhillon for being among BC Entertainment Hall of Fame's latest inductees.

As a South Asian award-winning screenwriter, producer, director and journalist, R. Paul has made his community very proud. He has been able to shed light on the experience of B.C.'s South Asian population as well as highlight the significant contributions that Canada's South Asian population has made to the social, cultural and economic fabric of our community and our nation.

*Statements by Members*

I would also like to congratulate Luv Randhawa for recently being awarded the 2020 best international artist by UK Bhangra Awards, and reaching into the top five on iTunes. Only hours after the release of his album, *Believe in Me*, the album reached number two on the iTunes R&B charts in Canada, number five in the U.K. and number nine in the U.S.

I congratulate both of them for their success in the arts.

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• (1415)

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Manitobans, like all Canadians, are hurting as a result of COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed by governments in a response.

Families have been forced to say goodbye to loved ones over video calls. Many have lost jobs or seen their hours reduced. Businesses have had to close their doors, some permanently. This is not the way things should be.

COVID-19 has been with us for a year now, yet the Liberal government's response has failed to mature with the passage of time. This endless cycle of restrictions, some imposed by provinces and others by the Liberal government, must end.

The Conservatives have asked the Liberals for a timeline to lift restrictions. We have asked for a plan on vaccine procurement. We have asked for a plan to restore the economy. In every case, the Liberals refuse.

It is time to stop the excuses and show some leadership, protect the vulnerable, provide vaccines to those who want them and allow everyone else to resume their lives.

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**FIREARMS**

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a government's number one priority should always be to keep its citizens safe. This is why it is so confusing that the Liberals are attempting to demonize the law-abiding firearm owners in Bill C-21, while simultaneously introducing new measures that reduce sentences for criminals charged with illegal gun offences.

If the Liberals were focused on protecting Canadians, they would not have voted against Bill C-238, which would have imposed tougher sentences for criminals found to have smuggled firearms or to be in possession of illegal firearms.

It is abundantly clear to my colleagues and many of my constituents that the Liberals are more focused on furthering their own ideological agenda rather than protecting all Canadians.

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**LONG-TERM CARE HOMES**

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a global pandemic that has shone a bright light on the deplorable conditions in some of our for-profit, long-term care homes in Canada, and in Hamilton.

The site of the deadliest outbreak of COVID-19 in our city, Grace Villa long-term care, exemplifies what is wrong with the for-profit model. There were 234 cases, and 44 of the 156 residents, or 30%, have died due to the virus.

We have heard stories of poor sanitation, lack of personal protective equipment, bad working conditions and understaffing, resulting in woefully inadequate care. We recently learned that not one single long-term care home has had resident quality inspection by the Ontario Ministry of Health since 2018.

It is time for the federal government to work with our provincial and territorial partners on long-term care. It is time to improve the working conditions to allow for better care. It is time to develop national care standards and regulations, and step up the Canada Health Act. It is time to take profit out of long-term care.

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[*Translation*]

**DIABETES**

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin. This was a major breakthrough for people with diabetes, but there is still a lot of work to do.

In 2018, a group of young people came to Parliament Hill to speak to parliamentarians about type 1 diabetes, which is a topic most people know little about. I got to meet Juliette Benoit, an eloquent, precise and brave young woman who wants to advance research. I learned that these young people have to be very disciplined to deal with the pressure this disease puts on them, as they must endure more than 1,460 injections a year.

We need to promote awareness of all the different types of diabetes, a disease that affects more than 760,000 people in Quebec alone. Research is key to improving the lives of people with diabetes. If we work together, we can make that happen. We must combine intelligence, knowledge and funding as we work towards this common goal.

As the African proverb goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together."

*Oral Questions*

[English]

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in my riding, students are not able to find jobs post graduation, people are struggling with mental health, civil liberties are being eroded, small businesses are going bankrupt and families are not able to feed themselves, all because of the COVID pandemic and the Liberal government's botched response.

I have heard from friends and family of people taking their own lives because of financial pain and isolation. It is very heartbreaking to hear. The reality is that only about 4% of Canadians have received a single dose of the vaccine, while other countries are easing restrictions and opening up. Our per capita vaccination rate is behind more than 40 countries.

We need to get the vaccine rollout right in order to secure jobs and secure our future, but the Liberal government is failing Canadians. While it negotiated with CanSino, a deal that eventually flopped, other countries secured deals with Pfizer and Moderna that put them near the front of the line.

Canadians are paying dearly for the government's mistakes. The government needs to start doing its job so Canadians can get back to doing theirs.

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[Translation]

**CHARLOTTE L'ÉCUYER**

**Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Aylmer sector of Gatineau has lost two great women in 2021.

A few weeks ago, I rose in the House to recognize former mayor Constance Provost. Today, I rise to pay tribute to Charlotte L'Écuyer, who represented Pontiac in the Quebec National Assembly from 2003 to 2014.

She was very connected to her community and was passionate about access to health care. Charlotte dedicated her entire career to improving health care and social services in her riding. She remained an outspoken advocate for these services after she retired from politics.

Charlotte was a smart, strong and wise woman with a great deal of integrity.

On behalf of my constituents in Aylmer, I thank you, Charlotte. We miss you a lot.

● (1420)

[English]

**The Speaker:** I believe the hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook has a point of order.

[Translation]

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, because of the lack of interpretation during my member statement, I would like to redo it if the House is okay with that.

**The Speaker:** Yes, there were some glitches. The member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook once again.

[Member repeated his statement]

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is deeply troubling that the Canadian chief of the defence staff has had to step down only a month after assuming command. This happened shortly after we learned that the Minister of National Defence sat on allegations with respect to the previous chief of the defence staff.

My question for the Minister of National Defence is simple: Is he aware of any other misconduct allegations against any other commanding officer in the Canadian Armed Forces?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government takes all allegations of misconduct very seriously and will always take strong action in response to any allegation of misconduct that is brought forward, no matter the rank and no matter the position. Let me say that every woman in Canada should be able to do her job free of harassment. The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service has confirmed an investigation into Admiral McDonald.

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**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government's quarantine program is in complete ruins. The hotline does not work. Travellers are ignoring the quarantine and waltzing right out of the airport, sometimes receiving fines but sometimes not. Most disturbing are the reports of violence and people in quarantine hotels not being kept safe. If no part of this program is working, why has the government not suspended it?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has some of the strictest travel and border measures in the world, and that is absolutely as it should be. There are new COVID variants of concern in the world and our government will always do whatever it takes to protect Canadians. As a mother, as a woman and as a feminist, I am deeply concerned by the reports of violence and sexual assault. No one should ever have to fear for her safety.

● (1425)

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I agree, but people are fearing for their safety. The government knows there are risks in the quarantine hotels it has set up. Health committee documents show that the government has been planning this series of quarantine hotels since June, but with more than seven months of planning, it has still failed to keep Canadians safe. Australia and other countries had similar problems that the Liberal government could have learned from.

*Oral Questions*

When the Deputy Prime Minister knows there are problems with safety for Canadians, why is this program still in operation?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this program is still in operation precisely because all Canadians are unsafe as long as the coronavirus is circulating in the world. By introducing strict border measures, including obligatory quarantine, we are acting to protect Canadians. This is something we will always do. Let me remind everyone in the House, and everyone listening, that no one should be travelling outside the country for non-essential reasons right now.

[Translation]

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, mandatory stays in quarantine hotels are making people worry and fear for their safety. Bullying and violence are unacceptable. The government must protect people who are in quarantine. If the Prime Minister cannot keep people safe, he must suspend the program.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives do not want to protect Canadians from COVID-19, that is their prerogative. Those of us in government, however, want to keep protecting Canadians with our quarantine and border measures.

As a woman and a mother, I am of course deeply concerned by the reports of violence and sexual assault. Nobody should have to fear for their own safety.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government had eight months to plan the program. The hotline that people were supposed to call is a failure. Canadians are not safe. Like the rapid tests and the vaccines, everything the Liberal government touches ends in failure.

When will the government fix this program?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's travel and border measures are among the strictest in the world, and I am proud of that. It provides an essential protection for Canadians, who are sacrificing a great deal in our fight against COVID-19.

From day one of the pandemic, we have made it clear that no one should be travelling. I want to repeat that travelling can put people and their loved ones at risk.

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**HEALTH**

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government has completely abdicated its responsibilities when it comes to the hotel quarantine system.

However, what we are asking for is not complicated. We just want the government to set up a phone line that works. We want the government to ensure that once travellers get to the hotel, they follow all public health rules, they are kept safe and they do not contract COVID-19.

The feds had two months to prepare for this. It seems to me that Canada should be up to the task. The solution is not to cancel quar-

antines, but rather to show the kind of leadership that is worthy of a G7 government.

Seriously, does the Prime Minister still want to lead this country?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the hon. Bloc member, and I know he agrees with our government that we all need to take tough, strict measures to protect Canadians. These tough, strict measures include border and quarantine measures.

I want to emphasize once again for all Canadians that now is not the time for non-essential travel abroad.

• (1430)

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since I knew that the Deputy Prime Minister would be answering my question, I should have asked her if she is ever tempted to take over as prime minister.

The government needs to do its job. We are in the middle of a pandemic. The government must get going and take effective action. The government failed to quickly procure vaccines, it failed to manage the border and it failed with the hotel quarantines. I could go on and on. It is a horror show.

The public needs an effective federal government. It is possible to work quickly and well.

When will the government get its act together?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the quarantines and the strict measures that we had to implement at the border, I want to remind the hon. member that the provinces, including the province of Quebec, agree with us that we need strong measures at the border to protect Canadians. That is something that our government will always do.

\* \* \*

**PHARMACARE**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, many people in Canada cannot afford to buy the medication they need. Universal pharmacare could have helped them save money and given them access to the drugs they need. However, the Liberals voted against it.

Why does the government always defend the interests of big pharma instead of helping ordinary Canadians?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, no one should have to choose between buying medicine and buying groceries.

We have already done more than any other government in the past generation to lower the cost of medication. We are also working with the provinces, territories and other stakeholders to establish the foundational elements of national universal pharmacare.

[English]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister made the same claim that the Liberal government has lowered the cost of medication, but that is not what I am hearing. I got a note yesterday from Kathleen in Oakville, and she told me her son filled out a prescription for his epilepsy medication and the cost has doubled. He does not have coverage and he lost his job because of COVID-19. So many Canadians cannot afford the medication they need during this pandemic, and the government has clearly shown it is more interested in protecting the interests of big pharma than people.

Why is it that the Prime Minister continues to choose big pharma over people like Kathleen's son?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, no Canadian should have to choose between paying for medicine and paying for groceries. That is why our government continues to work hard, in collaboration with the provinces, the territories and other stakeholders, to move forward in establishing the foundational elements of national universal pharmacare. That includes a new Canadian drug agency that would negotiate drug prices on behalf of all Canadians, thereby lowering prices. It includes a national formulary. It also includes a national strategy for high-cost drugs for rare diseases.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister did not seem too concerned about the situation he created in quarantine hotels.

As though it were not bad enough that people have to wait on the phone for days and hotel staff are overwhelmed, now there have been cases of assault. That is very serious and very worrisome. Once again, the government improvised by presenting a policy that it is unable to implement properly. We are asking that the quarantine policy be suspended until the situation is quickly resolved.

What does the Liberal government intend to do?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has some of the strictest travel restrictions and border measures in the world, but with new variants of concern, we know that we need to take additional measures to protect Canadians against COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have clearly indicated that no one should be travelling because it could endanger the traveller and those close to them.

• (1435)

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is quite simple: The safety of our citizens is currently at risk. That is more important than anything else.

#### Oral Questions

The Liberals' plan is not working at all. The government has failed on all counts. I am thinking now of the women who were assaulted and I cannot believe that we are letting this slide.

Is the government waiting for more assaults to occur before it decides to act?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the member does not want to help us, he must at least let us do our work.

We have implemented some of the strictest measures in the world because that is what is called for, not because it gives us any pleasure. We are obviously extremely concerned about what happened at the hotel. However, is the member saying that we should forget about the health and safety of Canadians by waiving all the steps of quarantine and letting people enter the country whenever and however they want? Is that what he is saying?

[English]

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' border and travel restrictions have been chaos from day one. Their rules have real consequences for Canadians' lives. Shockingly, there was an alleged sexual assault on a vulnerable woman at a federally run quarantine hotel, and a federally contracted official is charged with harassment, extortion and a sexual assault on a woman while enforcing federal rules. The public safety minister is directly responsible.

Will the Liberals shut it down before one more Canadian is harmed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, border measures are an important component of protecting Canadians from the virus and indeed from the variants of concern. Now is an important time to remind all Canadians that travel is to be avoided.

I will say that these allegations are deeply concerning. They are under investigation. My officials are reviewing all of the processes and protocols, including with our service providers, to ensure the safety of all Canadians. However, I will repeat that the border measures we have in place are there to protect Canadians.

*Oral Questions*

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I did not ask about the charges or the investigations. I asked what the Liberals are going to do. So-called concern and words are not enough. People are unsafe because this abuse happened in a federal facility run by the federal government with federal workers under federal rules. What is galling is that another woman complying with federal rules in the sanctity of her own home was extorted and assaulted by a screening officer sent by the federal government.

Will the Liberals stop this right now?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned to hear the member opposite suggest that we stop our border protection measures. In fact, they are some of the strictest in the world for a good purpose: to protect Canadians against the variants of concern, to protect Canadians against COVID-19 entering our borders and to protect families from travellers who have returned and inadvertently infected their loved ones.

These allegations are under investigation. We take them very seriously, but we will continue to apply appropriate measures at the border.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, upon entry into Canada, a woman's passport was seized and she was forced into a taxi without knowing where she would be taken. She was forced into a federally run facility, under a federal duty of care by the Liberal government, and she was sexually assaulted. This is misogyny and a gross violation of her rights.

The Deputy Prime Minister and the health minister have implied that the victim should not have travelled. Were they suggesting that she deserved what happened to her under their duty of care?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every woman deserves to live a life free of violence and a life of dignity, but I will repeat that these border measures are in place to protect Canadians and will remain in place until such time that science and evidence indicate that it is safe to release them.

The member opposite knows that this matter is under investigation. We take all of these allegations very seriously.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, his attention was unwanted, but he still made his way into her room. He touches her. He took a condom out of his pocket and asked her to sleep with him. She said no; he insists. She was terrified, but no help came. He masturbated in front of her.

If this is making those who are listening uncomfortable, good. Imagine how she felt. After, she was told she could go to the hospital but that she would have to come back to her place of assault. They had removed the security locks from her door.

Would the Minister of Health put herself in this situation, and if not, why is she subjecting others to it?

• (1440)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the assault of a woman is never okay. These are serious allegations and they are under investigation.

Having said that, the border measures we have in place are there to protect Canadians. We will continue to ensure that Canadians are

protected and safe, and we will refine processes with our service providers to ensure that happens.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is costing the federal government \$51 billion to shut out Quebec from the shipbuilding strategy.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has revealed that the cost of the contracts awarded to Irving for 15 frigates has increased from \$26 billion to \$77 billion. Do my colleagues realize how big a \$51-billion overrun is? That is 37 times what the Montreal Canadiens are worth. It is enough to buy the entire NHL and the Nordiques to boot.

When will the government give Davie its fair share of the contracts?

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are obviously committed to continuing with our national shipbuilding strategy so that our Coast Guard and navy can be equipped with ships befitting their place in the world.

Naturally, we have entered into discussions to include Quebec City's Davie shipyard in this strategy, to have it carry out this work and provide our navy and Coast Guard with the ships they deserve.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is worrisome.

In addition to the cost overruns, today the Auditor General is condemning the major delays in shipbuilding. She notes that Irving will not deliver its ships until 2030 and that Seaspan is also behind schedule.

These delays will get worse because there is going to be a labour shortage at both shipyards. Boycotting Quebec, as Pierre Elliott Trudeau recommended, costs tens of billions dollars more and takes decades longer.

When will the government completely revamp its national shipbuilding strategy to include Davie Shipyard more significantly?

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the answer is that we have already done that.

We did not wait for the Bloc Québécois to include the Davie shipyard. We already did that for the icebreaker contracts that are worth billions of dollars, for the repair and return of frigates and, obviously, for building ferries. As far as the third shipyard is concerned, we are in negotiations to include Davie.

The Davie shipyard could be part of the national shipbuilding strategy, but that is thanks to this government, not the Bloc Québécois.

### INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would be embarrassed to say what the Liberal member said about Davie, and I would be even more embarrassed about what the government has been promising indigenous communities since 2015. It promised to fix all the long-term water quality issues by March 31, 2021. Today, the Auditor General confirmed that the government is going to fail. She said, “Indigenous Services Canada did not provide the support necessary to ensure that First Nations communities have ongoing access to safe drinking water.” Half of the remaining problems are more than 10 years old, yet the government has the gall to blame its failure on the pandemic.

When is the government going to step up and take responsibility?

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we welcome the recommendations in the report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. I assure the House that we share this commitment and will continue to work around the clock until all of the long-term advisories are lifted.

We have been working directly with first nations communities since 2015 to improve access to drinking water. In spite of the challenges we announced in December, we are confident that we are on the right track to getting the long-term boil water advisories lifted.

\* \* \*

[English]

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a plan to reopen the British economy. Last week, Chancellor Merkel did the same for Germany. Even many of the U.S. states are reopening as people get vaccinated, yet here in Canada it is a different story. The National Post noted that “when you spend more money than anyone else and end up...experiencing death and economic collapse for 30 weeks longer than any other country...it's fair to call that a failure.”

Where is the Prime Minister's plan to reopen our economy?

• (1445)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, job one for all Canadians and all members of the House is to conquer COVID. That does include, in our government's view, strict border measures and vaccinating Canadians. That is why I am so pleased that 643,000 doses of vaccine are arriving this week alone. Once that job is done, I am confident that Canada will come roaring back, and we are hard at work with provinces, territories, municipalities, businesses and labour to do just that.

**Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, promises, promises, but it has been over 700 days since the Prime Minister last tabled a budget. The most important planning document for a federal government is a budget, yet the current government has spent hundreds of billions of dollars without a plan to reopen the economy. Millions of Canadians are falling through the cracks. Tourism, restaurant, energy, airline and health care workers are all being left behind by the Prime Minister.

### Oral Questions

With Canadians struggling to survive, when will the Prime Minister finally table a plan to open up our economy?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is, in fact, our government's support that is helping Canadians, Canadian people and Canadian businesses, do the right thing and get through COVID. I will say that Canadians would be suffering much more under Conservative economic austerity. Notwithstanding the difficulties imposed by COVID, Canadians are working hard and finding ways to get the job done. In fact, in Q4 of last year, our GDP increased by 1.9%. That is an annualized rate of 7.8%, and almost double the U.S. rate.

\* \* \*

### SMALL BUSINESS

**Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, news reports say that small businesses have taken on \$135 billion in COVID debt, which puts 2.5 million jobs at risk. Many small businesses cannot even access federal aid, but the ones that can will not be sustained on debt alone. They need a safe, open and employment-based economy.

Will the federal government acknowledge that its failures are prolonging Canada's lockdowns and table a plan to deal with them before we lose two and a half million small business jobs?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to hear the Conservatives say they are concerned about small businesses. I sure am, and that is why I would like to urge the Conservatives to stop their delaying tactics and pass Bill C-14. Members do not need to believe me that this is essential for small businesses. Let me quote Dan Kelly, who says that “Bill C-14 has some important measures for small businesses.... CFIB urges all parties to ensure this support is passed quickly”. Let me echo that and urge the Conservatives to pass these essential supports.

*Oral Questions***PHARMACARE**

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, hundreds of people have reached out to me over the past month and shared their struggles affording medication. They include Pam in Burns Lake whose son's expensive medication will not be covered once he graduates, or Valorie, a senior in Terrace who has to delay paying her basic bills in order to afford her diabetes drugs. We proposed a plan based on the government's own report, and it rejected it.

When is the minister going to have a universal pharmacare program for Pam, Valorie and the countless other Canadians who need it?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are following that same report and have been making steady progress to implement national universal pharmacare. Instead of imposing a top-down approach on the provinces and territories like the NDP have proposed, we are committing to work together to create a pharmacare system that works for all.

In the meantime, we have established a transition office and created a new Canadian drug agency and we are working on a national formulary and investing a billion dollars over two years to help Canadians with rare diseases to get access to the medications they need. That is progress.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the main thing they want to do is to renege on their promise yet again.

Yesterday, when the Liberals rejected our pharmacare bill, they showed us that what really matters to them is big pharma and rich insurance companies.

The Liberals have been procrastinating on this issue for 24 years, but in Quebec, there is a large coalition in favour of such a plan. The FTQ, CSN and CSQ all support real public pharmacare, as does the Union des consommateurs du Québec.

By rejecting our proposal, the Liberals are punishing all part-time workers and low-income people.

Will the Prime Minister be able to look at himself in the mirror after such a betrayal?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, surely the member opposite understands that it is better to work with provinces and territories than unilaterally impose programs on any province or territory, including Quebec. That is our approach. It is a collaborative approach. We are following the Hoskins report. We are moving forward on national universal pharmacare. We have taken a number of important steps. The government understands the hard work that is ahead of us to get this done. I think the NDP should understand the value of collaboration.

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in order to target gun and gang violence, we need better data to trace firearms used in the commission of an offence. In 2014-15, the Harper Conservatives closed half of the RCMP laboratories that analyzed and traced these types of firearms. It is clear that we need to rebuild and further that capacity.

Can the minister provide an update as to what our government is doing to help British Columbia enhance our data?

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Surrey—Newton for his excellent question and his tireless advocacy on behalf of the safety of the people of Surrey. We are pleased to see that our federal funds are being used to open a new forensic firearms lab in British Columbia. This is essential to holding criminals accountable and to getting illegal guns off our streets.

We are also renewing the Canada-United States Cross-Border Crime Forum and working on the creation of a new bilateral task force on gun smuggling and trafficking with our American allies. We will strengthen gun control in this country at our border and in our communities.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, more explosive allegations of sexual misconduct at the highest levels of the armed forces were revealed today. This time, the highest-ranking officer stepped down for the duration of the inquiry. This is all happening on that minister's watch.

Is the Minister of Defence aware of any more allegations or cases of abuse of power, sexual misconduct or other inappropriate behaviour by high-ranking officers?

[*English*]

**Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one thing I can assure the member about is that we have absolutely no tolerance for any type of sexual misconduct. Regardless of the rank and regardless of the position, we will take action. We want survivors to come forward. We want them to know that they will be heard and that things will be investigated, because we absolutely have a no-tolerance policy and we will take action.

*Oral Questions*

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, General McDonald was the person in charge of eradicating the very behaviour he is accused of. This leaves military members wondering if justice can actually be achieved. A safe and thorough independent investigation is critical, but senior officers who themselves may be complicit remain in key positions within the chain of command.

How will the minister ensure that compromised senior officers are not interfering in these investigations in order to protect themselves?

**Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that every single allegation will be investigated thoroughly and independently of the chain of command, regardless of position and regardless of rank. We will take the appropriate action because we owe it to our members. I want to commend the survivors who are coming forward and to let them know that they will be heard and their allegations will be investigated.

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**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, recently at the agriculture committee, a senior vice-president representing Maple Leaf Foods realized and revealed why a major processing plant was built in Indiana instead of here in Canada. She stated, “the not-so-good, with our regulatory system, is that it stymies investment. It creates barriers to predictability, barriers to innovation and barriers to cost efficiency that oftentimes far outweigh, and sometimes even stymie, the health and environmental positives we are trying to gain.”

The government is failing on job creation. When is it going to get work and start creating paycheques instead of pink slips for Canadians?

• (1455)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government absolutely understands that the single most important thing for Canadians right now is to recover the jobs lost by COVID. That is why I am delighted to say that notwithstanding the extremely difficult circumstances today, Canada has already recovered 71% of the jobs lost in the wake of the pandemic, and that compares with just 56% of the jobs recovered in the United States. I would like to thank all hard-working Canadians and Canadian businesses who are behind that.

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not believe a word that comes out of the minister's mouth. There are 213,000 more unemployed Canadians. The government has the worst job-creation record in the G7. Canadians are tired of empty platitudes and broken promises. It is time for the Liberal front benches to get to work so that Canadians from coast to coast can get back to earning paycheques.

When will the economic development minister and her cabinet colleagues bring forward a real plan to get our economy back on track and get Canadians back to work?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite does

not want to believe my words, let me quote David Parkinson from The Globe and Mail. Here is what he has to say: “For the economy as a whole, there are remarkably healthy signs. Unlike last spring's lockdowns...it appears we've learned how to keep the economy rolling.... The underlying recovery remains largely intact.” Thanks again to all the hard-working, innovative Canadian business owners who have made that possible.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, thousands of people receive their T4 slip and then realize that fraudsters have claimed the CERB using their name. The government does nothing.

People spend hours on the phone to no avail. It is easier to get someone's personal information to commit fraud than to get through on the CRA phone lines.

I would point out that the CRA's lack of verification before sending CERB cheques is what made this fraud possible.

What is the minister doing to fix this issue and help victims?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, The Canada Revenue Agency is thankful for all the work that call centre employees have put in over the past year.

Call volumes have increased by 83% since 2020 and show no signs of decreasing for the upcoming tax season.

We have hired an external firm to help with the call volume during tax season. This is a temporary measure that will help guarantee service quality for Canadians. By March, we will have hired over 2,000 new employees and extended CRA call centres' hours of operation.

We will keep working hard to serve Canadians.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency is neglecting victims of CERB fraud.

I spoke with parents whose three children were victims of fraud. They are spending hours on the phone, only to be told that the CRA can only deal with one file at a time and that they have to call back later about the other two children. These parents are being forced to take time off work because trying to reach the Canada Revenue Agency is a full-time job.

Seriously, is this the same hotline as the one for the quarantine hotels?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, I want to thank the Canada Revenue Agency's call centre employees, who are dealing with an 83% increase in call volumes.

I want to reassure victims of fraud that they will not have to reimburse the Government of Canada. We will continue to work hard to make sure people have better service.

\* \* \*

[English]

**PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is home to nearly 1.2 million people, but unfortunately only 43,000 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. That is less than 4%. Meanwhile, in the United States the number is around 12%, and we know in Israel it is nearly 50%.

Why is our government so far behind our allies in providing vaccines to those who want them?

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we of course share the urgency of the hon. member in vaccinating the people of Saskatchewan and indeed every Canadian. That is why we are very happy we are able to fill our commitment to receive six million doses in the first quarter of this year, over 23 million doses in the second quarter and more than enough pre-approved vaccines to vaccinate every Canadian by the end of September. That of course includes every person in Saskatchewan who wishes to receive a dose, and we look forward to that day.

● (1500)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government messed up vaccine and PPE procurement, and it has no idea how much everything cost. There is an \$11-billion gap between the Minister of Finance's budget and the estimated costs.

Why is there such a massive gap, which will drive us into an even deeper deficit?

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as we do every year, we will of course account for all government spending in the public accounts. It will be as transparent and open as the member can possibly imagine, just as it has been in the past. We will continue to do whatever it takes to protect Canadians with PPE and especially vaccines. We will have enough vaccines to vaccinate everyone by the end of September.

\* \* \*

[English]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government tries to make Canadians believe that they are focused on helping them, but actions speak louder than words.

This week I received an email from a single pensioner in my riding who got an EI repayment demand for \$130. Contrast that with the calls I am getting from constituents, asking when vaccines are coming. They want to get back to work and off of EI, and return to a normal life.

How is it that the government has the resources to go after paltry sums of money but cannot get vaccines to these same Canadians?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am committed to working to ensure that every Canadian receives the benefits they are entitled to, including EI.

We are not asking people to repay if they cannot afford to. I am happy to work with the member opposite on that particular case, of course. I will follow up with him directly after Oral Questions.

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**WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY**

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is the most serious public health crisis Canada has ever faced. It has laid bare fundamental gaps in our society and disproportionately impacted those who are already marginalized, vulnerable or struggling.

Women have faced steep job losses. Many have bravely served on the front lines of this crisis in our communities and carried the burden of unpaid care work at home.

With International Women's Day approaching on March 8, can the Minister for Women and Gender Equality update the House on the theme for the day, and how we will be marking the occasion?

**Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for Pickering—Uxbridge for her strength and for her leadership.

This International Women's Day, we salute the women on the front lines of the fight against COVID. We acknowledge all the ways that women, particularly racialized women, have been hardest hit by COVID. We invite applications to our \$100 million feminist response and recovery fund. We will convene a virtual two-day summit focused on Canada's feminist response and recovery.

Our government will continue to work with strong feminists to create one million jobs, and to improve health and safety outcomes for all women.

### AIRLINE INDUSTRY

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the GTA is home to thousands of airline sector employees. In fact, Barrie—Innisfil is known as terminal 4. I cannot begin to explain the level of frustration, anxiety and anger among pilots, flight attendants, service agents, employees and their families as they sit at home. Their lives and livelihoods are threatened because of incoherent policies and a resulting lack of sectoral support.

For months now, as layoffs mount, routes are cut and planes are parked, all these families have heard from the Liberals is that support is coming.

On behalf of these anxious families, I want to know this: When is that support going to be coming?

**Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Mississauga Centre, where many employees of the aviation sector live and work, I am very much in touch with them, and the anxiety they are going through today due to the COVID pandemic.

I can assure my hon. colleague and all employees of the aviation sector that we are engaged with the airline sector with a sense of urgency on finalizing a support package, because the aviation sector is important for Canada's economy and it is important for Canada's security.

• (1505)

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the privilege of meeting with the Association of Canadian Independent Travel Advisors. Many Canadians are suffering through this pandemic, but travel advisers are being decimated. These self-employed, hard-working individuals work on 100% commission. As we all know, the travel industry has been shut down for many months; therefore, they have had no ability to make any revenue. Now they are concerned that they may have to pay back past commissions.

Will the Prime Minister listen to the concerns of these hard-working Canadians and ensure that their livelihoods are protected in any rescue package provided to Canadians?

**Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure my hon. colleague that we are listening. As I said earlier, we are currently in discussions with the airline sector on providing customized support given the conditions that it is going through right now.

I can assure my hon. colleague that refunds, regional route restoration and commissions are part of the discussion.

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### YOUTH

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, young Canadians and their parents are growing increasingly concerned about the alarming decline of job opportunities as a result of the government's response to the pandemic. Experts are saying that it will be a decade before opportunities for our young people return to pre-pandemic levels. We know that in December 2020, 250,000 young people were out of work compared with the year prior.

### Oral Questions

This government has made hundreds of announcements and spent billions upon billions of dollars in the last year on pandemic emergency spending, yet it has failed to provide Canadians a jobs recovery plan for our young people to secure their future.

Where is it? Where is the plan?

**Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we will always work on behalf of young people in Canada, and that is exactly why we have a full voice at the cabinet table. When it comes to not only employment opportunities but creating opportunities in which young people are involved, we will continue to do that. If we look at strengthening the youth employment skills strategy, our government has committed to that. In the Canada summer jobs program, we have doubled the number of jobs, and young people can continue to apply. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we made sure that youth were at the forefront of our response.

We will continue working on behalf of young people. They are not only the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian farmers work hard every day to produce high quality products. In September 2019, Verner, Ontario, in the riding of Nickel Belt, hosted the largest international plowing match and rural expo of all time with the help of 1,000 community volunteers. The agricultural industry has been working very hard and facing some major challenges during this pandemic.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell us about the measures our government has put in place to help the agri-food sector across the country?

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are very grateful to our farmers, who have overcome great challenges to continue to keep our grocery shelves stocked throughout the pandemic.

Canada had a record year in 2020 with \$74 billion in agri-food exports. Our government is there to help farmers get through this crisis by providing various emergency assistance programs and improved risk management programs and by ensuring that foreign workers arrive safely in Canada.

*Business of the House*

[English]

**PHARMACARE**

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the NDP put forward a life-saving pharmacare bill that would help thousands of Canadians who cannot afford their medication. Eighty-eight per cent of Canadians support a universal pharmacare program, yet of the 34 members of Parliament in Alberta, I was the only one who voted to support this bill. We need to ensure that Alberta health care is strengthened at the federal level to prevent erosion at the provincial level.

How can the Prime Minister justify voting against this bill, which would help Canadians pay for life-saving medication?

• (1510)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think what the NDP and my hon. colleague fail to recognize is that we must work with the provinces and territories to ensure a pharmacare program that will work for everyone. That is what we are doing. We have done more than any government in a generation to lower drug prices. I am working with my colleagues on a national universal pharmacare plan. We have established a transition office to create a new Canada drug agency and a national formulary, and we are investing \$1 billion over two years to help Canadians who live with rare disease get access to the medications they need. That is real progress.

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**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents were instructed by officials that in order to access the CERB they must first apply for EI. Despite not qualifying for EI, they complied. They were denied. Then when they applied for the CERB, the CRA disqualified them because the system showed them as having active EI applications.

Can the government please explain what is being done to resolve the issues between these two departments?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we know that this continues to be a difficult time for many, which is why we transitioned to a simplified EI program and created three new recovery benefits to support Canadians. Service Canada and the CRA work closely together to share data on Canadians who apply for benefits, to ensure that only one benefit is paid to someone applying at any given time. In some instances this can cause a delay.

That said, we understand that any delay in receiving benefits can be really hard for people. That is why Service Canada and the CRA are continuing to work closely together to reduce delays and ensure that Canadians are paid the benefits they need in a timely manner.

**The Speaker:** That is all the time we have for today.

I wish to inform the House that the Chair has received notice from the House leaders of all recognized parties stating that they are satisfied the remote voting solution is ready to be used.

[Translation]

As a result, as of the next sitting on February 26 and until June 23, members who are voting remotely will use the new electronic voting system.

[English]

Information about this new system is available to members on Source.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after two conclusive tests, we now have a voting app. That being said, I would remind all hon. members that every vote is important and that we must respect decorum to the highest degree regarding the mandate the people have entrusted to us in our respective ridings.

Speaking of ridings, we know that next week the 338 parliamentarians will be in their riding to hear from their constituents on the ground. Then they will return to the House.

I invite the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to tell us what we can expect on our return on March 8.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for sharing this excellent news. I believe hon. members were unanimous on this.

That being said, I thank my colleague for his Thursday question.

This afternoon we will continue debate on the Bloc Québécois opposition day. Tomorrow morning, Friday, we will begin second reading stage of Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments in relation to firearms. Tomorrow afternoon, we will resume debate on Bill C-14, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 30, 2020 and other measures.

Finally, I would like to inform the House that Tuesday, March 9, the week we return, will be an allotted day.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish my colleagues an excellent week in their respective ridings and excellent work with their community.

• (1515)

[English]

**Mr. Paul Manly:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There have been consultations among the parties, and I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that the House recognize that housing is a fundamental human right; that it recognize that an estimated 1.8 million Canadian households spend more than the affordability threshold of 30% of their income on rent, and 800,000 of those households spend more than 50%; that it recognize that an estimated 2.4 million Canadian households experienced core housing needs in 2020; that it recognize that housing is becoming less affordable and more precarious for low-wage workers, people who have lost work due to COVID-19 restrictions and people living on fixed incomes; that it recognize that an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Canadians are homeless and hundreds of thousands more are on the verge of becoming homeless; that it recognize that housing affordability and homelessness are twin national crises; and that the House believes the government should take immediate action to protect existing affordable rental stock from predatory investment practices and that the government should prioritize investments in non-profit and cooperative housing.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE ELDERLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in the House to speak to this motion from the Bloc Québécois.

I am proud that my party is using one of its opposition days to talk about seniors and the precarious financial situations they live in. By putting this issue on today's agenda, we are giving all parliamentarians a chance to wake up to this issue, since some do not seem to be aware of it, and share their thoughts.

The Bloc Québécois is calling on the House to recognize that seniors have been most directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to recall that too many seniors are living in a financially precarious position, and to acknowledge the collective debt that we owe those who built Quebec and Canada. We are asking the government, in the next budget, to increase the old age security benefit by \$110 a month for those aged 65 and more.

You will therefore understand how proud I am to participate in the debate about seniors. I will perhaps speak about more familiar issues to help Canadians and parliamentarians better understand the reality of seniors aged 65 and over.

After listening to various speeches, I am very surprised to see that my colleagues opposite are making a distinction between someone who is 65 and someone who is 75. Those 65 and older all have the same needs and responsibilities. They need decent and suitable housing, they must be able to buy groceries, they must be

### *Government Orders*

able to eat fruits and vegetables and meat or, if they are vegetarian, pulses and tofu, they must be able to pay their electrical and Internet bills, and they must be able to pay for their medications.

What we see, and I believe everyone here must have noticed this, is that over the past few years, and especially this past year, the cost of living has increased substantially, as shown by the grocery bill.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, whether they are 65 or 75, people need to be able to house and feed themselves. Our seniors' financial means must be increased to reflect the new cost of living. It is not okay for absolutely everything to increase except for our seniors' old age security.

If we do a quick calculation, those receiving the guaranteed income supplement and old age security get about \$1,500 a month. Whether I am 65 or 75, these two combined sources of income provide just \$18,600 a year to live on. What can I buy with that? What is happening right now?

Quebec seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible. To be able to stay in my home as long as possible, I need services and support from my community, community groups, volunteers, family, caregivers and friends, but also from CLSCs. This is what our seniors want more than anything, and some even want to die at home. This requires doctors and nurses who will be able to support our seniors throughout their lives at home.

However, people who can no longer stay at home because they need too much care must find a place to live where they can be cared for and provided with the services they need. In Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, to find a place to live that can provide the kind of services needed when one is sick or losing their autonomy, no private assisted-living residence can offer these services for less than \$1,000 per month.

• (1520)

On top of that, while this includes basic meals, it does not necessarily include any services. You could easily spend up to \$1,500 or \$2,000 a month to get your medication and meals and to have your room serviced. We can see very clearly right away, by my rather simple calculation, that expenses exceed the \$1,500 per month that seniors receive.

It might be a bit of an occupational hazard, but I am very concerned about the most vulnerable, people who have worked hard their entire lives but have not had the good fortune or the privilege of being unionized or having a collective agreement that includes pension income. Those who were fortunate enough to contribute to a private pension fund were able to benefit, once they retired, not only from old age security, but also from those savings. However, that is not the situation for many seniors in Quebec. Most of them have to live solely on their pension and the guaranteed income supplement.

*Government Orders*

As a member of Parliament, every week, I am contacted by seniors who tell me how difficult it is to make ends meet these days, and how they have to make some difficult choices. They know they need certain services, but they cannot afford them. As an MP, I assure them that the Bloc Québécois supports them completely, and I promise to be their voice in the House of Commons.

That is why I wanted to rise today. I wanted to point out that these people are falling through the cracks. They are perhaps a group that we do not hear much about, but they are so very important. It bothers me when seniors are seen as victims or as people who need help. In contrast, in Quebec, our seniors are our strength. They helped build our society and they deserve to be taken care of.

Moreover, there are many low-income seniors who help our communities by contributing to their development and building community solidarity. They may be in a precarious financial situation, but that does not keep them from contributing or volunteering for many community organizations, which have now become essential services that help us get through the pandemic.

Today, we are making a heartfelt appeal to the members across the way so that, in their next budget, they include a \$110 monthly increase in the old age security pension and a \$50 monthly increase in the guaranteed income supplement. That would enable those affected to live decently, with dignity. More importantly, it would make them feel like they matter, that they are people who deserve our support.

I encourage all parliamentarians to give serious thought to the Bloc Québécois motion before rejecting it. I especially encourage the government to finally include in its next budget a decent increase that respects and recognizes the contributions of the seniors, who built Quebec and Canada and who built a just and equitable society for us. Collectively, we must allow ourselves the will and the means to support them as they deserve.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish the very best for our seniors, which means there must be an increase in the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement.

• (1525)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government came out with the \$300 payment last May and it finally reached the doorsteps in July, our office in Saskatoon had hundreds of calls each and every day. We have a high concentration of seniors in Saskatoon—Grasswood. The one group that maybe we have not looked at are senior singles. They have been left behind. Couples of course are on fixed incomes. The expenses of single seniors are the same as couples, but they only get one instalment.

I really feel for single seniors, because they have really struggled. Everything has gone up: water, power, food, as the hon. member mentioned. I wanted to get her thoughts about single seniors in her province who are trying to stay in their home and survive from day to day.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very interesting question.

Whether one is younger, older or elderly, being single is more expensive because fixed costs are the same. That is a very important concept.

Like my colleague, I received dozens of letters from seniors criticizing the one-time payment. They saw it as an attempt to shut them up and tell them they would be getting \$300, whether they lived by themselves or with someone else, and that was it. The government does not recognize that fixed costs have to be paid every month. A one-time payment is fine at first, but people have to keep paying for food, health care and rent.

I agree with my colleague that the government either ignores or is insensitive to the financial plight of our seniors. We ask the government to support our motion when the vote takes place on March 8.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, a very good motion has been brought forward today to increase old age security. The regional district in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith has the largest per capita number of seniors in it. Many people come here to retire. They are struggling with COVID-19, but also with affordable housing.

Housing costs here have increased by 59% in the last five years alone. OAS is not keeping up with the increased cost of housing, the cost of food and the cost of dealing with COVID-19. So many of the services for seniors have been closed because of COVID-19, a lot of the meal and community programs.

I want to add my support for the motion today and I hope it passes through the House.

• (1530)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I completely agree.

Housing is a major expense for any household, whether it is a single person or a whole family. The hon. member correctly pointed out that housing costs have increased in Quebec and in his riding. That is a problem for seniors who have only the OAS and the GIS to make ends meet.

In my opinion, transfers have to be dramatically increased, to fund social housing, for example, or to better support provincial health care services. This boils down to health transfer payments to provinces to help them support their residents in need.

I thank my colleague. I share his concerns.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to such an important subject. I would like to begin by informing the House that I will be sharing my time with the member for Orléans.

I also want to thank my colleagues who shared their thoughts on the pandemic's impact on our seniors.

[*English*]

In my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, we have a very high number of seniors. Between 2011 and 2016, the increase in seniors in my riding was greater than in any other riding in the province of Nova Scotia. We know the challenges that seniors face, such as the socio-economic and health impacts of this pandemic, have been felt around the world. Even before the virus, we were facing a number of important challenges, and many of these challenges have become more evident during this pandemic. In particular, seniors, marginalized and racialized women, Black Canadians, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, veterans and new Canadians have been disproportionately hurt by this COVID-19 recession, if I may call it that.

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has done everything in its power to combat the virus and mitigate its harm by using every tool available to safeguard the health and livelihoods of Canadians. In our long-term care plan for recovery, we have committed to addressing the fundamental gaps that were exposed by this pandemic.

This year has been tough on many Canadian seniors. Unfortunately, many have experienced considerable health, economic and social challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the disease has disproportionately affected them, particularly those living in long-term care facilities. I have had the opportunity to talk to many seniors in Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, and they have told me how challenging it has been, not only with the isolation but also with other challenges related to the pandemic, such as costs. The devastating COVID-19 outbreak in long-term home care has highlighted the gaps in standards of care for our most vulnerable, as the majority of COVID-19 deaths have occurred in long-term care facilities and residences.

From April to July of 2020, Operation Laser deployed Canadian Armed Forces personnel to support 54 long-term care facilities across Quebec and Ontario. At the peak, over 1,900 Canadian Armed Forces personnel were helping to care for seniors.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

They did a critical task by helping our grandparents, our parents, our seniors. They deserve our sincere thanks for that.

[*English*]

To address this disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on seniors, the Government of Canada has made a number of investments through the fall economic statement. The government has committed \$1 billion for the safe long-term care fund, building on what we have learned from the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces in long-term care homes. This fund, which helps provinces and terri-

### *Government Orders*

tries to protect people in long-term care and supports infection prevention and control, will better support both those living in long-term care residences and those who work in them.

In order to ensure that seniors in long-term care live in safe and dignified conditions, the federal government will work with provinces and territories to set new national standards for long-term care. We remain committed to establishing these standards as a means of addressing critical gaps in long-term care facilities, including raising the working conditions of essential workers in senior care facilities, particularly personal support workers, who have persevered in the face of adversity.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada has introduced measures to support seniors in their daily expenses to help them weather the storm.

In April, we provided low- and modest-income Canadians with a one-time special payment through the GST credit. More than four million seniors benefited from this top-up, which gave an average of \$375 to single seniors and \$510 to senior couples. Over 6,000 seniors in my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook received those payments, equalling \$2.4 million in our riding.

We also introduced a \$2.5-billion investment in a one-time tax-free payment of \$300 for those seniors on OAS and an additional \$200 for those seniors on GIS, for a total of \$500, and that was tax free, I would remind the House. Over 10,000 seniors in our riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook received this one-time \$300 payment, for over \$3 million, and another 3,600 seniors received the one-time \$500 payment, equalling just about \$5 million in total.

At the same time, we are supporting programs and organizations that help improve seniors' quality of life. For example, we expanded the New Horizons for Seniors program with an additional \$20 million for support organizations. We have also contributed \$9 million in funding through the United Way to work with communities in each province and territory to support isolated and vulnerable seniors.

[*Translation*]

We also allocated \$350 million to charitable and non-profit community organizations to help vulnerable Canadians through an emergency community assistance fund.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The funds provided have supported many organizations in my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook in the delivery of groceries and medicine, transportation services for medical appointments and other challenges. For example, Alice House, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, the Eastern Shore Family Resource Association and the MusGo Rider association, the East Preston Day Care centre, the Health Association of African Canadians, the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia and the Old School Community Gathering Place all received funding, which represented over \$400,000.

Some other accomplishments of our government for seniors since our election in 2015 have been to keep the senior eligibility age at 65 and not the age of 67 that the Conservatives wanted, and we increased the guaranteed income supplement by \$947, which improves the financial security of over 900,000 vulnerable single seniors. As well, we added \$6 billion for home care and community care, as well as palliative care services. Housing benefits of \$4 billion was shared through the provinces and territories to provide rent support for seniors and other groups that face housing challenges.

The result, which is very important, is that 25% fewer seniors live in poverty today than in 2015.

Future commitments that we have made include increasing old age security for seniors 75 years of age and older; boosting the Canada pension plan survivor benefit; taking additional action to help people stay at home; and ensuring that everyone, including in rural and remote areas, has access to family doctors for primary care. Finally, we will move forward with our national universal pharmacare plan in the very near future.

These are just some of the programs and benefits that support our seniors in Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, as well as across Canada.

• (1540)

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his concern for seniors.

After listening to my colleagues' speeches since this morning, I get the impression that we are living on two different planets, Quebec and the rest of Canada, particularly on two fronts.

We were told that seniors received a cheque for \$300 this summer and that those who receive old age security got an additional \$200. Seniors in my riding wrote me to say that these amounts are not enough and that they are waiting for the second cheque. They felt like the government was laughing at them because it was giving a lot more to others.

With regard to standards in Quebec's long-term care facilities, what does my colleague think about FADOQ, which appeared before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women?

FADOQ is an organization that represents a huge number of Quebec seniors. Representatives came to committee to tell us that they do not need standards to be implemented in long-term care facilities because such standards already exist. What they need is the

means to apply those standards; in other words, they need health transfers. The government needs to do its own job and provide vaccines and personal protective equipment.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the differences we have been hearing about since this morning between seniors in Quebec and those living elsewhere in Canada.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

I know she works very hard to support the seniors in her area and I really appreciate that.

When it comes to seniors, it is not about jurisdiction. The government has a responsibility to help all seniors, whether they live in Nova Scotia, British Columbia or Quebec, and that is exactly what we are doing.

As I said in my speech, we have helped seniors in many areas, including those who need it the most and those who are less vulnerable. Our goal is to continue to support seniors because they have done so much to help build our great country.

*[English]*

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first I would like to acknowledge the parliamentary secretary's thanks to the Canadian Forces members who helped our elderly during the pandemic.

However, the debate today is about financial support for those seniors. I have tried to get the answer to this question out of the Minister of Seniors and her office, and I also asked a parliamentary secretary earlier, but could not get the answer. Could this parliamentary secretary tell me when the government is going to deliver on its election promise of a 10% boost to the OAS and a 25% increase to the Canada pension plan for widows? This is a question I am getting regularly from seniors across my riding.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's hope to get that money to seniors quickly, and that is what we are working on. As the member is aware, we did announce it again in our fall economic statement. It was also in the throne speech.

It is clear this is a top priority. As soon as we have the support of the House, we are going to be moving on it very quickly.

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Liberals say they want to help seniors, but it took two whole months in the middle of a global pandemic, and convincing by the NDP, before they even announced an intention to give the piddly \$300 one-time payment. Then it took another two months before they actually issued the payment.

Government members have been talking about a plan to improve OAS, but this plan still excludes those who are 65 to 74 years of age. I suspect the member opposite is going to have a difficult time choosing between following his party line and supporting this motion for all seniors in his constituency, which includes seniors who are 65 and over.

Does the member intend to vote in favour of this motion and thus increase retirement support for more seniors in his riding than would be included in his own party's plan?

• (1545)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that it took two months to make an announcement during a global pandemic. I think that is pretty impressive when we were dealing with a global pandemic.

As well, the member needs to realize the costs for seniors 75 and older are much greater at that age because of some of the challenges they may have, the renovations they may have to do to their homes or their health costs, depending on the programs they have. We are working closely with seniors and will continue to support seniors, as they have supported Canada from day one.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to participate in today's debate in the House.

I want to begin my speech by making one important point.

[*English*]

Canada is what it is today because of our seniors. After a lifetime of hard work, seniors deserve to enjoy a secure and dignified retirement. My work in senior care before entering politics has made this a top concern of mine.

We need to always remember the value of their years of experience, their wisdom, their guidance and their care. I will say they are our greatest community of volunteers, caregivers and babysitters. They are our mentors, our teachers and advisers. They are a connection to our histories, the work and knowledge that shaped our country, our families and our communities.

In their twilight years, seniors should have the opportunity to enjoy and embrace their lives without having to fear poverty. In 2015, the Liberal government, after years of neglect by the Conservatives, has taken specific and targeted steps to reduce poverty among our seniors, and ensure that all those whose lifetime of work has brought us to where we are today are able to enjoy a proper, dignified and long retirement.

One of the government's first steps in 2015 was to engage with the provinces to enhance the Canada Pension Plan and provide retirement security for all Canadians. After collaborating with its provincial partners, it took real actions to improve the lives of our seniors. Before this, the CPP retirement pension replaced only one quarter of someone's average work earnings. Since 2019, this has been growing, and soon the CPP pension will replace one third of their average work earnings.

Eligible pension earnings will also increase to \$82,700, from the \$54,000 a few years ago. This is a hallmark of the government's

### *Government Orders*

social welfare policy and was advocated for and endorsed by CARP, an organization which, before entering politics, I co-chaired here in Ottawa. The enhanced CPP, once fully implemented, will put up to 50% more into the pockets of retirees.

Another fundamental component of this strategy is the additional supports provided by old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. Since the government took office in 2015, 25% fewer seniors live in poverty. Just as it did with the retirement age, the Liberal government restored the eligibility age for old age security to 65 after the previous Conservative government's decision to raise it to 67.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Shefford is rising on a point of order.

Does it have to do with the interpretation?

• (1550)

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Speaker, yes, I rise on a point of order regarding the interpretation services.

It is very difficult for the interpreter to understand what the hon. member is saying.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I will see if we can reboot the interpretation. I will speak in English momentarily, and members could perhaps signal if they are getting the French interpretation.

Is the interpretation working?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Speaker, the mask the member is wearing is making it very difficult for the interpreters to do their job.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I will have to put that to the hon. member. We are hearing that interpretation is having some difficulty with their work because of the mask, and it is certainly no reflection on the hon. member, who is taking due precautions, but if she would be able to present without the mask, it could be helpful.

I see the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order, or additional comments on this point of order.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, to contribute to this point of order, this is the second time during the last several weeks the Bloc Québécois has brought up that wearing a mask is what is interfering with the ability of the interpreters to do their work. I do not know if it is up to us to decide what is effective or not. I do not think anybody in this room is qualified to assess if it is specifically a mask that is interfering with that.

*Government Orders*

On this side of the House, we have taken what we see as precautionary measures, and I would suggest we tread very lightly over asking members to remove their masks when they have chosen to keep them on when talking.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his comments on this point of order. I am in fact in agreement with this proposal concerning the use of masks. In my view, it is up to each member to decide. Perhaps members could speak louder to help the interpreters do their job.

I see that the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles is rising on the same point of order.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Mr. Speaker, I think it is very easy to understand.

Masks muffle sound. Thicker masks muffle it even more. The interpreters cannot make out the words. It is as simple as that.

It is ridiculous to point out that the two members who raised this issue are from the Bloc Québécois.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît wishes to rise on this point of order.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, as whip, I sit on the Board of Internal Economy, and I am quite familiar with the rules.

They state that masks are mandatory in certain places, but that when we rise at our seats, we are free to remove them or keep them on. I would point out that the blue masks that are available at the entrance to each lobby might allow for better interpretation.

I agree that all members who want to wear a mask have the right to do so and that it is their choice. However, if they wish to express themselves and the interpreters cannot make out what they are saying, I would invite them to switch masks because the surgical masks are thinner but offer the same protection.

I understand that the member might be worried. We want to understand what she says and, to that end, I would encourage her to take one of the blue surgical masks available at the entrance to each party's lobby.

• (1555)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I see that other members would like to speak to this point of order.

The hon. member for Orléans.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, I had absolutely no intention of causing problems for my colleagues from Quebec or the interpreters who work very hard to help members understand one another in our country's two official languages.

With the unanimous consent of the House, I would be happy to go get a blue mask. I will change my mask gladly and with the utmost respect for my colleagues.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We will take a short break to allow the hon. member to try a different approach.

I appreciate all the interventions by hon. members, as well as their suggestions. We will try a different approach with a different mask.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Orléans.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this new mask is not blue, but I think it will work.

[*English*]

Another fundamental component of this strategy is the additional support provided by old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

Since we took office in 2015, 25% fewer seniors live in poverty. Like the retirement age, the Liberal government restored the eligibility age for old age security to 65 after the previous government's decision to raise it to 67. Without those changes, our vulnerable seniors would have faced a much higher risk of living in poverty, which is not acceptable.

The government also introduced the guaranteed income supplement top-up. Since 2017, seniors who live alone are receiving an extra \$947 per year through GIS. This is helping 900,000 vulnerable seniors across Canada, of which 70% are women.

[*Translation*]

We know that, on average, women live longer than men. We also know that many older people who have the opportunity to enjoy a longer life are having an increasingly difficult time making ends meet as the years go by.

As the Liberal government clearly stated in the throne speech, our seniors need more help, and the House plans to give it to them. The Bloc Québécois, however, voted against the throne speech, clearly demonstrating that its members are not interested in a comprehensive plan to help Canada's seniors.

The government made it abundantly clear that it will increase the OAS by 10% for people 75 and up. It will also increase the Canada pension plan survivor's pension in recognition of seniors' years of work and progress, which have put them in a much better position than their forebears and prevented more of them from living in poverty.

The Bloc Québécois seems to think that all this work on the part of the government should be swapped for \$110.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Throughout the pandemic, I have been in touch with seniors in Orléans to hear how they are doing and what I, as a local representative, and our government can do to support them. During one of our round tables, they shared with me that they wanted to see a pan-Canadian standard for long-term care.

Pan-Canadian standards for long-term care was a key feature in the Speech from the Throne. The Bloc voted against it. We have seen the biggest tragedies of this crisis in our long-term care homes. It should be clear to every member of the House that something needs to be done to ensure this never happens again. However, the Bloc did not support it.

The government's work to build pan-Canadian standards for long-term care, understanding the importance of collaboration with provinces and territories, will prevent needless suffering and increase the quality of life for our seniors.

For me, this is a very important debate, and I have one thing to share in conclusion.

*[Translation]*

I would like to elaborate on those elements.

*[English]*

I would like to talk about some of the key things we have done, and I want to ensure the House realizes that this was not just one single payment. There were a multitude of aspects of our support for seniors. I was at a round table with the United Way. I was happy to see the government provide \$350 million for charities and not-for-profit organizations: \$9 million for United Way Canada, \$100 million for food banks and local food organizations and \$50 million for previously funded New Horizons for Seniors projects that could be modified to meet the needs of seniors. This one was particularly important in my community for our local seniors organization, Carrefour santé d'Orléans.

*[Translation]*

In conclusion, I have the greatest respect for our seniors, and I feel they are too often taken for granted. We must always strive to do a better job of supporting them and to bring in policies that will make a real difference in their lives.

Governing means making decisions that work, and the throne speech described many different ways in which the government will help seniors. The government will stay focused on what it is doing and build on its proven experience supporting seniors and fighting poverty.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Orl ans for her speech, which conveyed her dedication to seniors. However, I would like to make a few minor corrections.

There are two main reasons we rejected the Speech from the Throne, which she talked about in her speech. First, she spoke about standards for long-term care. In addition to the Bloc Qu b cois, the Quebec National Assembly and the Government of Ontario do not want these standards.

The other thing Quebec and the provinces want that was missing from the Speech from the Throne is a permanent increase in the Canada health transfer. It must be increased from 22% to 35%. That is what Quebec and the provinces all want, because it will make it possible for them to care for people. It is unacceptable to wait until after the pandemic to increase it.

### *Government Orders*

We recognize that there have been one-time transfers during the pandemic, but what the health care systems need in the long term in order to take care of seniors is funding, not standards. I am not the only one saying this. That is what was written in the Canadian Armed Forces report. The standards already exist.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments.

I worked in the health sector for 20 years, more specifically in long-term care homes for seniors.

Before I became a member of Parliament, I was an MPP, so I understand how important collaboration is. However, one thing is for sure now: When people call my riding office, they tell me that I need to do something. We need to address long-term care services in Ontario and all across Canada. That is what the federal government plans to do.

I think that Canada-wide standards are important if we want to protect our beloved seniors and keep them, and all Canadians, safe and healthy.

• (1605)

*[English]*

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting listening to the member. She talked a lot about promises made, but very little about promises kept.

One of the issues I have heard time and again from seniors is the cost of living increases, the cost of the carbon tax. With the cancellation of Keystone XL, there were seniors who finally did not have to choose between buying groceries and paying their bills because they had a boarder, a local worker, in their home. There are tremendous challenges faced by seniors across our country.

Specifically, the member mentioned the resources provided to not-for-profit organizations across the country. One of the challenges faced by many organizations in my constituency, because I represent a large rural area, was they did not have access to those supports because they were rural. I would like the member to comment on that.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, I think that question has two parts. The member talked again about carbon pricing. In the community I represent, there is not a single senior who does not fear climate change. Seniors listen to the science and see how our government can do more to improve their lives and the lives of our future generation.

The other aspect is the fact that some organizations across our great country, which is so big, did not have access to some of the most important financial help that was available. I am very sorry, and that is why we are continuing our efforts to help people all over Canada, in rural, urban and suburban, just like Orleans, the community I represent.

*Government Orders*

I was very happy that the leadership of the local United Way reached out to over 100 organizations all over Ottawa and eastern Ontario. They came together to share, and they all share the same: the need to have resources. I was happy that we came forward to help them.

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it seems like every step along the way, the Liberal responses to a crisis are a dream deferred. The hon. member said she worked 20 years with seniors. She talked about them fearing poverty. The seniors in my community are facing poverty.

What would she say to my seniors who are 65, who worked their entire lives waiting for retirement, who now have to hold on and struggle to the Liberals' definition at 74? Will she support this motion today that calls on the government to increase OAS for all seniors from 65 onward?

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, I have always found some of these aspects very interesting. I understand the member represents his community, and I am sure, very well. Some seniors are facing poverty. This is why I am so happy. I did not have a chance, unfortunately because of the distraction, to share all the measures that have been put in place since 2015 to help, knowing that over 900,000 seniors have benefited from actions we took. This is very important for me and I know for our government as well.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Jonquière.

We have heard a lot today about the financial situation of seniors. I would have liked to have all day to talk about all of the calls my office gets from constituents. Although our riding offices are closed, Internet access is not always great and we are working virtually, I feel compelled to give my speech, which will naturally reiterate everything that we have been calling for for so many years.

Today we are debating the motion moved by my esteemed colleague from Shefford. The members of the Bloc Québécois have always stood up for seniors and always will.

Let us go back in time to the 2019 election campaign, when the Liberals promised to increase old age security benefits by 10% when seniors turn 75, not 65. They reiterated their intention of increasing these benefits in the September 2020 throne speech. We have sadly heard nothing since.

The old age security program is the main vehicle by which the federal government supports seniors by offering people aged 65 and over a minimum income. The two programs are the old age security benefit and the guaranteed income supplement. I think this is well known, but it bears repeating. Taxpayers who are eligible for the goods and services tax credit, the GST credit, are entitled to a one-time payment ranging from \$443 to \$1,160, with an average payment of \$375 for a single person and \$510 for a couple. That is not enough in this day and age, in light of the rising cost of living and the impact of the pandemic. It is easy to see.

Of course, supports are welcome in these most difficult times, but they should benefit every member of society, including work-

ers, families, businesses and, of course, seniors. However, these are one-time payments.

What we are asking for in our motion is welcomed by senior groups. We heard in previous speeches that we were giving incorrect information. Here are the facts.

The FADOQ network is the largest seniors' organization in Canada, with 550,000 members, 705 clubs and 16 regional groups, as well as around 17,000 volunteers, which is quite something. Seniors prefer stability and predictability, especially when they have a fixed income. Seniors in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle really feel overlooked. I would be remiss if I did not mention the outrageous cost of Internet access, that is, when it is available at all, which is rarely the case, just as cell coverage is also problematic. There is a huge challenge.

That said, what should the government do? Let me repeat it today for the umpteenth time: The government should invest to provide more financial assistance to all citizens, especially to seniors, through the community services network.

Also, in order to mitigate the risk of people being deprived of the guaranteed income supplement, it should be possible to file an automatic income tax return. A person who fails to file a return loses the supplement. Taxpayers should be able to automatically validate their tax return, without any action needed on their part, as long as the information has not changed in comparison to the previous year.

Ten years ago, I was working as a political assistant for Ms. Deschamps, who sat in this House, and it was a major issue. People who did not act would not receive the supplement. They were not entitled to it. The situation is still the same in 2021.

• (1610)

Quebec's seniors can count on the Bloc Québécois. As the government keeps saying, we will keep working and making progress. Let me talk about that progress.

Twenty years ago, back in 2001, the Bloc called for automatic enrolment in the guaranteed income supplement at 65 based on people's tax returns. We are still calling for that, and we will keep calling for it until it is done.

In 2007, the former member for Laurentides—Labelle toured Quebec, meeting with seniors, groups and associations. Following the tour, a number of findings were formulated, and the Bloc decided to take action by introducing a bill to improve the lives of seniors in Quebec.

In 2009, the National Assembly, under a Liberal government, unanimously called on the federal government to implement the Bloc Québécois's proposals. That is a big deal. Who made that happen? The Bloc Québécois.

Here is some of the real progress that came out of that.

There was automatic renewal for claimants in 2014, as well as automatic enrolment for people on their 65th birthday, which began in 2018. This is in addition to the increase of more than \$110 per month, an increase of \$50 after the 2011 election and more than \$60 after the 2015 election, not counting the automatic annual indexing. As of 2013, people who receive an old age security pension also receive notices to register for the guaranteed income supplement.

Is that not progress? I think this proves that we are there for our seniors and always will be.

Less than a week before the throne speech was delivered, Mr. Legault and Mr. Ford issued a joint call on September 18 for a significant increase in federal funding to help cover the rising costs of health care, but they did not specify the amount they wanted. As my colleague mentioned earlier, all the provinces as well as Quebec are demanding an increase. They called for a \$28-billion increase in health transfers, to increase Ottawa's share of health care funding from 22% to 35%.

With the ongoing pandemic, the federal government has committed to transferring \$19 billion to the provinces and Quebec, including \$10 billion for health-related expenditures. For Mr. Legault and Mr. Ford, the provinces need sustainable funding, not just one-time assistance.

I could go on and on about this, but I have only a minute and a half left, so I would like to take a moment to talk about a recent forecast by the Conference Board of Canada that we heard about today.

Health care spending will increase at an average annual rate of 5.3% until 2030-31. That is worrisome. We must do something in response. Approximately 46% of this average annual increase will be due to inflation, 18% to population growth, 19% to population aging, and the remaining 17% to better access to care and improvements to the health care system.

In closing, I want to reiterate the Bloc Québécois's proposals. I will keep repeating it even if I have to say it hundreds of times. It is about increasing OAS by \$110 a month for all citizens 65 and over; the guaranteed income supplement needs to be increased by \$50 a month for single individuals and by \$70 a month for couples. People everywhere are unanimously calling for a 35% increase in the annual contribution to health transfers and for that contribution to be ongoing.

• (1615)

This requires the annual federal transfer to go from \$42 billion to \$70 billion and for it to increase by 6% every year thereafter.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if we had been listening only to interventions by the Bloc Québécois today, we would think that nothing has been done for seniors over the last number of years and in particular in the past year, during the pandemic.

My question for the member from the Bloc is very simple. Does she agree that seniors have received meaningful increases to bene-

### Government Orders

fits over the last year that have made an impact in their lives, particularly during the global pandemic?

• (1620)

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes.

They received a one-time payment of \$500. That was short-term relief. What else can they expect?

A simple calculation shows us that they ended up with just a few bucks. It is not for nothing that we are asking for an increase of \$110 a month. It is to help lift them out of their vulnerable situation and to increase their spending power. Although the government has been acting on an ad hoc basis throughout the pandemic, this has been a problem for a long time.

In the Bloc, we want to look at the future of our seniors. We will not back down.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I think there is another major problem: the carbon tax.

[English]

Let me explain. I represent a senior community called Sandycove Acres. There are almost 3,000 seniors in this community who are finding it difficult to pay their bills. With the carbon tax being implemented on home heating, many of them are paying, in some cases, \$20 to \$30 more a month. I have seen the bills. Any gains that are made with the OAS or the guaranteed income supplement are being eroded by the cost of the necessities of life, like home heating and others.

Would the member agree that seniors should be exempt, at a minimum, from the carbon tax so they can enjoy a good quality of life and not see an erosion of their income?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get into statistics because I gave enough of them in my speech.

However, I do want to point out that the amount given to these seniors, who opened doors for us and to whom we are indebted, is equivalent to 1%.

If we take into account all of the money that was spent to save everyone's skin, including the amount of the current debt, 1% is a minimal cost.

Out of respect for our seniors, we should be thinking about their future. Let us take action to deal with the pandemic, but let us also watch over them for the coming decades.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker brought up some really important points, particularly on the automation of filings. I cannot help but think about how much money goes unclaimed by our seniors every year simply because things are not automatically filed. We heard from the government that a couple of hundred piddling dollars to our seniors in the middle of a global pandemic was enough because they could rely on Liberal charity.

Does the member want to tell us why the Bloc believes seniors deserve the dignity of a permanent increase directly and automatically at 65 rather than being forced out by Liberal policies that kick the can for another 10 years while they are in their final years? Does the hon. member from the Bloc agree that seniors deserve respect at 65 and should not have to rely on Liberal charity?

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Let us look at the facts, Mr. Speaker.

People are being told that, if they do not have enough money, there are other resources available to them, such as food banks and community services and support. Come on. It is shameful how these people are being treated when they do not have the means to survive.

That is basically saying that we accept that they are in a vulnerable situation. It is saying that they need to make use of other resources rather than making minimum payments on their account balance and spending 30% to 50% of their budget on housing.

One-time assistance is one thing. However, out of respect for seniors, that increase should be given to everyone aged 65 and over. That is non-negotiable, given everything that seniors have done for our communities.

• (1625)

**Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, earlier this afternoon, I was thinking about how to approach this issue, and it occurred to me that perhaps the best way was to start with a story. I hope members will see where I am going with it.

People refer to themselves as their father's child. I am my grandmother's child. I was raised by my grandmother. She played a rather important role in my life. I can say that I am the youngest pensioner in Canada. I received my pension at the age of 14, when my grandmother received her old age security at the age of 65. I was 14 and I told my friends that I did not need to get a job, I did not need to mow lawns because I had my grandmother.

The reason I am telling this story is that seniors are the ones who generally teach us the values that will be important to us. Our parents do this, but so do our grandparents. My grandmother instilled in me values that I hold to this day. Generosity is definitely one of them, and so is the sharing of wealth.

How can we impart these values of generosity and sharing of wealth in political life? Many years later, I understood that perhaps it could be done through social programs. That was part of what I did as a teacher. I gave social workers a course entitled "Social Policy and Citizenship", and I saw the re-emergence of the same type

of generosity and sharing of wealth that my grandmother had taught me. I rediscovered them in, among other things, the policies that I implemented in the Government of Quebec. What comes to mind immediately is Quebec's family policy, which is very generous.

With regard to social policies, the unfortunate thing, perhaps, is that old age security and the guaranteed income supplement are a federal responsibility.

There is no denying that I am sovereignist and I am critical of the government, but I get the impression that successive federal governments are a bit cheap. As the adage goes, you can tell how important equality is to a government by the way it treats the most vulnerable.

If we look at that adage today, we might say that this government has a lot of work to do when it comes to equality. I say that because when we look more closely at the basic income seniors receive, those who receive only the guaranteed income supplement and the old age security pension are just a few dollars away from the poverty line.

I cannot understand how we can be collectively okay with that in an advanced society. The values that my grandmother instilled in me are such that I think this is an aberration and if we take our work as parliamentarians seriously, it is something we should address. I say that by way of an introduction knowing full well that there is a rather simple solution.

What we are proposing today through this motion, and what we have been wanting for some time now is an increase of \$110 a month for the OAS. The guaranteed income supplement, or the GIS, would increase by \$50 for single individuals and \$70 for couples. I do not think that is too much to ask. What is so daunting in the government's eyes about this proposal? I was wondering earlier why they would not accept this proposal. Is it because it comes from the Bloc Québécois? It would be petty of me to say that.

Furthermore, I see the situation we are in and the crisis we have come through, and I must say that there have been some startling goings-on in this Parliament. During the crisis, there was the \$900-million WE Charity scandal. Is that what we call helping the most vulnerable? I do not believe so. Then there are the political parties—I have a Conservative friend who is nodding, and I thank him for that, but he may well stop after he hears what I am about to say. There are political parties that saw fit to dip into the Canada emergency wage subsidy program, and they have yet to repay those benefits.

There must be some disillusioned seniors watching this. What kind of logic is there in refusing to increase the old age security and guaranteed income supplement payments? I really do not understand. I am eager to hear my Liberal colleagues' questions on this matter.

In the debate on seniors, there is the whole issue of a livable income, but for me there is also another very important aspect, and that is health care.

• (1630)

There is a storm coming, and every region, not just Quebec, will have to face it. The population is aging across Quebec. Canadian society is aging. An aging population means a health care system under pressure. If the current crisis has taught us one thing, it is that we are not prepared. Quebec has a way to go. We saw how some things were not up to par in long-term care homes, and that is putting it kindly.

I want to figure out with my fellow members of this House why some things were not up to par. I believe it has to do with health care funding. Health care funding in Canada is an absolute train wreck. I want to point out that fiscal imbalance is a defining characteristic of health care funding. The Séguin report was tabled by a Liberal minister, not a PQ minister. Yves Séguin was a Liberal minister. In the report he submitted to the National Assembly, he demonstrated that the Canadian federation is broken.

The Canadian federation is broken because the federal government keeps bringing in more than it spends. During a crisis, the federal government usually balances its books at the expense of provinces by lowering their transfer payments. This has happened twice, most notably in the early 1990s under the Mulroney government. Canada was in a precarious position and Mr. Mulroney slashed health and education transfers. In doing so, he managed to balance his budget, more or less.

However, the world champion in every respect, the man who pioneered what some analysts call Canadian neoliberalism, is Paul Martin. Year after year, Paul Martin said that he was going to draft his budget in black and not red. He pulled surpluses out of his hat. I remember that. My whole life is based on what happened after the 1995 referendum. Immediately after the referendum, in 1995-96 and 1996-97, Paul Martin cut health transfers by about \$2 billion. That is huge.

That decision completely tore apart the Quebec health care system. Today, the crisis we are going through is partly due to the cuts to health transfer payments in 1996-97 and 1997-98. It made taking care of seniors more difficult, and we are still feeling the effects of that today.

If we wish to directly improve the quality of life of seniors, we must increase the health transfer payments. I will conclude with that. The House leader repeated several times that seniors are not an area of jurisdiction. I heard him say that many times. It is quite convenient for him to use those words to evade his responsibility. In the years to come, there will be pressures on the public purse. I am sure that Conservatives and Liberals will be tempted, once again, to solve their deficit problems by reducing transfer payments to the provinces. However, the best thing they can do, if they care about seniors at all, is to listen to the Government of Quebec and increase health transfers so as to cover 35% of expenditures.

### *Government Orders*

• (1635)

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there has been a whole lot of discussion today about transfers of money from the federal government to the provincial governments, and Quebec in particular.

I am looking at today's motion and I do not see anything about that. If it is so important to the member, why is today's motion not on that instead of what it is on?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. Speaker, if my esteemed colleague had listened to what I said, he would understand that in my view the issue of health care is inextricably linked to the well-being of seniors.

I spoke earlier about the aging population, which will require more health services in the future. That goes without saying. Proper funding is essential to ensure that seniors have access to good services.

If the member wants to talk more about that, I can give him a primer on social policy. I will be happy to do it.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yes, today we are supposed to be talking about the financial situation of the elderly. They built this country; we all know that. We all door knock here, all 338 of us, and we see some desperate situations when we do. Seniors are hanging on, especially single ones, in their homes and do not want to go to the food bank. They are too proud, but unfortunately this situation is facing a lot of seniors today. They are not getting by. I see it in Saskatoon—Grasswood every week. Yes, there are some who are snowbirds and are enjoying their golden years, but the golden years do not exist for the majority of seniors in this country.

How can we make it better for seniors who have built this country over the decades?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. Speaker, it is quite simple. The first thing that needs to be done is to increase old age security by \$110 a month and the guaranteed income supplement by \$50 a month for single people and \$70 a month for couples.

If we do not want to be seen as being phony-baloney, our primary concern should be to ensure that seniors are living more than just a hair's breadth above the poverty line.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, seniors have been facing high costs for rent, food and medications. We must increase the OAS, the GIS and the CPP to make life more affordable for seniors. I want to thank the member for his and his Bloc colleagues' advocacy in favour of permanently increasing old age security starting at age 65.

Talking to seniors in my riding of Victoria, I know that this kind of increase could make a real difference. In the pandemic, seniors have been facing increased risks with isolation and financial hardship, but they are also facing horrific conditions in long-term care. We know there are more deaths and often inadequate standards of care in privatized long-term care.

In addition to supporting seniors by pushing for increases to the OAS, does the member agree that we need to take profit out of long-term care?

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if that was an interpretation error, but there is no profit in CHSLDs. They are public institutions. My colleague was probably talking about private residences for seniors. There is certainly some work to be done in that regard.

I also believe that the crisis showed us that some services are inadequate. If we really want to work on that, better funding for public institutions is needed. It seems that the best thing to do in that regard is to increase health care transfers by 35%.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Saint-Jean, who is participating virtually, would like to ask a question, so I am going to give her my time.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Okay. There was no indication of that before, but I see it now.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

• (1640)

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the question from the member for Kingston and the Islands, who was asking why the Bloc Qu b cois was not proposing a motion on health transfers.

I would like to ask my colleague from Jonqui re if he remembers that the Bloc did introduce a motion on that topic in December and that the Liberal members were the only ones who voted against it.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely remember.

It is in fact quite interesting. We do not have to take the word of a sovereigntist member of Parliament for it. One only has to look at the Parliamentary Budget Officer's 2013 report to see that the disaster was foreseeable.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer clearly wrote in 2013 that if nothing was done, the provinces would run a deficit because the cost of health care is huge. More than 44% of the yearly budget of the Government of Quebec is spent on health care.

If nothing is done, year after year the provinces will pile up debt, while the federal government will be wallowing in surpluses created by not sending transfer payments to the provinces.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. 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 Fredericton, Women and Gender Equality; the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Ethics; the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, International Trade.

*[English]*

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, indeed, we did have a discussion on health transfer taxes as a result of an opposition motion that the Bloc Qu b cois brought forward in December. It did not pass, yet here they are still talking about it. That was my point, that the Bloc members are continually and repeatedly harping on the same issue over and over again. They bring a motion before the House like they did in December to talk about the health transfers. The House debated it. We voted against it. Then they brought forward this other motion about seniors today and we are supposed to be debating it, but I hear members from the Bloc Qu b cois talking about health transfers. Yes, we certainly did debate and discuss that issue in December, but here they are, still talking about it.

Nonetheless, it is an honour today to rise to talk to this issue. I will be splitting my time with the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge. That said, I really am glad to talk about what this government has been able to accomplish on seniors' behalf and why, as a result of that, I do not think this motion is necessary given the incredible supports provided by the government to seniors throughout our communities.

Am I by any means suggesting that the mission is accomplished or that everybody is in a great position? Absolutely not. Our work will never be done in taking care of our seniors because, as has been pointed out by many members in the House today, our seniors are the ones who laid the groundwork and framework for the incredible quality of life we have today. Whether we talk about our grandparents, our great-grandparents or our parents, these are people who have done so much and inspired us to do so much for our children and for future generations so that every successive generation can have a better quality of life than the ones before. If it were not for that simple desire of human nature to improve the quality of life for future generations, what else would there really be for us in terms of our existence, for lack of a better expression?

Before I get into some of those supports that have been provided by the government, I will note what others have indicated, which is extremely germane to the motion before us today as we talk about supports for seniors. I am perplexed, as many other members are, how the Bloc Québécois is bringing forward a motion to support seniors with \$110 per month when they voted against a throne speech that had in it a number of measures to make sure that we could improve the quality of life of seniors.

The member for Shefford has mentioned on a number of occasions that they voted against the throne speech because of the long-term care standards that the federal government wants to establish. I am sorry, but a throne speech is not a be-all, end-all document for every single individual. The entire purpose of why 338 of us come from across the country is to participate in debate in order to find compromise. If the Bloc Québécois is saying today through the member for Shefford that the sole reason they voted against the throne speech was based on their desire for national long-term care standards, I am perplexed by that. For starters, national long-term care standards, any standard that would be set up by a national government within our Constitution, certainly would only be laying the framework. It would not necessarily imply that they need to be imposed upon a provincial or territorial jurisdiction. We do not have to look that far to see the reality of that being implemented.

Look at our building code, for example. We have a national building code, but it does not mean that the provinces have to adopt it, and, indeed, Quebec and Ontario have not adopted it. They have their own standards when it comes to buildings.

• (1645)

If we hold the two documents next to each other, we will see they are probably about 99.9% identical. The standards set by the national government are held to such high regard that they are adopted by other levels of government, because there is so much benefit in having the vast resources of a national government to create such standards. I am perplexed by the argument from members of the Bloc Québécois that they would not support a throne speech over one small item that happens to be contained therein.

I also really take offence to the NDP comments I have been hearing today. In particular, one member keeps referring to “Liberal charity” as though the Liberal government is extending, on its own and solely at the Liberal Party’s discretion, what resources are put into place for seniors in Canada.

We come to the House as a minority government. Liberal members cannot dictate the terms of the supports that are put out there. At least in a minority government, those supports are done through various parties coming together to collaborate. The NDP voted in favour of the throne speech, if I remember correctly. If the member in the House today who has continually referred to it as “Liberal charity” is referring to what the Liberal government is providing, then he is complicit in providing that charity, because he voted in favour of the throne speech and the budget that helped implement a number of these measures.

I want to talk briefly about some of the needs of seniors and how those are changing. It has been mentioned in the House a few times today that the needs of seniors are changing as a result of people’s life expectancy. If my statistics are correct, the life expectancy of a

### *Government Orders*

woman today is 84 years old. For a man it is 80 years old. That is remarkable. That has to do with the incredible advances humankind has made and the quality of life we enjoy here in Canada. What we know about those statistics is this. Statistically speaking, there are more single women living in poverty. A lot of seniors continue to work. Those who do, do not always work because they have to, although unfortunately there are times when they do. There are times when seniors choose to work because they want to continue working. My father is a perfect example. He did not want to stop working at the age of 65, and continued working into his seventies before deciding to retire.

What we know, and what I was getting at, is that women in particular, statistically speaking, are working for lower wages. Women are working in a lot of jobs that have been direly affected by the pandemic in one way or another, such as retail, hospitality and various front-line services. Senior women in the workforce have been affected twofold, in that they work a lot more in front-line jobs and jobs directly impacted by the demands the pandemic has created, and have been affected by layoffs and other effects.

I see I have already burned through my time. I will have to be more careful about how I go on. I will say this. I believe this government has done a number of incredible things. Regarding this pandemic alone, \$350 million has been given to charities, \$9 billion to the United Way, which has been distributing money throughout individual communities, \$100 million to the food banks and \$50 million to the New Horizons for Seniors program.

• (1650)

This government has demonstrated that it is there for seniors and that it will continue to be there for seniors. I do not see this motion as any more than the Bloc trying to play and perhaps create a political wedge for the government. I respect its need to do that, but I disagree with it.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech.

From having often listened to him at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I know him to be very thorough. Nevertheless, I must correct him.

The Bloc’s motion on health care transfer payments passed on a vote of 176 to 148. Therefore, since it is the will of Parliament, it is only natural that we revive the debate in the House until the government listens to what members are saying.

On the subject of the throne speech, I am happy to hear the member mention how important it is to think of our seniors. It was mentioned in the throne speech. As the French saying goes, those who can do more can also do less. The Bloc’s motion is part of what was said in the throne speech about financial support for seniors.

I would therefore ask him to explain why he should not support the motion.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed my time on the committee with my colleague from the Bloc. I apologize: I got my information incorrect related to the outcome of that vote, but that proves my point even more. The Bloc brought forward an opposition motion. We debated it and it won, but then it came back to the House and we have started talking about it again. I do not understand.

The Bloc won, so why is it continuing to go on about it? I do not understand why, when we are debating a motion like this today about seniors, the Bloc has been spending so much time homing in specifically on health transfers.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I see more of my colleague from Kingston and the Islands than anybody else. It is interesting to see him all the time, but I appreciate it.

We are talking about seniors. One thing that has been suggested to me by seniors, and I am not sure whether the Liberals would consider it, is moving the automatic withdrawal age to 75 and not having income tax charged on withdrawals from RIFs.

Would the member for Kingston and the Islands be interested in the Liberals supporting a change in the age for automatic withdrawals from RIFs from 71 to 75, and not having them income taxed? This is something that seniors have mentioned to me in their concerns, and it is a change that would help them.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, one thing I will say about this member, and we shared some time together on the environment committee, is that he always came to the discussions with an open mind to collaborate, get along and compromise with the other side and other parties involved. If he brings an issue like this forward, I would love to talk about it more and see how it could be expanded upon. Maybe there is great merit to what he is suggesting: in my opinion, not all good ideas have to come from Liberals.

With respect to RIFs specifically, the government did one thing right at the beginning of the pandemic. We put in place a measure to lower the amount that seniors could take out in order to be able to access some of that money during a time they particularly needed it. Are there other good options, as this member suggested? I know he would come to the table in a genuine way to discuss that, and I would love to have that conversation with him.

• (1655)

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that he wanted to help seniors during the pandemic, but the Liberal government was only willing to offer them a one-time payment. The Liberals say that they want to help seniors with affordability, yet they proposed only helping some of them, promising to increase OAS only for those 75 and over.

I spoke to a senior in my riding of Victoria. She is in her late sixties. She told me she worked her whole life and now she hates that she has to rely on the food bank. With the high cost of her medication, she cannot afford groceries. This is a reason to implement universal pharmacare, but is also a reason to include her in any OAS increase.

Will the member vote in favour of helping all seniors, vote in favour of raising OAS for seniors in their late sixties and early seventies, or does the member agree with the Liberal government, which is willing to leave seniors between 65 and 74 without support?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, what I agree with is that we take care of people, respecting the fact that we cannot do it just with a blanket approach like the NDP and the member have raised on a number of occasions; that we can change directly from one age to another. The reality is that it is not that simple.

We know that seniors who are 75 and older have more needs. A lot of them have burned through a lot of their savings. The medical costs become greater at that age. Without using a blanket approach, a lot of people's requirements change. We need to look at these problems from the perspective of how we help the people who are most in need. I know the NDP believe in this too.

At the end of day, what matters the most, in my opinion, is that the people who need support get the support. They are the ones most in need. It is the best thing for our society and it has, indeed, given us the incredible quality of life.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion before the House. I would like to point out that I am joining you from the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat peoples.

*[English]*

I will focus my remarks on COVID-19 measures to support seniors and, more specific, how gender-based analysis plus, or GBA+, informed our support for Canadians, particularly as it relates to our plan for seniors.

I would like to reiterate that in the last election we committed to Canadians that we would increase old security by 10% for seniors aged 75 and up. Our proposal recognizes that older seniors have different needs. As seniors age, they are more likely to outlive their savings, have disabilities, be unable to work and be widowed, all while their health care costs are rising.

For seniors over 75, few work. Those that do work have a median employment income of only \$720; half have a disability, half of which are severe; 57% are women; four in 10 are widows; 59% have incomes below \$30,000 and 39% of these seniors receive the guaranteed income supplement. These are real pressures on the quality of life for older seniors. Our government recognizes their needs and will help address them by increasing old age security by 10% for seniors aged 75 and up. It is clear that our proposals understand the need to support older women who face unique and elevated challenges.

More broadly, we have understood that Canadians need a government that steps up. At the very onset of the pandemic, we acted quickly to assist Canadians by issuing financial assistance so they could pay their bills. We acted swiftly to introduce the CERB, the Canada emergency student benefit, the emergency wage subsidies and extra income for families, seniors and persons with disabilities.

These measures, like all the measures put in place by our government, are aligned with our commitment to inclusion and diversity. The hard work that we have already done to shift the culture toward GBA+ thinking has helped inform our support measures.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

In addition, so that no one falls through the cracks, the government has committed to completing a thorough gender-based analysis while we continue to support Canadians during the pandemic and while taking incremental steps to restart the economy.

[*English*]

Allow me to provide an overview of our emergency measures for seniors, including women, seniors with disabilities and racialized seniors.

As we know, seniors are the most vulnerable to COVID-19. Part of a GBA+ way of thinking means knowing the facts. Statistically, in Canada, women over the age of 65 have a slightly longer life expectancy than men. In 2019, just over half of the Canadian population over 65 were women, so COVID-19 relief measures affecting this age bracket will help alleviate hardship among senior women in particular.

[*Translation*]

For instance, the government made a one-time, tax-free payment of \$300 to seniors who are eligible for the OAS benefit, with an extra \$200 for those who are eligible for the GIS.

This amounts to a total of \$500 for seniors who are eligible for both the OAS and the GIS to help them cover rising costs related to COVID-19. Eligible seniors received their one-time payment last summer.

[*English*]

In addition to senior women facing heightened barriers and challenges during the pandemic, female seniors with disabilities have also been disproportionately impacted.

[*Translation*]

According to the latest available data, there are more Canadian women than men living with disabilities: 2.1 million women versus 1.7 million men. Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable right now because they are more likely to be experiencing financial difficulties. What is more, more than half are victims of violence.

Last April, in keeping with the principles of GBA+, our government created the COVID-19 disability advisory group. This group applied an intersectional lens to accessibility and inclusion in the context of the current pandemic and raised key issues affecting Canadians with disabilities. With the help of this group, Health

### *Government Orders*

Canada developed guidelines to ensure that Canadians with disabilities are protected during the pandemic.

Thanks in part to the group's advice, we recognized that people with disabilities needed help to cover the extraordinary expenses they have had to incur during the pandemic.

[*English*]

That is why our government also provided a one-time payment of \$600 to certificate holders of the disability tax credit. Eligible seniors who were also receiving the credits I mentioned previously would be eligible for a top-up, for a maximum of \$600 in benefits. The group was such a success that it has been made a permanent advisory group to the Minister of Disability Inclusion, and our intersectional framework is continuing with the announcement last fall of the disability inclusion action plan, which will create an income benefit modelled after the guaranteed income supplement.

Now I will say a word about racialized seniors.

The pandemic has laid bare many gaps in our support systems and brought deeply rooted inequalities to the surface. We have seen a resurgence of public concern with systemic racism in the United States and in Canada.

[*Translation*]

That is why some have urged the government to take stronger steps to eliminate the often unconscious and hidden biases and behaviours in our institutions that perpetuate inequality.

[*English*]

Part of the issue is that we lack data on the specific experiences of Black or racialized seniors, and we know very little about how racialized seniors who are women or persons with disabilities have been impacted by the pandemic. I can assure members that having better data to inform policy is a priority for our government and in line with our GBA+ approach to programs and services.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Our government is working tirelessly to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus and protect the health and financial security of Canadians during the pandemic. We took emergency measures during this crisis with a focus on equality, equity, inclusivity and diversity. We realize that the work is not yet done.

As we move forward from this crisis, we have the opportunity to rebuild our economy with a focus on gender equality and a more inclusive society.

*Government Orders*

[English]

That was outlined in the plan that we announced in our September Speech from the Throne. This is why our government tends to keep doing more, particularly for seniors. We will continue to build an inclusive and diverse society in this great country we call home, Canada.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

However, I would like to hear his thoughts on something his colleague from Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation tweeted. He boasted that senior couples got a one-time payment that was higher than the Liberals' election promise to increase old age security by 10% starting at age 75. Talk about intellectual dishonesty.

How can the Liberals compare a one-time benefit to long-term support? They are completely ignoring and denying the financially precarious position that seniors were in before the crisis, are still in and will continue to be in after the crisis. I am not the only one saying this. FADOQ is as well.

[English]

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for being a great advocate for seniors.

When we were first elected in 2015, we kept our promise to reduce old age security and GIS age from 67 to 65. We kept our promise to increase the guaranteed income supplement by 10% for seniors, with up to \$947 for our most vulnerable seniors. We will continue to keep our promises to seniors, including our commitment to increase old age security by 10%. We will continue working for seniors. We also allowed seniors to keep more of their money, if they are working and collecting the guaranteed income supplement, and raised the exemption rate.

We have done many things to lift seniors out of poverty. We will continue doing the good work that seniors expect us to do, because they have sacrificed so much for our country.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to listen to the member speak. He talked about all sorts of things the Liberals supposedly succeeded in doing. However, when we look at the vaccine rollout, we see it has had a disproportionate effect on seniors because seniors have been most affected by COVID-19.

Could the member expand on whether or not seniors can expect the government to actually act on some of these promises, without the dithering and delay we have seen thus far?

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to many of the member's speeches on the oil and gas sector, which is a very important sector to his riding, and I applaud his continuing advocacy for that sector.

Obviously each province is in charge of its vaccine rollout. In the province of Ontario, a website will be up as of March 15 so seniors can get their vaccines.

We have committed to getting six million vaccines by the end of the first quarter, and I believe it is 24 million by the end of June.

All Canadians, if they wish to receive the vaccine, will be eligible to do so before the end of the summer. That is a great thing. We want our economy to recover, and it is, and we want to get things back to normal as much as possible. We all need to work together, and all levels of government are working together to get this done.

• (1710)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to raise one area of concern. The pandemic has exposed issues related to gender and racialized Canadians. However, those issues were well known before the pandemic. They were well known by many people and are actually still employed in some of the institutions we have.

I will point really quickly to one of them: employment insurance. We know that some of our seniors have to supplement their income to get by because of rising costs. They will never get this through employment insurance because they do not make enough money.

Would the parliamentary secretary like to address this issue? The systemic contributions seniors have to make and will never collect are a tax on our seniors.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the long-time member for Windsor West, who represents the wonderful constituents of Windsor.

All systemic barriers, in any shape or form, need to be broken down and eliminated in this country. As all MPs would agree, we need to continue to make Canada a more inclusive society. We are diverse, but we must make it inclusive.

With regard to the employment insurance system, we have changed the requirements during this extraordinary period of time so that Canadians can more easily qualify for employment insurance. We understand, and we do not want Canadians to have to choose between putting food on the table and paying their bills in a situation where their employment has been impacted negatively by the pandemic.

[Translation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The member for Riv re-des-Mille- les has about three minutes left for his comments.

The hon. member for Riv re-des-Mille- les.

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Riv re-des-Mille- les, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will make do with three minutes. It is fine.

Today, the Bloc Qu b cois tabled a simple, sensible, empathetic and caring motion. Logically, this rational, judicious bill should transcend party stances and party lines. This motion targets a particular segment of the population, the only segment that was neglected during this pandemic and has in fact been neglected for decades.

To sum up, the motion “asks the government, in the next budget, to increase the Old Age Security benefit by \$110 a month for those aged 65 and more.”

We have heard a lot about how underfunding is affecting seniors. I would like to take a moment to look at what this means in concrete terms. The \$110 a month adds up to \$8 billion, but some of that gross amount will be returned to the government in the form of taxes. People who earn more than \$80,000 per year pay a lot of tax. Some who currently get the guaranteed income supplement will no longer get it. Essentially, that \$8 billion ends up as \$4 billion net. That is what the Bloc Québécois's motion would actually cost.

A mere \$4 billion for our seniors, hitherto neglected by the government, is not much compared to the flood of subsidies and cash the government has been handing out over the past year. Four billion dollars is a drop in the bucket compared to \$400 billion. It is also very little compared to numbers like the one that came out today, Irving Shipbuilding's \$57-billion cost overrun. That is a single cost overrun totalling \$57 billion, when the Bloc is asking for a mere \$4 billion. Our seniors deserve that much.

Given that I do not have much time, I would like to conclude by stating that the Bloc Québécois motion calls for good judgment, consideration of the priorities that we want to have as a society, and respect for these people who today can no longer express their discontent or articulate their needs, much less take to the streets to express what they want.

Today, the Bloc Québécois is the voice of seniors. Today, the Bloc Québécois stands on behalf of seniors. I will leave my colleagues with these three words to guide our vote on this motion: judgment, priorities and respect.

• (1715)

**The Deputy Speaker:** It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the amendment.

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

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded vote.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the recorded division stands deferred until Monday, March 8, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m. in order to move on to Private Members' Business.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

*Private Members' Business*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

**ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION INCENTIVE ACT**

The House resumed from November 16, 2020, consideration of the motion that Bill C-221, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (oil and gas wells), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**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, it is a pleasure for me to talk about an industry that is so critically important to our country, in particular to give a western prairie perspective on it.

The essence of Bill C-221 is to provide a non-refundable tax credit at a rate of about 13%. There are a great deal of concerns, but it is a bill that I cannot support personally, and I will go into a bit of detail in regard to that.

Suffice it to say that what is taking place in Alberta and Saskatchewan and, to a lesser extent, in Manitoba and British Columbia with the whole issue of natural resources, in particular our oil and gas wells, is of great concern. I think the government has been moving forward in a very responsible fashion, and I would like to highlight a few things, but first, I will make reference.

The other day there was a question by the opposition about what is taking place in Alberta. Often we get the Conservatives talking about our not moving fast enough on the whole issue of western development. I really appreciated the concise answer by the Minister of Natural Resources at week ago in response to a question posed to him on February 19.

He addressed the chamber by saying:

...let me speak to impending projects in this country. There are 32 oil sands projects in Alberta that are approved and ready to go. They are just waiting for the provincial government's approval or investment from the private sector, but they are ready to go. This is in addition to our support for TMX, NGTL and Line 3. We approved them and are building them. In the case of TMX, we bought it. We are creating thousands of jobs for oil and gas workers because we are proud of them and we are proud of this industry as it continues to lower emissions.

We have recognized, as the minister said, the importance of the industry that we, when we talk about the industry, need to factor in the environment too. When we look at the industry here in Canada, I think it fares quite well, when we compare it with the same type of industry around the world. I believe Canada has played a leadership role, and I attribute that to the workers, the entrepreneurs and some of those businesses out west that are really leading the world in ensuring that we can minimize emissions. It has been referenced previously inside and outside the House that in many ways this is an industry that is going to be achieving net-zero emissions, which is really good to hear.

*Private Members' Business*

The bill focuses on wells and what we do when wells are no longer active, and the Conservatives are proposing this tax credit. I do not know to what degree they have really thought it out. For example, it would seem to apply to every company under a set price; I think it is about 100,000 barrels, in terms of the daily average. Outside of that one criterion, it seems that, as long as someone meets that requirement, they would be able to apply. It would not focus federal support on only the companies that need it; it is more a case that we would give the tax credit, no matter whether they needed the support or not.

I believe that the government has approached this issue in a very progressive fashion. In fact, our COVID-19 supports have included nearly \$1.7 billion, that is, more than \$1.5 billion, in support for those orphan well closures in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

• (1720)

All of us are concerned about workers in the energy sector. There have been some very difficult times, we recognize that, but unlike the impression many Conservatives try to give, sometimes things are beyond one's control. The pandemic is something we could not have prevented. No country could have done that, as this is a worldwide issue.

When former prime minister Harper was leaving office, we started to see a depreciation in world prices. It started before he left office and has continued. When we think of it, oil and gas producers are coping with two crises that have had a very serious impact in the energy sector and the workers in that sector.

I believe the proper thing for the government to do was to look at ways we could assist, and one of those ways was to look at cleaning up those tens of thousands of inactive and abandoned wells. It is not a small amount of money. We are going into hundreds of millions of dollars. As I said, it would be over \$1.5 billion.

There are two crises situations, the global pandemic and the aftershocks of the global price war, and now we have companies trying to react and make changes to their operations that are so badly needed. We will come out okay at the end of the day, because we recognized how important it is to be there for the industry.

A number we often hear is that one out of every three workers in the areas of mining, oil and gas were able to stay in their jobs because of the Canada emergency wage subsidy program. We often hear criticisms about the program and how company X received the program or company Y received the program. However, when I look at the literally millions of jobs that have been saved as a direct result of that program, I believe it was well worth the federal dollars to make the program what it is.

The energy sector is a very good example of how a sector within our communities was able to capitalize on a program that will enable the industry as a whole to rebound that much better going forward. Because of the supports provided, we were able to keep people in the workforce.

When we talk about the capping of wells, a big part is the issue of the climate and our climate record. This government has taken many, over 40, different emission-reducing measures over the

years. In fact, we are on track to cut pollution by more than any other Canadian government in its history.

I like to think investments in things like public transit, energy efficiency and having a price on pollution all matter. Investing in Canadians and offering support where we can is what I believe this government has done well over the last 12 months, but even more than that, over the last four years.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, introducing a bill is always an important moment in the life of a legislator, and so is the time when that bill is debated.

I therefore commend the member for Lakeland, and I want to explain to her why the Bloc Québécois will not be supporting her bill. In environmental policy, there is a basic principle known as the polluter pays principle.

According to this principle, to which the Bloc Québécois subscribes, it is up to businesses to assume the costs of environmental damage related to their operations. The provisions of the member for Lakeland's Bill C-221 fail to respect that basic principle. The very principle of granting a tax credit in an attempt to force companies to assume their responsibilities would mean funding an industry that is harmful to the environment rather than funding the energy transition. We agree with the hon. member that it is not up to Alberta taxpayers to pay the full cost of shutting down orphaned wells, but nor is it up to Quebec, the provinces and territories. This is the perfect opportunity to recognize the merit of the polluter pays principle and to implement it as rigorously as possible. Until the shift to clean energy is completed so that Canada can move away from fossil fuels, which we hope happens as quickly as possible, governments will have to strengthen their environmental policies and come up with effective ways to hold resource companies accountable.

Two years ago, the Supreme Court upheld the polluter pays principle in the Redwater Energy case by overturning a ruling from Alberta's highest court holding that repaying the creditor bank of the bankrupt company should take precedence over cleaning up abandoned sites. The Supreme Court disagreed and said that the priority is the cleanup, that decontaminating the environment takes precedence over repaying creditors when an oil company goes bankrupt. It even specified that the creditors and fiduciaries claiming to have priority were in fact people who benefited from the company's economic activity and who were, as a result, bound by the same regulatory obligations as the bankrupt company.

Between 2016 and 2019, in only three years, there were 28 bankruptcies involving 10,000 sites in Alberta for a total value of \$335 million. Over the same period, the Orphan Well Association's inventory grew by 300%. This NGO, also known as OWA, claims to be independent, funded primarily by the industry and under the regulatory authority of the Alberta Energy Regulator. Is that really the case? Let us continue. Its mandate is to close wells, plants and pipelines who are no longer under the responsibility of financially solvent owners in order to protect the public and the environment and to eliminate the potential threat posed by these unfunded liabilities.

If the industry properly funded the OWA to really repair the environmental damage caused by failed companies, would we still be talking about even more taxpayer dollars being funnelled to the fossil fuels industry? The federal funding that the member for Winnipeg North spoke of earlier, the \$1.7 billion announced last spring to clean up and close orphaned wells, is taxpayer money. Albertans also fund, through loans, the restoration of hundreds of wells—more taxpayer dollars. What about guaranteed federal loans with public money from all across the country? Even more taxpayer dollars.

The tax credit proposed in Bill C-221 will not prevent the inevitable decline of the fossil fuel sector, especially not for the qualifying corporations the bill identifies. The explosion in the number of sites that the OWA is now responsible for clearly illustrates this reality. It is in the economic interest of the western provinces to diversify. Even the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, says that demand for oil will plateau and will not grow much in the next 25 years, while renewable energy is already growing and will continue to grow even faster over the same period. In this context, we must approach the problem of bankruptcies head-on and make sure that governments reform and tighten their criteria for how companies finance the end of their facilities' life.

• (1730)

Forcing society at large to pay for the environmental costs of an industry that not only degrades the surrounding environment, but puts communities at risk and compromises our climate future, is neither fair nor legitimate.

For public funds spent on closing wells to be considered an investment, such expenditures would need to be made in the wider context of a comprehensive energy transition plan. If such a plan were implemented, making an investment to restore the environment around the wells would be considered a measure to ensure a fair transition. It would have the dual benefit of protecting the environment and supporting energy sector workers during the necessary transition.

However, as a stand-alone bill, Bill C-221 is a tax incentive to support the development of business models and an industry that are making no attempt to mitigate the impact of the environmental degradation for which it is responsible. Any financial support provided to manage the environmental risks that continuously result from the fossil fuel industry must be attached to restrictive environmental regulations, as well as other preventive measures, in order to avoid endlessly exacerbating the situation and the problem.

### *Private Members' Business*

There is one good program called area-based closures, where well operators work together to minimize the cost of restoring sites. It is a good program and a step in the right direction, but participation is voluntary.

We need to do more to protect the environment and our health and to address the climate emergency. One thing is for sure: Well operators must take note of the Supreme Court decision I mentioned earlier. Provincial governments, for their part, must create regulatory tools tied to taxation laws to enforce the Supreme Court decision.

In the Supreme Court Redwater case, the appellant, the Alberta Energy Regulator, estimated the province's oil and gas liability at \$30 billion or more. These massive costs, which are a relatively conservative estimate, are over and above the ever-increasing costs of greenhouse gas emissions, the impact on human health and the destruction of natural environments in the province.

A multi-level governmental review of the fossil fuel regulatory environment, which would empower governments to hold those benefiting from the resource responsible, is decades overdue. The orphan well problem, which is not addressed in Bill C-221, is real, it is current, and it is definitely connected to that.

In conclusion, the Orphan Well Association, or OWA, has had expanded powers since the spring of 2020, powers that were granted in the middle of a pandemic under two amendments adopted to its enabling legislation by the Government of Alberta. According to published information, these powers affect three areas: the role that the OWA plays in promoting the closure of sites, the role it plays in ensuring that oil and gas sites are not abandoned prematurely, and increased financial control to manage sites that may eventually be abandoned, as well as those under its control.

These wells are being kept in good working order, but why? To what end? Essentially, the OWA can now buy up sites before they are abandoned, which helps the company. Then it will clean up the defective sites, which did not use to happen, meaning the industry is relieved of its responsibility yet again. That is the direction that the Alberta government would like to move in with the OWA, which now works in service of the companies.

The Bloc Québécois has already indicated that it is prepared to stand with workers and families in western Canada, but efforts need to be made to break the Canadian economy's dependence on fossil fuels. We have proposed concrete measures in favour of a recovery plan, but we are still waiting for the government's green recovery strategy.

*Private Members' Business*

Without a comprehensive strategy, Bill C-221 is just a glorified subsidy for the fossil fuel industry. The Bloc Québécois's position is clear: We are against any subsidy for that sector. The pandemic must not be used as an excuse to make the public pay the high price of environmental damage.

● (1735)

[English]

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on this very important issue, which my colleague for Lakeland has proposed.

I have listened to the debate so far, and as an Albertan, I am disappointed to hear that other members will not be supporting a piece of legislation that is good for the environment. I have heard people say that it is good for oil and gas companies, but this is about the environment. The member for Lakeland has proposed a means for the private sector to contribute additional funds to remediate oil and gas wells that are basically at the end of their useful life.

I do not know how many members have done this, but I have walked along a well line that was successfully remediated and got its environmental certificate from the Government of Alberta. As far as my eyes could see, I could no longer see where the drill pad had been. It was restored to a state of nature, where animals and everybody else could walk and use it on an everyday basis.

This is the result of an inevitable shift from conventional oil and gas to unconventional oil and gas production, which is mostly the bitumen oil sands, SAGD operations and in situ operations. What we sometimes see, ridiculously presented as what happens in the northeast corner of Alberta by, say, the National Geographic, is the open-pit mining, which is the way of the past. Those are very old mines that will be decommissioned in 10 to 20 years.

However, members can look at the legislative costing note provided by the Parliamentary Budget Officer for Bill C-221. It is flow-through shares, and this is the solution for decommissioning costs. Yes, there are a lot of oil sites, as the previous member mentioned. The Orphan Well Association is a repository for a company that goes bankrupt or into receivership and returns its energy leases to the people of Alberta when it can no longer operate. There was a fund set up in order to pay for these things.

I hear a member chirping away and disagreeing with me, but it is a solution for private-sector dollars to be put towards an environmental goal. It is not offsetting all of a company's costs. We are talking about wells that produce the equivalent of 100,000 or fewer barrels per day. I think this is what we want. We want the private sector to be more involved in remediating environmental costs associated with production.

In my riding, where Imperial Oil has its headquarters, a lot of oil and gas workers are unemployed, and this would put them back to work. There is a very slight time window that these flow-through shares would work for, which is basically between 2019 and 2026. We are talking about a very small group of wells that would be eligible for this. Companies could use this to offset some of the costs associated with it, but it is for the environment.

The bill before us has an excellent goal behind it. Why would we not support it? It would get people back to work with jobs. It would improve the environment, our landscapes and ecosystems. It offers an opportunity for us to do something that we are going to have to do anyway, which is fix up these well sites, which are all over Alberta, usually on people's properties. They will need to be remediated either way. Again, this is not for companies. It is for the environment.

To me, the downside is that it would cost \$264 million by 2026, according to the PBO's cost estimate. However, it would get people who have great technical skills back to work and back out in the field. An excellent way of putting people back into the field is remediating these oil and gas wells.

The industry is the best in the world when it comes to this type of environmental work. There are wildlife biologists, people whose expertise is in rough fescue, which naturally grows in the foothills of Alberta. They are ready to go and do the work required for well remediation sites.

It was only a few years ago when some of the major Suncor sites were being remediated. What used to be an open-pit mine was completely remediated. We now have bison roaming again. It is a natural environment. One would not be able to tell what had been there, if it was not for the giant sign at the front of the site saying it used to be an open-pit mine. We have these large-scale industrial sites all over Canada.

I have known the member for Lakeland for a very long time, even pre-politics. We were in different provincial political parties. I am sure she would admit, and she would probably laugh at this, that we were probably each in the wrong political party. We likely would have identified as being in another one, should we have discussed it then.

However, she has been working at this for a long time. This type of proposal, had it been in place a decade or two ago, would have been able to support the sector and jobs in Alberta. We would not have to just wait for the Orphan Well Association to help remediate the sites for companies who can dig deep into foreign sources of capital to pay for remediation.

● (1740)

This would have been available for the smaller oil and gas companies in Alberta. It would have been available for the private sector. We say we have an ESG goal, say in a hedge fund or an equity fund, and we want to meet those. We have environmental and social goals that our fund investors want to meet. There is an opportunity right there. It would put tens of thousands of people back to work improving our environment and our landscapes. What could be better than that? We are using the Income Tax Act to do it, to offset some of the cost, not all of the cost, of this proposal.

I just do not see a downside to passing such a piece of legislation when the goal behind it is not subsidizing oil and gas companies but improving our environment. I just do not understand why other members of this House who had been in there originally will not support a piece of legislation like this. When we thought about this originally, it was just a total win on both sides. We would achieve a private sector goal, which is obviously to make a profit; and we would achieve an environmental goal, which is the remediation and improvement of our environment and the restoration of it to the condition it was in before industrial work was done on the property.

There is a Yiddish proverb that says, “he that cannot pay, let him pray.” Madam Speaker, I know you enjoy the Yiddish proverbs as much as I do. However, that is the case here.

• (1745)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Thoughts and prayers for oil and gas.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, I hear the same member chirping away again. I am sure it is a different condition out there in Hamilton and the regions that he comes from, but in my neck of the woods, in the southeast part of Calgary, I have a lot of oil and gas workers who have been out of work for years now.

Their severance pay has run out, they have no more space in a home equity line of credit, they are at the limit of what they can afford and the outlook is grim. For many of them, their kids, spouses, friends and former co-workers have moved to the United States or Algeria or South America to seek work, because there is a booming industry worldwide for oil and gas development. That might be hard to believe, but it is still going on. One of my neighbours is an LNG specialist, and he spent time working in Venezuela.

I have a lot of family members who moved out west specifically for work opportunities. Lots of those have dried up, and in connected industries the same thing is happening. We know in Alberta that oil and gas is not going to bounce back to the same as it was before. We have been through this before. Albertans are extremely resilient. This is not the first bust that we have experienced, frankly, and there will be other booms and other busts in the future. We have adapted, every single time, by changing our legislation, changing our regulations and looking after the environment. That is what we do best. That is what this piece of legislation proposes to do.

Through this, I see an opportunity to harness the power of the private sector to invest in things that it cares about. I see these hedge funds and equity funds out there, all over North America, looking toward investing in projects that have environmental and social goals behind them. ESG is the way of the future. Many of them are looking at things like carbon net-zero investments that they would like to make.

My riding is home to one of the most efficient gas turbine electricity-producing power stations in North America, with something like a 98% to 99% efficiency, producing half of the city of Calgary's electrical power. It is hyperefficient. There are barely any people working in that facility, and it has now added on a carbon capture and carbon utilization system as well.

Projects like this are how we are going to get to our environmental goals. Changes like this to the Income Tax Act would help the

### *Private Members' Business*

private sector achieve the environmental goals that we all share in this House. Climate change is real. We have to address it. This is a way to get there because, as I said, “he that cannot pay, let him pray.”

We are done praying. There is an opportunity here to make sure that the private sector pays for these types of costs.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-221, which seeks to amend the Income Tax Act and establish a tax incentive for the closure of oil and gas wells.

I want to acknowledge the work of the member for Lakeland, with whom I am fortunate to serve on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I can say in no uncertain terms that, unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois does not support this bill for one very simple reason that my colleague from Repentigny already pointed out: Bill C-221 is inconsistent with the polluter pay principle.

What is the polluter pay principle? It is a basic environmental policy principle supported by all those who believe that the environment is a priority. The Bloc Québécois therefore wholeheartedly supports it. This principle stipulates that companies need to assume the costs of any environmental damage they do.

It is simple. If a party causes environmental damage, then it must pay to fix it. If it cannot be fixed, then the party pays to compensate for the irreparable harm it has done to nature. It is not up to the government or taxpayers to absorb those costs. That would be unfair and illogical. That would mean collectively agreeing to pay to fix the environmental damage caused by oil and gas companies, while receiving no collective benefit from the profits.

That is the problem the Bloc Québécois has with Bill C-221. If this bill were to pass, oil and gas companies would be given a tax credit for assuming their responsibilities. In other words, if we say yes to Bill C-221, we are saying yes to more funding for an industry that we know is harmful to the environment, rather than increasing funding for the energy transition. That reasoning does not hold water in 2021.

Obviously, it is not as if the oil and gas industry was the poor cousin in Canada. As a matter of fact, in April 2020, less than a year ago, the federal government provided \$1.7 billion in financial assistance to clean up and decommission orphan wells in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

*Private Members' Business*

It does not stop there. Alberta already funds hundreds of well reclamation projects within its jurisdiction. That province offers loans to oil and gas companies, and the payment of interests is secured by none other than the federal government.

They will say that this support is needed in a pandemic and that workers in western Canada need support. We agree with helping workers and companies in times of crisis, but taxpayers already absorb much of the environmental costs from the oil and gas industry.

Moreover, it seems to me that the pandemic has become an excuse for a lot of things, much too many things. The present environmental crisis cannot be swept under the rug under the pretense that a public health crisis is raging. That kind of rhetoric no longer holds water in 2021 either.

The scientific evidence is too compelling on the cause-and-effect relationship between the destruction of the environment in the past decades and the pandemic we are living through. We cannot afford to legislate only to potentially hold oil and gas producers accountable. We must enshrine in law the requirement to start the energy transition, and yet, Bill C-221 would have the opposite effect.

Do we believe that oil and gas companies would change their ways if the government compensated them for their environmental mistakes? I think I know the answer: not a chance. Using taxpayer money to pay the environmental costs of an industry that damages the environment, puts communities at risk and compromises our climate future is completely irresponsible.

The member for Lakeland, who introduced this bill, says that it is not up to Alberta's taxpayers to assume 100% of the cost of decommissioning orphan wells. She is quite right, but I am sure she would agree with me that it is not up to Quebec taxpayers to pay for it either.

The Bloc Québécois recognizes the urgent need to deal with orphan wells, and we are prepared to support pragmatic solutions to this problem. However, these solutions must meet certain conditions. They must respect the polluter pays principle, they must contribute to an overall effort to make the energy transition, they must come with regulations and, last of all, they must help Canada meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets.

The Bloc Québécois is willing to discuss amendments to Bill C-221 in order for it to meet the conditions I mentioned. In this debate about orphan wells, it is important to have a broader conversation and to be aware of the importance of tackling climate change without further delay. More and more people are insisting that we, the elected members, address this issue.

A 2017 study by the C.D. Howe Institute showed that of some 450,000 listed oil and gas wells in Alberta, about 155,000 were no longer active but had not been completely cleaned up. In the spring of 2020, the Pembina Institute estimated that there were 164,000 abandoned wells in the province. The institute reported that these wells carried risks and expenditures that had not been borne by the owners, even though the owners benefited from the wells when they were active. The same study showed that for Albertans, the potential costs of cleaning up these abandoned wells could be as high as \$8 billion, and that was in 2017. Of course, today, the costs would be even higher.

• (1750)

In fact, official estimates by the Alberta Energy Regulator, the only regulatory body for the energy sector in the province, value oil and gas liabilities at over \$30 billion. However, internal documents estimate the total cleanup costs of Alberta's oil and gas sector, including the oil sands, at \$260 billion. Should Albertans pay the price for the oil and gas sector's environmental carelessness? Should all Quebecers and Canadians foot the bill? The answer is obvious.

We know that the economic downturn Alberta has faced for 10 years pushed many oil companies to bankruptcy. The province was left with thousands of wells left unattended by companies that did not bother to clean up their mess. That is a huge environmental problem, but it is also a public health and safety issue. These abandoned wells can contaminate the water and the soil, release greenhouse gases and put nearby houses at risk of exploding. It is a growing problem that companies keep sweeping into taxpayers' backyards. So much for being good corporate citizens.

A lawyer from Ecojustice, a Vancouver-based group of lawyers who specialize in environmental law, said that the best way for the province to address the problem of abandoned oil wells is to require companies to make a security deposit before drilling. That would be a more forward-looking solution than Bill C-221. We need to fix the mistakes of the past first.

The issue of orphan wells needs to be addressed, but there need to be strict conditions to warrant having the public cover the cost. Any financial assistance associated with environmental risks, such as the decommissioning of orphan wells, must be done in conjunction with changes to the environmental regulations. Preventive measures must also be taken to stop perpetually aggravating this problem.

We simply cannot vote in favour of a bill that sustains an industry that is causing environmental degradation. Alberta and the other oil- and gas-producing provinces have the power to make regulations that would require the industry to take care of its wells. The pandemic must not be used as an excuse for deregulating the environmental protection sector. There are ways to prevent more orphan wells from popping up in Alberta. There are ways to avoid making the public pay astronomical bills.

Environmental trusts exist precisely to allow producers to share the risk among themselves in case one of them goes bankrupt. Oil and gas companies should be required to maintain enough assets to cover the costs of dismantling and cleaning up their facilities. In the event of bankruptcy, the law should require companies to fulfill their environmental responsibilities before having to pay off their creditors. To avoid bankruptcies, governments should modify their criteria to require companies to finance the end of life of their wells upfront. In short, laws and taxes should be used to prevent problems, not to fix them after the fact.

In conclusion, investing public money to fix the problem of orphan wells would only be justifiable if it were part of a comprehensive, ambitious plan for an energy transition. If such a plan existed, the investment necessary for closing down these wells would have the dual impact of protecting the environment and supporting energy sector workers and their families during the transition.

The Bloc Québécois has proposed a green recovery plan, with concrete solutions for a successful energy transition. In its plan, the Bloc suggests, among other things, that the unused funds from the Trans Mountain expansion project be redirected toward renewable energy projects to create jobs, a large part of which could be earmarked for Alberta to support its green transition.

However, we are still waiting for the Liberal government's comprehensive strategy for a green recovery. Without stricter environmental regulations, measures like the tax credit proposed in Bill C-221 amount to little more than a new kind of subsidy for the fossil fuel industry.

The economic recovery policy should include powerful incentives to encourage companies to move away from fossil fuels and invest in clean and renewable technologies. The Bloc Québécois cannot support a bill that would make taxpayers bear the staggering costs of Canada's dependence on oil. The Bloc Québécois is prepared to stand in solidarity with the taxpayers, workers and families of western Canada on condition that laws and regulations are put in place to end the Canadian economy's dependence on fossil fuels from the previous century.

• (1755)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Resuming debate.

[English]

I invite the hon. member for Lakeland for her five-minute right of reply.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the debate on my PMB, Bill C-221, the environmental restoration incentive act, which is one part of what must be a multi-pronged approach to a current and future risk that needs resolution.

There is rarely a single perfect public policy remedy to a complex real-world challenge. Exponentially increasing orphaned and abandoned wells are mainly a result of major bankruptcies and a widespread economic collapse, caused in part by Canada's own anti-energy federal government and the 2019 Redwater decision that prevents struggling small oil and gas developers from getting private financing when nearing bankruptcy with outstanding remedia-

tion liabilities. The federal government can take real action while provinces do their part.

My bill exclusively focuses on the most financially challenged small and medium-sized oil and gas businesses and fairly proposes to include this tool that is currently available to other sectors, such as exploration development in mining, fabrication of metals and other technologies such as wind turbines, geothermal energy and fuel cells. Before 2017, flow-through shares could be used by oil and gas producers for drilling and exploration too. It makes sense to extend it to the smallest, most at-risk energy businesses in Canada, which cannot secure private sector financing due to their precarious economic positions and liabilities, specifically to encourage the remediation and reclamation efforts that they were doing under normal financial circumstances.

It is a no-brainer. Why should flow-through share provisions be limited to the extraction and production fees of resource development and not be available as an environmental remediation tool? South Okanagan—West Kootenay's NDP MP said he accepts the use of flow-through shares for mining extraction. I wonder why we cannot all agree that they should be used to stimulate private sector financing for restoration as well.

What is very odd is that the MPs who like flow-through shares for production but not remediation also offered support for a colleague's intended bill for qualifying environmental trusts. I supported it also, but the fact is that it would have immediately helped only the largest producers with the advantage of cash on hand. My Bill C-221 helps the smallest businesses on the edge of bankruptcy, businesses that cannot get financing and cannot or will not access the federal government's predatory payday style LEEFF loans or the BDC's co-lending and mid-market programs.

Some colleagues say my bill is a subsidy. I have explained extensively why it is not and I will not revisit that question, but I must emphasize that my intent is to protect taxpayers in the long run and limit public liability. My bill is a discount for Canadian taxpayers.

Canada's oil and gas sector contributed \$493 billion in revenues to governments in Canada between 2000 and 2018. That is \$26 billion per year. The PBO says my bill will cost \$264 million in total, ending in 2026. It could potentially cost taxpayers everywhere \$70 billion for all 130,000 active and inactive wells in Canada today.

*Private Members' Business*

Davenport's Liberal MP talked about the need to support measures that help companies avoid bankruptcy and support our environmental targets. Bill C-221 does exactly those things, but deliberately limits the use of public funds by enabling the lion's share of financing, specifically for remediation and reclamation, to come from the private sector.

Bloc MPs urged the polluter pay principle. Yes, the Conservatives enshrined it in law, but the fact is that voting against my bill goes against that principle, ignores the realities of small and medium-sized oil and gas businesses and workers on the edge of total devastation, and leaves either a lack of remediation or only taxpayers liable.

My bill is real action, not just rhetoric, on the polluter pay principle to help the most vulnerable energy businesses—

• (1800)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I have to interrupt the hon. member for Lakeland.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Madam Speaker, I think we heard the member say that her Internet connection is unstable.

For the benefit of the member, I know a lot of work goes into a private member's bill, and she does have the right to respond. I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow her to restate the last 30 or 45 seconds. We did not hear that, and I think she has a right to be heard.

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

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Can the hon. member for Lakeland start about 30 seconds back in her speech, please?

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the generosity. I do not know where I was. I think I am frozen—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Are you still having issues with your Internet connection? Your frame keeps freezing and your voice stops.

We can hear you now.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Madam Speaker, I am sorry. I am out in rural Alberta. I promise I am wrapping up, but I want to thank all members for helping me do this.

The Liberal member for Davenport talked about the need to support measures that help companies avoid bankruptcy and support our environmental targets. Bill C-221 does exactly those things, but deliberately limits the use of public funds by enabling the lion's share of financing to go specifically for remediation and reclamation by the private sector.

The Bloc members urged the polluter pay principle, which, yes, the Conservatives enshrined in law, but the fact is that voting against my bill would run against that principle, ignore the realities of small and medium-sized oil and gas businesses and workers on

the edge of total devastation, and leave either a lack of remediation or only taxpayers liable.

My bill is real action, not just rhetoric, on the polluter pay principle to help the most vulnerable energy businesses; not big oil and not major multinationals, but literally the little guys. The NDP MP said that Canadian taxpayers should not foot the bill and I agree. However, inaction, doing nothing, defeating this bill, would help guarantee they would.

Frankly, the objections have been mostly ideological and geographical, with no real alternative proposals. This is a challenge across Canada in most provinces. In Alberta alone, most wells are on private land. Financially forced abandonments are magnets for rural crime, but there are tens of thousands of wells on government land, on Crown grazing leases, and thousands on indigenous reserve lands too. What happens to all of them when companies go bankrupt?

Since 2015, Canada's energy sector has lost \$200 billion and 200,000 jobs while orphan and abandoned wells have increased 300%. That is not a coincidence, but a consequence. That was before 37% of oil and gas companies had to make permanent layoffs to stay alive at the start of last year. There is little light at the end of the tunnel.

I passionately support Canada's oil and gas workers. The sector is the most environmentally and socially responsible in the world. It is crucial to the whole country's economy and future. Bill C-221 can help continue its unmatched stewardship, clean-tech investment and innovation exceeding standards, while protecting farmers, municipalities, land owners, indigenous communities, the environment, taxpayers, and creating badly needed jobs. I hope MPs in all parties will actually walk their talk and support this bill.

• (1805)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The question is on the motion.

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

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Madam Speaker, I request a recorded vote.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Accordingly, pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 10, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

### WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP):** Madam Speaker, I am raising an issue today in our adjournment proceedings that I originally raised on December 3 during Oral Questions.

Almost a year ago, the UN Women issued a statement calling violence against women and girls the shadow pandemic. This should come as no surprise and it should not have taken COVID to expose the ways our society perpetuates this violence.

The data tells us that half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16. Approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. Despite decades of research and community activism across the country, violence against those identifying as women, girls or two-spirit people persists as a manifestation of misogyny, objectification and discrimination.

Women from all walks of life are victims and survivors of various types of physical, sexual and psychological violence inflicted by intimate partners: people they trust and often share their homes and lives with.

In 1982, MP Margaret Mitchell prompted a ruckus in the House of Commons that sparked national awareness of domestic violence. She told the House that one in 10 Canadian husbands regularly beat their wives. The male MPs erupted, laughing and shouting. She furiously replied that this is no laughing matter.

It has been almost 40 years, and things have changed in the House. No MP would laugh at that statement today, but not enough has changed in the houses of the women of this country. The violence persists.

I know there is room for enhanced leadership from our federal and provincial governments. I think of the recent government-funded, victim-blaming ad campaign in Montreal that showed an image of a young girl with a bag over her head, as though it was her fault that sexually explicit images of her were being passed around by anonymous men and boys on the Internet. This is unacceptable and adds to the hesitancy to report such abuses for fear of backlash.

● (1810)

In my home province, a group of survivors of sexual assault have gone public this week saying that they have been manipulated by the provincial government, and their experiences and research are being used as a way for the government to create the illusion of

wanting to help. We need government leadership and allyship that goes beyond illusion.

We know the statistics are worse for indigenous women; Black women; queer, non-binary and two-spirited women; newcomer women; women with disabilities; and women who are otherwise marginalized. Our approach must centre on an intersectional lens to address the unique and specific challenges of those facing the highest rates of gender-based violence. I will use this opportunity to remind the government of its responsibility to put forward the action plan to address the findings of the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women.

The challenges of COVID-19 cannot be an excuse for the delay. As I have outlined, the urgency has only increased, and we must respond. No more stolen sisters. No more bright lights snuffed out in the night. We need to act. We need a cultural shift. I believe it can start with leadership, and it starts with our generation here and now.

As the mother of young boys, I teach my children to respect all people, to find the right language to address their emotions and talk about the ways they may be struggling. I talk to them about tough subjects and the hard truths in this world, but I also teach them about the opportunity to change it. I empower them to do their part and trust their abilities. I am proud that my children are also young indigenous boys, *Wolastoqew*, who will be encouraged to end gender-based violence, and to lift up and protect the women in their community.

I look forward to hearing the member opposite discuss the role her government can play in combatting this shadow pandemic in Canada.

**Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Fredericton for her hard work and advocacy on this important subject.

Since 2015, our government has been working to prevent gender-based violence, to address the root causes, and support long-term solutions. We have worked with women's movements and organizations on the ground who have been doing this work for decades, even when the government before us left them underfunded and undermanned for 10 years. We know that the experience and knowledge of these groups is so important.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Ending gender-based violence does not happen overnight, but I can confirm that our government will continue to be collaborative, persistent and committed to sustainable change. Thanks to the investments of our government in women and gender equality, six million people benefit each year. In 2017, we announced the first-ever federal strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence by bringing together all federal efforts to prevent GBV.

Think about that: It took 150 years for a federal strategy to be created and designed to prevent GBV. Through the federal strategy, over \$200 million has been invested to expand and align federal efforts against gender-based violence. Through that strategy, we have supported innovative projects and programming with a whole-of-government approach.

Here are a few examples: Developing a framework to address gender-based violence in post-secondary institutions; creating and testing innovative practices to prevent teen dating violence; supporting the Canadian Centre for Child Protection; addressing gaps in supports for indigenous survivors of GBV across the country. Building on the foundations laid by the strategy, we are now working with provincial and territorial governments and indigenous leaders to advance the national action plan to end gender-based violence.

The key word there is “national”. In January, just a month ago, federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women came together over a few days with a joint declaration on a commitment to a Canada free from gender-based violence. This is such a significant milestone. This plan will address root causes to prevent gender-based violence and ensure that anyone facing GBV has reliable and timely access to protection and services, no matter where they live.

However, our work does not stop there. We announced \$22.4 million in new funding to organizations providing supports for at-risk populations, including survivors of violence, as part of the national strategy to combat human trafficking. In December, we announced our government's support for 63 organizations engaged in this work.

We are also actively working to provide crucial support to those most vulnerable in the COVID-19 pandemic. We are providing up to \$100 million in funding to shelters, sexual assault centres and other organizations working to support those experiencing GBV at this difficult time.

We believe strongly that, by acting quickly, by listening to experts and advocates and by engaging all levels of government, working closely with our partners and by investing in the most sustainable approaches, we will be on track to end gender-based violence in all its forms.

• (1815)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Madam Speaker, I am reminded of my experience in my first year of university during orientation. I was given a rape whistle. I was shown the dark paths not to go down and told stories of the women who had gone before me. Here is a thought: instead of arming women with rape whistles, and instead of removing responsibility from the perpetrators, how about we tell young women all the ways that we will support them and focus on

their safety; that we will educate them and their classmates about consent; that, should any problems arise, they should contact authorities without hesitation; that we will believe them and that their offenders will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law?

We do not say these things, and in many ways we cannot yet, because of the ongoing failures of our system. How about we also direct-fund organizations, particularly those supporting women fleeing domestic violence and those providing mental health services, meeting women with open doors instead of a lack of options? How about a guaranteed livable income, so that women are not financially dependent on their abusers?

I know that our generation has the power to put an end to gender-based violence. We require ongoing leadership and dedicated funding from the government to do it.

**Ms. Gudie Hutchings:** Madam Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with the member opposite, and I was so delighted to be in discussions with the federal, provincial and territorial ministers, when education was such a vital part of that conversation, and it is how everything has to start.

We know that GBV is a pervasive problem, but we are working quickly and actively to end it in all its forms, and we all have to do this together. Since the early days of the pandemic last year, we have engaged over 1,000 individuals, representing organizations working in the GBV sector across the country, on priorities and the next steps on that plan. That plan is going to be devised by people working with all levels of government from the ground up. We know some people and populations in Canada are more likely to experience violence, and many are facing unique barriers and challenges that put them at particular risk of gender-based violence. That is why applying an intersectional lens to development of the national action plan continues to be at the heart of all of our efforts.

I commend the member opposite. She sounds like an amazing mom, and I am glad that she is starting her young boys out right.

• (1820)

ETHICS

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the adjournment proceedings this evening to speak about an issue that we see reported in the papers today. That is the question of lobbying during this time when we have so much money flowing out from the federal government.

Of course, helping Canadians is paramount during these unprecedented times. We need to make sure that we are getting funding to support individuals, families, seniors and people who are living in at-risk situations and are marginalized. We need to make sure we are supporting small and medium-sized businesses, and that the provinces have the funding they need to fulfill their health care obligations.

When the federal government spends money there are questions to ask. Who is keeping an eye on the cash that is leaving the register? Who is making sure that it is being done in a fair and transparent manner? Of course we have independent officers of Parliament who are given the responsibility to make sure that things are done in an ethical manner. We have our Ethics Commissioner. We have our Lobbying Commissioner as well. When requests or interventions are made, where people are looking to do business with the government or do business with Canadians on behalf of the government, there are rules that need to be followed.

We are going to see the WE scandal back in the news in the coming days as we have more witnesses testifying at the ethics committee. Of course, this is an issue born out of a situation where Canada's Prime Minister and Canada's now former finance minister failed to recuse themselves from awarding a contract worth half a billion dollars to an organization that employed the immediate family members of the then finance minister and that had paid members of the Prime Minister's family half a million dollars.

If that is not enough to raise flags that perhaps there is a conflict of interest, or a need to recuse, or an obligation to consult the Lobbying Commissioner or the Ethics Commissioner, I am not sure what would. However, while originally we were told that nobody in the Prime Minister's family was paid by the WE organization and the two could not be farther apart, we later learned that, of course, that was not true. Half a million dollars was paid to members of the Prime Minister's family. During its heavy lobbying of the government, the WE organization even included pictures of the Prime Minister's family working for them in its brief to the federal cabinet, just to make sure it sealed the deal and that everyone at the table knew who was who in the zoo.

Even today, we read in Blacklock's Reporter that a lobbyist with a group here in Ottawa had emailed the procurement minister's office last March, seeking a contract for their son. The response from the minister's chief of staff was that she had vouched for the individual and forwarded the email for preferential treatment. Was that contact reported to the Lobbying Commissioner? I think colleagues know the answer to that.

We have seen this pattern with the government. What we are looking for is transparency. We are looking to hear from the government if it will finally co-operate with the independent officers of

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Parliament, give them the unfettered access they need and waive cabinet confidences. That is what we are looking for.

**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 always appreciate the exchanges my friend and I have, usually during the late shows.

I do believe in transparency and accountability. There has been a great sense of that, especially during the change in government back in 2015, I would argue, when I was sitting on the opposition benches doing what he is doing: calling for more transparency and accountability.

It is interesting that when the member refers to WE, he tries to paint it as a wonderful, cozy relationship with the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada. This is the same WE organization that had contracts with the Province of Manitoba and Brian Pallister, who is a Progressive Conservative. I also believe the Province of Saskatchewan had contracts with the very same WE organization. I am sure my colleague across the way will have his research department filter that and find out if I am right. If am not right, I am sure he will come back to me on it. Even in my own home province, I believe it was more than just a one-time contract. It was becoming an annual type of contract. I do not know how many years it has been going on.

The Conservatives want to give the impression that there is a buddy-buddy system between WE and the Liberal Party. The WE organization had other partners looked for support and supported other levels of government. I do not think it thought in terms of political affiliation, to the very best of my knowledge.

In terms of what I have witnessed, earlier today I was hoping that I would get the opportunity to share my thoughts at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. As I am sure the member is aware, there is a huge motion at PROC by the Conservatives saying that they want this, that and the other thing. I remember those arguments. Late last fall and even during the summertime, the opposition worked with the other opposition parties to paint a huge picture of evil. The Conservatives gave a lot of thought to how they could do this. At the end of the day, as much as they are being somewhat mischievous, as the member said and as I wrote down, helping Canadians is paramount, and that has been what this government has been focused on.

While my friend and his Conservative colleagues across the way continue to look under all the stones, this government's paramount focus has been on helping Canadians, recognizing just how important it is. He made reference to small businesses and to being there to support people, and the facts will clearly demonstrate that this government has done just that. I have argued in the past, since 2015, that the Conservative Party has had one focus, which is to give as much negative attention as humanly possible to the Prime Minister. I have referred to it as character assassination.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

As much as they are focused on that, we continue to remain focused on Canadians. The last 12 months are probably the very best example I can cite, using some of the things my friend used: small businesses, the wage subsidy program, the emergency rent program, the emergency business account, the credit availability program, helping people through the CERB program, providing seniors the one-time payments and providing the one-time payment to people with disabilities. These are all initiatives that the government has focused its attention on.

We have spent billions and billions of dollars. The Conservatives joined us in unanimously supporting most of the legislation that was passed to spend that kind of money.

I suggest that when spending that kind of money, at times there could be—

• (1825)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Madam Speaker, just as we supported the efforts to make sure that Canadians had what they needed during the pandemic, we are looking for the government to support the independent officers of Parliament, such as the Ethics Commissioner and the Commissioner of Lobbying.

We have seen this before. When the RCMP came knocking about corruption, the Prime Minister barred the door and turned out the lights. We know he has refused to co-operate with investigations by officers of Parliament before and has blocked investigations by law enforcement at every turn. When the lobbying commissioner told the ethics committee that she had sent three lobbying inquiries to the RCMP, we can be sure that the Prime Minister's phone was ringing off the hook. Time and time again the Prime Minister has shown that he has no regard for ethics and will always put his friends before everyday Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister finally come out of the basement, throw open the curtains and shine some sunlight on this? Will the Prime Minister commit to fully co-operating with investigations by officers of Parliament and the RCMP? Will he—

**Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, we have listened and responded to the reports from the Office of the Ethics Commissioner. I have more faith in the office of the Ethics Commissioner than I do in the collective opposition parties. Quite frankly, the collective opposition parties have a political agenda that is very different than the Ethics Commissioner, who is more concentrated and more focused on getting the facts and then providing a report.

When we have found that we are not in full compliance, the Prime Minister has acknowledged it, in some cases has had to apologize, and we move on. We need to recognize that even the office of the Ethics Commissioner is new for parliamentarians. Imagine some of the other prime ministers from the past, had we had an Ethics Commissioner, and some of the problems that might have been created?

We are a democracy that—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to join in these proceedings tonight, to have a conversation about a question I asked in Oral Questions before Christmas. I brought up the situation in my home province and city of Regina where 600 people at Evraz Steel had received layoff notices two weeks before Christmas.

The Deputy Prime Minister answered my question. I said that in the Prime Minister's stop in Regina—Lewvan at Evraz Steel during the 2019 campaign, he told the workers "I have your back." Lately, the men and women working at Evraz Steel are feeling left behind. Six hundred people were laid off. They spent their Christmas trying to figure out how they were going to pay the bills when they came due in 2021.

The Deputy Prime Minister's answer reflected no compassion, no concern for the people of Regina, the people I represent. She talked about trade deals. She patted herself on the back, saying how the government had a good trade deal with the United States. She blamed the Trump administration and then turned around and blamed our leader for those tariffs. There is always the opportunity to blame someone else.

I know whoever is going to answer these questions today is going to say that we did not build any pipelines under former Prime Minister Harper. I am going to cut that off at the pass right now and talk about pipelines we did build during the Harper years. We built Anchor Loop, Keystone, Alberta Clipper, Line 9B reversal, Southern Lights and we approved energy east and northern gateway. Evraz Steel supplied most of the pipe for those projects. It added \$1.25 billion barrels of oil into our system a day. Projects were done under former Prime Minister Harper.

We still want to work toward getting our products to tidewater, so we can get the world prices instead of a discounted price. More work still needs to be done. When I ask questions about what the government will do to support our energy workers, our oil and gas workers, I have talked to the union and the men and women. They build pipes, but they consider themselves an oil and gas company. Without oil and gas production, pipelines are not needed. Therefore, I raise their concerns with those questions.

I need the government members to take this more seriously, not just pat themselves on the back on a job that they think they have done well. They could work to do even better.

What have the Liberals done in the last four months to ensure that jobs stay in Regina? Evraz is an important employer in Regina. One Evraz job creates four spinoff jobs in our local economy. It puts people to work in the restaurant sector, the hospitality sector. Companies that work with and have contracts with Evraz are hurting. There needs to be an effort by the government. I hope the Liberals listen and show some compassion for the people who want to work and earn a paycheque.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I hope I can get some answers tonight on initiatives that are being taken. I am not talking about CERB, or CEBA or programs because of COVID-19. I am talking about a real plan to secure the future jobs at Evraz and to ensure those jobs are there for generations to come.

I have three young kids. I want to ensure there are opportunities for the next generation. This is the first generation that feels it will not have the opportunities into future that we have had. As public officials, we have to work to ensure those opportunities are there.

● (1830)

**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, being from the Prairies, I spent a few years in Regina and still have family who call Regina home. I am very much sensitive to what happens in Regina. In fact, my brother was the leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party for a few years. We had many different types of discussions about how important Saskatchewan and different sectors of the economy are, and we are very much concerned in the government.

The member talks about putting aside COVID. Yes, the pandemic has had a very significant impact on the industry, but about one-third of those employed in the natural resource sectors were able to access the wage subsidy program. Literally hundreds if not thousands of jobs were saved because of some of the programs, but he wants me to shy away from the pandemic. I can respect that.

The member made reference to pipelines and anticipated what I might say, so let me change things around. In the projects he is referencing, pipelines were not actually built to take our resources to the coast. That did not happen under Stephen Harper in his 10 years. That is happening under this administration. It got to a point where we even purchased a pipeline to ensure it was going to happen. There were lots of complications in regard to it, but we have to take into consideration environmental issues, indigenous issues and the different stakeholders.

We need a process in place that enables us to move the industry forward. I believe we have done this in a very responsible fashion. We are not just looking to export to the United States, for example. Everything Harper put down was for getting more oil there. I think 99% was going to the States prior to when Harper became the prime minister, and when he left it was the same percentage.

We need to look at ways to support the industry while respecting the importance of the environment and zero emissions. As I was commenting earlier today, the leadership coming from our energy sector regarding zero emissions is significant. I would argue that we are the best in the world in the ways we are improving upon our energy sector. We are second to no other country.

At the same time, the Canadian steel and aluminum industries are vital to our economy and provide employment in our communities across the country. In 2019, Canadian steel employed over 25,000 workers and contributed \$3.8 billion to Canada's economy. In that same year, the Canadian aluminum industry employed approximately 10,000 workers and contributed \$3.1 billion to our economy.

We understand these are not just numbers. They represent families and communities that depend on these industries. Our government has, and always will, stand with Canadian workers and protect their interests.

● (1835)

**Mr. Warren Steinley:** Madam Speaker, the member did not say one thing the government was going to do to put people back to work at Evraz steel. He talked about the Harper years, which I knew he would talk about. I already said that we need to build pipelines to the coast. Only the member and the Liberal government would think they bought a pipeline so they could get it built. The private sector was going to build it. They just had to get out of the way, and they would not do that.

I was really interested in hearing a plan on what the government was going to do to get people back to work and I heard nothing. In the minute he has after this, the member is probably going to talk about Mr. Harper again.

The Deputy Prime Minister quoted an article from *The Globe and Mail* today when I asked a question, so I will mention an article from Lorne Gunter. In it he said that since 2015, we have lost \$200 billion in investments in our energy sector because of the government's policies.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, the member was somewhat critical, saying that we bought a pipeline as if it were a bad thing. If I remember, his premier in Alberta bought shares in a pipeline called Keystone. I wonder if he would apply that very same principle to—

**An hon. member:** On a point of order—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** There are no points of order during the late show.

The hon. parliamentary secretary may proceed.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, our government has taken diligent action to complete things such as trade deals like CETA, securing and expanding market access for Canadian resource products, including steel and aluminum. In fact, in first 12 months that CETA was in force, aluminum exports to the Europe Union increased exponentially, up to 250%. These are significant things. To try to give a false impression that the Government of Canada is not being proactive to support the energy industry is just not true.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):**  
Just a reminder that the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan is from Saskatchewan, not Alberta.

The motion to adjourn the House 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 6:38 p.m.)

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Mr. Green .....	4570
Mr. Simard .....	4570
Mr. Gerretsen .....	4571
Mr. Waugh .....	4571
Ms. Collins .....	4572
Ms. Larouche .....	4572
Ms. Normandin .....	4572
Mr. Gerretsen .....	4572
Ms. Normandin .....	4573
Mr. Shields .....	4574
Ms. Collins .....	4574
Mr. Sorbara .....	4574
Ms. Larouche .....	4576
Mr. Kurek .....	4576
Mr. Masse .....	4576
Mr. Desilets .....	4576
Division on motion deferred .....	4577

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

<b>Environmental Restoration Incentive Act</b>	
Bill C-221. Second reading .....	4577

Mr. Lamoureux .....	4577
Ms. Pausé .....	4578
Mr. Kmiec .....	4580
Ms. Michaud .....	4581
Mrs. Stubbs .....	4583

**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

**Women and Gender Equality**

Mrs. Atwin .....	4585
Ms. Hutchings .....	4585

**Ethics**

Mr. Barrett .....	4587
Mr. Lamoureux .....	4587

**International Trade**

Mr. Steinley .....	4588
Mr. Lamoureux .....	4589



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