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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Honourable members, I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 15th meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic. This will be a hybrid meeting. Members will be participating via video conference or in person.

[*English*]

I will remind you that in order to avoid issues with sound, members participating in person should not also be connecting by video conference. In order to ensure that those joining the meeting via video conference can be seen and heard by those in the chamber, two screens have been set up here on either side of the Speaker's chair, and members in the chamber can listen to the floor audio or to interpretation using the earpieces on their desks.

[*Translation*]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name and please direct your remarks through the chair.

[*English*]

For those joining by video conference, I'd like to remind you to leave your microphones on mute when you are not speaking.

Also, please note that if you want to speak in English, you need to be on the English channel for interpretation, and if you want to speak French, you should do so on the French channel. Should you wish to alternate between the two languages, please change to the channel for the language that you happen to be using at the time.

[*Translation*]

Should members participating by video conference need to request the floor outside their designated speaking times, they should activate their mic and state that they have a point of order. Those in the Chamber can rise in the usual way.

[*English*]

Please note that today's proceedings will be televised in the same way as a typical sitting of the House.

[*Translation*]

We will now proceed to ministerial announcements.

I invite the Right Hon. Prime Minister to take the floor.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I rise today to address what so many people of colour live with every day.

Over the past few days, we've seen horrific reports of police violence against black men and women south of the border, but these are not isolated incidents or "elsewhere" problems. Prejudice, discrimination and violence are a lived reality for far too many people. They are a result of systems that far too often condone, normalize, perpetrate and perpetuate inequality and injustice against people of colour.

As a country, we are not concerned bystanders simply watching what is happening next door. We are part of it. The calls for justice, for equality and for peace are found echoed in our communities, because anti-black racism is happening here, everywhere in Canada, every single day.

This is something that our own staff, cabinet ministers and colleagues face even in these halls. Over the past few days, I've heard many of these personal stories directly from them. I'm not just talking about acts of violence. I'm also talking about microaggressions, which many of us may not even see. That is the daily reality of far too many racialized Canadians, and it needs to stop.

When it comes to being an ally, I have made serious mistakes in the past, mistakes that I deeply regret and continue to learn from. I want to thank my colleagues, community leaders and fellow Canadians for opening my eyes to what is really going on in our communities and for helping me better understand both privilege and power. I'm not perfect, but not being perfect is not a free pass to not do the right thing. It's not an excuse to not step up, stand up for each other, be an ally.

I know that for so many people listening right now, the last thing you want to hear is another speech on racism from a white politician. I'm not here today to describe a reality I do not know or to speak to a pain I have not felt. I'm here because I want you to know that our government is listening. We hear your calls for justice, equality and accountability. We acknowledge your frustration, your anger, your heartbreak. We see you.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Since coming to office, our government has taken many concrete steps to fight anti-black racism, systemic discrimination and injustice across the country.

We are working directly with the communities and their leaders to close the gaps that persist in Canada. For example, we have provided \$9 million to support programs for black Canadian youth. We have made significant investments to enable the Public Health Agency of Canada to provide more mental health services to people who have experienced racism or intergenerational trauma. We are helping community organizations to obtain funding to purchase equipment or lease space. We have also created the anti-racism secretariat, which has an envelope of \$4.6 million, to address systemic barriers, such as employment, justice and social participation, that perpetuate injustice.

We have made progress, but we know the work is far from being done.

[*English*]

Over the past five years, our government has worked with communities to recognize and address injustices. We've taken action to support community organizations, invest in better data and fight racism. While we've made some progress, there is still so much more to do, because here are the facts in Canada: Anti-black racism is real. Unconscious bias is real. Systemic discrimination is real. For millions of Canadians, it is their daily, lived reality. The pain and damage it causes are real too.

Mr. Chair, every Canadian who has felt the weight of oppression, every student who has the courage to demand a better future, every person who marches and posts and reads and fights, from Vancouver to Montreal to Halifax, expects more than the status quo. They expect more and deserve better.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada has a lot of work to do, but we're ready. We're ready to work with our opposition colleagues, community leaders and Canadians to make our country a more just and fair place. Racism never has a place in this country, and we will do everything we can to eradicate it from coast to coast to coast.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1210)

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Over the past week, we have all been affected by the heartbreaking killing of George Floyd in the United States. The video is painful to watch. No one should ever have to plead for help while a crime is being committed, ignored by other members of law enforcement.

[*Translation*]

The tragedy triggered marches, occupations, protests and, unfortunately, riots. However, I hope it has mostly sparked conversations. Racism is real, painful and unacceptable.

[*English*]

No one should ever feel unsafe because of the colour of their skin, especially around police officers who have a duty and a responsibility to uphold the law for all.

Here in Canada, we are fortunate to live in a country that is welcoming, tolerant and inclusive. Canada was a beacon of freedom to so many escaping slavery during the U.S. Civil War. Our nation has benefited immensely from great Canadians who overcame prejudices and discrimination to serve their communities and make Canada a better country: Lincoln Alexander, elected as a Conservative in 1968, was the first black member of Parliament and went on to become the first black cabinet minister; John Ware was born into slavery in South Carolina but, following the American Civil War, was a leading figure in bringing the first cattle to Alberta and spearheading the ranching industry that would become the backbone of the province; Josiah Henson escaped slavery to become a thriving businessman in Ontario; and of course, Viola Desmond challenged segregation in Nova Scotia.

Black Canadians throughout history have not just built this nation with their contributions; they have also represented Canada with excellence and pride on the world stage, like Harry Jerome, who represented Canada in three Olympic Games and won a bronze medal in 1964. He would go on to become a teacher in British Columbia, once again serving with excellence to try to make a better world for the next generation. Throughout our history, black Canadians have put their lives on the line for their fellow Canadians, bravely serving around the world in our armed forces.

While there are many things we can point to in our history with pride, that is not to say that we have a perfect record, nor that we are immune to the threat of racism or that anti-black racism is just an American problem. Canada has had its own dark episodes of racism that cannot be ignored—sadly, not just in our past. Every day, there are people who experience discrimination or racism in some form.

Throughout this pandemic, we have seen a troubling spike in anti-Asian racism. No one should be attacked in their community or targeted on the bus because of the colour of their skin. Nor should places of worship be broken into and desecrated, like the synagogue in Montreal.

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives condemn all acts of anti-semitism, racism and discrimination. In a peaceful and free country like Canada, there is absolutely no room for intolerance, racism or extremism of any kind.

[English]

But the violence and destruction we have seen in response are not the answer. Millions of people are protesting peacefully across the United States and in Canada, and we must always protect the rights of people who are protesting peacefully and within the law for a just cause and separate them from those who exploit tragedies to commit acts of violence.

Mr. Floyd's brother, Terrence, said that violence will not bring his brother back. Instead, he has called for peace and justice and urged the crowds to educate themselves and to vote. Out of such tragedy, Mr. Chair, that is a powerful message about how each one of us can use our democratic rights to effect change.

In a peaceful and free country like Canada, there is absolutely no room for intolerance, racism and extremism of any kind. We are not born believing we are better than one another. We are all created in the image and likeness of God, and because of that, we are all equal. An infinite value exists in each one of us.

• (1215)

Canada is an incredibly diverse country. Canada is a nation of immigrants that stands on the traditional territories of first nations, Inuit and Métis people. Waves of newcomers have come to Canada for a better life because our country is built on a rock-solid foundation of enduring values, democratic institutions, the rule of law and fundamental and universal human rights.

[Translation]

Everyone comes here because Canada is built on solid values, democratic institutions, and respect for the rule of law, as well as for fundamental, universal human rights.

[English]

We must absolutely protect these values, because they are what sets us apart. They allow Canada to offer what so many other countries simply cannot.

There are those who say that diversity is our strength, and that is true, but it doesn't quite capture the full picture. Diversity is the result of our strength, and our strength is and always has been our freedom.

It is the freedom for people to preserve and pass on their cultural traditions and the opportunity to live in peace with those around them; the freedom to live your life with equality under the law, regardless of your race or ethnic background; and the economic freedom that so many governments around the world deny their people.

It is that economic freedom that ensures that hard work pays off. It gives people the ability to work towards their dreams and choose their own path in life. Together, generations of Canadians who trace their roots back to countries around the world have built Canada to truly the greatest country on earth, the true north strong and free.

[Translation]

To ensure that our people remain free, we must continue to fight attacks on our freedoms, including racism and all forms of brutality and injustice in Canada and around the world. Minority rights must

be protected. Freedom of religion must be protected. Freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest must be protected.

[English]

As John Diefenbaker said, "I am a Canadian...free to speak without fear, free to worship...in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind."

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

George Floyd is not a victim of racism; he is another victim of racism. At a time of crisis when outrage is overwhelming the caution and fear of disease among thousands of people who, despite everything, take to the streets to express that outrage, we here in politics will have to be careful, once again, about the words we use. Indeed we are particularly inclined to give other people's words a meaning other than the one they would have liked to give them.

Today, our duty—and I would say almost our only duty—is to express our solidarity, our sadness, our indignation and our anger, but above all—and in saying this, I'm thinking of all my friends and acquaintances in the wonderful black community in Quebec and the United States—our friendship. We must try to be heard by all humans. Every time we talk about this, a small part of me surfaces, that of the non-practising but unrepentant anthropologist who wants to remind us that races do not exist. It is the frequency of manifestations of certain genetic traits favoured by geography and history, which in turn shape cultures.

Racism expresses itself first and foremost through aggression against what is presumed to be the culture of others, difference. Each time difference instills fear, it is, of course, one time too many. We must learn to live equality in diversity, in itself an extraordinary thing. Governments in the U.S. have all been racist. Their racism has necessarily been expressed, at some point in their history, in their institutions. It has left its mark. It is the only thing that we have the right to call "systemic racism" or "systemic discrimination".

I am concerned when anyone suggests that we are all and collectively inclined to engage in systemic discrimination or when anyone claims to be a bulwark of virtue between us and the victims. I believe that the Canadian government is not racist, that the Quebec government is not racist, and that the governments of our municipalities are not racist either.

I believe, however, that there may be traces of horrible things left in our institutions that colour our relationships with people of different origins or with people who were here long before us. So systemic racism probably exists. It should not denounce individuals, but it should encourage us to reread our rules to get rid of what might still be discriminatory in them. This day belongs to George Floyd. This day belongs to the black people of the United States. This day belongs to the black people of Quebec and Canada.

We don't play politics at the funeral doors: we gather our thoughts, and let indignation and sadness be expressed. We leave the streets to those who need to speak with one voice, in peace. All that is peaceful is legitimate. Nothing that is violent is legitimate.

The Prime Minister expressed the desire to implement concrete measures to fight racism. The first must be to show our solidarity and friendship. I'm proposing a very concrete measure, which is to give priority and expedited processing to the files of refugee claimants—especially Haitian, especially black, but also of other origins—who have expressed their desire to be part of the Quebec nation by putting themselves on the front line.

• (1220)

He has the power and the duty to do so, and if he needs Parliament, let's do it tomorrow or right now. That way, words will become actions, and the next step will be all the more credible. In the meantime, our duty is to stand up for those who are afraid and against those who frighten them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable member for Burnaby South.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many, many Canadians were shocked to see the violence surrounding the murder of George Floyd. George Floyd's murder is a grim reminder that anti-black racism still exists and that it hits hard.

Anti-black racism isn't only in the United States; it's here in Canada, too. Systemic racism against blacks, indigenous people and many other visible minorities is alive and well: racial profiling, economic inequality, social inequality, discriminatory hiring, trivialization of violence, excess incarceration, and so on. Things aren't moving forward because one government after another prefers pretty words to concrete action. When the time comes to act, they don't have the courage, they don't have the will to act.

People are feeling a lot of grief and frustration, but we can turn that into action and justice. We must not just call for peace. I believe that we have to call for justice. Justice is the only way to create a better world.

• (1225)

[*English*]

When people around the world saw the killing of George Floyd, it left all of us shaken to our core. It was chilling, the casual vio-

lence of anti-black racism, the callous taking of another human being's life. It hurt to the core. There was pain. There was sadness. There is anger, and rightly so. There is frustration.

This isn't just an American problem. This is just as much a Canadian problem as well, and something that continues to exist across our country. Anti-black racism and anti-indigenous racism are real. People have suffered violence. Indigenous people and black people have suffered violence and have been killed at the hands of police here in Canada. I think about Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Toronto and the calls for justice for Regis. A black trans woman was killed in suspicious circumstances in an interaction with the police. I think about Stewart Kevin Andrews, a young indigenous man killed in an interaction with the police in Winnipeg.

The anger and frustration are about this: How many more people need to die before there's action? How many more speeches will be made? How many more protests need to happen before something is done? How many more times will people plead to breathe? How many more times will they plead to live?

What we're talking about is basic human dignity. How many more voices have to ask, demand, plead, beg for basic human dignity? People are angry. They're feeling like enough is enough. Why do they need to keep on asking? Why do black people, why do indigenous people need to keep on asking to be treated like humans? Why?

You know, people are done with pretty speeches, particularly pretty speeches from people in power who could do something about it right now if they wanted to.

I'm standing in a hall of power, the chamber of the Commons, with a Prime Minister who has the power not just to say pretty words but to actually do something about this. The Prime Minister of this country has the power to go beyond pretty words and pretty speeches and do something.

I don't have all the answers. I don't think any one person does. We're going to have to come up with those solutions together, but there are certainly some things we do know.

Martin Luther King said, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." That's what we need. We need justice.

Killer Mike extolled that people should plan, plot, strategize, organize and then mobilize. Cardi B put it this way: "Another way for the people to take power—I don't want to make everything political but it is what it is—is by voting."

So what do we vote for? We vote for a government to take action.

I call on the Prime Minister, in this hall of power: If the Prime Minister believes that black lives matter, will the Prime Minister commit to ending racial profiling in our country? If the Prime Minister believes that black lives matter, will the Prime Minister commit to ending the over-policing of black bodies? If the Prime Minister believes, truly believes, that black lives matter, will the Prime Minister commit to ending the over-incarceration of black people in this country? If the Prime Minister truly believes that black lives matter, will he commit to ensuring that there are race-based data to make better decisions? Will he commit to ensuring that there's access to education and to health resources?

The Prime Minister has the power to do all these things right now. The Prime Minister simply needs to get it done.

If the Prime Minister truly believes that indigenous lives matter, then similarly the Prime Minister must commit today to ending the racial profiling of indigenous people, the over-policing of indigenous people and the over-incarceration of indigenous people. If the Prime Minister truly believes that indigenous lives matter, the Prime Minister could stop taking indigenous kids to court; the Prime Minister could stop delaying the action on the calls for justice for the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. If the Prime Minister believes that indigenous lives matter, he could ensure that there's clean drinking water and access to justice and to education and housing right now.

People are angry because they are frustrated and done with pretty words. People are angry because they're done with pretty speeches from people in power who could do something about it right now. People don't want peace. They don't want an absence of tension. People want the presence of justice. People want justice. People deserve justice. People need justice, and justice is what people will get. Nothing less will do.

Thank you.

• (1230)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable member for Saanich—Gulf Islands

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is indeed a difficult day. It's a difficult week. These have been difficult weeks.

I stand here and want to begin by acknowledging that we are all on the traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples, and again to say *meegwetch*, on a day like this when we're focusing on something so painful that really is beyond partisanship and that should bind us together as people who say we cannot tolerate racism, not in this country. But we know it's here.

As the Prime Minister just said,

[*Translation*]

“Racism never has a place in this country”.

[*English*]

But we know it's here and we know it's living with us.

We are facing, in this pandemic, two dangerous, invisible viruses. One is COVID-19 and the other one we've tolerated far too long, which is race-based hatred, hate speech and anti-black racism. Yes, black lives matter. I want to do nothing but just chant it in this place until we all stand together and say, “Black lives matter.”

What we are seeing in the murder of George Floyd is exactly as my colleague from the Bloc Québécois said:

[*Translation*]

“George Floyd is not a victim of racism; he is another victim of racism”.

There is victim upon victim upon victim.

These victims have names. We must not forget their names.

[*English*]

The first time a black man was killed when his last words were “I can't breathe” was in 2014, with Eric Garner. His mother did interviews this week. Imagine what she's going through, because George Floyd died on video also saying, “I can't breathe”, and the people who were stopping him from breathing, his killers, are the police. In the case of Eric Garner, the policemen were fired but never charged. In George Floyd's murder, at least one killer has been charged, but it doesn't do anything to ease the pain, nor, as my friend from the NDP said, does it quench the thirst for justice, because that's what people are crying out for. They're crying out for justice.

The names just keep cascading. I had to look it up because I thought, when was it that the poor young man who was jogging was murdered by the father and son in the pickup truck? He was murdered by a retired policeman and his son in their pickup truck, in February. Breonna Taylor of Louisville was murdered in her own home by cops who thought she might have drugs there. They searched, and she didn't.

What on earth allows this to keep happening over and over again?

I looked at a site called “Just Security” and I thought these words from reporter Mia Bloom, who happens to be Canadian, were pretty clear on what puts you at risk of death in the United States of America, but also in Canada: “driving while black, jogging while black, reporting while black, bird watching while black, selling lemonade while black” can get you killed.

The killers far too often are wearing a uniform. I want to go back to the words “reporting while black”, because this is something else we’ve seen in the last four days that we’ve never seen before, which is the deliberate targeting of reporters by police. Over 100 reporters have been injured in the United States in the last four days. One woman lost her eye. These are serious injuries. Sometimes reporters get in the way of riots and whatnot, but this is different. This is another element altogether.

It seems that, in this place, when we have speeches and pretty words to denounce racism, we do it in a kind of cycle. After Colten Boushie’s murder, we talked about anti-indigenous racism. We talked about the threat to our indigenous brothers and sisters across this country who also face racism on a daily basis. We talked about the fact that they are disproportionately in our prisons.

Just within the last day, the report came down on the killing of Dale Culver in Prince George at the hands of the Prince George RCMP. This indigenous young man was 35 years old, and he was pepper-sprayed until he couldn’t breathe. There will be charges in this case. That’s the recommendation that just came down.

We go through sequential moments where we can say Islamophobia is not okay. Six Muslims at prayer in Quebec City were murdered. We can all stand up and say we denounce Islamophobia. Or we can denounce anti-trans violence against individual trans people who are murdered.

• (1235)

We denounce anti-Semitism when we see anti-Semitic graffiti scrawled on the door of an Ottawa rabbi’s home. We denounce it, but can we get to the root of it?

As the honourable leader of the Conservative Party mentioned, in recent days we’re seeing anti-Asian racism on the increase.

We’re seeing all this happen and we want to be good allies. We want to be a good ally to the family of Regis Korchinski-Paquet. We want to be a good ally.

I am a woman of privilege. I got it by mere random accident of birth. I was born to white parents. Privilege is being white.

We have to study our privilege. We have to acknowledge our privilege and we have to know, as the Prime Minister said, we’re not perfect, but it doesn’t give us a free pass to ignore that we have to stand up and we have to speak out.

I am sitting so close to my friend here, our minister, Ahmed Hussen—I say your name out loud, but your tweets brought me to tears—that this fine man faces racism in his own riding, that his three beautiful black boys have people turn away or clutch their purse or they’re a little worried when the kids are around. It sounds exactly like what the Prime Minister just called the “microaggressions” that many of us might not even see.

We can look at our own conduct and our own behaviour. In looking at these things, there is something I want to say, when we look at all these things that are happening and we wonder, what we can do about it. When we see a bully, when we hear hate speech, we have to speak up. We have to speak out and we have to say that the President of the United States is fomenting hatred and violence and

it’s shameful and shocking that he would grab a Bible, then use tear gas to clear peaceful protestors on a Washington street so that Donald Trump could pose with a Bible in front of an Episcopal church.

The Episcopal Bishop of Washington had this to say, because she is a good ally:

In no way do we support the President’s incendiary response to a wounded, grieving nation. In faithfulness to our Saviour who lived a life of non-violence and sacrificial love, we align ourselves with those seeking justice for the death of George Floyd.

That’s what we must do in this place. We must acknowledge and speak up for justice for the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, the report on which languishes a year later.

We must stand up for justice and we must examine something very worrying. In 2006, the U.S. FBI warned that white supremacist groups were targeting police forces and joining them. If we’re looking for real action, things we can do in this place, I call on us to have an inquiry and an examination to root out white supremacist groups in Canada and identify them for what they are, a terrorist threat in our midst. We must make sure they’re not in our police forces, because if there is one thing scarier than a white supremacist with a gun, it’s a white supremacist with a gun in uniform.

Please, God, there are things we can do. Please, God, we love each other, take care of each other regardless of the colour of our skin, and pray for the United States of America. It’s a country being ripped apart, and the ripping and the tearing is being done by people who should at this very time be consoling and leading and inspiring.

Pray. Pray for Canada. Pray for each and every one of our beautiful black baby girls and boys, the indigenous baby girls and boys, the Asian kids. Wherever you look, reach out and be a good ally. Stand up and say, “With my body I get between you and the cops.” We have to be good allies. Right now, they’re just pretty words.

Thank you for listening.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now proceed to presenting petitions for a period not exceeding 15 minutes.

[*English*]

I'd like to remind honourable members that any petition presented during the meeting of this special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions.

[*Translation*]

For members participating in person, we ask that they please come and drop the signed certificate off at the table once the petition is presented.

[*English*]

The honourable member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Mr. Manly.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Chair, it's difficult to follow that set of speeches.

I have a petition on a serious issue dealing with plastic pollution. It creates a major impact on aquatic life but also on human health. It's estimated that 74,000 to 121,000 microplastic particles are ingested per person every year.

A recent study shows that each washing cycle 120,000 to 730,000 microfibrils are shed from clothes and go directly into waste water. Many of these microfibrils are synthetic and therefore are microplastics. Washing machine discharge filters are currently available on the market and greatly reduce the amount of microfibrils being released into waste water and thus the environment. This petition is calling on the government to legislate the requirement for all new washing machines to have discharge filters as of 2021 and to provide incentives to all residents of Canada to install discharge filters on current washing machines.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Presenting petitions, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Chair, I rise to table a petition signed by Canadians who are concerned about Bill C-7. Given what we've seen in assisted living homes in this country and the devastation particularly in Ontario and Quebec, the petitioners are asking for the government to look into assisted living, not assisted dying.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Presenting petitions, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Chair, it's an honour to rise to present a petition today from a number of constituents calling for the government to act to uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. There is a call to respect the Wet'suwet'en territory and to dismantle RCMP exclusion zones.

This petition came some time ago. Some of these issues have been dealt with. I am particularly pleased to note that the nation-to-nation talks called for by petitioners between the Wet'suwet'en and the federal and provincial governments have taken place. I will take this moment if I may to thank the honourable ministers involved in that effort.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That will conclude the presenting of petitions. I would ask members who have presented petitions here in person in the House if they would be so kind as to bring their petitions to the table. That would be most appreciated.

We'll now go to statements by members for a period not exceeding 15 minutes. I would remind members to do their best to keep their member statement to a maximum of one minute.

We'll start statements by members with Mr. Weiler, the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I continue to be amazed by how the communities throughout my riding have stepped up to support our most vulnerable at our time of crisis. In many ways it has brought our communities closer together even while we stay physically distant. Nowhere is this more true than on the Sunshine Coast.

Dedicated individuals immediately and organically mobilized the Sunshine Coast community task force to coordinate local government, non-profit and business efforts to provide critical services to the community. Social enterprises banded together to form the Sunshine Coast food service response, which provides ready-made meals and donates to food banks. Persephone Brewing and others deliver groceries to at-risk customers both on the coast and on isolated islands. The 101 Brewhouse + Distillery and Bruinwood Distillery quickly retooled their business to supply much-needed hand sanitizer to local hospitals and other front-line workers.

COVID-19, like all crises, has highlighted true leadership in our society, and I am grateful for what they and all of our health care workers do every day to get us through this.

• (1245)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister and his cabinet have shown they're unwilling to put the protection and safety of Canadians ahead of political interests. They themselves are the greatest source of disinformation in this country.

The Prime Minister told Canadians that they can buy a gun without a licence. Either purposely or because of ignorance, he left out the fact that doing so is a criminal offence with a five-year prison sentence. The Minister of Public Safety said he wouldn't target hunters, but then he went ahead and banned numerous bolt-action hunting rifles and made owning a shotgun a criminal offence. They have weakened the ability to protect our borders. They have ignored our rampant drug crisis, and they have weakened sentences for serious crimes, all while saying they take these issues very seriously. Today they tell us they are banning a new Liberal-invented type of firearm, a military-style assault rifle.

It's time to be honest with Canadians. The Liberals would rather make people afraid of hunters, farmers and sport shooters than deal with the real issues like drugs, gangs, illegal smuggling and crime.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Ms. Sgro, the hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is in our most difficult moments when we truly see stunning displays of human spirit and generosity. On that note, today I wish to recognize the work of the Humber River Hospital in my riding of Humber River—Black Creek and to congratulate them on the success of their Humber front-line support fund and PPE drive. Not only have they been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic keeping our residents safe and healthy, but thanks to the generosity of those both in my riding and beyond, the Humber River Hospital has raised over \$1 million and received over 400,000 pieces of personal protective equipment. This will be invaluable to the hospital as they continue to work with us and fight the good fight to keep us all healthy.

I thank all those brave workers at the hospital, and I thank those generous individuals who have donated to this important cause.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I now invite the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, Mr. Lemire, to take the floor.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am honoured to speak to you about a proud warrior.

Stephan Lavoie had made the choice to say thank you to life. For several years, he had been using his fight against cancer, which he led with the help of natural products only, to ensure cancer services and care were improved, particularly in regions far from major centres.

Mayor of Preissac, in the RCM of Abitibi, Stephan Lavoie passed away yesterday. I would like to extend my condolences to his wife, Anabelle, to his entire family and especially to his daughter, Astrid, who is only 20 months old.

Through his humanism, Stephan Lavoie was a warrior, a visionary and a great source of inspiration for all of us. To me, he was above all the perfect model of a committed and loving father.

My thoughts also go out to the citizens of Preissac, to whom he leaves a dynamic legacy, and to the leaders of the Abitibi community.

In our first conversation, he said to me, and I hope the House will echo it forever, that all of our decisions must be made with our children in mind.

Stephan, rest in peace, dear friend.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Mont Royal, Mr. Housefather, has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): It is with great sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to Tristan Roy, after his tragic passing exactly two weeks ago.

[*Translation*]

Born in Saint-Fabien-sur-Mer, Tristan became a pillar of the Mont Royal community in 1997 when he bought the old Mont Royal newspaper. When the city's oldest newspaper, the *TMR Weekly Post* ceased operations, Tristan registered the name and renamed his newspaper the *TMR Poste de Mont-Royal*.

[*English*]

He created a truly bilingual newspaper, ensuring that TMR residents could receive their news in both French and English. His editorials and views on local issues carried enormous weight. I join Mayor Philippe Roy and the members of the town council in offering our sincere condolences to Tristan's wife, Anne-Marie, his daughter, Ariël, and his son, Lancelot.

We all considered Tristan to be a friend, an example of what a good journalist and editor should be and could be. He will be sorely missed.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Beauce, Mr. Lehoux, has the floor.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Chair, if you didn't already know, people from Beauce are proud. There is Marie-Philip Poulin of Beauceville, who was named the best female hockey player in the world earlier this year, or Antony Auclair of Notre-Dame-des-Pins. Antony Auclair said, in a CBC article, that Beauce had prepared him for his arrival in the NFL. There is also Guillaume Couture, from Sainte-Marie, who made his mother very proud, and everyone from Beauce indirectly, on the program *Les Chefs* again last night.

It is this same pride that I see throughout the region, with companies like Revtech Systèmes, in Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, or Puri-Haze, in Sainte-Marie, which have invented robots to decontaminate spaces. There are also local purchasing initiatives such as the #onlaici campaign by the Nouvelle-Beauce chamber of commerce and industry or Achetons beauceron, by the Saint-Georges chamber of commerce.

Today I have but two words for my constituents: thank you. I thank them for continuing to encourage local businesses that greatly need it. I thank them for being loyal to their habits and to rolling up their sleeves to help their neighbours. I thank them for being proud and being residents of Beauce.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll go now to the member for Don Valley East, Ms. Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, our government has shown leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that Canadians remain safe and get the financial assistance they need.

Eight million Canadians are receiving the Canada emergency response benefit. The Canada emergency business account and the Canada emergency wage subsidy ensure that the economy is ready to start up post-pandemic. Seniors received top-ups to the OAS and GIS, and families, the child care benefit. All of these measures are helping thousands of seniors and low-income families in my riding of Don Valley East. The feedback from my regular virtual town halls has also helped to fine-tune many of the programs.

Many Canadians have shown generosity during this crisis. I want to particularly thank Saravanaa Bhavan and Happy Pops for donating food and frozen treats to our superhero front-line workers at local hospitals.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to the honourable member for Vaughan—Woodbridge, Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Chair, even though this year's festivities for Italian Heritage Month will be done differently, the same spirit and vitality exists throughout virtual events happening across the country. Virtual events have seen Italian Canadians, through their generosity, raise over \$1 million to help Italy during COVID-19.

Today, June 2, Italian citizens celebrate the founding of the modern day Italian Republic.

[*Member spoke in Italian*]

The Italian Canadian story remains one of passion, an adopted homeland filled with hard work, sacrifice and optimism.

Generations of Italian Canadians have contributed much to shaping the inclusive and generous Canada that we know today.

[*Translation*]

Our diversity is our strength, and I'm proud to be Italian Canadian.

[*English*]

Let's all join together in proudly celebrating Italian Heritage Month.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to the honourable member for Calgary Skyview, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Chair, as communities begin to ease restrictions, I remain mystified that, accord-

ing to this government, Parliament is not an essential service. If it were up to the Prime Minister, he would not have to answer to anyone. That is not how democracy works.

We in the opposition have been long calling for the return of Parliament, which would be possible while still maintaining public health guidelines. Canadians deserve to be represented in the House of Commons by the elected member of Parliament. While the work we do in our constituencies is incredibly important, it is equally important to bring those voices back to Ottawa to debate, to question and to hold the government to account. This is fundamental to the role of an elected representative.

The role of the opposition is crucial now more than ever when billions of dollars are being spent with little oversight. Our role as members of Parliament is to uphold our democracy and to be present. This is the greatest pandemic in our lifetime. Now is not the time to hide behind a podium. If this government were doing the best job for Canadians, they would not need to hide.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to the honourable member for Brampton East, Mr. Sidhu.

• (1255)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to take a moment to highlight displays of generosity in my riding of Brampton East. This is just a small sample of the many individuals and organizations that have stepped up across Canada.

Khalsa Aid has been providing food supplies with the help of Sperenza Banquet Hall, which has graciously provided the space to run a province-wide campaign out of Brampton East. Care4Cause has sent hundreds of prepared meals on a weekly basis to Good Shepherd Ministries to lessen their load. Navraj Brar at Pharmasave has offered free care packages to health care workers and hand sanitizer to the Peel Regional Police. Aujla Salon and Spa has partnered with GlobalMedic to help deliver over 10,000 pounds of food to local food banks.

I would also like to point out the heroic efforts of our truck drivers, taxi drivers, grocery store clerks, nurses, doctors, paramedics and countless other front-line heroes. We see you and we are immensely grateful for the bravery you display each and every day.

Thank you to everyone in Brampton East who has stepped up for their neighbour in their time of need. You are setting a great example of the kind of progress we can make as Canadians when we come together and support each other. I am truly honoured to represent you in Ottawa.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to the honourable member for Wellington—Halton Hills, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, the House of Commons is shut down.

Let's be clear. This is not the House of Commons. It's a committee where only statements, petitions and questions are allowed. There is no power to introduce motions, to test confidence or to vote.

The government came to office promising greater democracy but they broke their promise on electoral reform. They tried to give the PMO the control over this House in motion 6, and yesterday's report confirms that they rigged the leaders debate in their favour in the last election. Now they've shuttered Parliament.

Parliament sat through two world wars, the October crisis and previous pandemics and it survived the test, but not now. The people's representatives need to sit. People need their representation. Parliament and this House of Commons with its full powers needs to reopen and it needs to reopen now.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, these past few months have been tremendously difficult for so many Canadians: sickness, losing loved ones, job losses, economic hardships, loneliness and isolation. The pandemic has taken its toll on so many.

It is in these times of suffering and adversity that we have seen Canadians coming together to support each other and that brings us hope. Mosques, churches, synagogues and gurdwaras have all answered the call to help their communities. Whether it's providing meals to the hungry, clothing for the cold, or technology for those who need it most, these actions are true reflections of the kindness and generosity that Canadians are known for.

While there are too many groups to mention them all, I want to thank Vikas Sharma and Care4Cause out of Brampton for the meals that they have been providing their community in that area and across the GTA. This group and thousands of others like it across the country are working tirelessly to ease the suffering of others and help those in need.

Thank you, and God bless all the volunteers.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Now we will go to the honourable member for Winnipeg Centre.

Ms. Gazan, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I rise today in honour of National Indigenous History Month to speak truth about a history of racism in Canada that was built on the wrongful dispossession of lands from indigenous people and controlled through the use of police-state violence that has resulted in a loss of life, freedom, respect and dignity. Even today we continue to observe this reality in my very own city where we witnessed the killing of three indigenous youth by police in a span of 10 days this past April.

This is not a coincidence. We have statistics. We have research, and we have stories of loved ones lost. We know it, and we see it in our lives every day.

We need to address police violence throughout this country. Canadians are rising from coast to coast demanding this of all of us and sending a clear message that we must address systemic racism in all of its forms to ensure justice for all. There will never be reconciliation in the absence of justice.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, Mrs. Vignola, has the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Chair, Canada Post is literally not delivering the goods. But the postal service is an essential service, and even more so today because everything is done online, even local shopping. The current crisis partly explains the congestion, but it is mainly due to the fact that Canada Post forgot to join the 21st century. It has been left behind where others have made millions of dollars. Its platform isn't effective. It's now delivering more parcels, but it's losing money.

There's a statement to make here, right now. In the immediate term, Canada Post must deal with the delays, and to do so, it needs the help of the Government of Canada. Canada Post needs to hire staff. If a collective agreement had finally been signed, it would make it easier to hire staff. We have been waiting for two and a half years.

A premium for essential workers might also be appropriate. As I said, the postal service is an essential service, and it's time to give it the importance this status imposes.

• (1300)

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now go to the honourable member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. McLean, go ahead.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, the prospects in Canada's oil fields are bleak in the near term. Capital spending forecasts and drilling activities sank to a 49-year low. This is a result of the temporary collapse in demand for our most valuable commodity and the one that contributes the most to our GDP, our balance of trade, and whose taxes support the social programs Canadians enjoy, \$108 billion in GDP, \$8 billion per year in government revenues, \$77 billion in trade surplus. It is a rude blow to hard-working professionals who soldier past negligent government policies that have left a stain on another generation of western Canadians.

We're talking about an industry here that directly employs over 200,000, including 11,000 indigenous Canadians. We're talking about an industry that contributes 75% of Canada's investment in clean technology. However, Canada's resource industry will still be resilient. Bad policy cannot permanently erase the work, the hope and the pride of forward thinkers and doers, and their efforts to continue building a great country.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now go to the honourable member for Winnipeg South.

Mr. Duguid, go ahead.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Chair, today I want to give a special thank you to the health care workers at Victoria General Hospital, who are serving patients in our community here in Winnipeg South. Every day, doctors, nurses and staff work selflessly to take care of those in our community who need it most. Whether it's by keeping seniors connected with their families by using iPads or making sure that patients go home with a special care package, staff at the Vic are doing extraordinary work to make this difficult time just a little bit easier.

I would also like to give a big shout-out to our wonderful small businesses in Winnipeg South that continue to show their appreciation by preparing meals for the hard-working staff at the Vic.

Folks in our community continue to show what it means to be exemplary Canadians, and it is a great honour to represent them.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): This concludes the period for statements by members. We will now proceed to the questioning of ministers.

[English]

The honourable Leader of the Opposition.

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the staff of long-term care facilities for seniors are showing exceptional courage and dedication. François Legault asked that the military personnel currently helping in facilities in Quebec stay until the fall. The Prime Minister said no.

I'd like to hear the Prime Minister tell us why they can't stay.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, like all Canadians, I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary work that the Canadian Armed Forces are doing in long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario. Thanks to their reports, we've seen that the situation was even worse than we feared. The work our military is doing is extraordinary.

We will continue to support them, but we know that having military personnel in our long-term care facilities isn't a long-term solution. Therefore, we are going to work with Quebec to find better long-term solutions.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, now that Bell Canada has decided to partner with Ericsson to deliver its 5G network, the Liberals will undoubtedly ban Huawei, but the Liberal inaction on Huawei is just another example of this government's weak leadership. Instead of deciding for himself a year ago, the Prime Minister is forcing the business community to make the decision for him.

Why couldn't the Prime Minister have shown some backbone and banned Huawei a year ago?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, our approach every step of the way has been to listen to experts, to work with allies and to listen to the counsel of our security and intelligence community, which has been looking into this issue. We know we need to make sure that Canadian businesses, Canadians and Canadian infrastruc-

ture are protected at the same time as we remain competitive in the world. That has guided our approach on this from the beginning.

• (1305)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: The fact of the matter, Mr Chair, is that it hasn't.

The former public safety minister, Ralph Goodale, promised in this House over a year ago that an answer on Huawei would be coming. Here we are, it's June 2, 2020, and they still haven't made a decision.

On another topic, Mr. Chair, the President of the Treasury Board wrote to cabinet last week and said that transparency is important even in a time of crisis. I guess the Minister of Infrastructure didn't get that letter. She's refusing to tell us how much of a bonus she gave to the departing head of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. At a time when Canadians are struggling, it is disgusting that the Liberals are paying out bonuses to someone who accomplished nothing.

Will the Prime Minister have a little respect for taxpayers and tell us exactly how much of a bonus the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank received?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, the mandate of the Canada Infrastructure Bank is to find innovative ways to finance some of Canada's biggest infrastructure projects by leveraging private capital. The remuneration range of the former CEO has been in the public domain for more than two years. The opposition is looking backward. We're moving forward.

The bank is moving into its next phase of development, now under the leadership of the new board chair, Michael Sabia, and will play an important role in the recovery when the time comes.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, only a Liberal would an innovative approach to building infrastructure mean building absolutely nothing. The CEO of an infrastructure bank who accomplished zero completed infrastructure projects should not be receiving a bonus.

I didn't ask a question about the remuneration. I didn't ask a question about the salary. This individual received a bonus. How much was that bonus?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, as I said, the remuneration range of this former CEO has been in the public domain for more than two years. In regard to further payments, we do not comment on personal HR and financial information of individuals in government.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, again, I did not ask about the remuneration. I asked about the bonus.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank was a Liberal scheme designed to protect the investments of private investors and put all the risk onto taxpayers. Even with that model, do you know how many projects they completed? Zero. Yet, the individual in charge of that received a bonus from the Prime Minister. Apparently, to the Liberals, he was doing a good job.

They might try to claim that it's arm's length and that they can't divulge this information, but we know that Minister Champagne personally intervened in the decision regarding the bonus of the Canada Infrastructure Bank's CEO.

It's a simple question. How much did that individual receive?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, five years ago, when we first got elected, we had to turn around the underinvestment that Stephen Harper's Conservatives had made in infrastructure across the country. Even during the depths of the 2008 recession, the investments they made were for things like doorknobs and signs. They went into debt and didn't have anything to show for it.

We're going to continue to move forward on historic investments in infrastructure to build up this country. We're using innovative means like the infrastructure bank to do that.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable member for Beloeil—Chambly has the floor.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, well before 1867, in what became Quebec, in New Brunswick, in Acadia, in Ontario and in the west, lay the seeds of what later became the provinces of Canada and Quebec. It can therefore be inferred that Canada is a creature of the provinces and that the provinces are not creatures of Canada.

Could the Prime Minister read his answer to this question: who pays for the health transfers to the provinces?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have a country with a number of levels of government working together to serve Canadians. In times of crisis, but also in good times, Canadians expect that their governments will work together to provide the services and the care that they need. That is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Let me remind the Prime Minister that all the provinces and Quebec are asking for increased and recurring health transfers that are unconditional and sustainable.

Who pays for the all-too-meagre benefits made available to the seniors of Quebec and Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have worked with Quebec and the other provinces to make sure that we invest in health transfers. We have made transfers of \$500 million, that's half a billion dollars, because of the recent COVID-19 crisis. We will continue to work with the provinces in the long term. But, for the moment, we are working on the emergency situation in which we find ourselves.

• (1310)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, the Conservatives have backtracked on the wage subsidy, and I congratulate them for that.

Who pays for the part of the wage subsidy program that will be going into the coffers of the Liberal Party of Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, since this crisis began, we have made investments to protect jobs and workers, including accountants, human resources managers and receptionists. We are in the process of ensuring that people with all kinds of jobs in all kinds of organizations will be able to keep those jobs.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, it is comforting to know that they are a little richer now, but some companies are under threat because the Liberal Party is a little richer.

Who is going to pay for the fact that one company has been chosen by a closed call for tender? One company has been awarded a private contract, probably a foreign multinational, probably for 2021, while we are perfectly capable of doing the work in Quebec and in Canada.

Who is going to pay for this gift to a private company that will be doing the Government of Canada's work?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we are in a crisis. We are in the process of helping workers and helping Canadians by means of measures like the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy and with the assistance to companies,

We will continue to do what we must do to help workers all across the country so that we can come out of this crisis together.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Fundamentally, my impression was that, in a crisis, civil society turns to the state to find and implement solutions. I see that, in this case, and in all its operations, the Government of Canada takes money, about 20% of which comes from Quebec, and gives it to a private company, possibly a foreign company, so that it can tell us what will happen, although the first wave will have come and gone for a year already.

Is the Prime Minister telling us that he is incapable of doing his job?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, Canadians expect their government to look after their health and the health of the economy. That is exactly what we are doing. We are here for workers, we are here for families, we are here for our seniors and for our students. We will continue to be here throughout this pandemic and as the economy reopens. That is what Canadians expect of us and we will meet their expectations.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Blanchet, you have about 40 seconds left.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, as I see it, the Prime Minister is contracting out his job with taxpayers' money, a part of which is going into his party's bank account for the next election.

Is that the only explanation of his role he has for the residents of Quebec, a role that is currently protected by a crisis?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, all across the country, including in Quebec, people are worried about their jobs because of the crisis that the pandemic is causing. We are providing a wage subsidy to organizations and to companies to ensure that people will receive their paycheques in order to support their families and pay their rent. That is what people expected from this government as a priority.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now go to the honourable member for Burnaby South, Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, people are fed up with pretty words from people in power. The Prime Minister has the power to do something about the anti-black racism that Canada is faced with. Will the Prime Minister end racial profiling in Canada against black people once and for all?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, this government was the first government to recognize anti-black racism, systemic discrimination and unconscious bias and to take concrete actions against them in the context of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent but also in the context of a country that stands up for human rights and protects everyone.

We have made significant steps forward, but there is so much to do, and I look forward to working with all members in this House to do just that.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I did not hear an answer. Will the Prime Minister end the racial profiling of black people in Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, our justice system unfairly targets in many situations racialized Canadians, including indigenous Canadians and black Canadians. We know we need to improve our justice system and rates of incarceration and we will work on it.

• (1315)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Prime Minister end the over-policing and over-incarceration of black and indigenous people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, systemic discrimination means that people of colour are at greater risk of being incarcerated than others when facing negative outcomes in the justice system. We know we need to work on all the determinants of that. We will work as a country together.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Prime Minister make sure Canada is collecting disaggregated data on the impacts of COVID-19 on racialized people, particularly indigenous and black people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, not just on COVID-19 but on all ranges of data, we've made investments over the past years to Statistics Canada so that they are better able to collect data in a disaggregated fashion. We need to know what is happening within vulnerable communities. Disaggregated data will help, and we're working with provinces on the COVID-19 data.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We know people are frustrated with anti-black racism. People are also incredibly frustrated with anti-indigenous racism. Will the Prime Minister commit to ending the over-incarceration, over-policing and racial profiling of indigenous people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, I referred to that in an earlier answer.

Yes, we need to work to ensure that the rates of incarceration for indigenous people and for racialized Canadians are reduced. There are many measures we're working on to move forward to make our justice system fairer, to reduce systemic discrimination and eventually to eliminate it.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Here are two specific things we can do. I asked the Prime Minister if he will commit to stop taking indigenous kids to court, and if he will stop delaying the response to the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls calls for justice.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, tomorrow is the anniversary of the end of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry. We have been working over the past year with partners on the ground to formulate the measures and the response that needs to move forward. Many of those partners over the past months have been engaged in keeping their communities safe and working hard on that, and that has delayed the putting out of the report.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Prime Minister stop taking indigenous kids to court when it comes to indigenous child welfare?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we agree that we need to compensate kids and indigenous peoples who have suffered harm at the hands of our child and family services over the past decades and we will do that.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Prime Minister commit to not just pretty words but real action ensuring that all indigenous communities have access to clean drinking water?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, the NDP needs to know that we have eliminated over 80 long-term boil water advisories through our work over the past years, and we are on track to eliminating all of them on time by next spring.

This is something we committed to Canadians and we are doing.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister needs to speak to indigenous communities who talk of a completely different reality. They do not have access to clean drinking water, and communities are going off the list only to return back on to the list of boil water advisories.

Will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring all indigenous communities have clean drinking water?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, that was a commitment we made to Canadians and a commitment we are keeping. The member opposite continues to talk as if there has been no progress made. There has been significant progress made. We are on track to eliminating those boil water advisories.

It would be great if the members opposite talked about some good news instead of just highlighting the very real problems that are there. There is good news and there is challenging news. We are working on those together.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to the honourable member for Carleton, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Chair, what share of Canada's national debt is owed to foreign lenders?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, we continue to manage our fiscal situation in a responsible manner, and we'll continue to do that.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: How much does the Government of Canada owe to the People's Republic of China?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we would be happy to provide information. If the member would like to send my office questions directly, I'd be happy to provide this information.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It turns out I did a week ago. They still haven't provided answers to the questions, in particular the question regarding who owns Canada's foreign-held debt. We know that roughly a third of our debt is owned by foreigners. How much of that debt is owned by lenders from the People's Republic of China?

• (1320)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as I said, we'd be happy to reply to these questions directly. We'll do so. We'll get to it in order, as we work through this crisis, making sure we focus on Canadians first.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: How much is owned by lenders from Saudi Arabia?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Again, Mr. Chair, we'd be happy to provide information in this regard should the member wish to send a request directly to my office.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Which I have.

Mr. Chair, moving along to the impacts of the debt on our people, how much would a 1% increase in the effective interest rate on Canada's national debt cost Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we continue to manage our treasury function responsibly. I'd be happy to get financial calculations to the member if he'd like to send those directly to my office.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: All right, Mr. Chair, we'll try a different question, then, as we're not getting any answers.

We have lower interest rates than ever before. Normally, it means you lock in those rates for the long run. Anybody who has a mortgage knows you lock in for the long run when rates are low.

What percentage of Canada's national debt is locked in for more than five years?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to get this information to the member, but I would acknowledge that as we manage the treasury function for the Government of Canada, we look at the short term, the medium term and the long term. We think we have come up with a responsible approach to managing the ongoing debt that we have as a country.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, it turns out, according to Department of Finance officials, that less than 3% of Canada's recently added debt since March is for terms of more than five years. Why has this minister made Canada so susceptible to future interest rate hikes by failing to lock in the \$371.5 billion of new debt he's added in the last two and a half months?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we continue to manage the treasury function of the Government of Canada in a responsible way, making sure we consider what debt should be issued in a short term, a medium term and a long term, which we've been doing as the Government of Canada during our entire term and as previous governments have done as well.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Canadians would be wise not to hire this minister as their mortgage broker if they're looking to get the best rate.

Let's move on to the Canadian household. The average household was \$200 away from insolvency before this crisis began. How many Canadians would experience bankruptcy in the next 12 months if interest rates were to rise by an effective one percentage point?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, again, we'd be happy to get calculations to the member.

I would make the observation that what we've been working to do during the course of this pandemic is to support Canadians and support Canadian families by providing them income during a time when they don't have access to income because they're actually at home. We think that has supported them in a very, very positive way that allows us to ensure that we will have a continuing economy when we get through this crisis.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Poilievre. Go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Unfortunately, we will have a \$1-trillion debt when this fiscal year comes to an end. How much will the finance minister try to raise taxes if interest rates on that debt rise by, say, 1%?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as I've said to the House previously, we do not intend to raise taxes.

What the member opposite is suggesting is that we shouldn't be investing to support Canadians. I think the approach we've taken, with the emergency response benefit and the wage subsidy, has been particularly critical for enabling Canadians to get through a very challenging time.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The floor goes to the honourable member for Beauce, Mr. Lehoux.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Chair, my question goes to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Day after day, I speak with those involved in the world of agriculture and with witnesses appearing before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The consensus is very clear: the business risk management programs are not working.

When will the Minister become involved and make major changes to those programs?

• (1325)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Chair, we have made commitments to producers all across the country. Some programs are already provided, including the risk management programs. I am working regularly with my colleagues in the provinces in order to improve them.

We have also increased our contribution to various other programs, specifically in the meat sector, for pork or beef producers, and food processors.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Chair, I have been hearing the same answers for several weeks now.

Could the Minister simply give us a date?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I repeat that we are working regularly with producers and their representatives. In addition, I am working together with my provincial colleagues.

We are going to determine where the gaps are and we will identify the sectors that most need our assistance. Then, we will determine the best way to provide them with the assistance they need.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Chair, the government promised to set its share of the business risk management programs at 60%, even if a province or territory does not participate.

Have the provinces received the money, yes or no?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Here is how it works. Through the AgriRecovery program, we have provided \$50 million for pork producers and \$50 million for beef producers. The program is available everywhere, but the provinces are responsible for implementing it.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Chair, when will that transfer be made?

Can the minister simply give us a date? That is all we are asking.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I would really like to be able to give a date, but the answer depends on each of the provinces. The provinces have to implement the program.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: However, Mr. Chair, the minister has told us that she is ready to transfer the funds, whether or not the provinces add any to the program. To date, we still have no answer in that regard.

How does the Minister of Agriculture intend to make major changes to the various risk management programs by July, when the government has itself pushed back the federal-provincial-territorial meeting of Ministers of Agriculture to October?

We have been meeting by Zoom for some time now. Why was that not able to be an option?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I meet with my provincial colleagues every week, either by conference call or by Zoom.

I can assure my colleague about our ongoing collaboration with the provinces. As for the AgriRecovery program, once again, the provinces have to implement it and it is their choice to contribute their share of 40% or not, in whole or in part. However, our federal commitment on the 60% share is firm.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Chair, if I understand correctly, there will be no changes to the various programs before November.

The sectors of agriculture under supply management, like eggs and poultry producers in my constituency, who have been promised compensation for a long time, want to know when the money will be transferred to the producers who are working tirelessly to feed our country.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I know that poultry, egg and milk producers work extremely hard. Our commitment to them in terms of compensation in response to the three free-trade agreements is still firm. At the moment, we are concentrating on emergency programs. We will then proceed with that compensation.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Lehoux, you have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I see it, I still have not had an answer.

The country is moving towards more automation. I am thinking, for example, about the advances that many SMEs and farmers in my constituency could implement in their companies. Unfortunately, in the regions, the Internet is far from adequate.

When will I be able to tell my constituents that reliable Internet service will be available in their homes?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I assure you that we recognize the importance of the Internet in rural regions. I myself represent a rural constituency and it is a challenge every day. We are working with our colleagues, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry and the Minister of Rural Economic Development to speed up the implementation of programs along those lines.

• (1330)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)): We'll now proceed to Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Chair, for the Minister of Public Safety, Minister Blair, how many times has the list of banned firearms changed since May 1?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): My understanding is that an order in council was made on May 1, and we have not made any changes to that order in council.

Mr. Glen Motz: That's untrue.

How many more firearms have been added to the original prohibited list since that date?

Hon. Bill Blair: I suspect the member may be referring to the work that the RCMP has been doing through the Canadian firearms program in order to apply the order in council that was passed.

The Chair: Before we go to Mr. Motz, I want to ask all honourable members to ensure that they are on mute. We are getting some voices in the background.

Mr. Motz, please continue.

Mr. Glen Motz: How many .22 calibre rifles, firearms, are on that banned list?

Hon. Bill Blair: To be very clear, Mr. Chair, the banned list includes a number of assault-style rifles, including the AR-15. The member may be referring to a weapon that the RCMP has identified as using an AR-15 frame, which of course—

Mr. Glen Motz: Again, that is a wrong answer, Mr. Chair.

How many shotguns are now on that banned list?

Hon. Bill Blair: That is a bit of confusion put out by the gun lobby to frighten hunters. In fact, we did not prohibit any shotguns.

Mr. Glen Motz: Again, that is another untruth, Mr. Chair.

Are there any airsoft guns on the prohibited list?

Hon. Bill Blair: That's another bit of mistruth and deception put out by the gun lobby. In fact, there was a weapon called the Blackwater AR-15, which was a real gun that was prohibited, but the toy gun, the airsoft one, was not.

Mr. Glen Motz: That's untrue. I know some of those exact firearms that are on that list.

Why is the RCMP continuing to add firearms to the prohibited list after the list was published?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, it is a very important that the RCMP, as the agency responsible for administering the Canadian firearms program, continues to do its diligence to keep Canadians safe.

Mr. Glen Motz: Why has there been no notice given to firearms owners, retailers or the police of the many changes to the banned firearms list?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, Mr. Chair, it is very important that the Canadian firearms program and the RCMP continue to do the important work of ensuring that Canadians are kept safe.

Mr. Glen Motz: How many firearms have been transferred between licensed gun owners and/or retailers since May 1?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I do not have that information and, as the member probably knows, records are not kept by the government or by law enforcement about the transfer of firearms that are not restricted.

Mr. Glen Motz: How many firearms have been retroactively changed to “prohibited” since May 1? Of the firearms that have been transferred, how many now are retroactively prohibited since May 1?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, to be very clear, on May 1, by order in council, we prohibited 1,500 somewhat different types of firearms, all based upon a military design. Those are the weapons that are prohibited.

Mr. Glen Motz: Since that time you have added almost 700 more, and none of those meet that category you are trying to establish.

If a firearm that was not on the original prohibited list was transferred since May 1 and now that firearm appears on that prohibited list, are those transfers subject to a criminal prosecution?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, the member is asking me a question that is solely the responsibility of the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction, and that is their decision, not ours.

Mr. Glen Motz: The minister has said that the issuance of firearm licences and transfers was stopped recently due to a printer failure. We now know that to be completely false. There was no such failure, but an ordered shutdown.

Who ordered the RCMP to withhold these services from law-abiding Canadians?

Hon. Bill Blair: I have absolutely no knowledge of the allegation the member has just made, Mr. Chair, and so I cannot really confirm or deny that it actually ever happened.

Mr. Glen Motz: Maybe the minister needs to check with his officials and find out who actually did the ordering.

What does the minister believe to be the estimated cost of the firearms confiscation plan?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, there was no firearms confiscation plan. We will, however, be bringing legislation forward at the very first opportunity to facilitate a buyback program that will treat Canadians who purchased these firearms fairly.

Mr. Glen Motz: You can't buy back something that you never owned in the first place, Mr. Chair.

These costs must include administration, price per firearm, as well as the industry costs. We know that industry costs are over \$1 billion. If this minister doesn't know the cost, maybe he's as incompetent as our Minister of Finance.

I am wondering, Chair, through you, why the law enforcement notes were removed from the firearms reference table?

• (1335)

The Chair: I want to remind the honourable members that parliamentary language is something we need to respect in the House. We should be careful what we say.

The honourable minister may reply.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd just like to advise you and this House that our purpose is to protect the lives of Canadians, and we are taking strong action to strengthen gun control. We are not influenced by the gun lobby or by gun manufacturers, only by our interest in keeping Canadians safe.

The Chair: We will now continue to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by thanking the government for listening to my proposals a couple of weeks ago regarding the extension of benefits for vulnerable Canadians who may not have been able to file their income tax by this week's deadline. There are millions of relieved seniors with GIS and parents with the child tax benefit and GST who now know they have a bit of time and protection and aren't to be cut off from their benefits.

I'm hoping to go two for two here today, so there's no pressure to the Minister of Public Safety.

I want to build on the comments last week from Ms. Gladu, my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton, about family reunification between Canadians and Americans. Many constituents in my riding are concerned and are caught in this situation.

I certainly support, and I think we support in this chamber, the idea of the extension for travel. However, it's now been three months since many spouses have seen each other, and there are Canadian and American children in custody arrangements who have seen their parent only on one side of the border or the other.

After stating for months that reunifying families wasn't considered essential travel, I am thankful that he and the Prime Minister have now said that it is.

Will the minister agree to the safe and fair proposal we outlined in our letter last week, which would exempt spouses, children and those with medical needs travelling back and forth with accompanying documentation, so that we can get people and their families back together?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'd like to thank the member for what I think is a very important question and I want to assure him that I have had similar conversations with members of this House from all parties and representing all parts of the country. We recognize the challenge that this particular policy of restricting non-essential travel has meant for families. It is not our intention and never will be our intention to separate families. We are working very closely with the CBSA to ensure that individuals are treated fairly.

I want to share this with the member and honourable members of this House. Any change we make to our arrangement at the border will require a change by an order in council. Because there is a great deal of concern in our communities and from our provincial and territorial partners about the movement of people across our border, any change has to be discussed and negotiated with our provincial partners. Some of them, you may be aware, have expressed some concern, and we're addressing those concerns because we respect their concerns.

At the same time we are working very hard, and I am very hopeful that we'll be able to resolve this challenge to the satisfaction of the many Canadians you and everyone else represents.

The Chair: I want to remind the honourable members that when they are asking or answering a question, they should speak through the Chair and not directly to the other member.

We will go back to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: We were looking at each other. It's a bad habit.

To the minister, I appreciate the comments. I will just note that the Canadian and American governments have worked with provinces, as we have with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to repatriate Canadians from around the world. There have been quarantine protocols put in place to allow that. There are protocols and there is a precedence.

I am just wondering why there is a delay in acknowledging the families part. I believe there is a precedent and I believe there is a background there, and I think we can, through an order in council or whatever measure, get people back with their families.

Can the minister explain why reunifying families needs to be any different from repatriating Canadians from other countries?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again I thank the member, because this is a very important issue and it's important to us as well.

We have been working over the past couple of weeks very diligently on trying to find a resolution of this problem, because it is never our intention to separate families and we have all heard some very heart-wrenching concerns that have been raised. At the same time, I think it's important to work very closely, as we have done, with our provincial and territorial partners to ensure that we address the concerns they have raised.

We are prepared to move forward and we are working very hard to resolve the concerns that were raised so that we can have a positive answer to those many families, and we—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I appreciate that comment from the minister.

I want to share the story of a constituent of mine, Mr. David Lee, from Cornwall. He and his wife Maria have been married for a couple of years now. She is an American citizen. They spend about five months of the year in Texas and five months in Cornwall and would generally travel about two months of the year. However, she couldn't come up to Canada because of the restrictions that have been put in place, and it's certainly putting a strain on them.

Can the minister confirm that the three concerns we outlined in our letter are being discussed as part of reaching a solution or a resolution as soon as possible? The three concerns are that spouses and long-term partners can be reunited, that children with child custody arrangements can see both of their parents, and that if somebody needs to travel back or forth over the border for medical appointments, they can do that and can stay with their spouse.

Can you confirm that all three are on the table and will be addressed?

• (1340)

Hon. Bill Blair: What I can confirm is that we're working hard to make sure we keep families together.

I want to reiterate, because you raise a very important point, that when people cross the border they're still subject to the quarantine orders of public health. That's for the protection of all Canadians. You mentioned travelling back and forth across the border. If the travel is deemed essential, that is an exception, but if it is not deemed essential, then a person must go into quarantine for 14 days. That's one of the concerns the provinces have raised with us and one of the assurances they have sought. We're working to provide those assurances.

The Chair: Before we go to the next line of questioning, I want to remind the honourable members that we have interpreters who are working very hard to translate from one language to the other.

[*Translation*]

I therefore ask you to speak a little more slowly out of consideration for the interpreters, who are doing a really good job.

[*English*]

We'll now go to Mr. Kram.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Chair, I've had the opportunity to talk with Mr. James Bogusz, CEO of the Regina Airport Authority, and he paints a grim picture. He expects the airport to be out of money by the end of the summer. The loss of the Regina International Airport would be devastating, not only to the city of Regina but also to southern Saskatchewan.

The Liberal government has made a great show out of allegedly providing \$330 million in assistance to airports through lease deferrals, but here is what it's not telling people: Airport lease payments are already tied to revenue and have been for many years, so when an airport's revenue goes down to zero, its lease payments to the federal government go down to zero, pandemic or no pandemic. That means the government has done absolutely nothing to help Canada's airports.

Will the government commit today to providing real assistance to Canada's struggling airports?

Hon. Bill Blair: The Minister of Transport has been working very closely with airports, large and small, right across the country. We have continued to update our responses in this rapidly evolving situation. We've been in touch with each of the airports, and we've been working very hard to help them manage through these difficult times.

We know that in some circumstances, continued operations at smaller airports have not been possible, but wherever possible we have done our very best to try to accommodate the very real financial challenges these airports are experiencing.

Mr. Michael Kram: Mr. Chair, Canada's airports are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy and the Liberal government's response has been to defer their lease payments. These were already based on revenue, so these deferrals are effectively meaningless. In the meantime, the U.S. government's CARES program is providing \$10 billion in grants and low-interest forgivable loans to support American airports.

Will the government commit today to saving Canada's airports with a similar program of grants and forgivable loans?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, we have worked very hard, and continue to do so, to make sure we provide supports to regional airports right across this country. We know how important air transport is to such a vast country and we know the tremendous work they do. They support communities and the Canadian economy.

We're going to work very closely with them to make sure we provide the right supports to help them get through this difficult time, because we know how important they will be to the eventual restart of our economy. Their continued existence and success are important to that restart, and we'll work with them.

Mr. Michael Kram: Mr. Chair, the airport crisis goes far beyond my home city of Regina. Airports are vital to Canada's economy, providing over 200,000 jobs nationwide and paying \$13 billion in wages and \$7 billion in taxes. However, now Canada's airports are on the brink of collapse, and the government has stood idly by as airports have lost over 90% of their revenue.

Last month Joyce Carter, chair of the Canadian Airports Council, called on the government for a three-point plan for airport recovery. It includes the permanent elimination of ground leases, substantive loan and bond guarantees and a special plan to support smaller airports that provide vital supplies to rural and remote communities.

Could the minister inform the committee if the government has done anything in response to the Canadian Airports Council's request?

• (1345)

Hon. Bill Blair: I would make the observation that all of our smaller regional airports are vital to the communities they serve. That's why it's important that we work with them all.

The Minister of Transport is in regular communication and in ongoing discussions with airport authorities, large and small, right across this country on how we can continue to support them. There have been a number of proposals made by the industry itself and by some of the regional airports on what form that help can take. That's all part of a very important ongoing discussion.

I believe it is clear that Canadians need our help, and we are there for Canadians to help them get back on their feet when we get through this pandemic.

The Chair: Mr. Kram, we have time for a 15-second question and a 15-second answer.

Mr. Michael Kram: Mr. Chair, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan have all started free trade negotiations with the United Kingdom. Why hasn't Canada?

Hon. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for the question.

We, of course, are going to make sure that we will always act in the interests of Canadian businesses, and I want to assure Canadians that CETA continues to apply to our trade with the United Kingdom. We will make sure that our further work will always take into account the interests of Canadian businesses.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We now move to Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to know how many full-time and part-time employees are currently working for the Liberal Party of Canada.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I am not sure that the number of employees at the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, or the Conservative Party is relevant to government management.

The Chair: I am not sure whether that is a point of order, but I will let Mr. Therrien continue.

Mr. Alain Therrien: If he stays with me, he will understand. He can trust me. I would like to know how many people work full time and part time for the Liberal Party of Canada. It is a simple question.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: A number of people do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Chair, I know that they think it's funny to pilfer taxpayers' money from government coffers. But that is not our style. The Liberal Party took money through the emergency wage subsidy program. I would just like to know how many people work for the Liberal Party of Canada.

Hon. Bill Morneau: I do not know how many people work for the Liberal Party, but I can say that the emergency wage subsidy is for all sectors of the economy. That is how we can protect employees across the country who are working for businesses facing a reduction in revenue of 30% or more.

Mr. Alain Therrien: They have 157 MPs and they have known for two weeks that we are working on the wage subsidy. Not one member wondered how many people work for them. They are too busy helping themselves to the cookie jar.

In an article in *La Presse* on May 25, Liberal Party spokesman Braeden Caley said that between 75 and 100 employees were receiving wages subsidized through this program. Is that correct?

Hon. Bill Morneau: I am very focused on our concern, which is to protect Canadians across the country who are working for businesses facing a reduction in revenue of 30% or more. It is very important for them and for our economy.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Let's use a round number. Let's say 100 employees.

How many employees in the Liberal Party of Canada are threatened by the pandemic? You should know; it's your party.

The Chair: I would like to remind honourable members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The honourable minister has the floor.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We stand by our approach of protecting employees across the country. We want to make sure that they have enough money to meet the challenges that they are facing during the pandemic.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I would actually say that they want to have enough money for their next election campaign.

I would like to know how much taxpayers' money has been taken from the emergency wage subsidy program and will be used as election loot for the Liberal Party of Canada.

How much money have you taken from the program?

Hon. Bill Morneau: The emergency wage subsidy program allows us to protect 75% of the income that employees were earning before the crisis, to a maximum of \$847. This is important for them and, of course, very important for our economy.

• (1350)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Chair, since I am not getting an answer, let me share with you the very simple calculation I cobbled together. One hundred employees at \$847 a week is \$340,000 a month. That is the amount of taxpayers' money that the Liberal Party is putting into its pockets. If we multiply that amount by three—that's three months, since it started on March 15—we get over \$1 million. That is the amount they will have put in their pockets, to be used as election loot for the Liberal Party.

Given that the Liberals are extending the emergency wage subsidy, will their party continue to help itself to the money?

Hon. Bill Morneau: The purpose of the emergency wage subsidy is to protect employees. So every business must ensure that the money goes to the employees. That is very important. It is how employees and their incomes are protected. It will help millions of families across the country to be in a better situation.

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, you can ask a question of no more than 15 seconds.

Mr. Alain Therrien: They have already taken \$1 million out of the register, so that is settled.

My question is twofold. First, are they going to pay back that \$1 million?

Second, I hope they will not be taking another \$1 million by September. Can I at least be reassured of that?

Hon. Bill Morneau: We will continue with our approach to protect employees and businesses needing it during the crisis.

The Chair: We will take a short break so that our employees can safely change places.

We can now continue.

[*English*]

We'll go now to Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. Chair, as parliamentarians, our greatest responsibility is to keep Canadians safe. During the previous Parliament, our government made significant investments in the CBSA and the RCMP, and provided funds to provinces and territories to invest in programs that combat gun and gang violence and support our communities in providing positive alternatives for youth engagement and activities.

On May 1, our government banned assault-style weapons. This is something that we pledged to do during the last federal election and something that victims' groups, law enforcement and everyday Canadians called on for decades, but we must know that we need to take more action to keep our communities safe.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure that this continues to be an important issue for many communities.

Can the minister tell the House and the constituents of Newmarket—Aurora what further steps our government will take to keep Canadians safe?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I'd like to begin by thanking the honourable member for Newmarket—Aurora for his question and for his advocacy on behalf of the safety of his community.

Mr. Chair, building upon historic investments that we made in the last Parliament in law enforcement dealing with guns and gangs, we took the important next step in our promise to strengthen Canada's gun control by prohibiting weapons that many in the law enforcement community, including the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, have said have no place in our communities.

There is much more to do. We will build on these early steps by strengthening our work and our laws at the border, by taking steps to prevent the theft and criminal diversion of guns and also by making significant investments in kids, families and communities where the conditions give rise to gun violence right across Canada.

Mr. Chair, we have much work to do, and we are committed to keeping Canadians safe.

The Chair: The next question goes to Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, in cities and towns across Canada, small businesses are the backbones of our local economies. They are also pillars of our communities. Even during these challenging times, we have seen restaurants and other businesses step up to deliver meals to front-line workers and make donations to our local food banks. So many have supported Scarborough Health Network's meals on wheels program. Their leadership has been inspiring.

I have heard from many small business owners in Scarborough, from dentists to small manufacturers, who are having trouble paying their commercial rents due to the sharp downturn in business caused by COVID-19. They are interested in how programs like the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program would help them to stay in business, but they worry that these programs may

not be able to help if their landlords don't participate. These small businesses are crucial to our community.

Could the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade please explain why it is so important that the landlords participate to help small businesses make it through the pandemic and how we are working to make this program a success, not just here in Scarborough but across Canada?

● (1355)

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member of Parliament for her advocacy for the people of Scarborough Centre on this really important question.

While rent is an area of provincial responsibility, helping businesses across the country is all of our responsibility. This is why we have stepped up to provide rent relief to businesses while, at the same time, helping property owners maintain the rental income through this crisis.

We are asking property owners to do their part in keeping small businesses and their employees to get through these challenging times, and to take advantage of our forgivable loans in order to help small businesses that are the hardest hit by reducing their rent by 75%. This is a win-win situation. Many landlords have already stepped up, and we salute their efforts.

We will continue to do what we can to help protect and help our small businesses across Canada from coast to coast to coast.

The Chair: The next question goes to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): The \$4-billion Canada housing benefit agreement was announced in 2017. It's supposed to provide up to \$2,500 per year to help families in need with their rent. We know that poverty and inadequate housing are barriers felt even more by black, indigenous and racialized people.

Can the minister tell us how many families have actually received this housing support?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for asking about this really special and unique housing benefit.

We introduced the Canada housing benefit as part of the national housing strategy to help people as a bridge to permanent housing, people who are in core housing need, are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We have signed agreements with provinces. We hope all of them come to the table to sign this really important cost-sharing—

The Chair: We will go back to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It has been two and a half years, and families in need are still waiting. Only one province has signed on, and there has been no national consultation on how such a benefit program would even be implemented. With so little federal leadership, the Canadian Alliance of Non-Profit Housing Associations has stepped up and done the work for the government. They have outlined five key principles to guide the implementation of the Canada housing benefit.

Will the minister adopt those principles and get on with ensuring vulnerable families get the rental assistance they need?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, it is really unfortunate that the honourable member thinks that an investment of \$55 billion and the commitment of a 10-year federal plan of leadership in affordable housing and community housing is a lack of leadership. It is quite the opposite.

The Canada housing benefit is yet another important segment of the national housing strategy, which will ensure people have access to a safe, affordable place to call home. It is being signed by a number of provinces, not just one as the honourable member suggests. There are up to five provinces that have moved on signing on to the Canada housing benefit.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Then surely the minister can actually tell us how many families benefited from that program. The fact is that two and a half million families are paying more than 30% of their income on rent, and they have been hit hard by this pandemic. Reciting the same message box over and over again will not get them the help they need.

Aside from going forward with a housing benefit program, will the government prioritize affordable housing stimulus spending as a key component of any post-COVID stimulus policy?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, joining with provinces and territories and providing real help to members of the community who are experiencing homelessness so they can have a permanent roof over their heads is real action. It's real leadership by our government as part of the Canada housing benefit.

This is a real benefit that is going to households in core housing need, people who experience a core housing need and who need a permanent place to call home. The Canada housing benefit is providing real help to thousands and thousands of Canadian households. We will continue to provide that leadership in concert with provinces and territories.

• (1400)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Well, minister, I would say that B.C. is still looking for the government to step up. We bought our first hotel to house the homeless in permanent housing, and the government has yet to provide any funding to them.

The next question is for the Minister of Immigration. The first migrant worker died yesterday due to COVID-19. Migrant workers are warehoused in a space with no barriers between each sleeping cot. Others are housed in crowded communal bunkhouses.

What action will the minister take to address this alarming situation?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): I thank my colleague for the question, and I want to extend our sympathies regarding the temporary worker who passed away from COVID-19.

Of course, we continue to support workers by ensuring that they have the accommodations and the spacing necessary to work when they are here providing food security for all Canadians. We're also providing support to farmers to ensure that those accommodations are made. We put in place the regulations and the rules that are necessary, and we continue to work very closely with our provincial partners as well as leaders in this sector so that we can protect workers and ensure that Canadians have access to safe and affordable food.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No one should have to endure such inhumane housing conditions and risk their lives to support their families. We rely on them to put food on the table for our families. They don't have access to health care and they don't have a pathway to permanent residence.

Will the minister do the right thing and grant migrant workers health care coverage and ensure the government follows up on the principle that "if you're good enough to work, you're good enough to stay"?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In fact, Mr. Chair, I would clarify that temporary foreign workers do have a pathway to permanent residence. Of course, that is an opportunity we will continue to offer those who are ensuring that Canadians have access to healthy, safe and affordable food. We will continue to make the investments that are necessary to maintain a high standard of professionalism and workplace safety.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Chair, fisheries and oceans stakeholders and coastal communities face unprecedented threats from the COVID-19 crisis, and they deserve the support of all levels of government, including their own MPs.

Yesterday the Liberal and NDP MPs banded together to restrict the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to just four hours of sitting in the summer months. Conservatives are ready to put in the hours to support Canadians, while the Liberals and NDP refuse to do the work.

When will the Prime Minister tell his MPs to get back to work for the Canadians who need their support?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, we all agree that committees are doing extremely important work, and that's why committees are meeting regularly.

I would like to remind my colleague that the committees are masters of their own destiny and make their own decisions, not the government.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, it took months for DFO to realize that fish passage on the Fraser River was blocked at Big Bar. Then it took them seven more months to tender a contract to clear the blockage. Now that contract has tripled from \$17.6 million to over \$52.5 million without a single communications post from the minister's office.

The original contract amount was clearly inadequate, so who ordered it?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Chair, since we found out about the landslide at Big Bar, our government has been extremely active in making sure that the salmon have a passage through. We know how critically important the salmon are to the Fraser River, as well as to the indigenous communities along the Fraser. We're working diligently to make sure that we get that passage cleared.

So far, we've made significant progress, but we know there's more work that needs to be done. That's why we'll continue to work with indigenous communities and the province to make sure that these—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, the fisheries minister's mandate letter from November of last year directed her to make new investments in fighting invasive species. Half a year later, the minister has failed to deliver. Canadians on the front line of prevention wrote the minister, and when they got a response five months later, it was devoid of any help.

This government's delays are hurting Canada's fight against invasive species. When will the minister follow her Prime Minister's directive and make new investments in the fight against invasive species?

• (1405)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Mr. Chair, I want to thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Invasive species are a real challenge for our waterways. We know that a lot more has to be done. We're working diligently to find the answers to deal with some of the problems we are seeing from invasive species. We are continuing to monitor situations in waterways. I am committed to making sure that I meet my commitments within my mandate letter, and I will have more to say on that soon.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, the list of hunting and sport shooting firearms banned by Minister Blair's order in council continues to grow. What other hunting firearms does he plan to ban?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, to be very clear, the weapons we have prohibited are weapons that were not designed for hunting or sport shooting but for soldiers to use in combat. As law enforcement leaders right across the country have said many times, they have no place in our community, and we agree.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I continue to hear from constituents in the North Okanagan—Shuswap who are unable to access supports under the Canada emergency business account or the emergency commercial rent assistance program. Business owners have also lost employees and can't get them to come back to work because of the lack of flexibility in the emergency response benefit and the emergency student benefit.

When the Liberals shut down Parliament, they removed our ability to amend legislation and fix their failures. When will the government fix these problems and the programs?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we continue to look at the programs we've put out to support Canadians to make sure that they are actually having the desired impact. As we've moved along, we have said that we need to make amendments. We've committed to extending the wage subsidy, and of course we're looking at all the measures we've put out so we can ensure that people have the support they need during this crisis.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, an April 1 letter confirms that Deloitte Canada has been contracted to help supply PPE. Was this a sole-source contract?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Mr. Chair, the honourable member is correct that we have contracted with Deloitte to assist us with our operations on the ground in China in order to have an A-to-Z procurement approach to delivering goods—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Can the minister confirm that this was, indeed, a sole-source contract?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, there are a number of goods that need to be procured for Canadian health care professionals to be safe, and that's exactly—

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes or no, was this a sole-source contract?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, I will take that question back to my department and come back to the member with a further, fuller response.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Chair, is Deloitte of Canada able to speak on behalf of PSPC?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, not at all. The contracts that we are entering into are made by us—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: What is the value of the contract with Deloitte?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, again, that is information that we are not going to release at this time. When the time is right, we will do so.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Many of the suppliers that are in contact with Deloitte of Canada are indigenous contractors. Has the government secured any contracts with indigenous suppliers?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, we are in touch with indigenous suppliers, as we are with many suppliers across Canada and internationally. We are working hard to make sure that we have diverse supply chains across the board, and that means including indigenous suppliers in that mix.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Many of these indigenous suppliers have previously been vetted by the federal government and are certified vendors. Is it appropriate for Deloitte to be recertifying these vendors?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, the honourable member appears to have information regarding Deloitte's certification processes, which would not be outside what the government itself is doing. I encourage him to come forward with a question that actually responds to fact before—

• (1410)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Does the minister think that re-vetting suppliers is a good use of resources?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, I'll tell you what I think. I believe that Canada is in a crisis, and I am making every effort to order PPE as Canadian health care workers require.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Chair, indigenous suppliers stand at the ready to supply PPE to Canada. Has the minister contracted with any indigenous suppliers?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, we are in touch with indigenous suppliers and will continue to ensure that Canada has a diverse supply chain in terms of manufacturers, in terms of products and in terms of countries. That is our commitment to Canadian health care workers—

The Chair: Now we go back to Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Has the government signed a contract with a single indigenous supplier?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, I would like to say that we are continuing to make sure that our supplier list is confidential, because we are in a crisis and we do not want to jeopardize—

The Chair: We go back to Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Chair, on Friday the association for indigenous business could not name a single indigenous company that had been contracted.

Have any of the contracts signed with the federal government between Deloitte Canada and PPE suppliers been filled?

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, the member is mistaken. Deloitte is not signing contracts on behalf of the Government of Canada. Deloitte is assisting with and sourcing manufacturers, and all contracts are signed by the government with manufacturers.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now proceed with Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Chair, we have difficulty understanding the government's management of the border. The order between Canada and the United States has an exception allowing refugee claimants to submit their claims in Canada if they have family here and we accept them.

However, hundreds of Canadian-American couples cannot be reunited, which is a problem. I find it hard to believe that the minister

cannot quickly instruct border services officers to allow spouses to enter the country right now.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I appreciate very much the member's intervention and the long list of people he sent to me. I'm also working with a number of different families. We remain committed to keeping families together.

As I advised this House earlier, Mr. Chair, we're working diligently with our provincial and territorial partners to take the steps necessary to enable people to stay united as they cross the borders and enter into Canada, but to do so safely and not put other Canadians at risk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, letting a spouse come home will not put Canadians at risk.

A survey conducted in Canada reveals that a large majority of Canadians do not trust the Chinese communist regime at all and do not want Huawei in Canada. The good news today is that BCE and Telus have decided not to do business with Huawei.

Now that the government no longer has to worry about BCE and Telus, can they say today that no other company is going to use Huawei and that Huawei will be banned from Canada for 5G?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

Our government will always protect our networks and ensure that Canadians have access to the latest innovations in telecommunications. A review of 5G technologies and their economic and security considerations is currently under way.

We will ensure that Canadians' security and personal information will never be compromised.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Let me remind the minister that we have been working on this for years and that CSIS has confirmed that Huawei is unreliable as far as Canada's security is concerned.

Right now, two Canadians are being unjustly detained by the Chinese communist regime. The same regime continues to lie to the world about COVID-19, block our exports, and terrorize the citizens of Hong Kong.

When will the Prime Minister confirm that he is going to ban Huawei from developing 5G in Canada? It is a simple question.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, let's be very clear. Canadians deserve to have access to the most beneficial 5G technology. At the same time, the safety and security of Canada's digital environment will be of paramount consideration. We're doing the work required and we're not basing that agenda on some media report, but instead ensuring that all scientific and security factors are taken into account. We are engaged in robust discussions with our Five Eyes partners, including the United States, and all our security agencies.

Mr. Chair, we'll do the work necessary to—

• (1415)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus has the floor.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: The minister does not need a sheet of paper, this matter has been clear for a long time. Everyone is saying that we need to ban Huawei from Canada.

I have a quick question for the Minister of Finance.

Bell and Telus had each estimated that removing Huawei from their development would cost \$1 billion. Today we have learned that these companies have decided not to use Huawei. Did the government decide to pay for this under wraps to get out of it?

Having said that, my next question is more about the theft on May 27. About 90,000 surgical masks bound for the Quebec City UHC were stolen from the Toronto airport. As we all know, these masks are critical in the fight against COVID-19.

Has the minister called for an investigation? When are we going to find out what happened to those stolen masks that were bound for Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: Mr. Chair, I will gladly look into this issue and get back to my colleague. Our procurements have reached 101 million surgical masks at this time, and they're being distributed to provinces, including Quebec.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus, you have time to ask a 15-second question.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: It is a little strange. The masks were stolen in Toronto on May 27. So they have been gone a long time. I just want to know if there is an investigation and if they will ever be found.

I want to address another complex and important issue.

A police officer from the Montreal area called me and told me about a current fraud. Some social assistance recipients learned about the CERB and applied for it. Building managers have received a lot of cheques addressed to social assistance recipients. They know it is not legal and it constitutes fraud.

The police officer is asking me what to do with the cheques and to whom they should be sent. Should he give them to the fraudsters? How does that work?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Mr. Chair, I can assure the member that we have robust mechanisms in place to address CERB fraud. We understand that in delivering this benefit to a million Canadians to date, we had to put more of our integrity measures at the back, but make no mistake: Canadians who behave fraudulently will be held to account, and we will ensure that the money is either repaid or the cheques not cashed.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Moore.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, there remains a concern across Canada that delays in the criminal courts could result in criminals walking free. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court recently said in an interview that amendments to the Criminal Code could allow this backlog to be addressed. Can the minister outline what work has been done to address the backlog, and when we can expect to see it addressed?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Chair, I thank the honourable member for his question.

I can assure him that we are working closely with our provincial and territorial counterparts, who have the primary responsibility for the superior courts of justice and therefore the criminal law in their various jurisdictions for the administration of justice in criminal law.

I can also say that we have formed an action committee co-chaired by me and the Chief Justice of Canada, again with a variety of different kinds of representation on that committee, to look at the restart of the justice system—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Moore.

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Chair, weeks ago I raised these concerns with the minister over backlogs in the criminal courts and the risk they present to our justice system. The provinces have significant insight into how this can be addressed, and many provinces have been proactive with their court backlogs. Can the minister outline what work has been done with the provinces on this important issue?

Hon. David Lametti: We are working with the provinces. There are different practices in each province. We're working to serve in a coordinating role as a repository of information for best practices so that they can be shared across provinces. We're also looking at specific suggestions that provinces have made with respect to reforming the criminal law.

Hon. Rob Moore: Many owners of small businesses in my riding, and indeed in all of our ridings, are suffering right now and have received absolutely no help from this government because of technicalities.

Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister indicated the government was looking to expand access to the Canada emergency business account to include to those who operate their businesses out of a personal bank account. This is something that we've been calling for over the past several weeks, and businesses cannot wait any longer.

Can the minister tell me what we should be telling our constituents about those who are caught up based on a technicality and are not able to access this important measure?

• (1420)

Hon. Mary Ng: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the honourable member for that really important question. I want to assure the small business owners in his community and all across the country just how important they are and how difficult a time this is for them. We absolutely understand. We are hearing you and we are working as hard and as fast as we can to make sure that those business owners get access to this very important support.

I would like to highlight, though, that owners of 650,000 small businesses across the country are getting the loan support. Of course, there is more to do, and we will keep working hard for those business owners.

Hon. Rob Moore: The lack of access to high-speed Internet remains a major issue across my home province of New Brunswick. This is a significant barrier to rural economic development. It impacts the quality of life of rural constituents. The lack of progress and transparency on rural Internet is frustrating for residents, for municipal leaders and for small business owners who are already suffering due to COVID.

When will a new plan for rural Internet be introduced, and how quickly can we expect it to be deployed?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, our government has a plan to connect Canadians to high-speed Internet. To date, we've set aside investments to connect a million households, and there's more work to be done.

We will be announcing our next steps to connect more Canadians through the universal broadband funds in the days to come. I look forward to communities across the country benefiting from federal investments and the private investments that our investments will bring.

Hon. Rob Moore: On the issue of commercial rent, how is the government going to ensure that business owners whose landlords still refuse to participate in the government's program receive the support that they need to stay open at this time?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as the member knows and would understand, rent between small business owners and landlords is a provincial jurisdiction. That said, we've moved forward to try to ensure that there's a process so that those landlords and the commercial tenants can work together to come up with a solution that will work for both. We're seeing landlords—

The Chair: We'll now go to Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Nicholas Gibbs, Colten Boushie, Tina Fontaine, Alain Magloire and Breonna Taylor were not all born on the same side of the border, but they all lost their lives at the hand of the same cruel enemy: racism.

We cannot, here in Canada, think higher of ourselves when we are reading the headlines of our neighbour. We cannot ignore our history, past or present.

The final report from the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls stated that indigenous women and girls have faced a Canadian genocide.

In 2018 a report revealed that a black person was almost 20 times more likely than a white person to be fatally shot by the Toronto police, and a 2019 report exposed systemic bias among the Montreal police force against black and indigenous people.

Black lives matter. Indigenous lives matter.

I am asking the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, as per her mandate, what exactly our government intends to do now to fight racism among its institutions. If the anti-racism secretariat has in fact been established, what priorities have been actioned?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): I would like to thank the member for that very important question.

I will state that it is essential that we all work together, not only during this challenging time but during the times that come out of it. On the comments that were shared earlier, this is another life lost that should not have been lost.

Yes, the anti-racism secretariat has been established. This is a resource not only for Canadians but also for government agencies to better the way in which we do work internally as well, including advancement opportunities. We know that the decision-making table does not reflect the diversity of our country. That's exactly why we came out with an open, transparent, merit-based appointment process: so that we can see the country's diversity reflected at the decision-making table. There is a lot more work to do.

I can assure the member and all Canadians that my eyes are open, my ears are open and I am an ally. I will work as hard as possible to be that voice at the cabinet table. I cannot experience what it is to be a black Canadian, but I can tell you that your voices will be represented and they will be heard. I see you.

• (1425)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, it has been four years since the settlement payment for sixties scoop survivors was approved. That resolution hasn't taken place. The pain continues. Why is it that the 12,500 class members who have been determined eligible still haven't received the payments they are owed? These people deserve justice without any delay, especially in light of COVID-19 and the added pressures facing communities.

Can the minister confirm exactly when these survivors will receive the interim payment?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your advocacy on all these truly important things. As you know, because of the exceptional circumstance of COVID-19, the class counsel, with the support of Canada, was seeking direction from the courts to issue partial payments to the class members with a valid claim.

On June 1 the Federal Court granted that order. A similar motion is before the Ontario Superior Court. Once granted, eligible class members can expect to receive partial payments of \$21,000 over the coming weeks. Canada welcomes the Federal Court's—

The Chair: We'll now go back to Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Eighty per cent of people who are diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, will die within two to five years of receiving the diagnosis. The pandemic has made it more difficult than ever for these people to access medical appointments and treatment. They do not have the luxury of time. They want to live and to share moments with their families and their loved ones. The lack of urgency to approve new trials and therapies in Canada directly impacts the life expectancy of people with ALS.

Can the Minister of Health commit to taking leadership on this file, removing the barriers to accessing these promising treatments and therapies, and ensuring that the costs of these treatments will be covered?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much for the very important question. We know that people living with ALS and their families struggle immensely every single day.

Of course the member opposite has my commitment to work with the community and with manufacturers of drugs that are promising for ALS to expedite approval in a safe way that protects the health of Canadians but also provides treatment in an affordable way for all Canadians.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I can't breathe and I'm tired, and today we've heard a lot of progressive words from the Prime Minister, but he hasn't really said anything. If the Prime Minister will not provide leadership in this House, will anybody from his cabinet here today commit to taking concrete steps to address anti-black racism?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Chair, yes, we do commit. That's exactly why we will listen more. We will acknowledge that racism is alive in Canada. We know we must do better. However, I also need the member to recognize that this work has started. The open,

transparent, merit-based appointment process is resulting in the decision-making table better reflecting Canadians.

We recognize the UN international—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, will the member then commit today to make it a legal requirement to collect race-based data across all the ministries?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Chair, the recently announced immunity task force is providing disaggregated data to decision-makers, because decisions need to be based on science and evidence. Yes, I will work across all departments to ensure that data is better collected.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, that's not a legal requirement.

It is also not lost on the black community that the former Toronto chief of police, the architect of this country's largest profiling program under the guise of street checks or carding, was made this country's Minister of Public Safety by this Prime Minister. As the tragic consequence of the unlawful, unconstitutional and racist practices in Toronto, black people are 20 times more likely than non-black people to be murdered by police.

Does the Minister of Public Safety now admit that the police practice of street checks and carding is in fact a significant factor in Canada's systemic anti-black and anti-indigenous racism, and will he act to immediately end it today?

• (1430)

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, let me be very clear. First of all, every Canadian is entitled to bias-free and culturally competent policing.

I know from experience that there is nothing more corrosive to the relationship of trust that must exist between the police and racialized communities than the issue of racism or the biased influences of those decisions.

Mr. Chair, racial profiling is not only abhorrent and unacceptable, it's in fact unlawful. It's contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and it's contrary to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

We are working diligently within all of the federal agencies under my purview to ensure that all officers receive training on culturally competent and bias-free delivery of service. We remain committed to creating a diverse workforce that truly reflects and respects the diverse people of this country.

Mr. Matthew Green: Nobody knows better through experience about the corrosive practice of street checks than I do.

Will the minister now apologize to the black community for the harm caused under his tenure as chief of police?

Hon. Bill Blair: Just to be very clear, Mr. Chair, I actually worked with the diverse communities of Toronto for nearly four decades. I worked with extraordinary leaders from the black community and I learned extensively from their lived experience.

We worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of all of the people in all of our diverse communities.

Mr. Matthew Green: Bill C-51 was introduced by the Conservatives and supported by the Liberals, including this Prime Minister. It declared indigenous, racial, economic justice, and environmental activists as domestic terrorists. Each province was mandated to enact anti-terrorism protocols, which became a direction for the local police to engage in the practice of street checks or racial profiling.

Given what he has said today in the House, will this Minister of Public Safety work to repeal the changes made under Bill C-51?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I will repeat for the member opposite that racial profiling and bias in the delivery of policing service is not only unacceptable and abhorrent but unlawful. It's contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; it is contrary to the Canadian Human Rights Act. It cannot ever be tolerated in policing in any place in Canada, but we learned from the lived experience of black and indigenous communities, who tell us that this is still their lived experience, so there is a great deal of work left to do.

[Translation]

The Chair: It is now Mr. Champoux's turn.

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the honourable member for Joliette.

Supplementary unemployment benefits, or SUBs, give employers the opportunity to enhance their employees' employment insurance benefits when they need to temporarily lay them off. A number of companies, including Soprema in Drummond, have done so with the guarantee that the government would maintain the SUB terms when employment insurance is converted to the CERB.

However, surprise, surprise, when the employees applied for the CERB in May, they found that they did not meet the criteria because the amount of SUBs they have received exceeded \$1,000, the CERB income limit. In addition, they must reimburse the CERB because they found that they were not eligible for it.

So, what does the Minister of Finance intend to do to correct his error?

[English]

The Chair: We will pause for a second. We have a point of order on the floor. Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I posed the most important question. I had 10 seconds left by my count on my time before I was cut off, and I would appreciate, given the seriousness of the conversation here today, if the honourable Minister of Public Safety will please answer the question: Will he apologize to the black community for the ir-

reparable harm that was caused by the racist process of street checks and carding?

The Chair: The way I work it is that if there are 15 seconds or less, we go on to the next one, because it's not really enough time to ask a question and get an answer.

I will move on to Mr. Champoux. He did ask a question, and we'll let Ms. Qualtrough, the honourable minister, answer.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, SUB plans that existed prior to March 15 are very much alive and in place for companies, employers and their employees.

The CERB allows employers to top up an employee's wages to the maximum of a \$1,000. As was said, Mr. Chair, in order to deliver this important critical benefit to Canadians, we had to go outside of the EI system. That decision was made, and as a result, eight million Canadians are being helped.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Chair, SUBs do not have an employment insurance cap. Employers can contribute as much as they want, and they were assured that this would be the case with the CERB. Otherwise, they would have opted for another program.

Let me put my question to the Minister of Finance again, in the hope that he will be the one to answer it.

When does he intend to fix this error?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I thank the member for his question, Mr. Chair.

As we can all appreciate, delivering a benefit of this magnitude as quickly as possible to as many Canadians as possible, both those who were EI eligible and those who were outside of EI, resulted in our having to take some decisions to streamline processes and the system. SUB plans are available for employers—

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will continue on the subject of supplementary unemployment benefits.

Let me remind everyone that Service Canada has entered into agreements with companies and is not honouring them. The victims are thousands and thousands of workers who have to reimburse the Canada emergency response benefit, as my colleague just explained.

I also have the question my colleague from Drummond asked: why is the government not doing the same thing it does with employment insurance and not counting the benefits paid out as part of earned income? It is simple.

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, as legislated, we needed to set up a straightforward, simple benefit to deliver to as many people as possible. The nuance and sophistication of the EI system was not available to us. As a result, as I said, eight million Canadians are getting the CERB. Service Canada is working with each and every employee who is in a repayment situation. We do not want to put anybody in a more difficult situation.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, the truth is that the government has forgotten the thousands of workers covered under a supplementary unemployment benefit agreement. We are talking about mothers and fathers. When the government rolled out its Canada emergency response benefit, it was overwhelmed and it forgot about them. The government can fix it right here, right now.

Does it want to do that?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, let me clarify that employees who were covered by a SUB plan prior to March 15 are indeed covered by that plan. We're working with employers to make sure that their workers have this benefit, regardless of whether or not the CERB is in place. Those who accessed EI after March 15 have been streamlined into the CERB process, and their employers can help them with up to \$1,000 a month.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, we really do not have the same information. Agreements were signed before March 15 for subsequent periods, but there was an agreement with Service Canada.

Companies have tried to contact Service Canada by telephone, but no one is answering. They have tried by email, but no one is replying either. The companies have decided to honour their part of the contract and pay out the SUB. However, the government says that, after the fact, it changed the rules that had previously applied, and it is no longer honouring its agreement.

As I understand it, the government does not want to straighten out the situation, and that is unacceptable.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I want to reassure the honourable member that we have moved quickly to deal with the unprecedented volumes at Service Canada. We have set up a 1,500-agent call centre to help people through the CERB, as well as redeploying 3,000 additional staff to make sure that people are helped through the EI process.

The Chair: Now we'll go to the next question, which is from Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As of December 31, 2019, the total number of pending veterans' disability benefits applications had already grown to over 46,000. These are the most recent public figures. What is the current total

number of pending veterans' disability benefits applications before Veterans Affairs?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs): I am sorry, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I thank my honourable colleague for the question and for giving me the opportunity to respond to the Parliament of Canada from my home in Midgell.

As I indicated earlier in the House of Commons, I can assure the member that one of my major priorities is to make sure that we deal with the backlog and that the veterans of Canada receive the benefits they truly deserve and need.

• (1440)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Those 46,000 applications from December of 2019 represent over 30,000 individual veterans. These are men and women who are suffering. How many individual veterans are currently caught in the backlog?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I again thank my colleague. The fact is that service delivery and providing support to our veterans are of course my top priorities.

As you understand, with this pandemic there are some difficulties, but we are processing the same number of decisions daily. Our—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: On March 10, we learned that the average time that a veteran was waiting to have their disability benefit application processed had grown to 32 weeks.

What is the current average time a veteran is waiting to have their disability benefit application processed?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, as I indicated, what we're doing is working to make sure that we streamline the process, make sure that some of the applications can be done automatically. Some cannot, because we have to make sure that what's provided to the veteran is adequate for the disability they—

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: It seems as though having numbers is a difficult challenge for this government.

On March 10, the deputy minister of Veterans Affairs committed to providing the veterans affairs committee with an updated, written plan on how the department will resolve this backlog. This plan was to include timelines.

When will the veterans affairs committee be provided with this plan?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, I can assure my honourable colleague that of course the veterans affairs committee does vitally important work. I know how important this piece of information is for them.

My department is now working to make sure that the report itself reflects the reality we now face with the situation in the country. I can assure my honourable colleague—

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Chair, I'm sure that the department had a draft plan prior to COVID-19, so I wonder if Mr. MacAulay can provide the committee with that plan right now, rather than wait.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, I can assure my honourable colleague that we are working diligently to make sure that this report is prepared, and prepared properly, for the committee. As I said before, I fully understand the importance of the committee and the great work it does—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Can the minister give us a timeline of when this report will be given to the committee?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, it's difficult to give a timeline. I want to make sure that the report itself reflects the reality of the situation to make sure that the committee—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: The minister's mandate letter instructed Mr. MacAulay to implement a system of automatic approval for the most common disability applications. When will this system be implemented?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, of course this all ties in to the report that the veterans affairs committee is waiting for and to make sure that we're in place in order to make sure that the automatic approval can work and to make sure that veterans receive the proper—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: If automatic approval is implemented, does the minister know how many applications this measure will remove from the backlog?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, it will remove a number from the backlog, because quite simply, if you're skydiving out of a plane, you're going to have knee problems, and if you're a gunner, you're going to have ear problems. These things should be done automatically, and that's exactly what we're working on.

As I said before, other things are complicated. To make sure that the veteran receives the appropriate remuneration—

The Chair: Unfortunately, that's all the time we have for today.

The committee stands adjourned until tomorrow at noon.

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