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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 9, 2020

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1105)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS ON ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC) moved:

That an order of the House do issue for any document prepared by any department, agency and Crown corporation since November 4, 2015, discussing warnings or concerns of economic downturns, their potential impact on the fiscal framework, or advice or recommendations on how to deal with them; and that the documents be provided to the House within 45 days following the adoption of this motion.

The Speaker: Since today is the final allotted day for the supply period ending March 26, the House will go through the usual procedures to consider and dispose of the supply bills. In view of recent practices, do the hon. members agree that the bills be distributed now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, today is an occasion for us to reflect upon the economic events that are unfolding before our eyes. To do so, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Edmonton Mill Woods.

Let us begin with the story of the grasshopper and the ants:

One fine day in winter, some ants were busy drying their store of corn, which had gotten rather damp during the long spell of snow. Presently came up a grasshopper and begged them to spare a few grains. "For," he said, "I am simply starving."

The ants stopped work for a moment, though this was against their principles. "May we ask," said they, "what were you doing with yourself last summer? Why did you not collect a store of food for the winter?"

"The fact is," replied the grasshopper, "I was so busy singing that I hadn't the time." "If you spent the summer singing," the ants replied, "you can't do better than spend the winter dancing," and they chuckled and went on about the work.

The ants had been responsible. They knew that the sunshine of the summer would not last, that it was merely one season of the year, so they worked hard to accumulate and set aside grain for the difficult times they knew would be ahead. What did the grasshopper do? He assumed that the sun would always shine and that times

would always be good, and that therefore he did not need to do anything but dance and sing and play.

It is no so long ago that the sun was shining on the global economy. In the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, things were quite good. The U.S. economy was roaring, having some of the best growth it had experienced in two decades. Commodity prices had recovered from their lows in 2014, and interest rates were as low as one could expect them to be. In fact, it was almost a perfect coincidence of events where growth was high and interest rates were low, all of which maximized the sunshine that blanketed the economic countryside.

Conservatives said, "Like the ants, now is the time to store away the grains, because the sun will not shine forever." Liberals told us that we should dance and sing and spend. They said that we should spend the cupboard bare and not worry about the bad times, for the good times were here. They said that it was the time to squander those good times and to celebrate in a period of self-praise all the riches that fell from the sky.

Conservatives warned that one day winter would come, that trouble would arise and that we would want then to open our cupboards and find them overflowing with a surplus of supply to get us through those cold, dark months and into the economic springtime down the calendar. Of course, across the way the government said no and that it was going to continue to spend.

What did the Liberals do? In every single year since they formed government, their deficits have been bigger than they promised. They told us that deficits would never exceed \$10 billion a year, yet they reached \$29 billion. They told us that the budget would be balanced in 2019. That year came and went, and now they predict that the budget will never be balanced. They put us on track to add \$100 billion to our national debt.

They did all this while the sun was shining, convinced that the economic laws of the four seasons had been abolished, that bad times would never return and that all we needed to do was sing, dance and spend. It appears winter may have arrived.

• (1110)

I looked at Bloomberg News today at 9:30. I quote:

Canadian markets were battered on all fronts as the collapse in oil sent shockwaves through a country with one of the biggest exposures to the commodity among the Group of Seven.

Stocks cratered 10% with the biggest drop since October 1987, the loonie weakened and government bond yields plunged to fresh records as investor pessimism deepened for an economy that barely eked out any growth in the fourth quarter and is already grappling with the coronavirus.

Business of Supply

I emphasize again the last point in the Bloomberg article, that in the last three months of 2019 we had growth of 0.3%, and that was before the illegal blockades and before the coronavirus broke out and started to impact on global economic matters.

I go back to Bloomberg:

The slump in oil will exact another heavy toll on the natural resource-dependent country, which generates about 9% of its gross domestic product from energy and has the biggest exposure to the sector on its stock market at 15%.

Remember, that is the sector the Prime Minister wanted to phase out altogether, and it looks like he is achieving some success.

Not only would the ants be unhappy with the approach the government took to the good times; so too would be Keynes, the great economist leftists these days try to appropriate for themselves. In his great work *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, Keynes explained that during good economic times governments should run large surpluses and pay down debt in order to prepare a buffer and allow for economic stimulus when troubled times later come. That is exactly the formula followed by the previous Conservative government.

In the first two years it was in office, it paid off almost \$40 billion of debt under Stephen Harper and Jim Flaherty. To their credit, Chrétien and Martin in the years prior did likewise. That decision to pay down debt prepared us for the winter ahead. When the winter came, and it was a serious winter, we in Canada were more prepared than any other G7 country. We weathered that grand winter storm better than anyone else because our cupboards overflowed with the surplus of responsible planning and hard work that had happened in the summer months.

The current government, having done the opposite, now leaves us weak and vulnerable as we enter this winter period. Having rendered us so weak and so vulnerable, what can we do now to get us through the winter? We as Conservatives have a plan.

That plan would reduce taxes on workers and entrepreneurs to stimulate hard work, enterprise, investment and consumer activity. It would remove the anti-development barriers imposed by bills C-69 and C-48 which prevent us from shipping our resources from the Pacific coast, and from building pipelines to deliver them there in the first place.

We would require a two-for-one red tape reduction rule. That is to say if the government brings in one new economic regulation, it would need to get rid of two of them in order to remove the red tape that is holding back our economy.

We would replace wasteful corporate welfare, like the millions for Bombardier, Loblaws, Mastercard and BlackBerry, with lower taxes for all entrepreneurs to unleash their power to generate wealth and get us through these hard times. In other words, we want to unleash the fierce and ferocious power of free enterprise, which is the only source of prosperity that will get us through these difficult times.

We believe in responsible planning for trouble ahead. That planning did not occur, so now we as Conservatives step forward again with a responsible plan to get us through the hard times, to get us

over the difficulties and to allow Canadians to fulfill their potential so that anyone who works hard can achieve his or her dreams.

• (1115)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague touched on many topics of importance, some of which I agree with, and one is when he talked about lowering taxes for Canadians. When we came into government in 2015-16, the first priority in that new Parliament was to lower taxes. Therefore, he is right when he talks about the importance of lowering taxes.

I disagree with my colleague, however, when he talked about spending money. We have not been spending money. We have been building a strong Canada by investing in Canadians. We added a million jobs, which is important, and we lowered the unemployment to the lowest in 40 years, which is very important to note.

There is a big difference between spending money and investing in Canadians. We have been investing in Canadians now for five years. The economy has been very strong and we are well prepared to weather any storm we face as we move forward.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the facts are these. Canada's unemployment rate is higher than that of the U.S., the U.K., Japan and Germany. Four out of the seven G7 countries have lower unemployment. Under the Prime Minister, unemployment in Canada has been higher than the G7 average every single year he has been in office.

Our growth right now is 0.3%. It is projected to be 50% lower than that in the United States of America. There is nothing to celebrate about the government's growth in employment numbers.

What we are asking for in this motion, and I have no doubt the government will support it, is the release of all documents in which officials foretold the potential of an economic downturn. Was the government at any point warned by its officials at finance or industry about the economic downturn that could eventually come and what impact such a downturn would have on the size of our deficit?

We want to know if the government anticipated any of these problems. We surely did. We are on the record regularly warning that troubles like this could eventually appear. It turns out winter has come, just as we said it would. We want to know if the government knew these risks existed, if it ignored the warnings and if it took any preparatory action to defend Canadians against its impact.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was just reading budget 2019-20 released by the Liberal government, and its economic assumptions were that oil would be \$55 to \$65 a barrel. That is for West Texas Intermediate. We see this morning that it is currently sitting at just over \$30 a barrel.

Can the member comment on how he thinks the government could have better prepared for this precipitous drop in oil and what he thinks the impact is going to be on the Canadian economy?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the member asks a very good question. That assumption of \$55 for a barrel of oil is another example of the Prime Minister grasshopper who thought the sun would always shine and that winter would never come. He, as a result, spent the cupboard bare and squandered the good times, leaving us weak and vulnerable for the bad times.

Those bad times may have arrived. The oil price the member mentioned, West Texas Intermediate, is the best possible price we could imagine, that and Brent. Of course, we do not get WTI in Canada because we do not have enough pipeline capacity, so we get the Western Canadian Select price, which is lower still.

The result, of course, is that western Canadians will be devastated by this latest economic phenomenon. Hammered with anti-development laws, pipeline blockages and blockades of railroads that would otherwise be delivering agricultural goods, westerners are already suffering. This is another blow.

The government has imposed austerity on western Canadian workers with its anti-development agenda, and now they will suffer more. That is precisely why the Conservative plan would repeal anti-development legislation, approve major projects and unleash the fierce power of the free enterprise system that built the prairie economy over generations. That is how we get through this winter.

• (1120)

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me, speaking on behalf of my constituents, to rise and speak to this very important motion. It is a motion that my colleague from Carleton has brought forward, and one that I had the opportunity to second.

Throughout my ongoing consultations and interactions with constituents, I hear about the concerns of the people right across Edmonton Mill Woods. One of the most repeated concerns I hear, especially from those in the energy sector, is that they cannot find work.

Just this weekend I heard the story of James, a constituent in my riding who is just starting a young family. He had a great job, a well-paying job with benefits. He worked for a company that had been in operation in Alberta for over 25 years. Unfortunately he was laid off, as the company was forced to shut down and move its operations to the United States.

James has not been able to find work in over a year because of the economic situation in Alberta. He has seen first-hand the impacts the stalling economy has had on his living situation. It is situations like James' that are leading to the frustration, desperation and hopelessness at the root of the unity crisis we are seeing in western Canada.

To make matters worse, there are an unprecedented number of small businesses claiming bankruptcy. Canadians have seen the government raise taxes, spend wastefully and rack up massive deficits. Canadians are worried, and for good reason.

Business of Supply

We are here today for this important debate. We are calling on the government to provide documents discussing warnings or concerns of economic downturns, the potential impact on the fiscal framework, or advice or recommendations on how to deal with them, and that those documents be provided to the House within 45 days following the adoption of this motion.

We are requesting documents going back to November 2015 because today's economic situation is not something that just happened overnight. Many experts have been warning about this situation for many years.

Constituents in my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods and right across Alberta have felt the effects the Liberal government has had on the economy the hardest. Alberta saw four straight months of job losses at the end of last year, resulting in nearly 10,000 jobs lost in a four-month span. That is 10,000 families receiving the devastating news from their family members when they came home from work that they had just lost their job.

Investment is fleeing Alberta as regulations are strangling the energy sector and making it almost impossible to build pipelines in Canada. Instead of reducing regulation and bringing in smart rules to make Canada an attractive place to invest, the government brought in the most burdensome regulations on work. These have resulted in nearly \$200 billion in oil and gas projects being cancelled and 200,000 Canadian oil and gas workers losing their jobs over the last five years.

Bills like Bill C-69, the "no-more-pipelines" bill, and Bill C-48, the tanker ban, have unfairly targeted Alberta and have crippled its economy. We have seen the effects these bills and the lack of confidence in the government have had. This was highlighted most recently by Teck's decision to pull its application for the Frontier mine, a project that would have brought 7,000 construction jobs, 2,500 long-term jobs and billions of dollars in investment.

Investment continues to flee Canada while the demand for oil continues to climb right across the world. Foreign investment in Canada is down over 50% since the Prime Minister took power. This was most recently highlighted by Warren Buffet's decision to pull out of a \$9-billion liquefied natural gas project in Quebec over concerns about how the government is handling the illegal railway blockades and infrastructure disaster.

Business of Supply

This impact is worsened by the increased taxes as a result of the Liberal government. Since the Liberal government came to power in 2015, 81% of middle-income Canadians are seeing higher taxes, with the average income tax increase for middle-income families coming in at \$840.

● (1125)

From the cancelled family tax cut to the cancelled art and fitness tax credit, to the cancelled education and textbook credit, the government has found a way to target every Canadian with higher taxes. As a result of these policies, 48% of Canadians are within \$200 of not being able to pay their bills and their debt obligations. One-third of Canadians have no money left at the end of the month and are unable to cover their payments, falling further into debt. Adding to their growing concerns is the worry that the government has mismanaged the economy completely.

Businesses are experiencing the same harsh reality. Businesses are facing new carbon taxes and increased CPP and EI premiums. Thousands of local businesses across our great nation are no longer qualifying for the small business tax rate, or will see it reduced. While other G7 countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom and France, have all embarked on major tax reforms over the past few years to simplify the tax code and lower overall taxes, Canada continues to move in the opposite direction by increasing taxes and regulations, stifling our economy and having taxpayer dollars go up in smoke.

That is what the government is doing, while also spending these increased tax dollars at unprecedented levels. During the first four years of the Liberal government, the Prime Minister added over \$72 billion to the national debt. This was after the Prime Minister, during the 2015 debates, promised, "I am looking straight at Canadians and being honest the way I always have been. We've said we are committed to balanced budgets and we are. We will balance that budget in 2019."

However, here we are at the end of the 2019-20 fiscal year and we are staring at the reality of another deficit and nearly \$100 billion added to our debt. There is no evidence that there was any increase in economic growth as a result of the spending.

There is also little to show for the frivolous spending. We can look at the \$187-billion infrastructure program that the Parliamentary Budget Officer said resulted in zero increase in infrastructure built in Canada because the infrastructure plan did not exist; the \$40 million to BlackBerry, where the CEO of the company candidly admitted he did not need the money; the \$12 million to buy new refrigerators for Loblaws, a company that turned hundreds of millions of dollars in profits last year; or the \$50-million handout to Mastercard. These examples are priceless.

Canadians are getting the short end of the stick again while seeing their hard-earned tax dollars going to waste and turned into subsidies for these Liberal-favoured companies. Let us contrast this with the Conservative plan that my honourable colleague from Carleton laid out.

Being the party of the taxpayer, we outlined our five-step plan focused on tax cuts for workers and entrepreneurs, a plan to phase out the deficit, eliminate red tape and free businesses, end corporate

welfare for Liberal-favoured companies, and end wasteful Liberal spending that we have seen over the past four years. These are the types of actions needed to ensure our economy continues to function and that is why we bring forward this motion.

I am proud to support this motion in the House today. Canadians have seen the government raise taxes, spend wastefully and rack up massive deficits. Canadians are worried about the state of the economy, and for good reason, especially given the bleak reality our stock markets reflect today. The Liberals have squandered the good times, leaving us weak and vulnerable for economic turmoil.

As opposed to paying down the debt, the government racked it up while the world was stable and prosperous and spent at unprecedented levels. Canada's economic growth has slowed to 0.3% in the fourth quarter, the worst performance in almost four years, and this was all before the impact of the illegal blockades and coronavirus. The blockades have stifled our economy for weeks and affected small businesses across the country. The Prime Minister's sky-high taxes, wasteful spending and massive deficits have put Canada in an incredibly weak and vulnerable position, with the possibility of a made-in-Canada recession rapidly approaching.

● (1130)

As we continue to see the effects these illegal blockades have had on our economy and the increased concern of the effects of COVID-19, now is the time for the government to finally be transparent with Canadians, to provide us with its plans discussing warnings or concerns of the economic downturns and their potential impacts on the fiscal framework, and advice and recommendations on how to deal with them. Canadians are worried about what is next. The people in my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods, right across Alberta and across this country as a whole cannot handle more weakness and vulnerability from the government.

Canada's Conservatives have a plan to unleash our economy, reward hard work, eliminate waste and allow Canadians to fulfill their potential. We will continue to be the voice of hard-working entrepreneurs and Canadians today and demand that the Liberals get our economy back on track, so that Canadians can get back to work.

Business of Supply

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I take issue with a number of the different points my hon. colleague has made, but I will focus my question on one. In a very brief way, he passed over his objection to the improvements we have made to the Canada pension plan. When I talk to constituents in the communities I represent, one of the top things I hear from the seniors who live in these communities is that they have real trouble affording the increasing cost of living. Did I hear correctly that the plan of the Conservative Party of Canada is to undo improvements, which will result in fewer dollars going to seniors in retirement? If that is the case, why does he want to cut benefits for seniors in order to pay for whatever the Conservative plan is shaping up to be?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, what I talked about was providing a plan for businesses right across this country to be able to support workers to get back to work. We want to take the burden away from businesses, especially the small businesses that help to run this country. The Liberal government has created so much red tape and has burdened some of these businesses that they are unable to do what they do best, which is grow the economy and help support workers, so that they can provide for their families.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, regardless of what people may think, we sympathize with our Conservative colleagues' concerns about the effects and economic impact of the energy sector slowdown. We realize that western Canada's economy is largely energy-based.

I do not know whether my colleague is aware that the reason this oil is not competitive on the international market today comes down to three key factors. The first is that it takes the equivalent of four barrels of oil to produce one barrel of this kind of oil, so production is non-competitive right off the bat when the price per barrel falls below \$50 or so.

Since 2012, Saudi Arabia has literally cut the price of its oil by raising taxes within its own country to guarantee international dumping. Thanks to those two factors, Canadian oil is not competitive right now and probably will not be for quite some time. That is a business reality, not a political reality under the circumstances.

I understand the local and social concerns this can cause, especially on an economic level, but has my colleague considered any potential transition solutions for his province?

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, my colleague mentions the price of oil being part of the factor here. Yes, it is true the world price of oil makes a difference, but at the end of the day I have seen companies shut down in Alberta and move south to Texas where there is less regulation and more support overall for the industry and they are able to flourish. I am talking about burdensome regulations like Bill C-69 and other bills the Liberal government has brought in that are hurting our industry, such as Bill C-48, which is hurting the possibility of taking oil from Alberta to international markets. The problem here is mismanagement by the current government.

I would hope my hon. colleagues from the Bloc would support this motion so we could see the documents and what types of warnings were given to the government. Let us see what those documents say and how the government has reacted. I think that transparency is important to allow the House and members of Parliament to do our work and to know what types of warnings were given to the government well before this economic situation that has come up now.

● (1135)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member's colleague rose to regale us with tales of Aesop's fables. He acknowledged the variations of his stories, but he did not express the compassion and charity of Aesop's fables, nor did he acknowledge that a variation of this story is with the dung beetle, which is an improvident insect that finds that the winter rains wash away the dung on which it feeds.

The Conservatives have always maintained the billions in subsidies of the rich oil and gas companies. Will the hon. member finally acknowledge that the billions of taxpayer subsidies to the oil and gas sector are in no way in keeping with the free market, nor in keeping with his colleague's fable?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, there are no subsidies to the oil and gas sector. The fact of the matter is that we are talking about taking off the burdensome regulations, the unnecessary regulations, regulations that are strangling the energy sector and that is a result of what is happening in Alberta with so many job losses.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as always it is a pleasure to rise in the chamber and, in this instance, to contribute to the debate that largely revolves around the fiscal and economic health of our nation in uncertain and challenging times globally.

The sponsor of the motion went to great lengths to talk down the Canadian economy in an effort to score political points. I disagree with the vast majority of the points that he raised during his debate, so it is somewhat ironic that I plan on supporting the motion because the documents that may exist are not documents that we have any interest in keeping from the opposition nor the Canadian public.

Over the course of my remarks there are a few key themes that I hope to touch on, in order to provide an overview of the current economic and fiscal context in which we find ourselves; to highlight some of the emerging challenges that face the Canadian economy; and to introduce some of the measures that we have put forward in the past few years, which have yielded results far beyond what I thought possible when I was a candidate in the 2015 federal election campaign.

By way of background, it would be helpful to describe the context within which we find ourselves.

Canada is in a very healthy fiscal position compared to other developed economies in the global community. We are well positioned to respond to the kinds of challenges that are now making themselves present.

Business of Supply

The narrative that somehow overspending has put us in a position where we cannot afford to deal with the challenges we are now facing is based on false pretenses. I honestly believe that it is designed purely to score political points based on misinformation, rather than making substantive points that contribute to the health of our democratic discourse in Canada.

The fundamentals of our economy are strong. We have seen extraordinary job growth in the past few years. We have seen, as importantly, that growth translate into benefits for middle-class and low-income Canadians. We have seen certain measures improve the competitiveness of our nation's economy and we have seen an overall improvement to the fiscal health of our economy.

Responsible management of the economy is at the forefront of our government. The mandate letter to the finance minister from the Prime Minister specifically mandates him to continue to see our national debt shrink as a function of our economy and to ensure that we preserve enough economic firepower to respond, in the event that an economic downturn does come to pass.

We have been planning to invest in Canadians to create growth but also making sure that we have enough fiscal room to operate, should the circumstances demand any kind of a change in course. Sometimes, the fiscally prudent thing to do is to take advantage of opportunities to invest that may exist.

If I look at the status of Canada's economy right now, what I see is a debt-to-GDP ratio that has actually been shrinking and is projected to continue to go down. What I see is the healthiest debt-to-GDP ratio of any G7 economy. Canada is one of only two countries within the G7 to have a AAA credit rating, the highest possible rating with all of the major credit agencies. Canada is one of only about 10 countries on the planet today that have a credit rating of this strength.

In addition, in our federal budgets that we table, we prepare for contingencies to deal with events that we may not have been able to foresee at the time of their crafting, specifically to deal with challenges that may present themselves that may not be apparent on the day a budget is tabled. Having that contingency in place is precisely the kind of thing we do to deal with emerging challenges, and I will deal with a few of them now.

Of course, the spread of COVID-19, or as most Canadian households would refer to it, coronavirus, in recent weeks may not have been something that could have been apparent months ago. When we became aware that this was an issue that needed to be dealt with, we responded professionally every step of the way.

When it comes to something like the coronavirus, I want to make clear that while it is also an economic issue, our number one priority is protecting the health of Canadians. I have been blown away by the leadership of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the level of co-operation with our international partners, whether it is the G7 or IMF on the economic side, or the World Health Organization on the public health side. I have also been blown away with the level of coordination between federal departments through the government operations centre, which was triggered by public safety in recent weeks, as well as the Public Health Agency's coordination of

the efforts between the provinces and territories with federal measures that have been put in place.

● (1140)

To those front-line workers who are diligently protecting the health of Canadians, so that my family and I can sleep soundly knowing that we are in good hands, I want to thank them for their professionalism and excellence throughout.

I want to recognize that despite the fact that it is primarily a public health issue, there are also economic challenges that obviously arise when we see threats of this nature. We do not have to have a crystal ball to see that there is an impact on commodity prices when a particular region of the world has such a dramatic drop in demand that it suddenly has an impact on the countries that produce those commodities. This is having a particular impact on the metals and oil and gas sectors that Canada's economy has depended on for a very long time.

We also see that the travel and tourism sectors can be significantly impacted whenever there are affected regions of the world that have travel advisories. It also can have an economic impact at home. My home province of Nova Scotia was set to host the international women's hockey championship in the coming months. Unfortunately, out of concern of public health and safety, that event had to be cancelled. That will have an unfortunate economic impact on the communities that were so looking forward to hosting that tournament.

There is also an economic impact on global supply chains. Canadian businesses that may not be able to secure the products they rely on for the manufacturing process, for example, may not be able to provide their products to their typical end customers or they may have to pay a higher price. It is not lost on us that the events that are global in nature can have a very serious impact on us at home and they can also impact the general business and consumer sentiments. They can cause them to change course in the spending decisions they otherwise would have made.

One of the things we are doing to monitor the economic impact of this outbreak is to make sure that we have the resources in place so that Canada can maintain a world-class public health response. We also want to continue to monitor the impact on businesses and workers and ensure the measures that we are putting in place are going to serve the interests of keeping the Canadian economy operating at capacity.

We have a plan to increase our risk adjustment in the upcoming federal budget to make sure that we are planning for the potential impact that this illness could have on our nation's economy. We can look recently at the blockades that were canvassed in a number of debates in the House in response to the protests tied to the land rights issue in the Wet'suwet'en territory in western Canada.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

We have also taken measures to address the economic impacts of the rail blockades. If there is a lesson to be learned from the past few weeks, it is that there is no straight path to reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Reconciliation requires dedication and hard work, and we have to recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done. This is a healing process that will involve good days and not-so-good days. We need to continue to show our determination.

Canada is a trading nation and we ship a lot of our goods to world markets by rail. Although it is too early to know the full impact of the blockades, we know that they were extremely challenging and frustrating for businesses and individuals. We have to keep in mind that many Canadians rely on rail transit networks to obtain basic necessities like food, to commute to and from work every day and to earn a living.

Thousands of workers were laid off, and many are still having problems. The situation is having real and immediate effects. Our government is working 24 hours a day to mitigate the economic risks of the rail blockades and to find a lasting solution.

From day one, we knew that we could not take shortcuts and that, no matter how difficult, dialogue was the best approach. Many people have criticized our approach, but it is working. For the most part, trains are running again. The people who were laid off are being rehired. Most of the blockades have been dismantled. In my opinion, the Prime Minister took the right approach even though other politicians proposed simple solutions to a very complex problem.

• (1145)

[English]

There is another emerging challenge for the Canadian economy. I do not know if I can even call it that, we have known about it for so long. I would be remiss if I did not raise the threat posed by climate change not only to our environment, but to our nation's economy.

The fact that we still have debates over whether human industrial activity is the primary driver of climate change is beyond me, and the fact that in the Canadian political context we still have debates on whether Canada can play a meaningful role in the fight against climate change is something that, as a representative who cares about this, I simply cannot accept. We cannot address challenges to our economy if we do not deal with the threats posed by climate change.

Canadians are feeling the effects today. We have seen storm surges in Nova Scotia, floods in New Brunswick, heat waves in Quebec and Ontario, droughts in the prairies, forest fires in the west and a glacial melt in the north. They are having a real impact on the traditional way of life of Canadians and on our economies.

Of course, there is also a direct economic impact. When representatives of the Insurance Bureau of Canada testified before the finance committee as part of our pre-budget consultations, they highlighted that in 1990, the losses associated with severe weather events were in the ballpark of \$100 million. That number last year was in the ballpark of \$2 billion, a twentyfold increase. I do not doubt that their motivations are pure, but I think they are motivated

not only by the desire to do social good for our planet and environment, but also, as they represent the insurance industry, by the bottom line. If we follow the money, we can see that it costs more because life on planet earth has changed. We can address these challenges. They also testified that for every dollar in insured losses, three dollars in uninsured losses were being picked up by taxpayers today, whether municipal, provincial or federal. It is the same group of people who are now out of pocket far too much to deal with climate inaction over decades.

It is not just the cost of mitigating disasters or responding to floods that we need to deal with. There are also missed economic opportunities. When we look at the forest fires out west, we see that the impact they had on production, even in the energy sector, was immense.

Something that I am deeply concerned about, as I represent Nova Scotia, is what happened to the lobster fishery in Maine a few years ago because of high ocean temperatures. I fear that a similar kind of consequence will befall the lobster harvesters in Nova Scotia if we do not take action soon. I hope it is not already too late.

We also need to turn our mind to other things, not just the challenge facing our economy when we are dealing with climate change. There is a massive economic opportunity, according to Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and current governor of the Bank of England. He said there is a \$26-trillion global opportunity.

The world is changing and we have to decide whether we want to change with it. If we choose to change and be a part of this transition, we will be at the front of a wave of economic growth that we perhaps cannot contemplate now.

In fact, we are seeing it already today. In my own community, the Trinity group of companies is helping with energy efficiency initiatives. It grew from a shop of about two people to dozens and dozens of employees. It helps homeowners reduce their power bills and emissions at the same time.

Business of Supply

We are seeing investments in green infrastructure that are able to create jobs, put people to work and prevent the worst consequences of climate change for future generations. We are also seeing investments in research at St. Francis Xavier University, a university in my own backyard, to the Flux Lab, where Dr. David Risk has helped to discover a new gas leak detection technology that is helping energy companies reduce their emissions. It has put people to work not just in his lab, but at some of Canada's largest energy producers, which have now adopted this technology.

We have put forward the first national climate action plan, and we have introduced more than 50 measures. We expect to see growth in the green economy as a result.

However, while it is one thing to experience economic growth, it is another thing to make sure that it actually benefits everyday, ordinary Canadians. To grow the economy, we have made investments in infrastructure, which put people to work and strengthen communities, and in innovation through our universities, as I just cited. We have also triggered private sector investment.

We have changed rules around immigration to ensure that employers are not missing out on growth opportunities because they cannot find people in their communities to do the work. We have invested in trade to help grow the economy and are now the only G7 economy with free trade access to every other G7 economy.

We have cut the small business tax rate from 11% to 9%, making it the lowest rate of small business tax in the G7. We have also put new rules forward to accelerate the capital cost allowance right now for companies that are investing in ways to increase their production and put more people to work.

What is the result of these investments? There are more than 1.2 million new jobs in our nation's economy, including more than 30,000 last month. We are seeing record low unemployment, with more Canadians working now than at more or less any other point in our nation's history since we started keeping track of those statistics. However, it is cold comfort for someone living in poverty or who cannot afford the cost of raising a family to hear that there are a number of new jobs across Canada or that our GDP has, in fact, gone up.

• (1150)

That is why we have introduced policies like the Canada child benefit, which ended the practice of sending child care cheques to millionaires and puts more money directly into the pockets of nine out of 10 Canadian families. It is why the first thing we did when we came here after 2015 was advance a tax cut for nine million middle-class Canadians and raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% of income earners. It is why the first thing we did when we got here in 2019 was put forward a measure to reduce taxes for 20 million Canadians and eliminate federal income tax altogether for more than one million low-income Canadians. It is why we have advanced OAS benefits, reducing the age of eligibility for old age security from 67 to 65. It is why we have increased the guaranteed income supplement by 10% for low-income single seniors. It is why we made enhancements to the Canada pension plan, which I am learning the Conservative Party now opposes, to ensure our seniors can have a more dignified and secure retirement. It is why we are tackling the cost of education by improving the Canada student

grants program, changing the timeline under which students have to repay debt they may have built up while studying, and why we doubled the Canada summer jobs program to put more young people to work.

What we are actually seeing, despite the clever use of statistics by some of the members opposite, is that the typical Canadian household, when we consider the totality of our body of work, is about \$2,000 better off today than it was before we took office. More importantly, as we have seen recently, is that more than one million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty in the past few years. We have achieved the single greatest reduction in poverty over a three-year period in the history of Canada. About 334,000 of the people no longer living in poverty, who were living in poverty just four and a half years ago, are Canadian children. This is the kind of policy development that we should be shouting from the rooftops and sharing with the world to demonstrate how to successfully manage the benefits of economic growth to support Canadians.

The Conservatives' attack on the Canadian economy is not, in and of itself, an economic plan. What we have, when we look at the facts, is a rate of job growth that most would not have thought possible when the Liberals were coming into power at the end of 2015. More importantly, we have seen that Canadians writ large are sharing in the benefit of that growth, rather than it being concentrated among the wealthiest 1% of income earners. We have also seen more Canadians lifted out of poverty than almost any member of the House could have imagined four and a half years ago.

All of this has taken place while we have maintained a healthy fiscal framework that allows us to respond to the changing dynamics of the global economy. If members do not want to accept my word on this, I would invite them to read the report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who confirmed this to be the case just a few short weeks ago.

Yes, the world is changing and yes, there are challenges. However, Canada is up to them now and will be as long as we remain in government.

• (1155)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am quite embarrassed by the member's statement. He is living in a fantasy world. It is time to get real. It is the government's job to give Canadians the straight goods.

He is talking about a \$26-trillion green initiative. However, do members know who the biggest investors in green energy are in Canada? They are oil and gas companies. For every dollar that oil goes down, the Alberta treasury loses \$355 million. Today's drop alone will cost the Alberta treasury \$10 billion. We are seeing revenues collapsing across this country and the government is not prepared for it. Pension contribution liabilities are increasing. Revenues are dropping. Other expenses are increasing. The Liberals are not ready for these changes.

What percentage of the debt-to-GDP ratio is the government prepared to go to? Is it 50%, 100% or 200%? How far are the Liberals going to put this country into debt before they get real with Canadians?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, I accept that the member feels embarrassed in asking his question, but it is not because of the comments coming from this side of the aisle.

What we are seeing is the Conservatives coming to the very boundary of accusing the Prime Minister of causing a global drop in oil prices. Are they next going to blame him for the spread of the coronavirus in Iran or Wuhan? It is becoming a fool's errand to even engage, but I will do my best.

We recognize that there are structural challenges facing the global oil and gas sector. I actually spent five years working in Alberta, oftentimes in the oil and gas sector. This is not something that has come lately to my attention. It is something that the federal and provincial governments should have been preparing for a very long time ago.

What we are doing is investing in the Canadian economy. That is going to allow us to achieve growth not just in one sector of strategic importance, but across the board. At the same time, we are trying to help position Canadians so they can weather the storm and are preserving a fiscal economic framework that allows us to respond to these challenges.

Right now the balance sheet of Canada is the envy of the G7. We have come down to about 31% of our debt-to-GDP ratio. We were more than double that in our nation's fairly recent history. If there is a developed economy in the world that is prepared to respond to the challenges raised in the global marketplace, it is Canada's.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his speech, including the part he delivered in French. I want to congratulate him on the quality of his French.

I was very interested in what he said about the economic opportunities offered by the transition economy, such as when he mentioned the former governor of the Bank of Canada and current Governor of the Bank of England, Mr. Carney.

I want him to know that I agreed with most of what he said, and I agree with what his party said it would do. However, I want to remind him that, if we look at how the government has actually spent money and what it is actually doing, that is the exact opposite of what it said, unfortunately. What is being done for the transition economy is not comparable to what is being done to support and develop the oil economy.

I would remind him that, during his party's first term in office, the sector grew by 24% and is still growing at 8% per year. No sector of the Canadian economy is growing at that rate today.

Furthermore, I would remind him that during the final year of his previous term, the Prime Minister announced more than \$20 billion in support for this industry.

Business of Supply

When will the government change course and support a transition economy instead of the 20th-century economy that is crashing today?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, first off, I want to thank the hon. member for his question and for giving me French lessons at meetings of the Standing Committee on Finance.

I hope he will not mind if I answer in English.

[English]

The fact of the matter is that we are in the midst of Canada's very first national action on climate change. With respect, we recognize that the energy sector is still very much a part of the Canadian economy, and we are not going to flip the switch and shut down this industry of strategic importance overnight.

What does the transition look like to me? It looks like making sure we have a price on pollution so that those in the conventional oil and gas sector are not necessarily able to operate without dealing with the costs of the externalities that have been borne by the rest of Canadians. It looks like creating a market for the next generation of fuels by developing a clean fuel standard. It looks like investments in energy efficiency, including the \$56 million for my home province of Nova Scotia, to help homeowners make their homes more efficient. It looks like subsidies in electrical vehicles, which have received a level of uptake that we frankly did not contemplate, with 50% of the three-year subsidy eaten away in just the first eight months.

It also looks like investments in protecting nature that will put people to work in restoring some of the most important critical habitat to fight the biodiversity crisis we are facing and protect our carbon sinks. Recognizing as a social fact that the energy sector is still of strategic importance to Canada does not exclude the idea that we can be investing in the transition.

Canada has never seen a government put so much effort into the transition toward a green economy. I would be happy to continue the conversation with my friend, who I know is a big supporter of the transition. If we work together, I feel we can help Canada lead the rest of the world as we transition to a net-zero future.

• (1200)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP will be supporting the motion, as we support transparency.

The member talked about contingency. He said that when times are tough the government can react. We have seen the biggest drop on the Toronto Stock Exchange today since 1987. We have seen oil prices lose 30% of their value over the last day. This is a different time.

Business of Supply

We need a government with a plan. We need a government that is going to help diversify our economy, build more resiliency and invest in the future. The government has committed \$17.1 billion to the Trans Mountain pipeline. What we need is a climate bank, a plan to build and invest in clean energy so that the workers who will be most affected will get jobs. We need to invest in salmon restoration and projects that are going to get people to work immediately.

Will the member come out with an immediate plan for Canadians who are being impacted by what is happening with COVID-19 and the crisis we are facing, which we have never seen before? We are expecting an emergency package right now for Canadians that will move us forward for the next generation and the future generations to come.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, it will take me a moment to unpack some of the different angles of that question.

With respect to COVID-19, yes, it requires a serious response, given the nature of the public health emergency we are dealing with. Respectfully, we have engaged the Government Operations Centre to make sure that all government departments coordinate their efforts. The Public Health Agency of Canada has coordinated efforts with all of the provincial and territorial health authorities to ensure that front-line care is meeting the quality of service that they would expect. We are coordinating our efforts with the World Health Organization.

We also recognize that there is an economic impact and, with respect, there will be details shared soon about support for those who have to deal with self-isolation to help combat the spread of COVID-19.

The member mentioned the significant drop in global oil prices as a result of the disagreement between Saudi Arabia and Russia in recent days. The fact is that we have been working on a transition and diversification of the economy for four and a half years. It is not the case that we suddenly need to respond because an emergency has popped up, though the situation does also require an acute response. The fact is that we have been diversifying the economy by investing in infrastructure and changing rules around immigration to bring a more talented labour force to Canada to fill needs when employers cannot meet the needs locally.

We have been investing in innovation to boost research, which is now paying dividends through the commercialization of new technologies that have been developed right here in Canada. We have been engaging in investment and trade to have new markets come to our country. We have been making the investments the member is now calling for during the past four and a half years and we are going to continue to make those kinds of investments because they are good for the Canadian economy and good for Canadians.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, early in the member's comments he referred to Canada's AAA credit rating, and in response to a colleague he also referred to Canada's excellent present balance sheet.

Could he explain what the past five years of a Liberal government have done to contribute to those two conditions, or is Canada still riding on the crest of the previous government?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, I am glad to take this question.

The Conservatives often talk about the great recession, which was a real challenge and a global financial crisis, and how the Canadian economy was the first to emerge from that very challenging economic time, but what they never tell people is that we were the only G7 country to find ourselves, a few years later, in another recession that was driven by the Conservatives' failed economic policies of anti-growth.

With respect, the Conservatives racked up \$150 billion of debt and had the slowest rate of economic growth of any government, and get this, since the Great Depression.

Over the past few years, what our government has done to preserve our fiscal health is make investments that grow the economy and have the benefits of that economic growth go to Canadians, all while monitoring a downward-trending debt-to-GDP ratio. This is sound economic policy, and I am happy to defend it any day of the week.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague, the member for Laurentides—Labelle. It is an honour for me to start things off.

On a more serious note, the global economy is in bad shape. The New York and Toronto stock exchanges both temporarily suspended trading this morning because stock prices were plummeting too quickly, as we also saw when the European stock exchanges closed. This is very worrisome, and it can be attributed to the panic created by the oil crash, which in turn can be attributed to the threat currently facing the global economy because of the coronavirus. I would add that even before those two events that caused stock markets to plummet, the global economy was beginning to show signs of a downturn. It was clearly already struggling.

According to widely reported statistics, global growth was pretty weak in 2019 at 2.9%. It is generally understood that when growth is at 2.5% or less, there is a serious risk of global recession. Things are not going well. Europe is also struggling, as it was even before the problems related to the coronavirus arose. The same is true in Asia, especially in Japan, China and other countries in the region.

In North America, the situation is not as bad, but growth is weak and, since the global economy is interconnected, the risks are real. We often get the impression that economic crises, no matter how big or small, happen roughly every 10 years. In fact, the last one was in 2008-09.

Business of Supply

The global economy is struggling and now it is sustaining external shocks that we could not see coming, like the coronavirus, the plunge in oil prices and the resulting repercussions. The coronavirus is creating fear, which has crippled tourism all around the world. Some large regions, for example in Italy or China, the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, are under quarantine. We can expect an additional slowdown and, since both local and global economies are interconnected, these shocks are likely to have adverse effects on all economic sectors.

If the economy were on a strong footing, then this shock would be temporary and the economy would return to normal growth after a few months. However, as I was just saying, there are already signs of a serious economic slowdown. The current situation might be bad enough to have a serious impact on the economy and plunge us into that phase of the economic cycle we call “recession”.

The problems of the tourism industry, the quarantines and the reduction in personal expenditures could result in the classic scenario of a decline in demand that would possibly trigger an economic crisis. I am certain that our colleague could tell us more about Keynesian analysis and possible solutions later today. I will be there because it will be very interesting, and I invite all my colleagues to come and listen to him.

In his analysis of the current situation, renowned economist Kenneth Rogoff, from Harvard, is introducing a new element by suggesting that there could also be a risk of a supply shock as the coronavirus could cause a downturn in supply. The global economy is so interconnected and supply chains so diversified that a quarantine in a given region, such as China, could slow production of a component used in the manufacture of cars, transportation equipment or other goods. A single missing link could halt and even paralyze the entire production chain in a given economic sector. This possibility is worrisome and the economist Rogoff has more to say.

• (1210)

The Chinese economy is now twice as big as it was during the SARS crisis in 2003. Every segment of the economy is in massive debt. Individuals, businesses and local governments all rely on income coming in regularly to be able to make payments, since they are all over-indebted and over-leveraged. This becomes very worrisome if a zone is quarantined. Individuals, businesses and municipalities will no longer be able to make their payments, which could cause a cash crisis. Everyone knows that China plays a big role in the international economy. This situation is very worrisome.

The economy could slow down because of a drop in demand and also a drop in supply. Basic economic theory tells us that a drop in supply can cause a drop in production, leading to an increase in prices and inflation rates. This is particularly worrisome because the potential inflation could make the traditional methods we rely on to recover from recessions less effective.

The reason inflation has been so low over the past few years is that the primary goal of most central banks is to keep inflation within a target range of 1% to 3%. I would add that it is also due to increased trade worldwide. All this interconnectedness has lowered production costs in every sector, which could explain why inflation has not gone up. However, if the coronavirus sets off a panic and

countries start closing their borders, the gains from increased international trade could drop off, leading to an inflation problem.

As I mentioned earlier, the global economy was starting to show signs of slowing down, and we are now facing two problems, namely the coronavirus and the oil crash. Let us hope this is only temporary. However, it is extremely important that governments around the world take concrete steps to help us recover as fast as possible. These problems are so serious that they could mark the beginning of a crisis, and that is deeply troubling.

Naturally, the government will have to make use of its traditional tools. We have seen the Bank of Canada, which operates independently of the government, cut its policy rate. There is also public spending. The parliamentary secretary told us earlier that it is important for Canada to maintain a world-class health care system.

Canada's health care system belongs first and foremost to Quebec and the provinces. It falls under provincial jurisdiction. The federal government's role is to provide adequate funding for the health care system in accordance with its previous commitments, but we are seeing exactly the opposite. I would like to remind members that Quebec's former finance minister, who was a member of the Liberal Party, accused this government of engaging in predatory federalism because it is not honouring its commitment to provide better funding for health care. That really says a lot. There is still no social housing agreement between Quebec and Ottawa. Money for infrastructure is not being disbursed. These fundamental tools would be useful in dealing with current problems, but the government is making the process more difficult than it needs to be. Things are not moving as fast as we would like.

No short-term solution is very effective in boosting supply in an economic downturn. The crisis is an excellent opportunity to move toward the economy of the future. The parliamentary secretary was talking about a transition economy. In my opinion, the government really needs to get on that and stop insisting on remaining in the last century's economy. The price of oil has just dropped. It does not make any sense that the oil industry is receiving more government support than any other industry. We are talking about over \$20 billion with cost overruns. That is what was announced just over a year ago. The government is stuck in the past. We need to diversify the economy, and Quebec has everything it takes to succeed in the transition economy.

Business of Supply

• (1215)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is important to recognize that the provinces and territories play an administrative role in health care. However, we have given historical amounts of transfers in health care dollars to the provinces. We recognize that Canadians, no matter what region of the country they are in, expect the federal government to play a role in health care delivery.

On a daily basis, Canadians are following the news on the coronavirus situation. Would the member not agree that Ottawa needs to continue to work with the provinces, which are responsible for the administration of health care, and with other stakeholders, including first responders and so forth? I would like his thoughts on dealing with the coronavirus and the importance of all of us coming together, including first responders, provincial and federal governments and others.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for the comments and question.

This is a unique situation. It is often said that we can make numbers say what we want. The parliamentary secretary is correct to say that federal government health transfers to the provinces have never been so high. If we consider demographic growth and the increased cost of health services, the federal government has never contributed so little to health in terms of percentage of GDP or health spending. The provinces are having to take on more and more of our health care spending. We have to pay closer attention to the data.

I would remind my colleague that under the initial agreement, Ottawa was supposed to cover half of our health care spending. Ottawa was supposed to match every dollar spent by Quebec. The provinces and Quebec are currently asking the federal government to cover 25% of our health care spending. In other words, we are asking Ottawa to spend \$1 for every \$3 we spend and we are not even getting that. That is why Quebec's Liberal health minister called this predatory federalism.

Coronavirus presents a real threat. Everyone has to work together to limit the spread of this virus as much as possible, at least until there is a vaccine, which should arrive in a few months.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Liberals and Conservatives have managed the economy for the wealthiest and the multinationals. However, when it comes to helping people in our ridings, that is completely different. We know that the average person is \$200 away from insolvency. Therefore, I was very happy to hear conversations around housing and the transition that includes workers, because all we have heard today is the transition as it relates to corporations and those making the most in our country.

Would my friend opposite consider supporting a true, just transition for workers that includes health care, a place for people to live,

medication and child care? Would the members support us in investing in people? Would they support our Motion No. 1, for a true, just transition for workers in a green new deal?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and his question.

I unfortunately have not yet read through the entire motion. In general, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois tend to be progressive, meaning that we are in favour of a social democracy, redistribution of wealth and support for the less fortunate. However, our views differ when it comes to respect for jurisdictions. We do not want Ottawa to take away Quebec's and the provinces' jurisdiction over health, for example. If the motion includes respect for provincial jurisdictions, we expect compliance with the Sherbrooke declaration. We expect the motion to acknowledge the right to opt out with full compensation.

Since the world economy has been slowing down, I want to remind the House that it is important to crack down on tax havens. States have fewer resources and OECD countries, such as the United States and Canada, are in debt because corporations and the wealthy are finding more and more tax loopholes and are abusing them. We must take real action and make things that are immoral illegal. Take, for example, the Toronto banks that all have branches in the Caribbean. We need to do something about this.

• (1220)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will discuss our position on the motion and share some of my own thoughts on this request.

As the Bloc Québécois critic for access to information and ethics, emphasis on ethics, I think it is important to explain what I think this motion is really about.

First of all, as several people have said today, the Bloc Québécois obviously agrees with the motion that an order of the House do issue for any document prepared by any department, agency and Crown corporation since November 4, 2015. Obviously, documents produced by any department should be disclosed and available to all parliamentarians.

I am a new member of the 43rd Parliament, and I have a lot to learn, but I know there are fundamental things we must do to be transparent, open and easy to understand, not opaque. Information relevant to public opinion must be entirely accessible. Dialogue is a conversation between two or more people about a particular subject.

Business of Supply

The Access to Information Act requires that, upon taking up their positions, ministers proactively publish briefing materials within 120 calendar days of their appointment. The title and reference number of memoranda prepared for ministers by a federal institution must be published within 30 calendar days. Briefing notes prepared for the appearance of a minister before Parliament must be published within 120 calendar days after that appearance.

At present, there is no policy that provides for the proactive disclosure of these documents. Individuals must make a request to have access to all these documents pursuant to the act. They must then obtain a response within 30 days, unless an extension is warranted by the circumstances.

With respect to proactive disclosure, the Access to Information Act provides for time frames that are generally much longer than the 30 days to act on a request. It authorizes institutions to not act on a request for documents when they have already been made public. The commissioner has no oversight over documents that require proactive publication, including the application of exceptions. That is a step backwards with respect to the current law.

The commissioner recommends extending the scope of the legislation to ministers' offices, organizations that support Parliament and organizations that provide administrative support to the courts, with an exception to prevent any breach of parliamentary privilege and any violation of judicial independence.

The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics made the same recommendation in the previous Parliament, a few months ago, with an exception related to parliamentary duties.

Today we should be talking more about the urgent need to amend this legislation, which is flawed. Considering all these aspects, that is where we stand regarding this disclosure request. I will put it another way. Whether or not we are talking about legislation, I think this is really about transparency, plain and simple. Transparency is an attitude that ensures clarity, intelligibility, and complete accessibility to information relevant to public opinion. Once we achieve that, then dialogue can begin. I have heard the government talk about dialogue on several occasions recently.

● (1225)

I would therefore expect transparency to include initiating a genuine dialogue. Let's not forget that dialogue helps build trust and significantly enhances the level of discussion.

I would like to share an example that demonstrates the benefits of transparency. In the early 2000s, I was working for a wood processing company. It was a hundred-year-old company with over 200 employees. I was working for the chief communications officer. Although the company was privately, not publicly, owned, we made the decision to release all of the company's financial statements, good or bad, on a regular basis.

Everyone was surprised by the numbers. There were many different reactions. Some people could not believe that the economic situation could have such an impact on them. They thought that if it continued, the company would really have to take action, and that could hurt them.

What was the outcome? The quality of the products shot up. This enabled the company to make up ground on sales and exports, which require higher quality in a market that is evolving significantly.

Because the company was transparent, all of its members were more aware of how they could be affected. There was no need to ask employees to maximize their efforts to overcome the obstacles created by the market downturn.

Alternatively, what happened when we presented results that were a little more positive? This reassured employees that the company was healthy and that their jobs were safe. It also improved productivity. Employees wanted things to continue to go well in the hopes that they would one day get a raise.

The Bloc Québécois works for taxpayers. We do not manage private funds.

Would it not be better to use a day like this to debate fundamental concerns and make the health, safety and prosperity of our fellow citizens central to our discussions and dialogue?

I do not even dare calculate how much it is costing us today, March 9, to debate a request that should be accepted by the government in any case.

For all of these reasons, I think that we should be debating more fundamental issues, namely the prosperity, collective well-being and sustainability of our industries.

In closing, I hope that today's motion and any other motion like it need never again be part of such an official request. I hope that from now on, we will be able to work together on urgent and important issues. Otherwise, I might be inclined to think there are documents in the public interest that cannot be disclosed to parliamentarians.

It should come as no surprise to learn that the government lacks transparency and is hiding things from us. When that happens, it prevents all parliamentarians from working toward the common good, even though that is what we were elected to do.

● (1230)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister in particular has been very proactive on the issues of disclosing information and in transparency and accountability. We saw that even before he became Prime Minister, when we, as the third party in the chamber, advocated for proactive disclosure for all members of Parliament. Even though it was not mandated, it was mandated within our caucus to provide information with respect to our expenses.

Business of Supply

The request before us is for the government to continue to provide information so members of Parliament, whether in the House or at standing committees, are in a better position to make decisions.

I am compelled to provide comment in response to the member saying that we need to get into the real meat of the issues, such as Canada's middle class and some of the industries that are so vitally important to our country and the well-being of our nation.

What would my colleague across the way see as the most outstanding issue the government is facing?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I think the government and all parliamentarians should address urgent and important issues. Every document that is in the public interest should automatically be disclosed so that everyone can see what we are doing. As I said earlier, when we have nothing to hide and we want to collaborate, then providing as much information as possible is the best way to enable dialogue and collaboration.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Laurentides—Labelle, for her passionate speech on the real issues we should be discussing in the House. I completely agree with her.

When we talk about economic downturns, we always forget average Canadians, the people who have been affected by years of inadequate government services and the underfunding of health and other areas. Government priorities are not necessarily in the best interest of average Canadians.

I have a question for my colleague. Does she think that this government and the previous government have favoured large corporations and the rich over average Canadians?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

Earlier I was talking about what a day like today costs taxpayers, when people are hungry, looking for shelter, having a hard time paying their monthly bills and their rent, and so forth. The first thing I said when I arrived in Parliament was that if we wanted prosperity, we must each take a good look at ourselves. It is important to me to see that when there are urgent and important issues we have a comprehensive system. Far too often, some are neglected.

I want to be the first to stand up for the interests of the most vulnerable. We are talking about the middle class, but we are also talking about people living in extreme poverty and the very vulnerable. Having worked in industry as a businesswoman, I can fully understand that for some issues the priority has to be the economy. However, I hope that the 43rd Parliament can provide extremely effective direction to the work of the 338 parliamentarians.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with a very dynamic

member of Parliament, the member for Courtenay—Alberni. He will be taking the second half of this first round for the NDP.

There is no doubt the NDP will support this motion. What member of Parliament could actually stand in this House and say that he or she opposes transparency and getting this information out about what the government has prepared in terms of an economic downturn. No member of Parliament worth his or her salt would be opposed to that transparency.

As a number of other members have indicated, it is really unfortunate that it has to be an opposition day motion to compel the government to bring forward information that it should be presenting to parliamentarians anyhow. This should be part and parcel of Canadian democracy. Regardless of whether we are talking about a majority government or a minority government, the issue of transparency and full disclosure should be always present.

I am happy to see my Conservative colleagues have learned a lesson from the many years of the Harper government where there was no transparency and the Conservatives were not forthcoming on this kind of information. They appear to have learned their lesson. That is very good. Hopefully the Liberal government has now learned its lesson and the transparency that not just parliamentarians but all Canadians are entitled to will be brought forward.

When we talk about the economic downturn in terms of the preparation the Ministry of Finance or other ministries may have done, it is particularly relevant today when many people see the threat of COVID-19. In some countries we are seeing the spread of that disease in a very unfortunate and tragic way for many victims. We need to know what the economic impacts are and what the government has prepared in terms of an economic downturn that is linked to that virus.

I would like to talk about two other aspects of economic downturns. Regardless of whether we are talking about COVID-19, the fall in oil prices or anything else, there are two considerations that have to be front and centre in the deliberations of this Parliament.

[*Translation*]

When we talk about the economic downturn, we always forget to mention how it affects ordinary people. Over the past few years, Canadians' quality of life has diminished. There is no doubt about that. There have been cuts to services and today there is a gap in the services provided to the public.

In reality, the economic effects of this downturn have resulted in Canadian families having the highest level of debt among all industrialized countries. This debt is due to the federal government's lack of foresight. The effects of the economic downturn on the finances of ordinary families means that 50% of all Canadian families are \$200 away from not being able to pay their monthly bills.

[English]

We need to look at those two elements and consider the fact that Canadians have the highest family debt load in industrialized countries and certainly the highest family debt load in Canada's history. At the same time, half of Canadian families are \$200 away from insolvency in any given month. We have to wonder why, when we talk about economic downturns, we neglect the fact that Canadian families are worse off than they have been.

Over the last couple of decades, we have seen the deterioration in the quality of life of Canadians. There is the housing crisis where tens of thousands of Canadians do not even have a roof over their head. Nearly seven million Canadians do not have access to the medication that is so vital to keep them in good health and in many cases to keep them alive. Millions of Canadians do not have access to basic dental care.

The week before last, we talked in this House about the importance of having basic dental care rather than a tax cut for people with six-figure incomes. Even though the government voted against that, the reality is that it has touched a chord with the Canadian population. Last week, which was a riding week, people in my riding were talking to me about the importance of bringing basic dental care into Canada.

• (1240)

We see the deplorable state of indigenous communities because of the lack of investments made.

When it comes to the economic downturn we are talking about, whether it is for COVID-19 or any other reason, the reality is Canadians have felt for decades that they have not been the priority.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer tells us that \$26 billion a year go into offshore tax havens. Wealthy and profitable corporations use them and basically take taxpayer dollars that should be invested for the benefit of all and, with impunity, put them overseas. We have seen massive handouts for the banking sector and handouts such as \$12 million to Loblaw's for a fridge. There have been many other cases of corporate welfare.

This simply indicates the extent to which the current government and the previous government lost their way in responding to the needs of Canadians. When we are talking about economic downturns, the priority has to be to put Canadian families first, to start investing in pharmacare, basic dental care and affordable housing, and make sure that indigenous communities finally get the investments they have been deprived of for decades. All of these things will help turn around the economic downturn that Canadian families have felt.

There is another element and this is a key one. The issue of climate change has had a profound impact on our economy. Two weeks ago, the Insurance Bureau of Canada came to the finance committee and talked about \$5 billion a year in insured liabilities and another \$5 billion in economic costs. That is a \$10-billion price tag for climate change, and that is growing. As members know, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy is talking about that rising to \$45 billion a year over the next couple of decades.

Business of Supply

When we talk about economic downturns, the importance of making that shift to put in place the transition to ensure workers are taken care of and investments in clean energy are in place is more critical than we could possibly imagine in our nation's history. Instead, we have a government that is spending over \$17 billion to subsidize the Trans Mountain pipeline debacle, something that does not have a business case. The pipeline simply could not be built by the private sector, so the government took it over and is now hemorrhaging money for Trans Mountain. At \$17.1 billion, it is a money-losing project. Over \$100 million was lost last year. When I asked the finance minister at the finance committee at what point the government was going to stop throwing money at Trans Mountain, whether it was \$25 billion, \$30 billion or if the sky was the limit, he could not reply.

At a time when we see the economic impacts, the downturn related to climate change, and it is crucial to make those investments into clean energy and transition our economy, we instead see the current government, like the previous government, throwing money at the oil and gas lobbyists. It seems to have a limitless capacity of putting in place oil and gas subsidies instead of cutting back and curtailing those subsidies and putting them into clean energy, where I know energy workers in Alberta would want to see those investments. I know when we talk about the 100,000 capped oil wells in Alberta and Saskatchewan and the tremendous potential for geothermal energy, they would want to see those investments. Instead, we see the government hemorrhaging tens of billions of dollars to provide support for Trans Mountain.

These are the issues when we talk about the economic downturn. We need to start making these investments to transition now, as the economic downturn related to climate change hits us. We need to start reinvesting in families to ensure that families are no longer left behind. That is the motive behind the green new deal motion, private member's Motion No. 1, that is before Parliament, which we hope to bring to a vote at some point this year.

These are the kinds of things that will make a difference in the lives of families and protect our country and our planet. I certainly hope that the impacts of climate change and the economic downturn that is related to them are taken seriously by all members of Parliament.

• (1245)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have heard that member talk many times against the Trans Mountain pipeline and the \$7.8 billion that the government is spending. The government is spending for many reasons. One is jobs, but it is really to create another export market for Canada's natural resource products.

I want to tell the member the economics behind this spending. There is a thing called the Alberta discount. The oil market discounts Canadian oil because we have no alternative but to sell to the United States. That amounts to 15% to 28% of the price per barrel of oil.

Business of Supply

The pipeline would be safer and better for the environment, but if we could get rid of that Alberta discount, it would mean \$587 billion per year to Canadians. We lose \$1.8 billion a day in this country because of the Alberta discount, yet that member constantly talks against a pipeline that would allow us to get proper market prices for our oil. Come on.

Mr. Peter Julian: Where to start, Madam Speaker?

First, I come from the oil industry. I worked at the Shellburn oil refinery, which is now closed, and that is the real problem. It is not just that the member's figures are completely bogus. It is not \$7.6 billion; the cost of Trans Mountain is now close to \$13 billion, and climbing. The member should update his figures.

The reality is the discounted price does not apply to integrated companies. Suncor, Esso and Husky upgrade and refine their oil products here in Canada and benefit from that differential, and that is the issue. We are talking about largely supporting companies that refuse to upgrade and refine their oil products in Canada, and many of them, if not most of them, are foreign owned.

What we are doing is subsidizing, in a massive, unprecedented way, oil and gas executives who know full well that Trans Mountain has no business case. The increase in costs means that even shippers will have to be subsidized.

I am ready to have that debate with the member for Malpeque anytime. I respect him a lot, but the reality is that his figures do not hold up.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am really pleased that my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby drew attention to the fact that insurance companies are now using climate change as a reason to increase premiums. In fact, they are going to capitalize off that.

My question pertains to a subject that my colleague from Malpeque and I were discussing in Toronto at the PDAC meeting. It has to do with clean, new, emission-free energy. It is actually a modification of an existing type of energy. I am referring to small modular reactors and microreactors. They could be used in the Arctic instead of diesel fuel. The member for Malpeque was saying that it would take a lot of trucks off the road if we could install a microreactor or small modular reactor at his french fry plant.

Since the member who just spoke would like to see a clean, emission-free environment, would he be willing to ensure that small modular reactors and microreactors will come to market very soon?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I have always enjoyed working with that member.

As the member points out, the reality is that over 600 northern indigenous communities and isolated communities rely on diesel being flown in, and anyone who has travelled through the north has seen the toxic waste dumps that have developed a kilometre or two from a village or a community as a result. The high cost of flying in that diesel fuel and then the high cost of disposing of it mean that we need to make it an imperative to transition to clean energy, which I would prefer, and thereby ensure that with clean energy development, those communities would develop their own grids and

be able to provide for the economic development that comes with clean energy. It will take federal government leadership to make sure those 600 communities can transition to clean energy.

● (1250)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on this motion before the House.

As members have heard, New Democrats are supporting this motion, which calls on the government to ensure that the House receives tabled documents when there are warnings about economic downturns or potential impacts on the fiscal framework of the government, or when it gets advice or recommendations on how to deal with them.

The timing of this motion could not be more appropriate. Today we have seen the biggest drop in the TSX since 1987, and oil prices have dropped about 30%. We are seeing the impact on Canada of concerns about COVID-19, the coronavirus that is spreading globally, and the uncertainty that it is bringing. We know, when we see oil prices plummet like this, that the result will be the loss of thousands of jobs in the energy sector. It is going to impact families and communities in Alberta and across this country, because people commute to the oil sands to work there. This is going to have an impact on those who are vulnerable right now and struggling to get by. We know that household debt is skyrocketing, that 50% of Canadians are within \$200 of becoming insolvent. This will quickly have an impact on those people.

In my riding alone, 10,000 jobs are reliant on tourism. As we can imagine, people are very concerned about travel and tourism being affected by this global crisis.

I am deeply concerned about the most vulnerable, such as those who cannot afford a place to live. The government has made a commitment to house 50% of the homeless in the next 10 years. Clearly, that is not good enough. There are people who cannot afford medicine and have to make a choice between whether they will pay rent or eat or fill their prescriptions. There are people who cannot get jobs because they are missing teeth or living in chronic pain because of dental work they require, and the government still has not delivered on a plan to help these very vulnerable people, as well as everyday Canadians who are working hard to make ends meet.

We are seeing housing costs skyrocket. It is impacting people in our communities and it is impacting the business community. There are six chambers of commerce in my riding, and the number one concern of every one of those chambers is affordable housing. It is limiting growth and making it difficult for even small business owners to find places to live. The government has not delivered on these very important concerns that people have been bringing forward and that we have been relaying here to Ottawa.

Business of Supply

We have a climate crisis. The IPCC has called on all governments across this incredible planet that we share to reduce global emissions by 40% by 2030, and the government still does not have a plan to meet that important threshold. We have 12 years to do it, but we have not seen action.

We have not built the resiliency to diversify our economy, to protect us when commodity prices crash in the way we are seeing today. Here we are, at a time when the wealthy, CEOs and big corporations get bailouts. Loblaw's received \$12 million in its bailout and Mastercard received \$50 million. In the meantime, Mastercard is still charging small business people some of the highest merchant fees in the world. The government has proposed a 1.4% voluntary rate for interchange fees, whereas in Europe it is 0.5% and in Australia it is 0.3%. The government is constantly protecting big corporations, maintaining the CEO stock option loophole and supporting tax havens, which is an economic leakage of \$26 billion a year that could pay for an affordable dental care plan for Canadians.

We know the government has maintained the same health care transfers that Stephen Harper and the Conservatives put forward, which is leading to chronic underfunding of our health care system. There is overcrowding in our hospitals. Rural communities are unable to attract doctors or invest in primary health networks, things that are absolutely critical to make our health care system more efficient and to serve Canadians.

• (1255)

As we see the government fail to deliver on these transfers, it really does affect the most vulnerable, especially seniors or people with compromised health. Now we have a crisis upon us. With the coronavirus fast approaching our country, our health care system is not prepared to deal with it in the way we should be able to. This is something that could have been mitigated had we not been doing corporate giveaways and helping the wealthy move their money out of this country.

We know that the Conservatives continue to cut services, so we are concerned. When we talk about an economic plan, what does that economic plan look like for maintaining services and helping those who are struggling to make ends meet? New Democrats are looking for a plan with real transition. We are talking about the health care system, and this is the government's opportunity to beef up transfers to the provinces so that we can be better prepared when a crisis like the coronavirus hits our country.

We need a pharmacare plan. New Democrats put forward the costing of our pharmacare plan and showed how it would actually save money in the end and ensure that people would not have to make those difficult choices.

We also put forward a proposal in the House for a dental care plan, which the Liberals defeated. The plan would have limited the middle-class tax break for those who earn over \$90,000 so that anyone earning less than \$90,000 would receive the dental care they need. What an opportunity this would have been. It would have been good for the GDP. It would have taken the pressure off the small business community that is buying private insurance for its employees and is unable to afford it. It would have ensured that there would be fewer lost days in the workplace and that employers

were taking care of their number one asset, their employees. We know that these are critical opportunities for investment.

We hear a lot about the housing crisis. Yesterday, on my way to Ottawa, I was at the gas bar and ran into my good friend Thomas. Thomas has been homeless for almost a year. He has told me that there is just nowhere to live and that he is unable to get a good job. Thomas is indigenous, and the government still does not have an indigenous urban housing strategy or a rural housing strategy for indigenous people.

Everyday people in my riding who are working two or three jobs cannot find a place to live. Single parents are especially vulnerable. The government talks about its housing plan, but it is being delayed. The housing plan should be front-ended, not back-ended. New Democrats are calling on the government to speed up its investments when it comes to helping the most vulnerable.

As for clean energy, right now is the opportunity for the government to come out with an emergency package for Canadians to deal with the drop in commodity prices and invest in a future for Canadians by investing in clean energy and a climate bank, as we proposed in our campaign. The government could invest into a climate bank and into clean energy across the country, especially in areas that will be hit the hardest by the drop in oil prices.

In my riding, constituents are desperate for salmon restoration funds. The government needs to invest in the future and ensure we bring our salmon back to abundance, which is key to our economy and food security. It is also key to our ecosystem and culture. Port Alberni, which is the only deep sea port on the west coast of Vancouver Island, is looking for a floating dry dock. An investment like this would help alleviate the pressure on floating dry dock space, which is clearly needed between Oregon and Alaska. It is an opportunity to create jobs.

My colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby talked about indigenous communities that are bringing diesel into their communities. There is a community called Hesquiath that has been working with the government, but the process has been dragged out. This is the time to invest in communities like Hesquiath so they can get off diesel and operate on clean energy. These communities are waiting for these important strategic investments.

With regard to firefighting capacity, we know that firefighting season is coming upon us. We need to invest in firefighting capacity so that we can attack these issues when fires come up across our country. We need a strategic plan. There is a great company in my riding called Coulson Aviation, and the government has done some great work with it, but this is an opportunity for us to expand that work.

Business of Supply

We need a plan right now to deal with the crisis at hand. New Democrats are calling on the government to do the right thing and come out with an emergency aid package that is going to benefit Canadians.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I always find it interesting when we hear the Conservatives saying we are doing too much, we are spending too much and we have to take control of the deficit. On the other hand, my New Democrat friends take the opposite approach, that we should be spending billions and billions more in areas such as health care.

I like to believe that we have been very successful in terms of focusing our attention on Canada's middle class. Examples of that would include lifting thousands of children out of poverty, lifting thousands of seniors out of poverty and putting hundreds of millions of dollars in the pockets of Canada's middle class, thereby increasing the disposable income that helps build Canada's economy.

The New Democrats seem to be focusing a great deal today on the dental plan. I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts on why, in the last few years when they were the official opposition, I very rarely heard that. Is it safe to say it is because we are moving forward on pharmacare, and now the NDP is wanting to see the expansion?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, the Liberals have moved as far on pharmacare as they did when they put out the red book in 1993. They have made no gains. We are talking about pharmacare because they still have not addressed it. People are still not able to fill their prescriptions when they need them. We are talking about dental care because it makes sense.

In the first middle-class tax break that the Liberals introduced, people who earned \$45,000 a year or less got nothing, while those who earned over \$100,000 got \$700. It did not make sense. It did not help the people the member is talking about.

Right now, the Liberals have a golden opportunity to invest in the transition to clean energy, to a future that works for everybody, to invest in people. We know that when we invest in health care, it saves the health care system in the long term. When we invest in housing, it saves money.

Therefore, we are asking the Liberals to make these critical investments instead of allowing their friends to move money offshore into tax havens, allowing CEO stock option loopholes or bailing out their corporate friends.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate that some of the asks in my colleague's speech were honourable. We need to obviously provide funding for some of the things where we have gaps in this country. There is a disconnect. We know that a segment of our economy, 15% of our economy, is driven by the oil and gas sector, coast to coast.

How can the member and his party ask for more and more, yet continually side with the government to try to derail our energy sector?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, my friend and colleague comes from Alberta, which we know is being hardest hit right now with the drop in oil prices. What is derailing the oil economy and the oil sector right now is the global economy first and foremost.

We talk about the investments that the government is continuing to put in oil and gas, whether it be its failed business plan and model for the TMX pipeline or constant oil subsidies. The opportunity should be to use that money in transition to invest in clean energy, and to continue to support Alberta as a powerhouse in the Canadian economy. This is an opportunity right now to make strategic record investments in clean energy.

The member will find that, on this side of the House, even someone from coastal British Columbia would genuinely support targeting those investments in areas that are going to most feel this downturn in the oil economy, but investments that are turned toward the future so that we are not so vulnerable, especially for the communities he comes from. I really appreciate the member's passion, his concern and absolutely his standing up for his community and his province.

• (1305)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, when we have economic downturns we know the most disadvantaged and those who are in precarious work often get hurt first and hurt hardest. I would like my colleague to explain to the House why it is so important that we get this information from the government. It would allow us, as members of Parliament, to make an analysis of what the department has recommended and how well the government programs are responding to the crisis at hand.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker it is important, especially in times like this, to be able to ensure that the House of Commons and parliamentarians have a chance to put scrutiny on the government's plans, to have transparency and to foster the necessary dialogue so that we can improve on the government's plans to bring forward voices from every corner of this country.

It is absolutely essential that the government relays this information to the House for debate so we can have that opportunity to dissect the information the Liberals are bringing forward and make sure that we have a plan for all Canadians.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Griesbach.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the motion put forward by my hon. colleague from the eastern Ontario riding of Carleton.

This motion is about lost opportunity. The finance minister has squandered the healthy treasury that was left to him by the previous Conservative government and the balanced budget that came with our prudent management of public finances. A balanced budget is not an aspirational goal for the next century. It is something that Canadians expect in this decade or before.

An absolute vacuum of leadership exists in the Liberal Party today. Canadians have yet to hear a coherent question period response from the Prime Minister since his party lost the popular vote in the last election, which is the same arrogant approach the Prime Minister took before the election. Canadians deserve better.

Canadians are now asking whether Canada is broken. The answer I am hearing from Canadians from all walks of life is yes. The failed, divisive policies of the current government are breaking Canada apart and there is no doubt that, with the events of late, Canada is at a turning point. During a recent question period, my colleague from Alberta politely asked if the Prime Minister wanted to keep Alberta in Canada. Canadians are still waiting for an answer.

Can we move forward in this changing world of 2020, awash in manufactured fears about the weather and phony policies like carbon taxes, which do nothing to help the environment but do everything to raise taxes to reward Liberal Party favourites?

Can we overcome the economic, social and political unrest the government has created by making promises to indigenous Canadians and giving an aboriginal woman a prominent seat at the cabinet table only to purge her from the Liberal Party for standing up for the rule of law in Canada? The fired former justice minister passed the democracy test with flying colours. The Prime Minister failed Canadians miserably with his treatment of a strong woman.

Happy International Women's Day, Mr. Prime Minister.

That is a powerful message the groper sent to women and aboriginals. Actions speak louder than words. Canadians—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer rises on a point of order.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I believe it is against the rules of the House to refer to other hon. members in any disparaging terms. I think if the speaker were to take a look at the record, she would find that she had referred to an hon. member as a “groper”.

• (1310)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member wish to withdraw her wording?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I believe that is a matter for debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The use of words is not a matter for debate, and I would definitely recommend that we look into the Hansard, but I do believe that the word was inappropriately used.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, if the word appears in the list of inappropriate words, I shall retract it.

Business of Supply

Actions speak louder than words, and Canadians are very wary of efforts to incite hatred and suspicion. Canadians are not a violent people and it is time for the Liberal Party to quit using law-abiding citizens, like firearms owners, to whip up their left-wing base. The Liberals need to stop wasting taxpayer dollars to create problems that only cause divisiveness.

Today's motion requires information paid for with taxpayer dollars to be made available to all Canadians. I can understand why the government refuses to be open and transparent with Canadians when we see where the government is paying for advice from, with what has been made available.

The former minister of the environment took the step to create the Canadian institute for climate change and handed it 20 million of our taxpayer dollars for a report supporting her view. I quote from independent analysis by the informed observer Parker Gallant, no relation, on what that \$20 million in taxpayer dollars cost Canadians:

Should one read a report titled Canada's Top Climate Change Risks issued July 2019 by the “Expert Panel” on “Climate Change Risks and Adaptation Potential”, you would probably think the “Charting our Course” report recently issued by the Canadian Institute for Climate Choices (CICC) was an update but it wasn't! What a comparison of the two reports highlight is words spoken by the former Minister of the Environment... who said: “if you repeat it, if you say it louder, if that is your talking point, people will totally believe it”. The latest CICC report exemplifies her quote and us taxpayers have provided the CICC with \$20 million to ensure we “totally believe it”!

The first report's “Expert Panel” are part of the “Canadian Council of Academies”. The council, launched in 2002, has managed to survive on \$45 million of our tax dollars for the past 18 years. They are required to produce five reports annually when directed by the Federal Government. Their report on Canada's climate change risks came about as a result of a direction from the Treasury Board of Canada. Seven (7) individuals on CCA's “expert panel” and “workshop participants” are a part of CICC's “expert” group and another eight (8) of those experts at the CICC were also cited as references in the CCA's report. One of those was Blair Feltmate, Chair of the Intact Centre at Waterloo University. Needless to say, both reports lean heavily on the insurance industries information about how “climate change” has increased insurance claims. Catastrophes are forecast in both reports and similar comparisons are made to past events blaming them on “climate change”. The latter includes the Fort McMurray wildfires with estimated insurance claims of \$1.4 billion. The CBC reported on the fire stating: “Provincial wildfire investigators have established that the fire was most likely the result of “human activity.”

On page 2 of the CCA's report they have a map of Canada and have highlighted 10 of “Canada's Top Climate Change Risks” and one of them is: “Lower Great Lakes water levels, affecting shipping, hydropower production, and recreation”. As noted above the CCA report was published in July 2019 two years after Ontarians were told Lake Ontario had just experienced a “100-year flood”. Even worse flooding occurred in 2019 setting new records. Apparently the “experts” involved in preparing the report failed to absorb the well-publicized news at that time and said nothing about “Plan 2014”!

Business of Supply

Plan 2014, for the benefit of Canadians who have not heard of it, is the policy of the federal government to create 26,000 hectares, or 64,000 acres, of wetland by flooding homeowners in the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence water basin, which includes the Ottawa River watershed. What happens when homeowners who are being adversely affected by catastrophic flooding dare to question the Liberal policy to flood their homes? They are viciously attacked by the Liberal government's hand-picked Liberal appointees shilling that policy.

• (1315)

Canadian co-chair Pierre Béland is one of three recent Liberal appointees on the International Joint Commission that is overseeing Liberal flood policy. I found his comment to the volunteer president of the United Shoreline Ontario, telling her to effectively “shut up”, deeply offensive. His shallow attempt at a superficial apology, after he was called out for his comment, was even more offensive when he dismissed the concern of flood victims.

For the record, here is the response to Chairman Béland from the president of a group of flood victims trying to get a fair hearing from an insensitive government that paid \$20 million, taxpayer dollars, to hear that the problem with the lower Great Lakes is “not enough water”.

“Yes, you have deeply offended...as a woman and as a mother, as a homeowner and a flood survivor, as a volunteer and as an advocate, and as a Canadian with a right to be heard and not dismissed by those in power. Thank you for your explanation justifying why I was so deserving of your response. We consider our position to be balanced and evidence-based. We are asking for balance. Your description of my bias is your own. To address your claim, we indicate that 250 is foreseeable while also explaining that nobody can predict. If you listen to the recording at both the Toronto and Kingston events this week, you will hear exactly, which is being repeated at all events, 'Plan for the worst, hope for the best.' Perhaps you might consider how shipping has an exclusive focus and hydro has an exclusive focus, both of whom are extremely well-funded, and have incredible power and access to both the IJC and the media. The shoreline is unfunded, unrepresented and absolutely exhausted from trying to desperately be heard. Your flippant, misogynistic and rude email has simply reinforced the shoreline does not have a respected nor genuine position at the table. I will resign from the USO effective May 1, under advisement that the Canadian chair of the IJC has suggested 'her' to take a break.”

Liberal appointee Béland has lost all credibility with Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I found my Conservative colleague's comments puzzling, since her speech espoused the notion that climate change concerns are unfounded.

Does she realize that more than 96% of scientists around the world agree that climate change is caused by human activity?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, that is not what we are debating today. His arrogance is astounding, even for a Liberal.

If Pierre Béland will not do the honourable thing and resign to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is accountable for the IJC in Parliament, will the hon. member do the right thing and remove him from the board of the International Joint Commission now, before the next flood season?

This needs to happen immediately if the Government of Canada wants any confidence in the Canadian representation on the IJC. With bad advice come bad decisions. Historians believe that a 50-year perspective is needed to analyze events. Many believe that history will not be on Canada's side in terms of the poor record of the Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I seem to be the only member who wants to ask her questions. My hon. colleague should answer my question instead of reading off more of her speech. Does she realize that 96% of scientists around the world agree that climate change is caused by human activity?

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I am sure there is a large percentage of scientists who depend on funding for climate change who agree that it is definitely what is changing the world.

While we cannot wait for 50 years of history to judge, it is worth noting these disturbing trends. We have so many riches, both in the ground and in the hearts and minds of Canadians. Our parents and our grandparents did not fight in two world wars for a broken country. They fought instead for a country that inspires hope and justice. Canada is at a turning point.

It is time for the government to start listening to Canadians.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the issues that we are talking about today is the fact that the government, when times were good, spent money with abandon. The challenge now is that we are likely having an economic downturn.

What does my colleague think the longer-term impact of this will be? I know that she has been here for a while and has seen what governments must do to get their fiscal house back in order.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, as always, when the country's finances are in a deplorable state, as a consequence of not paying down debt when times are good, it will take another Conservative government to get our fiscal house back in order, get into a balanced budget, work hard and allow Canadians to enjoy the fruits of their hard labour.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am a little taken aback both by the member's comments and the answers to the member's questions. It appears to me as though she is a climate denier. I wonder if the member is aware of the fact that the world is literally on fire. Australia has a wildfire that is going on and it is real. It is climate action that we see that needs to be addressed.

We have extreme climate situations in British Columbia and Alberta. We have had forest fires. That is very real. Unless and until we actually get on with dealing with the climate crisis, this will continue.

If we want to talk about economic prosperity, then we need to address what is in front of us today. Otherwise, future generations will have to pay for it and that is not acceptable.

Will the member simply acknowledge that there is a climate crisis before us today?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I was in Australia during the fires and I know that over 200 people were charged with arson. Worse than ever is the climate of just spending away money without making sure that the money is there to pay for what Canadians need.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am speaking today about our important opposition motion. Just so everybody remembers what it is, I will read that motion again. I believe it is vital that the House is provided with documentation "discussing warnings or concerns of economic downturns, their potential impact on the fiscal framework, or advice or recommendations on how to deal with them" that any department, agency or Crown corporation has produced since 2015. That is what we are talking about today.

In 2015, the Prime Minister promised that he would have a few \$10-billion deficits, small deficits, before returning to a balanced budget in 2019. Do members remember that? Teeny-tiny deficits and then everything would be rosy in 2019.

We know what happened. The budget deficits turned out to be a whole lot larger than \$10 billion annually. The year 2019 has also come and gone and despite promises made, we are nowhere near a balanced budget, not even close. In his first four years, the Prime Minister added more than \$72 billion to the national debt. That is just disgraceful. The Bank of Canada has now slashed its interest rates, citing negative outlooks for the Canadian and global economies.

A responsible government would have prepared for a downturn. A responsible government would have set money aside for future uncertainty. We are certainly seeing that uncertainty now. It is absolutely a financial mess. A responsible government would have paid down the debt during years of economic growth. However, the Liberal government has not been responsible. Instead of showing lead-

Business of Supply

ership, the Liberals doubled down on unnecessary spending. They called it investment and investing in Canadians.

Let us just think back at some of those wise investments. The Liberals gave \$50 million to Mastercard, a multinational company that made \$16 billion in 2019 alone, and Mastercard gets \$50 million. They gave \$12 million to Loblaw's to buy new fridges. They are basically giving more than \$600 million as a bailout to the media. Here is a whopper: They spent \$1,900 on cardboard cut-outs of the Prime Minister. How is that for value for money? They spent more than \$12 billion on the still unbuilt Trans Mountain pipeline after scaring away investors. There is also the \$256 million the Liberals gave to the Asian infrastructure bank to build pipelines in Asia. It seems the foreign pipelines are the only ones the Liberals can get built.

There is also the \$186-billion infrastructure program. It has been a huge failure. In fact, it is now being audited by the Auditor General because of the Liberals' lack of transparency and accountability to Canadians. The bottom line is that the Liberals have failed to responsibly manage Canadian tax dollars. That failure has left Canada much more vulnerable to global economic downturns. We are seeing that right now.

• (1325)

Across our country, Canadians work hard to live within their means. They know that racking up credit card debt just is not sound policy. It leaves them unable to manage unexpected expenses, yet that is exactly what the Liberals have done in Canada. The Liberals have done what is easy instead of what is best for our country.

Let us compare this to the actions of the previous Conservative government.

Prior to the global recession of 2008-09, the Conservatives had paid down more than \$37 billion in debt. This allowed the government flexibility to meet the fiscal challenges of the recession head on. That was why Canada had the mildest and shortest recession of the G7 countries.

In a 2010 report, Philip Cross, then chief economic analyst at Statistics Canada, said:

One reason for the relatively mild slump is that Canada was better positioned to weather the global recession than other large western economies, primarily due to savings as reflected in our national balance sheet.

He went on to say:

...strong balance sheets in Canada stood it in good stead to endure the recession and emerge into recovery. The recession was shorter and milder in Canada than in other G7 nations, partly because the flow of credit was not disrupted as it was in other nations and a large pool of savings was available to finance spending when income fell temporarily.

That was good fiscal policy under the Conservative government.

Business of Supply

However, The Liberals have deliberately done the opposite. It sounds like a bad *Seinfeld* episode. That is the reason, in the elections of 2015 and 2019, the Conservatives promised voters that we would be responsible and that we would balance the budget. We knew that a responsible government needed to be prepared for global downturns.

The chickens are coming home to roost. We see what happens with global downturns in the situation we are in now. Just today, we saw the stock market plunge. Trading was actually halted. To say the least, the economic outlook is very grim. Now the Liberals will have to deal with that from a position of weakness. True leadership requires fiscal restraint.

Despite the Liberals wasting billions of dollars, they failed to build the key projects that would have helped Canadians weather this storm. The Trans Mountain pipeline is still nowhere near complete. Both the energy east pipeline and the northern gateway project are gone, thanks to the Liberals. The Teck Frontier project that promised thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of revenue was killed by government dithering and delay. Even Warren Buffett is moving his money out of a Quebec project, citing “the Canadian political context”.

In total, more than \$160 billion worth of investment have been lost under the Prime Minister's watch. This is a direct result of the policies he and his Liberal government have advanced.

Take, for example, Bill C-69, or the no more pipelines bill. Bill C-69 would make it even harder to build a new project. Many critics do not see how any new projects can be built under this new regulatory process. There was widespread opposition to this regulation, including from provincial governments, industry, communities and indigenous groups, yet the Liberals went ahead with that harmful legislation anyway.

• (1330)

The bottom line is this. We have to return to fiscal accountability, to balanced budgets and to paying down the debt. This is what is showing up today and it is a disaster.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, I do not know if my colleague realizes that two elements of his speech are key and essential to resolving the problems of recurring deficits and indebtedness.

According to several serious economic studies carried out in recent years, nine out of 10 provinces will be insolvent by 2030-35. There is a likelihood that Canada could default on its debt in 2030-35. In the meantime, two-thirds of the federal government's budget consists of all sorts of transfers. Only one-third of the budget is allocated to the provision of immediate public services.

To resolve this problem, would my colleague and the Conservative Party be in favour of the federal government letting the provinces decide what to do with two-thirds of the budget in order to alleviate the enormous financial and fiscal pressures on Canadians?

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, it is fairly evident what is happening today. We only need to turn on the TV. This is a crisis. I know people in the other parties want to talk about the climate crisis and so forth, and climate change is real. However, we must look at the markets today and the position Canada is in. We are in a deep hole. The runaway spending by other parties, especially the government, has put us there. It spent tons of money in good times, and look at the situation we are in now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I listen to the Conservative members, I hear a spin on the issue that does not match reality. The reality is quite different from what I have heard Conservative members say. The best example to highlight is the fact that they have concentrated on the current and growing deficit. Let me remind my friends across the way, in particular the members who are relatively new to the chamber, that when Stephen Harper became the Prime Minister of Canada, he inherited a multi-billion surplus. Before the recession even took place, he converted that multi-billion surplus into a multi-billion deficit.

My question for the member across the way is this. If he were to look at all the comments from the Conservatives that have been put on the record this morning, would he not agree that hypocrisy might be one of the words that comes to mind?

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, that is an alternate reality right there. It has been said time and again that the current government was left with balanced books. Now there has been runaway spending. The chickens have come home to roost. The market is a bloodbath today. It is awful. We are now in a worse situation than ever.

The Liberals have been spending like crazy over the years when they should have been saving for exactly this eventuality, the terrible economic situation we are now seeing.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I noticed we are talking a lot about grasshoppers, ants, chickens and all those things.

Historically, we have seen that the Liberals and Conservatives have not been working to make our economy work better for working-class Canadians. They have typically been working to make it better for their wealthy friends. We have seen subsidies for corporations. We have seen tax breaks for the wealthy. We have seen things like income splitting, which we know works best for those who are the wealthiest. Historically, we know that we have not done the work we need to do to diversify our economy.

Could the member tell us what a Conservative government would do in the short, medium and long term to protect the economy, particularly in my home province of Alberta?

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Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, one thing we would do is get some pipelines built so there would be some wealth created in Alberta and in the rest of the country, unlike the member over there who does not believe in the oil and gas industry and does not like pipelines. We would also get out of the way and let free enterprise do the work that it does so well.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Toronto—Danforth.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to respond to the member's motion on the economy.

As members are aware, our government has been advocating its plan to build an economy that works for everyone, and our plan is working. Since we introduced it back in 2015, our plan has invested in Canadians and their communities, invested in the things that people need to build a better future for themselves and their families and in the things that create new opportunities for Canadians and support strong economic growth.

One of the first actions our government took was to introduce a tax cut for the middle class, which benefited more than nine million hard-working Canadians.

We introduced the Canada child benefit, which is providing more money to those families that need it the most. By doing so, we have helped lift more than 330,000 kids out of poverty and have given them a better start in life.

We increased the guaranteed income supplement to provide low-income single seniors with greater financial security in their retirement. We strengthened the Canada pension plan by working in cooperation with provincial partners so Canadian workers would have more money for their retirement.

We cut taxes for small business, from 11% down to 9%, to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses and create more good, well-paying jobs in our communities and across our country.

With Canada's first-ever national housing strategy, we have helped make it more affordable for people to buy their first home. We have invested in the construction of more affordable housing in communities across Canada. Particularly, in my community, we have created over 2,000 subsidized housing units in over 2,000 new building units, with respect to our national housing strategy.

As a result of the hard work of Canadians and these investments, Canada's economy is resilient. Canadians have created more than one million new jobs over the past four years and stronger wage growth has helped more people get ahead. However, we still know that there is more work to do.

People are concerned about the cost of living. They are concerned about the global economic situation and developments arising from outside our borders. They worry about the impact these developments will have on their homes and communities. Therefore, I would like to make it clear today that as long as these efforts and sorts of changes are there, our government will keep working to help Canadians overcome them.

Increasing the basic personal amount to make life more affordable for Canadians, and support the economy, is one of the best ways we can do that. That is why we have proposed to increase the basic personal amount to \$15,000 by 2023, which will benefit more than 20 million Canadians. This will mean that nearly 1.1 million more Canadians will no longer pay federal income tax in 2023. It will put \$3 billion back into the pockets of Canadian households in 2020, with this amount rising to \$6 billion by 2023. Those \$6 billion will help make life more affordable and keep our economy growing. Those \$6 billion are on top of the support we have already delivered for the past four years.

We are investing in Canadians to support a growing economy. As a result of our middle-class tax cut, the Canada child benefit and the changes we have proposed to the basic personal amount, a typical family of four could be better off by more than \$2,300 per year, compared to 2015. When the proposed changes to the basic personal amount are fully implemented in 2023, this same family could be better off by more than \$2,800 per year compared to 2015. These changes mean that more families can now pay for things that will make a positive difference in their children's futures, things like healthy foods, warm clothes for the winter, and sports and music lessons.

We are also supporting Canadians and the economy with the introduction of Canada's first-ever national housing strategy. This 10-year, \$55-billion investment will give more Canadians a place to call home. By doing so, it is lifting 530,000 families out of housing needs and reducing chronic homelessness by 50%.

Our enhanced guaranteed income supplement means there is now greater income security for close to 900,000 seniors, about 67% of whom are women, and this has helped 50,000 vulnerable seniors out of poverty.

● (1340)

These are just a few examples of how we are investing in people and in the things that grow our economy and give people a better quality of life. The last four years have proven that our plan is working. There is more money for families to help grow the economy, more livable communities, more good jobs and more than one million people no longer living in poverty.

In the face of current global changes we will continue to advance our plan in a way that is fiscally responsible. We will continue to reduce the federal debt relative to the size of our economy.

Business of Supply

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has concluded that current government spending is sustainable over the long term and that our fiscal plan gives us the room we need to confront new and evolving challenges and keep our economy growing. Canada's net debt-to-GDP ratio remains low and on a downward track. That puts us at an advantage with respect to our group of seven partners. Our relatively low level of debt is a real competitive advantage, one that our government is fully committed to maintaining.

Even though our economy is doing well, we need to be ready to respond to whatever challenges might arise. We need to continue to build confidence in the Canadian economy, making sure that the world continues to see Canada as a great place to invest.

Canada is only one of 11 countries in the world with an AAA credit rating. This strong rating reflects the confidence that others have in Canada's economic strength. We build this confidence by making our businesses more competitive. We have cut taxes for small business twice, from 11% down to 9%, as I mentioned earlier, making it easier for them to succeed and create more jobs. Today, Canada has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7 as a result of federal and provincial actions.

We will preserve and build these advantages to keep Canada's economy strong in the face of current challenges. We will continue to ensure that all Canadians can share in the benefit of this growth by making life more affordable and investing in new opportunities and investing in Canadians.

We have seen what can happen when we invest in Canadians. They take that help, combine it with their own hard work, and the result is a strong and growing economy.

With more than one million new jobs in just four years and record low unemployment and poverty rates, we will continue to advance our plan for middle-class prosperity over the coming years.

I would like to thank the member for the opportunity to make this clear today. I want to thank the members that spoke earlier about our plan. Again, our plan has been working with the introduction of the Canada child benefit, middle-class tax cuts, cuts on small business from 11% to 9%, and making Canada a place to invest in businesses so they can grow and scale up. We want to continue investing in Canadians so that we can see this prosperity not only now, but also in future generations.

• (1345)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, as was said by someone earlier, the Liberals are living in some kind of alternate universe in terms of the way that things work fiscally.

The member for Kitchener South—Hespeler talked about how the government is spending this money, calling it investing. Does he not realize that those forestry workers that are unemployed are not paying into their tax bucket? Does he not realize that oil workers in Alberta are not paying? Does he not realize that as the stock market crashes around us, people are not paying tax on the dividends? Does he not realize that the government is driving investment out of this country with its poorly planned policies, whether it is Bill C-69 or Bill C-48? Does the member not see what is happening today?

Liberal members are standing up and saying that everything is fine, that we should not worry and that they are going to spend more money. They do not have more money to spend.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Madam Speaker, it is not about spending more money. It is about investing in Canadians. We have invested millions of dollars in Toyota, which has a manufacturing facility in my riding. We are creating 450 new jobs. Combine that with our lowest unemployment rate in 40 years.

This is about investing in Canadians. When we invest in Canadians we create more jobs. We lowered taxes with our small business tax rate. This is how we get more investments in Canada. This is how we ensure that Canadians prosper.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I do appreciate the long list of so-called progressive policies from my colleague across the way, but they all seem like they are dreams deferred.

People in his constituency as well as mine are suffering dearly, yet in this place we are all covered by significant benefits and a great pension.

Would the member not also support, for his constituents, access to universal pharmacare, access to dental care, access to housing, and a true transition for workers into a new economy and a green new deal?

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Absolutely, Madam Speaker, and I mentioned in my speech some of the great things that our Liberal government has done in four years. However, there is still more to be done. We have seen housing prices increase a lot, particularly in my area in southwestern Ontario, all the way to the west coast in Vancouver, British Columbia. Yes, we still need to do more as people are feeling the pinch.

Creating a million jobs and lifting thousands of people out of poverty is something we can look at and still build on. Obviously, we need to invest in more green technology and this is something that our government takes seriously. We know that is the future. It is a trillion-dollar economy and we will make sure we impose measures and that we invest in the new green economy.

• (1350)

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. He talked about how Canada is doing compared to the G7. A couple of numbers the member did not mention were that Canada's unemployment rate is higher than the G7 average and higher than that of the U.S.A., the U.K., Germany and Japan. This is because of the policies the Liberal government has brought forward.

We had an emergency debate on Teck Frontier. That project was shelved two weeks ago when we were in this House. Two days ago Berkshire Hathaway pulled \$4.6 billion out of an LNG project in Saguenay, Quebec.

The member is talking about some of the good numbers on what the Liberals have done in his riding. There is no doubt in my mind that Liberals put money into Liberal ridings. That is how they won so many seats in the last election.

Considering the whole Canadian economy, do the Liberals realize their policies are hurting people across Canada, especially those in the energy sector? Can they do something to make sure that employment goes up in our country, instead of down like it has over the last four years?

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Madam Speaker, to say that we put money just into Liberal ridings is false. We put money into Toyota. Yes, Toyota has one of its manufacturing plants in my riding, and I hear people chuckling on the other side, but the second plant is in Woodstock, which is in a Conservative riding. We put money where we know investments will grow jobs. We have created 450 new jobs by investing in Toyota, and over 1,000 co-op placements are created from that.

Speaking in terms of the G7, we have a AAA rating. That allows us to ensure that creditors know Canada's institutions are working well. Canada has a strong economy, and we are able to invest more so that we can grow our economy.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am really happy that we are having this debate in the House today. It has been very interesting to hear everyone talking about the economy. It is very important to their communities.

In my community the issue of affordability and the issue of how to deal with child poverty are issues that come up frequently. We are tackling a lot of these issues today, and that is very helpful.

When I look at the wording of the motion, one thing that is disappointing is that it is very focused on getting information about the negatives. We do need to know the downturns, but if we are going to chart a path forward, we also have to know what we are doing right.

There is a glass that is half full or half empty. Somewhere in there is water in a glass. Let us look at it. Let us look at what is there and where we are going.

I would say that yes, recent events have meant that we are in unusual times. That is going to have to be taken into account when we are looking at the budget and when our government is creating its budget. Let us also look at where we have gone and where we are going.

Today, we are facing challenges that we could never have foreseen last fall. The world has changed a lot in the last couple of months but, despite all that has transpired, as we go into the budget process, we are in a good position. We are confident we can continue to plan to invest in Canadians and to keep Canadians working. That is something that I know everyone in this House cares about.

Business of Supply

Our fundamentals are strong. We have heard about that from many members who spoke before me. Canada's economy is sound and growing at a solid pace. As has been pointed out as well, economic growth in Canada is expected to be one of the fastest growing among G7 countries.

What I would like to begin with is something I feel has the biggest impact in my community, across the city of Toronto and across our country, and that is the impact of the Canada child benefit on responding to child poverty. It has been tremendous. We do not actually talk about that enough.

When I talk with community members, they tell me they have seen the impact in their own lives. They have seen the impact of the ability to buy warm clothes for their children during the winter, their ability to buy healthy food and their ability to register their kids for programs.

This is something that really hits home for me because before I was elected I had a conversation that really stood out as far as a person expressing their needs is concerned. This conversation was with a woman who talked about wanting to register her daughter for soccer.

At the time we had a child fitness tax credit, but the problem was she did not have the money in hand to be able to pay for the registration or to pay for the soccer cleats. Therefore, she did not benefit from that tax credit and her child was not able to play soccer. It is really and truly a terrible thing that she was faced with that decision between healthy food and registering her child for soccer. She could not do it.

I sometimes hear from across the way reminders of the child fitness tax credit. Well, it did not help people in my community who are struggling to make ends meet, but the Canada child benefit has put money back into people's pockets. It has had a very true and important impact on child poverty for families across this country.

The Canada child benefit is non-taxable and it is indexed. That is what poverty activists were asking for. They were asking that it be indexed and they would respond to it. Now people like the person I was talking about are doing better because they have the money directly in their pockets. It is not just about activities. The Canada child benefit is directly impacting child poverty across our country.

Statistics Canada, in February 2019, put out a survey. It found that in 2017 there was an increase in the median after-tax income of Canadian families and unattached individuals of 3.3%. For the two prior years there had been no growth. Part of that was higher wages being paid by Canadian employers, but the other part that was having an impact was the Canada child benefit.

Statements by Members

One of the most interesting things for me, because I am very interested in food policy, is the impact of the Canada child benefit on food insecurity in our country. Anecdotally, when I have spoken with people who work in our local food banks and food support programs, they have told me they have seen fewer families with children coming to the food banks. That is an amazing thing.

What was really important to me was to see that there has been a study done specifically on this issue. Valerie Tarasuk is from the University of Toronto and she is an expert in food security issues. She and Erika M. Brown of the University of California in Berkeley did a study called “Money speaks: Reductions in severe food insecurity follow the Canada Child Benefit”.

● (1355)

In their conclusion, they stated:

...we identified improvements to overall food security status among Canadian households with children across the income spectrum following the implementation of CCB. Decreases in the probability of experiencing severe food insecurity were significant and more pronounced with declining economic circumstance, suggesting that CCB, and more specifically, increases to the country's child benefits, disproportionately benefited vulnerable households.

As long as CCB benefits are indexed to inflation...we anticipate that these improvements will persist.

That is a tremendous thing. If members are interested in food security and these issues, this is very important.

In addition, Statistics Canada recently put out Canada's official poverty dashboard, which gives a snapshot of income security and poverty across our country. It shows that Canada's poverty rate dropped from 12.1% in 2015 to 8.7% in 2018.

Now, there is still more to do. I was talking about a glass being half empty or half full. There is still some air in there to fill it with more water. However, we have still seen a tremendous impact in our own communities. I certainly see it in mine. I see the need, the continuing need, but I see that there are tangible improvements. I want to continue to work on this with my Liberal colleagues and my colleagues across the way, because all of us are here to make sure our communities are strengthened. That is what we would all like to see.

I am so happy we are here today talking about the economy and the impacts in our communities. We need to keep having these discussions.

● (1400)

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary will have two minutes remaining upon our return from question period, when we take this up again.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a province that once experienced the biggest explosion on Canadian soil, the Halifax explosion, residents of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, just recently were rocked by a 2.6 magnitude earth-

quake that shook homes and sounded like an explosion or a cannon being fired. Thankfully, there were no injuries.

The number one continuity safety issue for emergency preparedness is geographic separation and redundancy in communications. The recent earthquake is a prime example of why it is not wise to put all of our eggs in one basket, which is what the RCMP is proposing to do by moving the 911 call centre from Truro to Dartmouth. The rationale for this move seems less about safety and more about the fact that the RCMP moved into a headquarters that is too big for its needs.

I would urge the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to reconsider this action and protect the 100-kilometre geographic separation of these facilities for the safety and protection of all Nova Scotians.

* * *

[Translation]

HENRI RICHARD

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hockey legend Henri Richard, the immortal number 16, is no more.

He was a hockey original, a winner. He took home the Stanley Cup 11 times, a record that will probably never be matched or beaten. He was the kind of leader who leads by example, who makes sacrifices and who always takes care of his teammates.

His singular determination enabled him to fulfill his dream of playing alongside his big brother at age 19. Throughout his 20-year career, he was always driven by a hunger to win. He was a mentor and role model for more than one generation. He proved that by staying true to oneself and putting in the maximum effort, anything is possible.

The National Hockey League and the Montreal Canadiens have lost a great man. His memory will live on forever in the annals of Quebec and Canadian sports history.

My colleagues and I wish to offer our deepest condolences to his entire family.

Henri Richard, thank you for all the incredible hockey moments you gave to the families watching you on TV on a Saturday night.

*Statements by Members**[English]***ST. PATRICK'S DAY IN VAUDREUIL—SOULANGES**

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the hard work of Jay de la Durantaye, Brenda O'Farrell, Rob Dumas, Craig and Brent Nolan, Ken Bell and the entire team at the Soulanges Irish Society, our community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges becomes Irish for a day at the annual St. Patrick's Day parade in Hudson. This year, the parade will be led by Grand Marshall Mitch Melnick, renowned sports broadcaster, and will feature our Irishman of the year, Ken Doran, parade queen Emma Gauthier, princesses Chris Walsh and Robin Brodrick and reviewing officer Mitch Gallo.

As always, it is an event not to be missed, so on Saturday, March 21, at 1 p.m., come one, come all to Main Street, sporting bright green anything to celebrate rich Irish culture and heritage, and let us make the 11th annual Hudson St. Patrick's Day Parade one to remember.

Slainte. Cheers.

* * *

*[Translation]***RAIL TRANSPORTATION CRISIS**

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after 29 days, the rail blockade in Kahnawake has finally been removed.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the extraordinary resilience of the people of La Prairie, Saint-Philippe, Saint-Mathieu, Candiac, Delson, Saint-Constant and Sainte-Catherine. Over 3,000 people were deprived of access to their means of transportation every day.

I would also like to commend the Régie intermunicipale de police Roussillon, under the direction of Marc Rodier, for its outstanding co-operation, as well as the mayors of my riding.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the great work accomplished by Exo, a company that provides commuter train services. Thanks to its creative emergency measures, the Exo team was able to provide daily bus transportation, despite the many challenges.

I hope that the Prime Minister will now recognize the true value of Exo's efforts and compensate the company for the additional \$1.2 million it had to spend to keep services running during this unfortunate crisis for which he is primarily responsible.

* * *

● (1405)

*[English]***EMANCIPATION DAY**

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today, as today marks the official tabling of my private member's motion, Motion No. 36, calling for the designation of August 1 as emancipation day in Canada.

This motion calls for the House to recognize the abolition of slavery that occurred within the British Empire on August 1, 1834, acknowledge the history of slavery in Canada and other Common-

wealth countries prior to that point and recognize the significance that August 1 holds as a historic celebration of freedom among abolitionists and emancipated settlers in Canada.

I call upon all my colleagues in the House to vote in favour of designating August 1 of every year as emancipation day throughout our wonderful nation and to honour the important contributions of Canadians of African and Caribbean descent.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our current Prime Minister has had a deep impact on Canada.

In the Prime Minister's Canada, if it earns, he taxes it. If it moves, he regulates it. If it fails, he buys it. If it is government, he grows it. If it is Albertan, he blocks it. If it protests, he funds it. If it blockades, he enables it. If it is addictive, he legalizes it. If it is criminal, he coddles it. If it is a victim, he ignores it. If it farms, he takes from it. If it follows the law, he punishes it. If it is guilty, he denies it. If it speaks truth, he removes it. If it offends, he prohibits it. If it is a veteran, he forgets it.

When the Prime Minister does not know what to do, which happens regularly, he either dithers or blames others. Just to be clear, that deep impact I was speaking of earlier is ruining our Canada.

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ONTARIO TEACHERS

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stand in solidarity with all teachers in Ontario.

Teachers shape the leaders of tomorrow. They fill our students with the confidence, courage and knowledge necessary to chase after their dreams, become their best selves and achieve their truest potential.

Teaching does not start and stop when the school bell rings. Our teachers spend their evenings and weekends going above and beyond to learn the unique needs of their students, make difficult subjects relatable and transform the classroom into a welcoming place for all. Our teachers further enrich our communities as coaches, mentors, therapists and friends. Some teachers even go on to become prime minister.

Statements by Members

As teachers across the province raise their collective voice to protect class sizes, ensure students with special needs have access to quality learning opportunities and keep our children learning in the classroom, I want to let them know that we are in full support of their movement. We thank all our teachers as they continue to make our country a better place, one mind at a time.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 8 is International Women's Day, a time to celebrate the achievements of women in our communities and right across Canada. We recognize our grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters and advocates who have worked tirelessly to advance the rights of women.

Women continue to face discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence and a lack of opportunity and support. That is why our government has made advancing gender equality a top priority. We have provided new funding for women entrepreneurs, newcomer women and women in trades, and launched the first-ever national strategy to prevent and address gender violence.

Everyone has a role to play in achieving gender equality, so today and every day, let us celebrate women's contributions, stand up for women's rights and listen to women's voices. Together we can build a world where all women and girls are free to pursue their dreams and reach their full potential.

* * *

COMMONWEALTH DAY

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Commonwealth Day. As many people might know, Edmonton has a strong connection to the Commonwealth. We once hosted a very successful Commonwealth Games in 1978. The legacy from that includes the city's first leg of its light rail transit line and the nearly 60,000-seat Commonwealth stadium, home of the legendary Edmonton Eskimos. That stadium is actually located in my riding of Edmonton Griesbach.

I am proud to be involved in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I am an elected executive member of the Canadian branch. I have built some strong relationships through my work and travel with that association.

Speaking of Commonwealth relationships, the most important one I have, of course, is with my amazing wife, Clare Denman, who just happens to be from England.

I look forward to seeing many parliamentary colleagues at an event tonight in West Block to celebrate Canada's membership in the Commonwealth. Today, let us wish all citizens of Commonwealth countries a very happy Commonwealth Day.

● (1410)

The Speaker: Order. I want to remind everyone that members are making statements and we want to make sure everyone can hear them, because they are wonderful.

The hon. member for Avalon.

2020 TIM HORTONS BRIER

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a tale as old as time: Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador. It is usually a story of two friends. However, last night it was a battle of the rocks of the rings for the 2020 Tim Hortons Brier. Team Gushue, Olympic gold medallists, two-time world champions, three-time Brier winners and the pride of the Rock, took home the 2020 Brier in a nearly perfect seven to three win over Team Alberta. Mark Nichols, Brett Gallant, Geoff Walker and our boy Brad Gushue brought home the Brier cup to where it rightfully belongs, settling yet another rivalry once and for all.

As we watched from home, the crowd cheering and celebrating along with the team in Kingston, Ontario, last night, we could have sworn they were back home at Mile One stadium in St. John's with their hometown crowd. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are proud to be a part of Team Gushue and we are certainly proud to call them our own.

“Congratulations, hurry home and, as always, hurry, hurry hard.”

* * *

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one should have to imagine what it would feel like to try to breathe while under water, but for Canadians living with cystic fibrosis, this is a daily reality. However, there is hope. Trikafta has been approved in the United States and is showing remarkable results for Americans living with cystic fibrosis, but it is not approved in Canada. It is not approved in Canada because of changes that the Liberal government made to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. Last week, I met with families who are living with cystic fibrosis. The words of one young woman really struck home. She said very simply, “I want to live. I want to see my son grow up.”

The Minister of Health needs to do the right thing. She needs to put down her talking points, set aside her partisanship and work with the manufacturer to get Trikafta approved in Canada. Canadians are counting on us. Let us not be the Parliament that fails to act.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we celebrated International Women's Day. I was honoured to attend an event celebrating Sikh women in Calgary. I want to thank the Sikh Society of Calgary for hosting such a wonderful event. It was important to pay homage and to celebrate women's contributions to our community and across the country.

I am pleased to be the deputy shadow minister for women and gender equality. We know we still have a long way to go to achieve true gender equality. The first step to achieving this begins in our homes. We can do this by encouraging and supporting the women and girls in our lives to succeed, to not let any obstacles that society may have created prevent them from achieving their full potential.

As we move forward, let us celebrate and remember all the strong women in our lives, our mothers, sisters and daughters, and support them in achieving their goals. Let us remember this momentum and carry it with us all year long, because when women succeed, all Canadians benefit.

I wish everyone a happy International Women's Day today and every day.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was International Women's Day and while we celebrated gains that have been made, there is still much work left to do.

There is work to eradicate barriers to women's full economic, social and political participation in our society; work to enact pay equity legislation and affordable national universal child care programs, as well as affordable housing; work to address violence against women and reject all restrictions on women's reproductive rights; work to improve the lives of indigenous women and girls by enacting all the calls for justice; and work to address the specific challenges faced by women of colour and members of the LGBTQI2S+ and the disability communities.

[Translation]

That is certainly a long list, but all women deserve to be valued and to enjoy equity, affordability, equality of opportunity and the freedom to live without fear.

We can never stop working towards that, and we never will.

* * *

• (1415)

SAINT-CHARLES-SUR-RICHELIEU

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 1, 1695, some 325 years ago, Governor Frontenac granted a fourth seigneurie on the shores of the Richelieu River to a soldier by the name of François Hertel de la Fresnière in recognition of his years of loyal service.

Statements by Members

The seigneurie had several names over the years, including Saint-François-Le-Neuf, Saint-Louis and Debartzch, but, in the end, it took the name Saint-Charles-sur-Richelieu.

The ultimate patriotic village, it was the site of the infamous assembly of the six counties on October 23, 1837, where thousands of Patriote supporters gathered to hear from great figures of our history.

These days, Saint-Charles-sur-Richelieu is a beautiful village, a kind of paradise for families and a great place to live. It is primarily an agricultural municipality and it boasts a precious heritage legacy.

On this very special anniversary, I wish the 1,700 residents of Saint-Charles all the best for their celebrations.

* * *

[English]

ALBERTA

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always been a leader on environmental innovation and stewardship. In Canada, Alberta has the most environmentally protected heritage sites. It is the first to have an environment minister for almost five decades. It has the largest connected green space since the 1970s, a commercial wind farm for nearly three decades and the largest approved solar farm.

Alberta leads North America with the first and only renewable LRT system for nearly a decade. It was the first to pass climate change laws, to report and set emissions reductions targets, and to levy heavy emitters almost 15 years ago. Globally, Alberta is the first to turn garbage into biofuels. It has the largest carbon capture project and produces the most environmentally and socially responsible oil and gas in the world. That is just a snapshot.

Albertans are environmental trailblazers. All of that and so many other reasons are why a strong Alberta is a strong Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the entire month of March is Francophonie month. On March 2, I attended the launch of the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie in Orleans. This year's theme is, fittingly, "at the centre of a change". It was a pleasure to talk about change in all its forms with students from Le Prélude and Mer Bleue schools.

Yesterday, March 8, was International Women's Day. I want to take this opportunity to thank all Canadian women for their passion and dedication, as well as their positive impact on our society.

Oral Questions

I also had the privilege of celebrating International Women's Day locally, with the women of Orleans, on March 6. One hundred and fifty of them joined me for breakfast at OCCO Kitchen. Afterwards, there was a ceremony in which I recognized 46 exceptional women and girls by presenting them with the Prix Reconnaissance des femmes et jeunes filles leaders d'Orléans leadership award.

Congratulations to all these women and girls.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is on the brink of a recession, but the government pretends that everything is fine. Canadian stocks are crashing, with the biggest drop since 1987. For every dollar Canadian households bring in, they have \$1.75 in consumer debt. Unemployment is higher than in most G7 countries and 76% of Canadians are worried about losing their jobs.

If the government will not accept that there is a problem, how will it ever work to fix it? When will the government abandon its failed economic policies and change course?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus is having a serious impact on the global economy and on the Canadian economy. Canada's strong fiscal position means we have the firepower to support our economy, and we will.

Measures we take will include, but not be limited to, supporting workers and parents who have to miss work in order to prevent the spread of the virus and supporting our excellent health care system. We are prepared to act and we are.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our fiscal position is not strong and Canada's economy was grinding to a halt well before the coronavirus and the rail blockades.

The government's weak leadership and failed economic approach have created a crisis in confidence for companies wanting to invest and grow in Canada. Even Berkshire Hathaway, one of the most influential investment firms, is abandoning an energy project in Quebec because of the political instability created by the Prime Minister.

When will the government stop blaming everyone else and take responsibility for its role in the coming recession?

• (1420)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very aware of the GNL Québec project, and let me say very clearly our government believes in the natural resources sector and we are working hard to support workers in this sector and investment. Over 400 major resource projects are planned or under construction in Canada. This is up from the previous year, and it includes the largest private sector investment in Canadian history: LNG Canada, which is strongly supported by this government.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our economy is in trouble, and it is getting worse in all our key sectors. Energy projects are being abandoned, mining investment is fleeing Canada, automotive plants are being closed and aerospace revenue is in decline, but the government's failure to provide stability and security has sent a clear message that Canada is closed for business.

What is the Prime Minister's plan to stop six years of eroding Canada's economic foundation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has cited some sectors that are indeed facing difficulties as a direct result of the impact of the coronavirus on the global economy and on the Canadian economy. Let me be very clear. As—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members that interrupting someone who is speaking is a lack of respect. This is something we want to bring back to the chamber, and it is up to all of us to do that.

The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. As Canada faces this serious challenge to public health and also to our economy, our government will be focused on working together with all Canadians to respond to this challenge, and not on taking cheap partisan shots.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since those people have been in government, 200,000 energy sector workers have lost their jobs in Canada. More than seven projects have been cancelled and more than \$150 billion in investments have evaporated. To date, this happened only out west, but now Quebec is being affected by the abandonment of the GNL Québec project. The backers of the project said that major projects in Canada are no longer attractive because of this government's political instability.

How can the Deputy Prime Minister defend such an abysmal record with respect to creating jobs and, especially, attracting major projects that create jobs for all Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that working with the resource sector to create good jobs and attract investment is a priority. Canada has over 400 major resource projects in the planning stages or under way. That is more than last year and includes the largest private sector investment in Canadian history, the LNG Canada project, which our government strongly supports.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the Deputy Prime Minister could talk to her colleagues, including those at Canadian Heritage, who must have been happy to learn that GNL Québec's plan for the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean project was shelved because of this government's policies and because it let a rail crisis drag on for more than four weeks, giving global investors the impression that there are no more opportunities for major projects in Canada.

What will the government do to fix the situation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to note once again that the natural resources sector is a priority for our government. We understand that this sector supports many good jobs across the country. We are working with major investors. I also want to note that the largest private sector project in Canadian history is the LNG Canada project, which our government strongly supports.

* * *

● (1425)

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a month later, the blockade at Kahnawake has finally been lifted, but that does not mean that the rail crisis is over.

Today, the government must take responsibility for its lack of leadership on this file. For example, in my riding, Exo spent more than \$1 million to try to replace commuter trains. Manufacturers and exporters in Quebec lost between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a day. This was quite costly to our businesses.

Will the government present a compensation plan to the victims of the collateral damage of its inaction on the rail crisis?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the blockades had some very real consequences for Canadians, including Quebecers.

We needed to find a peaceful and lasting resolution. I want to point out that by engaging in dialogue, we have reached a tentative agreement with the Wet'suwet'en. This is a good thing for all Canadians. All blockades have been removed and rail service has resumed. This is also a good thing.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we did not get an answer.

We have not yet started dealing with the impact of the rail crisis and now the new coronavirus crisis is causing concern. This same government is the one managing our borders. This same government is the one managing our airports. This same government is the one that will be preventing the coronavirus from getting into the country. There is cause for concern. Last week, the Customs and Immigration Union sounded the alarm. Border officers are not getting any support to identify people with the virus. This is hard to imagine.

The government messed up with the rail crisis. Everyone knows that. Does the government realize that there is no room for failure with the coronavirus?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for this important question. I will begin by describing the whole-of-government approach we are taking.

Experts are saying that this situation is likely to get worse before it gets better, in Canada and around the world. Our government will do whatever it takes to keep Canadians safe and keep our economy strong.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people are deeply worried about the spread of the coronavirus, and they want to do their part. The Liberal government has suggested that people who might be infected should self-quarantine and stay at home from work. That is very difficult for workers who do not have sick leave. How are they going to pay their bills? How will they make that difficult decision?

[Translation]

People want to do their part to stop the spread of the coronavirus, but without sick leave, they cannot do so.

Will the government help people stay home?

[English]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will. We know that we must support Canadians who may not be able to work because of illness or quarantine. We have already reduced the EI waiting period from two weeks to one week, and we are committing to extending EI benefits to 26 weeks. We are planning for worst-case scenarios, as is prudent and correct for our government to do, and we are preparing further measures to support Canadian workers and our economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, health experts are concerned about the fact that our health care system is not equipped to deal with a coronavirus crisis.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

That is not surprising, given the fact that for decades both Liberal and Conservative governments have been cutting funding to health care. To support the crisis as it potentially increases, will the Prime Minister commit to reversing the Harper era cuts and properly fund our health care system?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was at Sunnybrook hospital on Friday and I must say I was so impressed by the hard work, intelligence and dedication of the health care professionals I met there. Our federal government will not hesitate to support Canada's health care system as necessary during this situation. We are already engaged in bulk procurement efforts. This is not a time to quibble about federal and provincial responsibilities. This is a time to work together, as we are doing.

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● (1430)

*[Translation]***THE ECONOMY**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the sun is shining, responsible home owners repair the roof, strengthen the foundation and fill the cupboards for the coming winter. This government spent the sunny days wasting money, going into debt and stifling investment. Now, the roof is leaking, the foundation is cracking and the cupboards are bare.

What is the plan now?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my grandfather always warned me to never let anything as petty as the cold, hard facts get in the way of a good story, and it sounds like the hon. member has been speaking to my grandfather.

When I look at the argument he makes, it rests on false pretenses. Over the past few years, we have made investments in the Canadian economy that have seen 1.2 million jobs added, including more than 30,000 in the past month alone. We have also seen more than a million people lifted out of poverty.

If he does not want to take my word for it, I would direct him to the report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who confirmed that we have enough space in our budget to respond with the firepower we need in the event of a downturn. These things do not happen by accident. They happen because we have been putting measures in place to grow the economy and support Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the hon. member had a wonderful and wise grandfather to whom he should have listened. His grandfather would have advised him to fill up the cupboards with supplies for a rainy day, and repair the roof and the foundation for the storm that inevitably comes. Instead, the Liberals added almost \$100 billion of new debt, ground economic growth to 0.3% and shut down 150 billion dollars' worth of projects, all before the coronavirus problem even began.

How could they have left common sense behind and made us so weak and vulnerable?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it fascinating that the hon. member has a new-found interest in debt and economic growth. If we look at the record, while he was sitting around the cabinet table in the previous government, it added \$150 billion to our nation's debt and had the lowest rate of economic growth since the Great Depression. I could not make this stuff up.

Through the measures that we put in place, we have seen more than 1.2 million jobs added to the Canadian economy, more than a million people lifted out of poverty, including 300,000 kids, and we now have the healthiest balance sheet in the G7. This is what success looks like. I would invite the hon. member to take a look and enjoy.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said he could not make this stuff up. He underestimates himself. I am glad that he brought up our record, because in the first two years after we took office we did what his grandfather would have done. We paid off \$40 billion in debt to prepare for the crisis that we knew would one day come. As a result, we had a buffer. We were prepared and we had the strongest economy in the G7 through the great global recession—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I thought we started off so well. I will not choose one side or the other, but as we sit here today, I want members to think about what their grandparents would think of them sitting in this room.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my grandfather turns 99 in May, and he is one of the few people I know who personally witnessed a government with a slower rate of economic growth than the Conservatives under Stephen Harper.

The fact remains that we have the healthiest balance sheet of any G7 economy. This is because we have been investing in measures that create economic growth and we have been putting in place policies that actually make sure ordinary Canadians benefit from that growth.

We are going to continue on a path to deal with the very serious challenges facing the Canadian economy, but we are going to work toward achieving economic growth, and growth that works for everyone.

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, we learned that Berkshire Hathaway, a company that was strongly considering investing \$4 billion in the GNL Québec project, had decided to pull out. The company had chosen GNL Québec from among 100 liquefied natural gas projects around the world. It made its exit at a time when the Prime Minister is creating a climate of uncertainty never before seen in Canada.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to win back the roughly \$200 billion in lost or delayed investments in natural resource projects?

• (1435)

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working with the resource sector to ensure that the best projects come to fruition. We know that investors and global consumers in Canada and around the world are increasingly looking for cleaner products and sustainable resource development.

We understand that GNL Québec is planning to continue with the evaluation process while seeking new investors for the proposed project.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, GNL Québec is yet another project the Government of Canada sabotaged, even though it is a green project that fits right into the global energy transition. The project could produce \$807 million in economic spinoffs annually, \$110 million in tax revenue and 1,100 direct and indirect jobs.

What does the Prime Minister have to say to the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and elsewhere, the majority of whom support this project?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that project is currently undergoing a federal assessment by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada in accordance with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012, which is the system set up by my colleague's party when it was in power.

I am sure that the outcome of this rigorous process will make it clear to all Canadians whether the project should go ahead or not. Cabinet will make a decision in due time.

[English]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another major investor has had enough of the Liberals' job-killing policies.

Warren Buffett withdrew his promised \$4-billion investment in a natural gas pipeline in Quebec. As one media outlet stated, Buffett realizes "he can't rely on a stable investment or regulatory environment, so he is walking away. He won't be alone, and...regular Canadians will be hurt by a lack of jobs."

Oral Questions

Will the Liberals finally admit that they are the problem or will they continue to kill jobs and investment in Canada that we so desperately need?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working with the resource sector to ensure jobs are created for Canadians from coast to coast to coast, while at the same time protecting our environment. It is what Canadians expect from our government.

We know that investors all around the world are looking for projects that find that balance between economic growth and giving them return on their investment, while also putting in place sustainable methods by which to do that. We have also heard the good news that the evaluation will move forward while GNL Quebec looks for other investors.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the rail crisis has had a huge impact on the economy in eastern Quebec. The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie is still taking stock, but we already know that losses exceed half a million dollars.

The Baie-des-Chaleurs chamber of commerce has sounded the alarm and is worried that it will take months for the economy to recover. The chamber asked the federal government for assistance last Thursday. The lack of federal leadership is what caused the rail crisis to drag on.

Will the government compensate companies for their losses?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this government, we believe it is important to follow a process for reconciliation. That is what we have done. The rail blockades were unfortunate, but we worked very hard, around the clock, to resolve the crisis. I am pleased to see that trains are moving again on rail lines across the country.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus is spreading across Asia, Europe and North America, and the government must be prepared to face a global crisis. It is good that the government set up a war room, but we have to piece together information bit by bit to get an overview of the situation.

Will the government be transparent and share its action plan in its entirety once and for all?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we have been working on this issue since Dr. Tam identified the very small cluster in Wuhan in late December.

Oral Questions

We have been working with all members in the House, offering briefings as they are available. We will continue to make ourselves available so they can understand the rapidly changing situation with COVID-19.

I will reassure the member that we are also working at all levels, with provinces, territories and other jurisdictions, including the local public health unit level, to make sure that our systems are prepared, that we know what we need and that we can handle any surge that we may face.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus is spreading ever more quickly, and the word “pandemic”, which seemed premature just a few days ago, is fast becoming the correct word. In just a few weeks' time, the number of cases in Europe increased by 19,000%. It takes leadership from the Prime Minister to reassure the public. It takes transparency and an action plan.

How many cases will it take before we have a contingency plan?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we have been working on this since we first identified those small clusters of atypical pneumonia in Wuhan in late December.

As the member opposite notes, we have formed a special committee on COVID-19 to make sure that we are fully apprised of the whole-of-government approach. We have scenario planning that is under way, so we can understand how it will impact the various different components that, as we can see around the world, are being impacted by disruption.

The health and safety of Canadians is of top priority for us. We will do everything in our power to keep them safe and well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many countries are starting to talk about COVID-19 as a global pandemic. As of today, the vast majority of developed countries have already implemented measures for travellers. Here in Canada, there are no restrictions on or monitoring of people entering the country.

My question is for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Does he intend to ban travellers from countries such as China, Iran or Italy from entering Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that question indicates that more briefing is required for that member, to let him know exactly what is happening at the borders.

We have been carefully screening travellers from a variety of countries, based on expert advice from the World Health Organization and many other medical professionals that have indicated to us that the best effort is to ensure we are asking travellers at the border to identify themselves, if they have travelled from specific regions. There are special questions on the kiosks. If a traveller is unwell, he

or she is referred to public health and the local public health authorities.

The member should apprise himself of the measures that are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Riverbend.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hospitals across the country have been warning the government that there is a shortage of masks, protective equipment and beds.

However, according to the minister's health officials, the health system is well prepared to deal with the growing number of COVID-19 cases in Canada. Now, finally, six weeks after the first confirmed case and now just after the first death in British Columbia, the Prime Minister has asked provinces for their state of readiness.

Why is the minister saying the government is well prepared, when she is only asking provinces for their state of readiness today?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is deeply saddening to hear the news out of British Columbia, where the first patient of coronavirus has passed away in Canada. I know we all send our condolences to the family.

The Prime Minister's letter follows the one I sent to my counterparts not long ago, also requesting they put on paper exactly where they thought they were going to have shortages. We have received several responses from provinces and territories in terms of what kinds of needs they might have.

We are working very closely with them to make sure we can provide them with the resources, whether it is equipment or whether it is financial resources. We will be there for provinces and territories.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ensuring our hospitals are well equipped in the case of a COVID-19 pandemic is a Canadian issue. We know that almost all confirmed cases have been from those entering Canada from high-risk areas, yet the government continues to claim that the problem is not at our borders.

Is the minister prepared to enforce the Quarantine Act and issue measures such as mandatory quarantine for those entering from high-risk areas?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member opposite to review the Quarantine Act. He will see that in fact we have been using it extensively. When we ask people from affected regions to self-isolate for 14 days, it requires a mandatory check-in with public health, which then continues to confirm the person is complying with the self-isolation practices that are necessary.

This virus knows no borders. We are very aware and alive to the supports we need to provide at the local levels so they can continue their excellent work in containing this illness and mitigating the effects on Canadians.

• (1445)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government assured Canadians our health system was well prepared to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak.

However, HealthCareCAN, the advocacy group for Canada's hospitals, is warning our system is stretched too thin, with dangerous shortages of critical care beds and protective equipment. It is calling for increased federal funding and much more testing.

Today, the first death from the virus in BC was confirmed and we know things will get worse before they get better.

Will the Liberals ensure hospitals have the resources they need to respond to COVID-19?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is yes. This is the work we are conducting right now with provinces and territories to make sure they have the capacity should they see a surge of illness in their communities that require increased hospitalization.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals keep saying they care about a nation-to-nation relationship, but as we face a potential coronavirus outbreak, they have turned their backs on first nations and Inuit again.

When the H1N1 crisis hit, indigenous nations asked for help, but the government sent body bags instead.

Lives are at risk.

Will the Prime Minister admit he was wrong and reverse his decision to exclude the Minister of Indigenous Services from the COVID-19 committee?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Indigenous Services, I can confirm that I am on the committee.

I will reassure the member opposite that regional offices are working with first nations leadership and communities on awareness. To assure that necessary resources are in place, we are actively engaged with the Public Health Agency of Canada, other departments and provincial and territorial counterparts to protect the health and safety of first nations and Inuit people.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was International Women's Day, a day to recognize the contributions of all women and an opportunity to promote and support gender equality. This year's theme, #BecauseOfYou, celebrates the generations of advocates, activists and other agents of change who are working to advance gender equality, such as the Centre des femmes de Saint-Laurent in my riding.

Can the Minister for Women and Gender Equality tell the House how we can celebrate Canada's progress toward greater equality for women and people of all genders?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

Oral Questions

thanks to the courage and hard work of those who came before us, women like my colleague from Saint-Laurent and I are able to put our names on a ballot. We have made a lot of progress, particularly over the past five years, and we are committed to doing much more.

[English]

While there is push-back to every step we take forward, we owe it to those who have come before us to make things better for those who will come after us.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is the only Five Eyes ally that has not yet made a decision about Huawei's participation in our 5G network. In defence of the government's lack of action, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry stated, and I quote, that Canada "won't get bullied by any other jurisdiction."

However, this is not the time to be picking fights with our allies.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to ban Huawei from our 5G network and to protect Canadian businesses and citizens?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to make sure Canadians have access to the most beneficial 5G technology.

The safety and security of our digital environment is a paramount consideration and we will make sure that Canadians are safe and that their systems are not compromised. We are doing the work that is required to ensure all scientific and security factors are taken into account from our allies, including the United States officials with whom I met this morning, and all our security agencies.

We are doing the work necessary to make sure the decision is the right one for Canadians.

Oral Questions

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indecision becomes a decision with time. The Prime Minister has failed to decide if he wants to protect the cybersecurity of Canadians by abandoning Huawei. Many Five Eyes partners have warned us that Huawei poses a serious risk to Canadians. Just today, the U.S. sent a top official to plead with the Liberals to ban Huawei. However, instead of working together with our most important ally, senior Liberals called them bullies.

Will the Prime Minister stop name-calling, act to protect Canadians and ban Huawei?

• (1450)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really do feel compelled to straighten out the mischaracterization just presented. In fact, there is a very robust and important discussion going on between ourselves and our allies to ensure that the decision we make in Canada's best interests takes into full account all the scientific and security factors that must be considered to ensure that we do what is right to maintain a safe and secure environment for Canadians and that we keep them safe.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces put their lives on the line to protect us every day. In the event of a pandemic, they may be on the front line as a response. They will be at a heightened risk of getting sick. They need to know we have their backs with the proper resources, resources like a functioning hospital. Construction on the hospital in Garrison Petawawa has been behind for two years. It is two years late in construction.

China built two hospitals in 10 days. How many more years will it take the Liberal government to build just one?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take the health and safety of our members of the Canadian Armed Forces very seriously. In fact, I was in Petawawa last year to look at infrastructure needs, and it was not only health services. We are also looking at the MFRC in Petawawa.

Infrastructure is something we need to continually invest in. That is exactly what our defence policy is doing. If the previous government had started investing in infrastructure, we would not be in this situation. That is why we are now making sure that our Canadian Armed Forces have all the tools necessary.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to correct the minister, because the Liberals have cut infrastructure funding to the Canadian Armed Forces by \$247 million. A recent internal audit warned that electrical outages and sewer backups on bases are threatening operations and putting the health and safety of our troops at risk.

It appears that the Liberals cannot even manage an outhouse, but they expect us to trust them to buy new ships and fighter jets.

Will the minister admit and agree with me that he is literally up to his knees in it this time?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the member opposite brought this up, because in the case of the infrastructure spending that he is talking about, he was the parliamentary secretary of national defence when the Conservatives actually did not invest in infrastructure.

This is why we are investing in our MFRCs and our health services, and when it comes to operational needs, we are making the right investments when the money is there to take care of our Canadian Armed Forces.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus epidemic has hit Europe hard. There are 7,000 cases in Italy and 1,000 in France and Germany. The government can no longer simply use targeted security measures for people arriving from a handful of countries. The crisis is now global, and Quebecers feel as though the government is managing the crisis on a case-by-case basis.

What is the government's full contingency plan now that travellers and nationals from around the world could be carriers of the virus?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and his observation that we now find the coronavirus in 102 countries globally.

Canada is no different. We have just over 70 cases here in Canada. That is why it was so great to sit down with Minister McCann last week in Montreal to talk about Montreal's preparedness plan and Quebec's preparedness plan.

I am very confident in the work that the provinces and territories are doing and I would like to thank Minister McCann particularly for a very good discussion.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, travellers at the Montréal-Trudeau International Airport complained that passengers arriving from at-risk areas were not being tested. Some travellers even likened the airport to a sieve. We need to protect the public against the spread of this virus. The government must issue clear directives to ensure that no cases of the virus are allowed in.

Will the government set up detection measures for the coronavirus at all border crossings, starting with airports?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hard-working men and women of both the CBSA and the Public Health Agency of Canada who have been working together so diligently for several months to ensure that we can support the health of Canadians as they come back home and also support the health of international travellers.

This is a rapidly evolving situation. We will make sure that the people who are doing this hard work for us are recognized for that work and are supported in that work. They are an integral part in making sure that we protect the health and safety of Canadians.

* * *

● (1455)

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to office space modernization, the table has been set for Liberal ministers, while humble civil servants get the scraps.

In the last four and a half years, Liberals have spent over \$1.6 million improving their own offices. Recently we learned that Public Services and Procurement Canada missed its office space modernization goal for public servants by 50%.

Will the minister inform her cabinet colleagues that they are cut off from further office renovations?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as part of its routine management of federal real property, Public Services and Procurement Canada led an initiative to identify ministerial offices across government in need of refurbishment.

This initiative addressed spaces that required modest, cost-effective repairs during the 2019 recess period and general election. These routine projects are done following Treasury Board policies and enable employees to work in functional, up-to-date workspaces.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to setting goals, the Liberals are all talk. They set a goal for office space modernization, but in the department's own explanation as to why they fell short, they admitted they were not funding their own goals.

While Liberals are redecorating their offices, our hard-working public servants go without basic improvements to theirs. Will the minister cancel all vanity office projects for her colleagues and redirect those resources to where they are most needed?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that these are routine projects. They are done following Treasury Board policies that were followed closely and they are enabling employees to continue their important work for the people of Canada in functional office space.

Oral Questions

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Chinese ambassador to Canada continues to absurdly label Uighur persecution as fake news, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has now officially labelled the Chinese government's persecution of Uighurs as crimes against humanity. This designation opens the door for an international legal response.

Aside from talking about it and expressing concern, is the government contemplating a concrete legal response to this atrocity, supporting international legal action, recognizing these as crimes against humanity or imposing Magnitsky sanctions against those responsible?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are deeply concerned by the human rights situation faced by the Uighur and other minorities in China.

Let me be very clear. Our government has raised this issue directly with the Chinese. Canada has also repeatedly voiced its concern at the United Nations Human Rights Council. We continue to call on the Chinese government to ensure that the human rights of its people, including freedom of religion, are fully respected.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, violence erupted on the fringes of demonstrations in the Indian capital of Delhi. At least 50 people lost their lives, and hundreds more were injured. One of the elements that caused dissension was the citizenship amendment act that was recently adopted by the Indian government. This law has many in my community and many Canadians across the country concerned.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs update the House on Canada's engagement with India on this issue?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore for his work and his important question.

First of all, I want to express our condolences to the families and friends of those who have lost their lives.

Last week, I did speak with the Indian foreign minister to directly raise our concern over the violence that has been taking place. In that conversation, I highlighted the importance of a path toward peaceful and productive dialogue. We will continue to follow this situation closely and continue to stress the importance of upholding the rights of all.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a new green-light law in New York state will now prevent those residents from enrolling in trusted traveller programs like Global Entry, FAST, NEXUS or SENTRI. This is very troubling for Niagara Falls and for the region of Niagara. We benefit tremendously from these programs, which support the flow of people and goods crossing our borders.

Oral Questions

With the busy summer tourism season quickly approaching, this is an issue we need resolved, and resolved soon. Has the Minister of Foreign Affairs spoken to his American counterparts to express Canadian concerns about these changes that are now impacting their trusted traveller programs?

• (1500)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the member opposite that we work very closely with our American counterparts, including those in the customs and border patrol and in their new rules. We are absolutely committed to maintaining the integrity and security of our borders, and at the same time facilitating the movement of people across our border.

This issue has not, at this point in time, been raised with them, but I will be happy to enter into that discussion on the member's behalf.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the date is quickly approaching for the World Trade Organization's decision on Australia's request to review Canada's excise tax exemption for 100% Canadian wines. If \$39 million per year in new taxes for our wineries was not bad enough, I am now hearing from local wineries that this will set the industry back 15 years, and banks are starting to call, enquiring how they are going to deal with this potential new expense.

When will the government stand up for our farm wineries, come to a solution and give them more certainty for the future?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her advocacy. As the member may know, the minister did meet very recently with leaders of the wine industry. We did that because we very much believe that this industry brings to Canada an incredible contribution to our reputation as a world-class agricultural producer.

We have been working very hard in order to resolve the dispute with Australia. I would like to assure the member opposite that our government will continue to stand up for the Canadian workers and defend the interests of the wine industry in Canada.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Earl Dreessen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a needle exchange program is to begin at the Bowden Institution. This program gives needles to prisoners so they can consume illicit drugs in their cells, all with the promise that they will not misuse the needles.

Prison guards are very concerned. In fact, the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers was not even consulted. When will the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness act to protect the safety of those on the front lines?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to reassure the member that prevention and treatment of infectious diseases within correctional institutions protects not only the federal offender population but also corrections personnel and the Canadian public. Job number one is the safety and security of all concerned.

The Correctional Service of Canada conducts a thorough risk assessment before any inmate is approved to participate in this program, and in every case appropriate safeguards are put in place to ensure that needles are safely stored and are accounted for at all times. We are looking after the security and safety of our inmates and our corrections workers.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, our government announced a \$3.6-million investment from FedNor in two projects proposed by the North Claybelt Community Futures Development Corporation. For more than 30 years, this not-for-profit organization has been helping local entrepreneurs start or expand their businesses and helping communities strengthen their economy.

Could the Minister of Economic Development tell us more about this project, which is extremely important to the community?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will gladly do so. I would like to thank my colleague from Nickel Belt for that great question. We know that entrepreneurs are the engine of northern Ontario's economy. By supporting the North Claybelt Community Futures Development Corporation, our government has helped more than 185 businesses create or maintain more than 221 jobs across the region. We are here for northern Ontarians and for our young entrepreneurs.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus is already hurting the economy, and we are facing the possibility of a global economic downturn. Canadians are counting on the government to deliver a stimulus and job creation strategy. We need to invest in new infrastructure, renewable energy, public transit and home retrofits to create jobs all across the country. The Liberals have the chance to show that they will help workers and the planet and not just big corporations.

Will the government invest in the sustainable jobs that Canadians need right now?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the question is yes.

With respect to the coronavirus, I will let the hon. member know that our priority remains making sure that our public health system can provide world-class services and we will have support announced in the near future for those who have to self-isolate. I would invite the hon. member to take a look at the infrastructure plan that we have put forward, which is seeing hundreds of billions of dollars going toward projects that are actually going to create jobs in our communities and leave our communities strengthened as a result. I would be happy to carry on this conversation in more detail with the hon. member at her leisure.

* * *

● (1505)

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of viruses like COVID-19 is if people stay home and self-isolate when they are sick, but for many low-wage workers and contractors, missing work is simply not an option. The loss of just a few hundred dollars could mean not feeding their families or potential homelessness.

Will the government extend financial support to all workers who must self-isolate for public safety reasons and will that commitment include workers who do not pay into EI or are not EI eligible?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that we must support Canadians who may not be able to work because of illness or quarantine. People should not be penalized for acting to support their own health and the health of their neighbours. We have already reduced the EI waiting period from two weeks to one week. We are committed to extending EI benefits to 26 weeks. We are planning for worst-case scenarios and, as the finance minister said last week, we will support Canadian workers in our economy.

The Speaker: That will end question period for today. I want to thank all members. You were very good today. I just want to mention that.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-8, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy).

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

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PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from young people in my riding who point out that climate change is accelerating in Canada and around the world and that Canadian youth are anxious about being left with an uncertain future. Therefore, they call upon

Routine Proceedings

the House of Commons to take meaningful steps to support the future of young Canadians and fulfill Canada's obligations under the Paris Agreement by adopting a detailed climate action strategy that includes legislated climate targets, science-based targets for greenhouse gas reduction and a plan to meet them, and by implementing a comprehensive and steadily rising national carbon price beyond 2022, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and redirecting those investments into renewable energy systems, energy efficiency, low-carbon transportation and job training.

● (1510)

OPIOIDS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, the first petition I have is about the opioid overdose crisis and the number of deaths. People are very concerned about this.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to declare a public health emergency due to overdose deaths in Canada, to reframe the overdose crisis in Canada as a health issue rather than a criminal issue and to take a comprehensive multi-faceted approach to overdose and the overdose crisis. They ask that Parliament address issues of addiction, poverty, housing, health care, racial discrimination, economic inequality and instability, that Parliament listen to and act on recommendations made by social workers, front-line workers, nurses, doctors, drug users and individuals directly involved in the drug-using community, and decriminalize drugs in Canada.

CANNABIS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I have is from residents in my riding who are concerned about an outdoor cannabis growing operation that has been put into their neighbourhood. They are calling on the government to amend the cannabis licensing regulations to require local community input, as well as to require local municipalities to have significant involvement in decision-making for licences, particularly as to the location of properties that are allocated licences for the outdoor production and processing of cannabis.

They are also asking for a one-year moratorium on licences for outdoor cultivated cannabis to allow municipalities sufficient time to develop appropriate bylaws in conjunction with their enhanced involvement in the decision-making process.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition signed by residents of the GTA.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons in Parliament assembled along with Global Affairs Canada to issue a statement with respect to South Korea's Moon Jae-in government, expressing denouncement and deep concern over the forcible repatriation of two North Korean defectors back to North Korea and urging the Moon government to take corrective actions ensuring that it will fully comply with international human rights laws; and, with respect to North Korea's Kim Jong-un's regime, urging the regime to disclose the whereabouts of the two North Korean defectors repatriated by South Korea's Moon government and to treat them with humanity.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to table a petition on behalf of residents of the Comox Valley, from Courtenay and Cumberland.

This petition is about the 12,500 preventable deaths due to the opioid and fentanyl crisis taking place across our country. The tabling of this petition could not be more timely, as tomorrow many of the signatories to this petition will be protesting the closure of the overdose protection site in Courtenay.

The petitioners are calling on the government to declare the current opioid overdose and fentanyl poisoning crisis a national public health emergency. They are calling for resources to support overdose protection sites, support treatment, support tackling this issue with a clean source. They want the government to make sure it is under the Emergencies Act in order to manage and resource it properly, with the aim to reduce, eliminate and prevent deaths; to reform current drug policies to decriminalize personal possession; and to create with urgency and immediacy a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose due to a contaminated source.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of 44 constituents of Pontiac, who presented me with a petition in my office. We had a very good discussion about the issue of the climate emergency that faces our planet.

The petitioners are urging our government and Parliament to move forward with measures to take action as we face so many climate-related events, such as the floods we faced in the Pontiac in 2017 and 2019. They are insisting it is urgent that we act immediately to address greenhouse gas emissions, to transition to a low-carbon economy and to do so in reconciliation with indigenous peoples and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

● (1515)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling two petitions.

The first petition is regarding private member's Motion No. 1, the green new deal. It is my pleasure to present this petition on behalf of dozens of residents across Canada. They are joining their voices with those of thousands of Canadians who have signed petitions thus far. All of them are calling on the Government of Canada

to address the climate emergency with the ambition and urgency required, on behalf of present and future generations.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support private member's Motion No. 1, a made-in-Canada green new deal, which calls on Canada to take bold and rapid action to tackle the climate emergency, to address the worsening socio-economic and racial inequalities at the same time and to support workers impacted by the transition to a clean and renewable energy economy.

CANADA POST

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from many constituents from my riding, close to 400 of them. They are calling on the Minister of Public Services and Procurement to adopt the delivering community power vision by Canada Post by transitioning Canada Post to 100% renewable energy, expanding services for seniors, introducing postal banking, converting Canada Post's fleet to all electric vehicles, installing public charging stations, delivering medicines and groceries, installing solar panels and retrofitting post offices.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition from over 100 students at Notre Dame High School in Beaches—East York. They call attention to the inadequate housing on reserve and the lack of clean water. They note that as a matter of basic equality and human rights, this is unacceptable in Canada. They ask the government to take this more seriously. While 88 boil water advisories have been lifted since 2015, 64 remain. The petitioners request that Parliament lend more funding and support to attend to these issues and bring equality to first nations communities.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions today and I will move through them very quickly.

The first two have to do with the environment.

Members of my constituency are concerned about the impact that we are having on our environment and what the government should be doing to address this.

In one of the petitions they are calling on the House of Commons and Parliament to mandate and fund energy audits for all federal buildings.

In another, they are calling on the House of Commons and Parliament to increase subsidies for consumer purchases of electric vehicles to \$10,000.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition with 275 signatures on it from farmers and individuals in my constituency who support farmers throughout Canada. They are calling on the Canadian government to refrain from making any regulations under the Plant Breeders' Rights Act that would further erode farmers' rights or add to farmers' costs by restricting or eliminating farmers' privilege.

FLOOD RELIEF

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last petition has 1,677 signatures on it. This one is in relation to the flooding that has been going on in Lake Ontario, the Ottawa River and the St. Lawrence River.

The petitioners ask the government to initiate a program of patterning to either close the seaway early or open it later in the spring; to use extraordinary measures to target Lake Ontario levels to reduce the levels earlier on; and to further increase the L-limit deviation, similar to the 1986 fall season's defensive actions when outflows exceeded the current limit of 200.

SENIORS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from the residents of Winnipeg North. They emphasize the importance of our seniors and call upon parliamentarians to recognize how important they are by looking at ways to enhance their quality of life, using the example of the old age supplement, and ways in which we might lift more seniors out of poverty.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS ON ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very excited to have the opportunity to talk about the impact of the Canada child benefit in my community, the impact that it has had on child poverty right across our country and its impact on food insecurity. There are studies that have been done now that show that food insecurity is being impacted by the fact that we have a Canada child benefit that is indexed and that is non-taxable.

Business of Supply

That is all money in the pockets of some of the people who are the neediest in our communities, and it is helping children and families to pay for their needs. I believe that is one of the most important programs that we put into place, although there is much more that we can speak about.

That is why I have been so happy that we have had this opportunity today. All members of the House have spoken from all different sides about how, in our communities, what we want is to work together to make sure that our communities are stronger, that people are able to afford what they need to make ends meet, and that they are able to find the employment that they would like to get. All of these are so important to what we have been working on.

I very much appreciate that I have been given this extra time to complete my speech, and I am now ready for my five minutes of questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago I had the opportunity to rise and table a petition for seniors. Seniors across the country are important to all of us, and my friend and colleague made reference to the Canada child benefit program.

Along with the increases that we saw there that ultimately lifted children out of poverty, a few years back, through a budgetary motion, we brought forward changes to the guaranteed income supplement. I know that would have also had an impact on the constituents she represented.

I am wondering if she can say just how important that was, in terms of assisting seniors to get out of poverty.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that question because I have seen the impact of that work. In fact, the Statistics Canada study that came out last year pointed out that the changes to the GIS had actually reduced poverty for seniors living in our communities and across the country. I believe that is reflected once again in the most recent poverty dashboard that was released by Statistics Canada.

Statistically we are seeing it, but we are also seeing it anecdotally. We should actually broaden it and speak about some of the other things we are doing for seniors. One thing I have seen in my own community is that we are building affordable housing for seniors. That is something I know is always top of mind: accessing affordable housing.

Those two pieces, along with other pieces we have been working on, have been helping seniors across our country.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the hon. member's comments, she talked about her passion for food security issues, particularly for lower-income people.

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To that end, my colleague, the member for Vancouver Kingsway tabled a private member's bill for a school food program. In my riding of Vancouver East, we have many lower-income communities where food is simply not accessible or available for many low-income families. If we could in fact provide for a national food program at the schools, I think that would go a long way toward addressing these concerns.

I wonder if that is something the member would support.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I am so happy that a national school food program was raised by my colleague across the way, because that is something I have been quite passionate about.

I was so excited that there was a section in our last budget about a national food policy, in fact Canada's first national food policy. There was a commitment to negotiate with our provinces and territories to support national school food programs across our country, for many reasons. Food programs help kids who go to school without food in their bellies, perhaps for poverty reasons. However, there are many reasons why a kid might go to school without food.

It is actually something that helps education outcomes. It helps with health outcomes and education outcomes. I very much support a national school food program right across our country.

• (1525)

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's speech where she talked, over and over again, about the universal child care benefit.

I was proud to have been part of the government elected in 2006. One of our five priorities in that election campaign was the universal child care benefit. I was pleased that even after we introduced that, we still managed to pay down \$40 billion in debt over the next few years while the economy was good. Then, when we went through a rough patch in the global economy, our government introduced a stimulus program and eventually got the budget back to balance.

Year after year, we defended spending for the universal child care benefit. When we wound up with a balanced budget in 2015, the balanced budget that the Liberal government inherited, we still had a very strong universal child care benefit.

I have the document here. After she is done with questions and comments, would the hon. member be interested in sitting down with me so that I could share with her the key to the success of the previous government, of how we managed to protect funding for something as important as the universal child care benefit and still balanced the budget in 2015?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I am always happy to have a conversation, but the universal child care benefit was taxable and it paid the same exact amount of money to everyone regardless of their income.

Having a means-tested, indexed, non-taxable Canada child benefit has reduced child poverty. The previous program did not.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Carleton. I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

It is a very important debate that we are having today, particularly given the circumstances we find ourselves in with the coronavirus, the blockades and a general slowdown in the economy. One thing of note is that the Liberal government has always prided itself on its fiscal anchors. Let us talk a bit about those fiscal anchors that have now put us in a situation where we have limited flexibility to react to crises like these.

The first fiscal anchor the Liberals claimed was that they would balance the budget within five years. They said they would have very small deficits and then they would balance the budget. Of course, that anchor has now fallen off. Next they said they would try to find a balance with debt-to-GDP ratios and continue to see a decline. That fiscal anchor has fallen off the boat as well.

The one anchor they have left is when they talk about employment numbers. I would suggest there is a weakening in the employment numbers and, when we compare ourselves against some of the other G7 countries, Canada's unemployment rate does not look as favourable. Here is a government priding itself on fiscal anchors. I would say the anchor has fallen through the boat, the boat has a big hole, the boat is sinking and the Liberals do not even see it happening.

The Minister of Finance keeps saying that we are in good shape and we have this great reserve built up so that we can weather these storms. I am wondering if we will ever find out what that reserve is because, from the numbers Conservatives are looking at, we do not see that being the case.

The leadership of the government and the regulations that are stopping the growth of business have resulted in over 200,000 job losses in my province of Saskatchewan. There is \$150 billion in capital that has gone elsewhere.

I always hear that it is because the commodity price is low. The fact is that the money went somewhere. Norway has now opened up another field and says it will pump oil for as long as it is needed. It put that investment in. The Russians have just put a big capital investment into the resource sector, and we know the Americans have been very successful growing their resource business and market share, which is something the Liberal government has not been able to recognize.

There is also the tax structure that has been put in place, burdening small businesses with increases in CPP, EI and particularly the carbon tax. The carbon tax is a tax on everything. These hard-working small businesses are trying to produce products, trying to be competitive in the global market and are restrained by the government continuing to increase taxes. By throwing in the TOSI rules and limiting the ability of husbands and wives to split income through those corporations, it strikes me that we are doing everything we can to try to slow down these hard-working individuals and great businesses that are the strength of Canada.

Under the Liberal government's weak leadership, the energy sector alone has lost over \$150 billion in investment. I can name off the projects: \$20 billion for Teck, \$8 billion for northern gateway, \$16 billion for energy east, \$36 billion for Pacific North-West, \$28 billion for Aurora and \$25 billion for WCC LNG. The list goes on and on.

I can give the government a little help. There is a quick fix to send the right message that it supports resource development, that it supports these great Canadian companies getting to market. The government can support my bill, which would take away the tanker ban and allow companies to export their products through a deep-water port, be competitive and export our clean energy to other countries.

• (1530)

Last week, I was in Toronto at the mining conference. There again I heard great concern about the regulatory process in this country. Project after project talked about how the current government does not understand the importance of investments. I hope it is listening to the extraction sector, whether it be the oil and gas or mining businesses. If it wants to get this economy going, it is time it recognizes these businesses are its lifeblood. They are the ones that produce the revenue, can help this economy and will pay for all these programs I continually hear about. At the finance committee, submission after submission was about spending. At some point, we have to have an economy that is growing at a rate to be able to pay for all that spending.

While I am on spending, there is spending that can work toward growing the economy and then there is outright waste. The government seems to be the expert on waste. We can talk about the \$50 million to Mastercard, the \$12 million to Loblaw's or the \$40 million to BlackBerry. It goes on and on. Those types of investments are not what we need; we need the government to invest in less regulation, to empower the private sector and let these people get back to work.

We have an infrastructure program. I will acknowledge that the Conservatives also had an infrastructure program. Here is the difference. When the Liberals put out their infrastructure program, they talked about the three anchors they wanted to have within that program: investments in productivity; a reduction in greenhouse gases; and an increase in GDP. When we had a discussion with the PBO about this program, we asked if they were hitting the mark on any of those measures. There is no evidence they are hitting the mark on the measures, particularly in the area of productivity, which is the way we can get this economy going. Putting an infrastructure program together that has a lack of accountability, focus

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and measurables makes it really difficult to see if it is working. I hope the government will reverse its course on the infrastructure program and recognize that it should be focusing on allowing companies to be more productive, giving them better access to markets and making sure we have the most competitive regime of any country out there.

This program is full of flaws. Now is the time to push the reset button and start to deliver on programs that would be effective, allow us to grow the economy and help industry grow, rather than grow the government's budget.

With respect to the future outlook, beyond anything else we need to see a plan that gets us back to a balanced budget. It is not unreasonable to ask government when it will finally get back to balance, and I think there is an opportunity for it to do that. We need the government to get out of the way of the private sector. The private sector offered to build the pipeline and government ended up having to buy the pipeline because of the regulatory burden the government put on that company. The private sector wants to invest in Canada and believes in Canada, but it needs the government to send the right message to say we are open for business again.

Our energy sector and the province I come from are proud of what they do. They do it well, they do it clean and they have an opportunity to gain market share if we let them. We need to expand our ability to ship. I ask the government to seriously consider making revisions to Bill C-69 to make sure there is confidence in the markets here, as well as eliminate the tanker ban off the west coast. It is certainly not there.

A pay-as-we-go principle would bring some discipline back to government. If government is going to add something new, it has to be able to pay for it, so it should be able to balance those things, which would ensure discipline in the government and make sure it gets back on a path of balancing the budget.

On the tax front for small businesses, we have to eliminate the input taxes, lower the burdens on these businesses and allow them to succeed.

• (1535)

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague cited in the billions of dollars, 28, 16, 36, 28 and 25, as a loss to the economy. This is a yes-or-no question. Does he have a number to cite if we have a lack of climate change initiative, other than the cost to the future of our children?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, absolutely I have a number. We currently contribute 1.6% to global emissions, so there is a number for him to realize. The balance that they always talk about on the other side is balancing the environment with resource development. Let us start talking about that balance.

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The member can come to my province. I would be glad to entertain him and I would be able to show him what is going on in this province. We have businesses there that are world class, and we can bring those levels down if we allow them to do what they can do, by the export of LNG and displacing the market that is captured by those countries that do not have the standards that we have. We will have that ability to lower emissions globally if we get on the bandwagon.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, we live in a free market, so determining what we might gain from royalties from certain industries is kind of a bet on the system. We are seeing right now in the free market that the price of oil has been collapsing. When Teck Resources was putting forward its proposal, the price for a barrel of oil was \$99.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It was \$45.

Mr. Paul Manly: Mr. Speaker, now it is under \$50.

The stats I was looking at from the oil industry show it was up to \$99.

How many oil sands projects have been approved that are not going forward because investors have backed out, based on the price per barrel of producing in Alberta?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, that is a very narrow look at what the current state is. I will acknowledge that prices have come off, but this is a longer-term play for most of these businesses. If the price is at \$45 or \$55, I can say that our companies have been driving their costs down to be competitive. The oil sands companies have done an outstanding job doing that. I believe the price will come back. These investors look at it as the long term; they do not look at it over a three-month period.

• (1540)

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton Centre is well known and well respected in the Edmonton business community. The Liberals are saying that the current economic situation is really because of the coronavirus or even because of the current oil prices. What is the member hearing from the Edmonton business community or Alberta business community?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, the question is very pertinent to why I am here today. I stood for election five years ago, and was unsuccessful. I stood because I was concerned about the economy. I decided that I would give myself again for public service because of exactly that.

These business owners have talked to me and have suggested that they are very concerned about their livelihood. They are very concerned about their standard of living. They see that the direction the government is going is the absolute wrong thing for them. They want to see investment and they want to play. However, they need the government to get out of the way, and certainly that has not been the case.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a simple question. How much public subsidy does the industry need? I would like to know from the member.

We have invested in a pipeline. Export Development Canada does a lot of promotion for the oil industry. The Business Develop-

ment Bank of Canada does as well. There is also the Province of Alberta. What is the threshold in terms of the commitment for the public to contribute to this industry's success?

Mr. James Cumming: First, Mr. Speaker, we did hear at the finance committee that it is a fallacy of this subsidy that it is being considered for the oil and gas business. That was cleared up by the officials who presented.

Let me say this. I will not apologize for the contribution that the oil and gas sector has made to this country toward infrastructure and to fund all the programs we want, and it has my full support.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak today on our opposition motion. We have a government across the way that for the last four and a half years has governed as if the good times would never come to an end. It appears that the government's luck has run out in the face of a slowing economy, soaring deficits and debt, and economic uncertainties arising from the coronavirus, the illegal blockades and today the collapse in the price of oil.

Therefore, we have put forward a very straightforward motion, a motion in the name of transparency, calling on the government to do something it should be quite enthusiastic to do, which is to release all documents whereby it may have been provided advice or input about the possibility of an economic downturn. Canadians deserve to see those documents to know whether the government heeded those warnings, whether the government took precautionary measures or whether the government did what it appears to have done, which is to ignore those warnings altogether.

I say that the government should be quite enthusiastic because it is what is in the mandate letter from the Prime Minister to the Minister of Finance wherein the Prime Minister states, "I also expect us to continue to raise the bar on openness, effectiveness and transparency in government. This means a government that is open by default." Surely consistent with the finance minister's mandate letter would be a government that would be welcoming our timely motion here today.

When the Liberals came to office in 2015, they inherited a strong economy from the previous Conservative government. They also benefited, in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, a period of strong global economic growth, from low interest rates and a return in terms of commodity prices from a low at the earlier part of the decade.

When I got here in 2015, I know that my Conservative colleagues and I provided advice to the Liberals in terms of encouraging them in the face of a relatively strong economy to take a responsible approach, to pay down debt and prepare for a rainy day. That is precisely the approach that Prime Minister Stephen Harper took when the times were good in 2006 and 2007. Between 2006 and 2008, the Harper government paid down \$38 billion of debt, which constituted the largest debt repayment of any government in Canadian history.

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Why did the Harper government do that? It was because it recognized that the good times would not last forever. As it turned out, they did not, because in 2008-09, we saw the largest global economic recession since the Great Depression. However, because of Stephen Harper's foresight, Canada had the fiscal capacity to respond to that global economic downturn, later resulting in a recovery that was faster and stronger than that of any other G7 country.

That was the Conservatives' approach. That was the approach that we encouraged the government to take, but it had different ideas. The Liberals' approach, contrary to ours, was to spend, spend, spend and spend some more. One could say that the Liberals spent like drunken sailors. However, as Ronald Reagan used to say, that would be an insult to drunken sailors.

● (1545)

The Liberal government has added \$75 billion of new debt in just four years. By the end of this fiscal year, Canada will be on track to adding \$100 billion of new debt.

The finance minister said that we should not worry, that the good times would continue. It is not so, as dark clouds are on the horizon for Canada's economy.

We have seen a significant slowdown in the Canadian economy. Indeed, in the fourth quarter of 2019, Canada experienced just 0.3% GDP growth. That constitutes negative per capita GDP growth. In fact, in November we actually saw a decline in the Canadian economy, and 71,000 jobs were lost.

While Canada grew at only 0.3% in the last quarter of 2019, our biggest trading partner, our biggest economic competitor, the United States, saw a GDP growth of 2.1%. There is quite a contrast between the growth in the United and the dismal performance of the Canadian economy.

That pattern of lagging behind the United States is projected to continue into this year. Indeed, the Canadian economy is expected to grow at only half the rate of the United States'. Meanwhile, unemployment is 30% higher in Canada than in the United States. Indeed, under the Liberal government's watch, Canada has the unenviable position of having the highest unemployment rate of any G7 country, save for Italy and France. These are hardly jurisdictions we should be seeking to emulate in terms of economic performance, yet that is precisely the approach the government seems to want to take.

The over four and a half years of spending and more spending, without any plan for a rainy day, has left the Canadian economy weak and vulnerable.

In the face of that, Canadians deserve to know the government's plan. What is the government's plan to get beyond per capita negative GDP growth of a pathetic 0.3%? What is the government's plan to stimulate the economy and restore some level of fiscal responsibility? We know that today's \$30-billion deficit could very easily translate into \$50-billion or \$60-billion deficits if there is a further slowdown.

I know that unlike the Liberals, we on this side of the House do have a plan. It involves unleashing the Canadian economy by cutting taxes for workers and small businesses, repealing the anti-de-

velopment bills, Bill C-69 and Bill C-48, and reducing red tape with a two-for-one rule that builds on the legislated one-for-one rule and is consistent with what has been undertaken by the Province of Manitoba and our largest competitor, the United States.

The Conservatives have a plan to, in a reasonable way, get spending under control by eliminating waste, reducing red tape and reducing the burden of government to eventually get to what the Liberal government inherited from our previous Conservative government: a balanced budget.

In closing, where is the government's plan? It has no plan beyond spending and spending some more. In the face of that plan versus our plan to unleash the Canadian economy, I will take our plan any day.

● (1550)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention by my colleague today, but I think some of his facts are wrong.

He said that the former Stephen Harper government had prepared for a rainy day, but let us put the facts on the table. What really happened, and I know the member is very good with the data and knows what went on, is that the former Martin government left a \$13-billion surplus. The member is basically saying that over a two-year period, the Conservative government continued to save in preparation for a rainy day. However, what it did in 2007 and 2008, before the recession hit, was decrease the surplus. The former government was already on its way down, by decreasing the surplus and going into a deficit position.

The member suggests that Stephen Harper was saving for a rainy day, but the facts do not support that claim.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves: Stephen Harper's government presided over the largest debt repayment in Canadian history of \$38 billion. That is a fact.

My friend from Kingston and the Islands cites the Paul Martin government, and it is true that under Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin the government did move toward a balanced budget and a surplus budget, with a lot of pressure from the Conservatives and the Reformers at the time. Nonetheless, they did that and deserve credit where credit is due.

The government does not deserve such credit. The Liberals have totally disassociated themselves from that legacy, inheriting a surplus and leaving the cupboard bare. At a time when the economy is in a downturn, the government has left the cupboard bare with nothing to show.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague. This is hardly a Paul Martin Liberal government. This is way beyond anything that Paul Martin would have ever done or imagined to do.

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I want to bring my question back to the motion we are debating today. My hon. colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton spoke about the fact that the Minister of Finance's mandate letter, just like all of the ministers' mandate letters, speaks to the issue of transparency and that the government would be open by default. Is there any reason at all why the government should not support the motion that is on the table, if openness is indeed the will of the Prime Minister to his ministers and the will of the Prime Minister himself?

• (1555)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, simply put, if the government means what it says and says what it means, it would support the motion and release the documents. It is expressly there for all Canadians to see in the mandate letter. What is more, in addition to transparency, if the government has actually been doing its work, then surely it would be very enthusiastic to show all of the contingency measures that are in the works, all of the preparatory measures. However, I suspect that the government is so resistant because it does not have any.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member says that the Conservatives have a plan to reduce taxes for the middle class, yet they actually voted against the tax reduction to the middle class. They said part of the plan is to reduce small business tax. This government has done just that, yet the Conservatives voted against the budget.

I am wondering if my friend would agree there is a little inconsistency between the Conservative plan and reality.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, what we voted against were record deficits and debt. We voted against the government's reckless spending and the government's reckless budget.

Our plan is a comprehensive one. It involves tax cuts. It involves repealing anti-energy legislation. It involves attracting investments in the most vital sector in our economy, the energy sector, by providing for an accelerated capital cost allowance regime comparable to that offered to the manufacturing sector. It also involves reducing all of the waste that the government has given its Liberal corporate friends, like the \$372 million to Bombardier. What happened in that case? As a result, 3,000 jobs were lost while executives gave themselves a 50% pay hike. That is some value for the taxpayer.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Kings—Hants.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak about the government's actual record rather than the selective statistics chosen by the hon. member for Carleton.

The results of the government's investment in people, communities and hard-working Canadians are clear. Canada's economy is sound and growing, the unemployment rate is low, business investment is recovering and there are more full-time, well-paying jobs, with more women working today than ever before in Canada's history.

In fact, I would like to draw the House's attention to the recent job numbers from Statistics Canada. In February, the economy

added 30,300 net new jobs. All of the national gains were in full-time work.

The government is focused on building an economy that works for everyone and will continue to make progress on the things that matter most to Canadians, while being sensitive and responsible with new investments. In the face of emerging global risks, our approach will be practical and prudent, maintaining Canada's strong fiscal position and our ability to protect Canada from risk both today and tomorrow.

As a former business owner, I understand the importance of tax competitiveness. Small businesses thrive when there is a competitive tax environment. That is why we have lowered the small business tax rate, first to 10%, effective January 1, 2018, and then to 9%, effective January 1, 2019. Canada's combined federal-provincial-territorial average income tax rate for small business is one of the lowest in the G7. In the face of ongoing global developments, it is essential that Canada continues to innovate so that businesses seeking to expand and grow can confidently choose to invest in Canada.

In last year's fall economic statement, the government took important and timely action in this regard. This included allowing businesses to immediately write off the full cost of specific clean-energy equipment to spur new investment and the adoption of advanced clean technology in the Canadian economy. It also included allowing businesses to immediately write off the full cost of machinery and equipment used for the manufacturing or processing of goods. The government also introduced the accelerated investment incentive, which allows businesses of all sizes and in all sectors of the economy to write off a larger share of the costs of newly acquired assets in the year the investment is made.

What does this mean for businesses? Taken together, the incentives announced in last year's fall economic statement made it more attractive for businesses to invest in assets that help drive growth, thereby freeing up capital that businesses can use to create better, well-paying jobs for Canadians.

In budget 2019, the government introduced a measure to improve the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program. It is a very important program. It encourages innovation by giving investment tax credits to businesses in all sectors that conduct scientific research and experimental development in Canada. With this measure, the program will more effectively support growing small and medium-sized firms as they scale up. It is a very important measure.

In today's global economy, new technology and innovation can reshape whole industries, and we want to make sure Canada is a central player in those transformations. We believe concrete, comprehensive and systematic measures such as the ones I have mentioned are more effective for continuing the strong growth seen in our economy.

• (1600)

The Canadian economy remains fundamentally strong, but we must also ensure that it remains strong as we work to combat the very real threats posed by climate change and the transition toward a greener economy. Building a strong economy can go hand in hand with protecting the environment.

The global challenge of climate change requires an innovative solution, one that can create jobs. That is why in November 2018, the government announced the creation of the advisory council on climate action to help identify fiscally sustainable opportunities to reduce carbon pollution in the transportation sector and the building sector. The advisory council presented its final report to the government, which identifies a number of opportunities to reduce emissions and build a competitive clean growth economy that provides Canadians with good jobs.

The council identifies ways that the government can help Canadians switch to zero-emissions vehicles, like the federal purchase incentive and a scaled-up investment in enabling measures such as charging infrastructure and research and development.

Most important, our budget 2019 addressed the recommendations with investments to help make zero-emission vehicles more affordable by establishing a new federal purchase incentive of up to \$5,000 for battery-electric, hydrogen fuel cell and longer-range plug-in hybrid vehicles; make zero-emission vehicles more viable by expanding the network of charging and refuelling stations in workplaces, public parking spots, commercial and multi-unit residential buildings and in remote locations; attract and support new high-quality, job-creating investments in zero-emission vehicle manufacturing in Canada by accessing funding through the strategic innovation fund; and finally, work with auto manufacturers to secure voluntary zero-emission vehicle sales targets to ensure vehicle supply meets increased demand.

The government will continue to cut pollution, create jobs and support clean growth. Cleaner transportation will help ensure a healthier and more prosperous future for our kids and grandkids.

The government is committed to growing the economy by helping all Canadians. We believe in pressing forward with various measures that will help to keep Canada's economy strong and resilient in the face of new challenges, both at home and abroad.

More so than any other country in the G7, Canada has the economic resiliency and fiscal firepower at its disposal to withstand potential challenges. We have invested in the things that matter most to Canadians. The government has prioritized investing wisely in order to ensure prosperity for all and to grow the economy, while rejecting the failed policies of austerity.

I can assure all hon. members in the House that this government will continue along a path to growth that works for everyone.

• (1605)

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am still very concerned about the debt. I recognize that all governments have carried on deficit spending over the years. We have spoken about the Chrétien-Martin government and how it actually reigned in the debt and dealt with it. However, it dealt with it

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by pushing a lot of that spending on to the provinces that then pushed it on to the municipalities, where I used to serve. I felt the pain there.

At some point, someone has to pay. However, before we get to that point, how much debt is too much? What is the limit that the member feels the government should reach in deficit spending?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, as a former businesswoman, I understand debt. The debt ratio in Canada is at its lowest. We have a low interest rate, which has allowed us to foster economic growth in investments.

I am very happy with what I hear from people when I go door to door. They want a government that invests in what matters to them. One thing that is very important is infrastructure investment, clean energy and ensuring that the jobs of tomorrow are there for the kids of tomorrow.

We can talk about debt, but there is a time when a government needs to invest, and the time is now.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about growing the economy and investing in Canadians. In comparison to the previous government, this government is investing in people by lowering the taxes on the middle class and ensuring seniors have the supports they need, not because it is the right thing to do in a society where we live together but because it helps to grow the economy. When we have a strong middle class, we have a strong economy and everybody does better.

Given her experience in the business community and as a business owner, what impacts does she see when the middle class does well because it has benefited from things like a lower tax rate?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, the member touched on a few things about seniors. He talked about investing in local people and what matters to them when it comes to the middle class. One thing I know is this. If employers pay their employees decent wages, all the economics will show these people will in turn continue to spend inside our communities, helping small businesses grow the economy.

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I want to ensure I do not forget to remind everyone about seniors. One thing we have done is to ensure seniors have a better long-term fiscal plan. I was very happy to see, as part of our promise, and I hope in our budget, an increase of 10% in old age benefits for seniors.

• (1610)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member was not here in 2015. She was part of the Kathleen Wynne government in Ontario, so I will excuse her for not knowing this.

In the real plan the Prime Minister put out in 2015, he stated, “It is time to shine more light on government and ensure that it remains focused on the people it is meant to serve. Government and its information should be open by default...”

In fact, the mandate letters for all the ministers speak to this directly from the Prime Minister. This motion is openness and transparency by default. Will she support the motion, yes or no?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, at this point, I feel confident that our government has shown transparency and openness since 2015. We are probably one of the most transparent and we are here to show members this.

I would remind the hon. member that while I might not have been here in 2015, I do live in Orleans and Ottawa. One thing that was made very clear to me when I went door to door was the openness of our government to invest in what mattered to people. We have done that since 2015, such as bringing the unemployment rates to their lowest in 40 years.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a privilege it is to rise today to speak to the opposition motion brought forward by the member for Carleton.

Let me start by giving credit where it is deserved. The member for Carleton is a great orator in the House, but listening to his remarks during question period and during debate on this motion, it is important to include facts on this government's economic and job creation record since we formed government in 2015.

There are many reasons I am proud to stand on this side of the House with the Liberal party, but it is perhaps our record on job creation and improving the lives of Canadians across the country which is why I am most proud.

I have mentioned before that my father was a truck driver and my mother was an administrative assistant at the local school. Simply put, I grew up in a family that was paycheque to paycheque. Therefore, I am sure members of the House can appreciate that when the Prime Minister spoke in 2015 about supporting Canada's middle class and those seeking to join it, his message resonated with me.

However, it has not just been a message; it has been a delivery for Canadians. Over one million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty since we formed government in 2015, including 334,000 children and 73,000 seniors. Poverty rates have decreased in all 10 provinces, and this is the largest three-year reduction in Canadian history. This has not been discussed enough in our debates today

about Canada's economic status and our ability to improve the lives of Canadians.

We know more work needs to be done, but we have invested in Canadians and, as a result, it has helped drive a stronger economy.

I have spoken at length in the House about the stories I have heard directly on the doorsteps of residents of Kings—Hants of the benefits of programs like the Canada child benefit and the middle-income tax cuts and what they have meant for families and their ability to buy healthier groceries and to allow their children to participate in recreational opportunities.

I want to talk about job creation. Obviously, today's motion is premised on the idea that our government has not been focused on the economy and that there has not been success in the last five years. That is simply not true. It follows that when individuals have extra money in their pockets, and we just talked about one million Canadians having more money at the end of the month, they will spend it. Our investments in the middle class have created a strong economy that has been buoyed by significant job creation.

I have listened to some of my opposition colleagues criticize the economic performance of this government, but they do not seem to appreciate the fact that 1.2 million jobs have been created in the country since 2015. That is a significant number, and I stand here recognizing that there remain challenges.

I do not provide this statistic in any way suggesting that our government is content or we do not recognize there remain challenges to ensure our growth in the days ahead. However, like we have in the last 5 years, we will continue to rise to the challenge to deliver for Canadians and work with the private sector to create opportunities for Canadians.

Again, I want to put some numbers on the record, on the Hansard, because the member for Carleton, and certainly earlier the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, has frankly a very elegant way of speaking politically to convey a point, but we are in the business of informing Canadians what is actually true. Therefore, I want to rhyme off some things that are actually true.

Unemployment in the country is at a near-historic low, in fact the lowest since 1976. That is not disputable; that is fact.

Foreign direct investment in 2018 and 2019 increased substantially by 60% and 18.9% respectively. If people were in the House, they would not believe that to be true by some of the narrative coming from our members opposite. That is a fact.

In February 2020 this year, the Canadian economy added 30,000 net jobs, most of which were full time. Again, these are facts, and hopefully my Conservative colleagues will not get into the theory of suggesting Statistics Canada is somehow fake news.

Let us talk about Canada's marginal effective tax rate. It now stands at 13.8%, which is the lowest of the G7 countries. I am sure my Conservative colleagues would not deny that lower taxes are not beneficial for new growth. We have cut small business tax rate from 11% to 9%.

• (1615)

I want to contrast this against where we were before 2015. It is important to remind Canadians from where we have come. We inherited an economy emerging from a second recession within a decade and the unemployment rate was over 7%. Annual growth was stalled and investment in research and development was declining. As the parliamentary secretary for finance mentioned today, the Conservative government before us was responsible for the lowest economic growth rate in a generation.

I could go on, but the point is some of the members opposite may resort to rhetoric. This government has created a strong economy and has the room to respond to the global economic downturn in the days ahead.

Let us talk about the ability for the government to respond to the challenges in our global economy. Of course all Canadians, and indeed all parliamentarians, have been focused on the impact of the coronavirus and what we are seeing around the world.

Earlier today in question period, the member for Carleton mentioned cupboards and the ability for the cupboards to be stocked to respond to a global downturn. I have news for him that the cupboards are stocked and we are ready to respond. Our debt-to-GDP ratio, which is the debt to the size of our economy, is on a downward track, and that is a key measure. We know from economists that when we borrow we have to ensure that the economy is growing, which it has been.

Canada is one of the only 11 countries in the world with an AAA credit rating. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has concluded that current government spending is sustainable over the long term and that our fiscal plan gives us the room we need to confront new and evolving challenges to keep our economy growing.

The Minister of Finance has communicated that he will be tabling a budget that will ensure we, as a government, are ready to respond to the coronavirus and the challenges it represents.

I want to conclude with just a few points. Our economy is strong; it has shown strength over the last five years. Job numbers are up; unemployment is lower than when we formed government. In fact, it is the lowest it has been since 1976. One million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty. We are well positioned to tackle the global uncertainties that may result from the coronavirus.

The last thing I want to mention is that I welcome the opportunity to debate in this House our economic policy and the government record of creating jobs and meaningful conditions for Canadians across the country. However, when we look at the text of this motion, it asks for essentially every document related to the economy that has been in government hands since 2015.

While our government may respond and support this motion in the days ahead, it begs asking whether this is just pure politics. The men and women in our public service, who are focused on deliver-

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ing for Canadians, would then have to spend time pulling these documents together. For what purpose, I am not necessarily sure, and I do not know if that has been well articulated by the members opposite today.

What a privilege it is to be able to speak on this topic today, and I welcome any questions from members.

• (1620)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sitting through the debate today, it is certainly clear the mantra of the current Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is holding true, which is that if one says things over and over again and loud enough, people will truly and totally start believing them.

I want to bring to light to the member that this is a Prime Minister who in 2015 said that the government would be transparent by default. I know that the member is new and perhaps does not know that a lot of the information the opposition has been asking for has in many cases been redacted. I use the impact on the carbon tax, for example, and how that was going to impact the economy, which was a document that was completely redacted.

Even the mandate letters to all the ministers, including that to the Minister of Finance, stated that the government was going to be transparent by default. This is a very simple motion. If the hon. member believes in transparency and accountability, that is precisely what this motion calls for. It is asking what information the government had to indicate the current economic downturn and to provide that information to Parliament. Will he support this motion, yes or no?

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, I want to tackle a couple of the different comments that the member opposite put forward. He talked about the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and that if something is said often enough, somehow it will become true.

The statistics I put forward on job creation and the economy come right from Statistics Canada. I do not know if the member is somehow questioning the independence or the validity of some of the reports from Statistics Canada, but that is exactly where my information comes from.

I will move to the point on transparency. Of course our government is built on the premise of providing this information. The member asked directly whether I will support it. I suspect this evening, once I have the chance to contemplate it, I will, but again I go back to this being pure politics.

We can sit and debate in this House, but asking for documents going back to 2015 that have any relevance to the economy or to our government's response is just going to create a lot of work for public servants who should otherwise be focused on delivering services for Canadians.

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Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have certainly heard some very eloquent statistics and facts presented by my friend from Kings—Hants. I would like to share some facts from Hamilton Centre.

It is a fact that in the fourth quarter of last year there were 1,500 more unemployed people in Hamilton compared to the same time in the previous year. It is a fact that the labour force of both unemployed and employed people has jumped by 11,000. It is also a fact that the number of people who have jobs has increased by 9,500. I say this because, when it comes to unemployment, the fact is that my residents are often having to work three times as many jobs as they did when they used to be able to have one good job.

With that, and with the statistics that have been coupled with conversations on cutting poverty, would the member not agree that the low-income cut-off rate has remained relatively the same while the cost of living has skyrocketed? Also, would the member not agree that unemployment and the low-income cut-off are not accurate ways to reflect the precarious nature of the lived experiences for the people not just in my riding, but also in ridings across this country?

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, for those Canadians at home who do not know, the member opposite has ties to my riding, having gone to Acadia University and as a member of the football team there, so we have a deep connection through Kings—Hants.

The member spoke about the challenges, in particular to those in his riding. Our government has been thorough in the last five years in terms of trying to support Canadians across the country. The Minister of Labour calls Hamilton home as well.

Speaking to the member's particular situation, I want to highlight the work that has been done. There are, again, the one million Canadians who have been lifted out of poverty. I want to focus on the fact that we have a shared interest in ensuring all Canadians can have access to basic necessities and in trying to improve their standing. That has been a mantra of our government. It will continue to be so, and I look forward to working with him collaboratively in the days ahead to make sure that happens.

• (1625)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, a great cleanup hitter for my time today.

I find it interesting when the Liberals comment during this debate and say we are adding too much work for the government by asking for transparency and clarity on some of these issues. We have certainly heard over the last several years that one of the things that seems to be lacking within this government when it is putting in new policies, policies that time and time again weaken industry and our economy, is it is not doing any economic impact assessment before these decisions are made.

We want to raise the awareness that they have been warned about the impacts or the possible consequences of some of their policy decisions and the ramifications they are having. Were the Liberals given those documents? If not, why were they not asking for some of that due diligence before implementing some of these decisions?

Certainly, the motion we have put forward today is highlighting “waste not, want not”. One of the things Canadians ask of their government is to ensure that it is being a strong steward of their tax dollars. There is no question that middle-class Canadians are paying more taxes, but one of the things we want to raise awareness about today is that these policies have also made Canadian business uncompetitive.

I want to talk about a constituent in southern Alberta, John Van Hierden, who has a grain business. Last week he emailed me his carbon tax bill for his grain operation. The carbon tax bill for the month of January was \$25,000. He has calculated that by 2022 the Liberal carbon tax will cost him close to \$1 million, making his grain operation unsustainable.

When we talk about competitiveness, the other issue the carbon tax has caused is that he has lost one of his most important contracts. He has been selling grain that comes from farmers throughout southern Alberta to Qatar. It is a \$2.8-million contract to send southern Alberta grain to Qatar. However, because of the Liberals' carbon tax, he can no longer match the prices of his global competitors. As a result of the carbon tax being in for one month, he has now lost that contract. That is just one of many contracts now in jeopardy because of the Liberal carbon tax.

We are asking the government if they can back this up. Did it do the due diligence before putting in these types of policies? We have specifically asked the Minister of Agriculture if she understands the ramifications the carbon tax is having on Canadian farmers, processors and producers across this country. In her responses she has been saying that she is collecting data and evidence, and that she does not believe it is as harmful as farmers are saying.

Why was this not done before the carbon tax was implemented? Is the government trying to tell Canadian farmers and the opposition that it did not do any due diligence? Could the government not find the information and data to find out what the implications of this were going to be to Canada's agriculture sector before implementing a carbon tax? Now that we are months into it, we still do not have that data or that evidence. I find that to be unfathomable. Frankly, Canadian farmers and producers do not take that as an answer. They want data to back this up.

For the Minister of Agriculture and the Liberal government to say they do not have that data is ridiculous. How is a decision of that magnitude made without doing an analysis of what the impact will be? That is just one producer of thousands across Canada.

I have heard it from grain farmers, dairy producers, honey farmers, and producers of beans and pulses in Ontario. This is from every sector of agriculture and certainly every corner of this country. This is not just something that is impacting western Canadian producers. This is something that is impacting every agriculture producer in this country, and that is even more frustrating.

My colleague across the way was talking about facts today. This is what makes it even more frustrating for Canadian producers, and small business owners as well, when they are being hammered with a carbon tax that the government says it needs in order to reduce GHG emissions and look at revenue.

• (1630)

The one thing that I want to mention as well is this. If the carbon tax is supposed to reduce your fuel usage, how is that possible in agriculture? Are my farmers to just combine on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays because of the carbon tax? That is impossible if we want to grow food, grow the economy and feed the world, and if we want the industry to be successful. Farmers have no way to reduce those things. It just does not exist. Those are some of the facts that the government needs to be aware of.

We have had the Prime Minister spending \$95,000 in food and drink on one international trip, 57 bottles of wine, 35 cans of beer, \$50 million to Mastercard, and \$12 million to one of Canada's largest grocery stores for refrigerator retrofits, even though they had profits exceeding more than \$800 million in one fiscal year. Other examples include 1.6 million of taxpayer dollars for the Prime Minister's photo ops, \$14,000 on a TV, \$8 million on an outdoor rink on Parliament Hill that lasted just a few months, \$200,000 on the cover design of the budget in 2017 and \$100,000 to operate one minister's Twitter account.

As the agriculture critic, I have to point out that agriculture Canada bought 100,000 cocktail napkins for close to \$4,000. That is literally throwing taxpayers' dollars in the waste bin when producers right now are struggling to find a way to remain successful or even profitable. When one sees those types of numbers, it adds to one's frustration.

We had officials from agriculture Canada at committee the other day. I wanted to mention too that we have producers dealing with the harvest from hell, illegal blockades, a carbon tax, lost trade markets and now many of them can no longer even subscribe to programs that should be there to help them, like AgriStability. It is un-bankable, it is unaffordable, it is unreliable. We asked the officials from agriculture Canada what the administration costs would be for AgriStability.

The Liberal government is paying bureaucrats 25% of the entire budget of AgriStability just on administering that program, close to \$70 million. That is ridiculous for administration of a program that farmers are not even using anymore because carbon tax, trade disruption and illegal blockades make it impossible for them to subscribe to that program. When we ask for changes to that program or other business risk management suites, the Liberals say they are not going to do that.

We have asked for extensions on the advance payments program loans, to waive interest fees and give agriculture some sort of assistance to get them through this very difficult time and the Liberals refuse to do that.

The Canadian budget deficit is billions of dollars more than the Liberals promised and they are using Canadian taxpayers like a credit card with absolutely no way of paying them back. With deficits of \$60 billion more than promised, which will certainly get

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higher, at some point it has to be paid back. How do the Liberals expect to pay that back when two of the most important pillars of our economy have been decimated, agriculture and energy, because of trade disruption alone? Just in trade disruption in lost markets in China, India, Peru, the United States, Italy and Japan, Canadian producers have lost more than \$5 billion in revenue since 2017, thanks to the geopolitical mistakes of the government.

Let us take a look at energy. We had Teck mine walk away from a \$20-billion oil sands project in Alberta. Warren Buffet announced that he has walked away from a \$9-billion LNG pipeline in Quebec. Energy is \$15 billion in royalty revenues for the government. When these revenue streams are taken away, how does the government possibly expect to pay back these massive deficits?

What we are asking from the government is to table the documents to show any due diligence and any economic impact analysis on the impacts that its decisions will have on the Canadian economy. We want the government to support this motion.

• (1635)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in particular, I took note of my colleague's story about the grain farmer he was speaking of. Of course, nobody wants to see anybody go through losing such a valuable contract that that grain farmer had with Qatar. What I assume is that the grain farmer had the contract in place prior to the price on pollution coming in. That is when Rachel Notley had another version of the tax in there.

Is my colleague saying that Rachel Notley's plan was a good plan because it gave an opportunity for this grain farmer to be competitive with Qatar? Is he saying that that was the preferred plan? If so, why, when the Conservatives came along, was Alberta in favour of scrapping Rachel Notley's plan?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, what my colleague is missing is that these contracts come up on an annual basis. This is a contract that he could have had, but because of being now uncompetitive, he is no longer able to compete on the global market. The carbon tax is being passed on to agriculture, which is a price taker at the ground level on farmers. They cannot pass that cost on to anyone else. They absorb it.

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We are asking the Liberals whether they did any impact analysis on what this would cost Canadian agricultural producers. It is clear that they have not done that and they do not understand the ramifications that this is going to have, not only here domestically in our ability to do business from province to province, but also internationally. More than 50% of agricultural production is traded on the global market. We must be competitive. Programs like the carbon tax have made us uncompetitive.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the key issues before us in terms of diversifying our economy is we know that Alberta has gone through a boom and bust cycle. It has been that way for a long time. We are into a different phase in terms of where we are with respect to the climate crisis. Part of the issue is to look at how we can ensure that the workers in Alberta and elsewhere have alternatives.

To that end, I wonder if the member would call on the government to embark on the new green deal and to actually do a just transition initiative for the workers in Alberta and elsewhere in the oil and gas sector.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, the question is really a root cause of where we see a problem within Canada. The Liberals do not look at Alberta as already having one of the most diversified economies in this country. To say that we rely only on energy, I would invite the member to come to my riding where I have more than 500 wind turbines, two of the largest solar farms in the country and one of the richest agricultural areas in Canada.

Alberta is one of the most diversified areas in this country and Albertans do not want a handout. They want to work. They are risk-takers and entrepreneurs, just like most other areas of this country. To say that we are going to somehow transition to this new green economy, where is it? I have 150,000 Albertans out of work who have been out of work for close to four years. There are no magical jobs in the wind turbines and the solar farms. People just want to work at what they do best and that is world-class energy and world-class agriculture.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we saw today just how the Liberals are starting to spin this downturn in the economy and blame it on COVID-19, when in fact we saw slow growth in advance of this. We saw the blockades have significant impact on our supply chain.

I am wondering if the hon. member buys into the Liberal spin that somehow COVID-19 is the cause of all that ails us today.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any question that this is not something that just occurred overnight. We have seen the slow erosion of Canada's economy for several years.

In agriculture specifically, trade disruptions and lost markets due to political bungling, like the trip to India, have cost Canadian agriculture more than \$5 billion in lost trade. We have seen \$150 billion in capital investment in Canada's energy sector leave. These companies are investing in energy, just not in Canada.

That money is somewhere else, but it is not here in Canada. Therefore, to blame this on the coronavirus is misleading. We have seen bad decisions lead to an erosion in our economy for several years, not just several days.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, The Environment; the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Government Appointments; and the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once upon a time, a young man wanted to become prime minister of Canada, just like his father. He got elected as a member of Parliament and then ran for leader of his party. In 2015, he decided to make promises to Canadians. He promised three small deficits: \$10 billion the first year, \$10 billion the second year and \$6 billion the third year, before balancing the budget.

He also promised Canadians that the money he borrowed would be put right into building infrastructure, such as bridges and roads, to stimulate the economy. He argued that when the economy is doing well, it is a good time to borrow money to invest in infrastructure. Unfortunately, this fairy tale had a different ending for Canadians. They were disappointed to see the three small deficits become massive, unending deficits. They were also very disappointed to see the government did not invest the money it had promised for infrastructure during its first four years. They did not see one penny of that money in their communities. Canadians were sorely disappointed and rightly wondered where the money went.

Today a hard-working and above all very vigilant member moved a motion in the House of Commons calling on the government to show us where that money went. In that nice fairy tale about a young MP who wanted to become prime minister of a great G7 country and who believed that budgets would balance themselves, did he ever plan to set some money aside for a rainy day?

The member for Carleton moved a very interesting motion today calling for all documents to be released so we could try to understand the Prime Minister's actions. The Prime Minister seemed to think that everything would be fine and he could borrow forevermore since there will always be future generations to pay the debts he has decided to inflict on all Canadians. Now the fairy tale is over and here we are today.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a fantasy land or in a fairy tale. Not every story has a Disney ending. Anyone who takes the time to read any of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales will see that endings are not always happy. Unfortunately, the government does not seem to realize the mess it is creating for our country because of its laissez-faire attitude towards our public finances.

My colleague's motion reads as follows:

That an order of the House do issue for any document prepared by any department, agency and Crown corporation since November 4, 2015, discussing warnings or concerns of economic downturns, their potential impact on the fiscal framework, or advice or recommendations on how to deal with them; and that the documents be provided to the House within 45 days following the adoption of this motion.

It is an entirely realistic motion. Canadians have the right to know how the government, which has so little interest in the country's public finances, will react in tough times, not just the ones before us, but those we are currently going through.

Even before the Canadian economy has started slowing down, we already know how our colleagues across the way are framing this. They claim that COVID-19 and the rail blockades have caused the Canadian economy immeasurable harm. That is true, but it did not start with the blockades or with the coronavirus. It started long before that.

In the last quarter, Canada posted its weakest economic growth in four years. The Liberals have completely abandoned their budgetary targets. The Canadian economy is adrift. The debt-to-GDP ratio is on the rise. The deficit has reached \$28 billion. The Liberals have completely abandoned the idea of eventually balancing the budget. By year's end, the Liberals will have added \$100 billion to the debt when the economy was strong and job creation was going full tilt in G7 countries. In the United States alone, the unemployment rate is 3.6%; Canada's unemployment rate is around 6%.

• (1645)

The Liberals have been patting themselves on the back since early afternoon, but there is nothing to brag about. Canada's unemployment rate is much higher than that of the United States, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom, all of which are G7 countries.

The Prime Minister's high taxes together with his out-of-control spending and massive deficits are putting Canada in a weak and vulnerable position. The Prime Minister cleaned out the coffers during a time of economic growth and now there is nothing left. The Liberals wasted Canada's good fortune.

Earlier in my speech, I mentioned infrastructure because the Parliamentary Budget Officer recently informed us that when he asked to see what the Liberals themselves have called Canada's most ambitious infrastructure plan, valued at \$186 billion, and to show it to all Canadians, the government told him that this plan does not exist.

This is rather surprising considering that, in a recent article published in several Canadian newspapers, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities gave an update on her mandate. According to the mandate letter, her mandate is to ensure that infrastructure investments are delivered as quickly as possible. The Liberals have been in power for four years. Why, after four years, does the mandate letter for the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities still include ensuring that investments get to the regions, on the ground?

That is unacceptable. It means that the Prime Minister has acknowledged that absolutely nothing has happened over the past four years and the Liberals are in panic mode.

The problem is that that money has already been spent. Where did it go?

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After looking at the government's numbers, we realized that we are currently dealing with the biggest-spending Prime Minister in the history of Canada. Spending for government programs has increased by \$80 billion since 2015. It went from \$273.6 billion to \$353.6 billion under this government. This money was not spent on small communities, for example to help connect the regions to the Internet in places like Newfoundland and Labrador or ridings in Quebec or Canada's north. Instead, the Liberals spent even more on various government programs.

That is what we will remember. This was the biggest-spending government in the history of Canada, even when the economy was doing well and the government could have made investments with the tax revenue alone. It could have created jobs across the country without burdening future generations with debt. That is the problem.

Today, we are facing a serious crisis with a projected deficit of approximately \$30 billion at the end of this year. If we are not careful, the crisis could drive that deficit up to \$60 billion.

Who is going to be on the hook for all that spending? All Canadians. Unfortunately, waiting until the very end is no longer an option, and letting our children and grandchildren pay is no longer an option. If deficits get that big, people will pay for it.

One Liberal got that. His name is Paul Martin. That Liberal knew that fixing things meant cutting \$25 billion in government spending. He cut 45,000 government jobs in Ottawa. That was a 14% cut. Corporate subsidies shrank, and government operations had to be run like a business.

A Liberal understood that nothing lasts forever and that the country's finances must be kept in order. That is what we are asking for.

What did this government do to anticipate setbacks, like the Liberals did back then?

I cannot wait to hear that answer. I am especially eager to get a look at the Liberals' plan for dealing with the crisis when we get all the documents 45 days from now. I have a feeling it will be a pretty short stack of documents, because nothing government members have said today or done since 2015 leads me to believe they ever saw a crisis coming or set any rainy day money aside.

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• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to key in on a couple of things. I was doing my best to keep up with the member's French as I learn the language myself.

He mentioned infrastructure and said it has not happened, but will he recognize that there have been four times more projects built in the last four years than under the Harper government? He mentioned we could have created jobs. Will he recognize that we have created 1.2 million jobs? He talked as well about cuts under Paul Martin. Which cuts he would start with? He can tell Canadians where he would start.

Those are the three questions. He can answer any one of the three that he wants to.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for making an effort to learn French. I would advise him to listen carefully to my speeches and to understand the arguments I make.

[English]

I can say it in English if the member wants. Only a very few of those jobs were created through infrastructure spending. It was supposed to be a big deal from the current Liberal government, and that did not happen.

[Translation]

These infrastructure investments were supposed to save us a lot of money. We were supposed to make sure our gross domestic product soared. Sadly, only half of those expectations were fulfilled.

When we are on the ground talking to mayors in all of our communities, we hear that they did not get any money. Where did the money go? That is what we want to know.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the Liberals being asked for their infrastructure plan and the discovery that the plan did not exist.

With these frightening ripples going through not only Canadians but global investors, I want to talk briefly about the \$20-billion Teck project and Warren Buffett pulling out of the Quebec LNG project. They both commented that part of the reason they pulled out of those projects was political instability. Those are comments one would hear about Mozambique or Venezuela, not a developed western country, a democracy like Canada.

I would ask my colleague this: What are the ramifications of these types of comments and this lack of clarity and transparency? What impact has he heard in his constituency in Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, all the abandoned projects in Alberta, Vancouver and Quebec are having an impact on all Canadians. If the country's economy is not doing well, then the economies of Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia are not doing well either.

If we want Canada to be recognized as a prosperous G7 nation, we need to act accordingly. The problem is that because of the Liberals, no one is confident enough to invest in major projects in Canada. Nobody wants to invest in Canada anymore. That is the reality.

The government is seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses, and we are eager to find out what is behind those glasses. That is why we are requesting all these documents. I hope the Liberals have them. Otherwise, Canadians will see the Liberals' true face.

We are in a Grimm fairy tale, not a Disney fairy tale.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about this Prime Minister being among the highest in spending. If he is going to go down that road, would he also recognize that we have had one of the fastest-growing economies in the world? Would he recognize that we have among the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios among the G7 countries? Would he recognize the fact that in the last year, we have had the lowest unemployment rate since we started recording unemployment? Would he at least recognize that spending and investing in people, when done properly, produces results?

• (1655)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals do it properly, I will. They did not.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by reassuring the hon. member that our government is addressing the concerns being raised by Canadians about the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

Just last Thursday, the Deputy Prime Minister convened a new cabinet committee on the federal response to the coronavirus. They discussed in detail the measures taken by the government to limit the spread of the virus in Canada and in the area where I live, York Region.

At the committee meeting, the Minister of Health and Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, provided an update on the evolving situation and the ongoing collaborative engagement with provinces and territories, as well as with our international partners, including the United States, to limit the spread of the virus.

If I may, as a Canadian of Italian heritage, I wish to express my thoughts and sympathies over the ongoing outbreak that is happening back home where many of my relatives still live. Our prayer is that it is controlled and that the numbers start coming down in Italy.

The finance minister has also provided an update of the impact of this evolving situation on the economy. The impact of COVID-19 on the economy is of concern. I understand, and so do my colleagues, the challenges many companies and Canadians face, including those in Vaughan—Woodbridge.

I will be splitting my time with my esteemed colleague and friend, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

I want to assure hon. members, Canadians and my constituents that we have a sound fiscal and economic track record. We will remain ready to respond to whatever may come our way.

[*Translation*]

In 2015, we proposed a plan to invest in Canadians and strengthen the middle class. That plan worked. Canada is in a good position to deal with this challenge. Our government's plan over the past four and a half years has been clear: to invest in the middle class and help those working hard to join it.

Canada's economy is healthy and, this year, Canada should rank second in the G7 in terms of economic growth. We are convinced that all Canadians should benefit from the country's economic success. That is why we are working to grow the economy in a way that will benefit all Canadians.

Lowering taxes for middle-class families and those who need help the most, for all but the wealthiest Canadians, is just the first step in our new mandate. What is more, we will ensure that people can further their education more easily, buy their first home and have access to care for their children. As part of our previous mandate, we reduced poverty across the country.

[*English*]

We have reduced poverty. We have lifted a million Canadians out of poverty.

[*Translation*]

We will continue to make crucial investments, especially in affordable housing. We will help workers enter the job market, develop their skills and move from one job to another. This is part of our government's responsible plan to build a modern, vigorous and growing economy. We will build on the progress of the past four years and continue to truly change the lives of Canadians today and in the future. We know that there is much more work to be done. The work begins with supporting business investments.

[*English*]

Our government knows that small business is a key driver of Canada's economy, accounting for 70% of all private sector jobs. In the city of Vaughan, where I am proud to live and call home and where I am raising our family with my wife, there are over 12,000 small businesses. Our entrepreneurial spirit is strong and second to none. These very small businesses play a supporting role in the resource sector, supplying goods and services to larger resource companies.

In support of my hard-working small business owners in Vaughan—Woodbridge, and all of those across Canada from coast to coast, the government reduced the small business tax rate as of January 2018 to 10%, and then reduced it to 9% as of January 2019. I believe if members check, they will see that is \$7,500 in lower taxes for individual small businesses across Canada.

In addition, in the 2018 fall economic statement, our government introduced three changes to Canada's tax system to attract investment and build the business confidence we need to succeed. This

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included allowing businesses to immediately write off the full cost of specified clean-energy equipment to spur new investments and the adoption of advanced clean technologies in the Canadian economy. It also included allowing businesses to immediately write off the full cost of machinery and equipment used for the manufacturing or processing of goods.

● (1700)

Our government also introduced the accelerated investment incentive, which allows businesses of all sizes in all sectors of the economy to write off a larger share of the cost of newly acquired assets in the year the investment is made.

Taken together, the incentives make it more attractive for businesses to invest in assets that help drive business growth, thereby freeing up capital that businesses can use to create more good, well-paying jobs for Canadians, including the hard-working residents in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

[*Translation*]

In addition to changing the tax system, the government did more to strengthen its investments in key drivers of economic growth by introducing new measures that will boost investor confidence in Canada and attract investment.

In budget 2018, the government made a commitment to regulatory reform, including a review of federal regulatory regimes; the goal of this review was to determine what is working and what is not.

We backed that commitment by announcing a legislative review. We want to look for opportunities to modernize the mandates of departments responsible for making regulations. The goal is to better integrate the importance of regulatory efficiency and economic growth. We also introduced an annual modernization bill to help eliminate outdated or redundant regulatory requirements and keep existing regulations up to date.

Measures like these are indicative of our government's proactive approach to helping Canadian businesses grow and compete by removing barriers at home and abroad.

[*English*]

Even with the concerns surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, Canada is well positioned to continue to prosper from our unique strengths and advantages. I worked at a bond rating agency for many years. Canada's AAA credit rating across the board is solid, and according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, our financial flexibility is sound. We are going in the right direction in our country. Our foundation is strong. Being a son of a carpenter and a roofer, I can surely say that our roof is sound as well.

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We are building an internationally competitive environment for Canadian businesses, one that attracts investment, contributes to our economic growth and creates jobs that support families and communities such as Vaughan—Woodbridge.

At the same time, our government is maintaining our steadfast commitment to a fair and inclusive society in which all Canadians can contribute to and benefit from a strong and growing economy. Economic growth must be for the benefit of all Canadians, not just the few. It must be inclusive.

We believe that our goals of not only a competitive economy but also a fair and inclusive economy are fully complementary. They reinforce and strengthen one another. Giving people the chance to succeed is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do for the economy, for Canadians and for the residents of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if I had a chance to do it yet, but I congratulate my colleague on his re-election. We had a good opportunity to debate during the election. I went all the way to Toronto just for the honour of debating against him, and it is great to have the chance to do so again.

At a basic level of philosophy, why does the member believe it is right for us to enjoy benefits today that will have to be paid for with interest by future generations? In my own life, it does not seem that it would be right for me to say to my kids that I am going to spend more than we have today and they can pay it back for me later on. We would accept that is not the sort of thing one should do in the private context of one's family, so perhaps he could tell me why it is acceptable for us collectively to say that we are going to spend so much more than we have today, during good times and bad, and expect my kids, the member's children and our grandchildren to pay back bankers with interest for the things we are enjoying right now.

• (1705)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to work with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan on the Canada-Holy See Parliamentary Friendship Group and we chatted on many different topics.

If we look at the government's program over the last several years, it has been balanced. It has been about investing in Canadians and putting money back into the pockets of Canadians. We had the first middle-class tax cut when we first assumed power in 2015. Almost \$30 billion has been returned to Canadians. It is their money. They work hard. They know how to spend it, invest it and put it to use for their families. We are doing it again. When fully implemented, there will be, roughly, a \$6-billion tax cut, which will benefit over a million Canadians and remove 700,000 Canadians from our tax rolls.

As an economist, I am very happy to see that. I am also very happy to see that our fiscal anchors, our AAA credit rating and a stable and declining debt-to-GDP ratio over the medium term, is what we need to do. We will undertake the critical investments to fill the deficits that were left behind in the prior years, a social deficit, a cultural deficit, a transportation deficit and a green deficit. We need to continue doing that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a motion that speaks to transparency, openness and accountability, more information that needs to be provided to Canadians. To that end, I am particularly interested in where the government is going to get the money to support the Trans Mountain expansion project. We now know that the dollar figure is projected to be \$12.7 billion. Is that going to be off-book financing? Where is that money going to come from? I wonder whether the member can speak to that and, in the spirit of transparency, let Canadians know.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, the member is from British Columbia, which is my home province. I grew up there before I moved to Ontario. My family lives in the Lower Mainland.

I am glad the hon. member highlighted our support for the TMX pipeline. I am in support of energy workers in Alberta and across this country. Nearly 10% of our GDP comes from the energy sector. We need to support those hard-working families these days when there is uncertainty in this sector. We need to show our support for those individuals working coast to coast to coast, the drill workers, carpenters and so forth. It is very important that we show support.

With regard to financing the project, we know that the existing pipeline does earn revenues and cash flow, which is helping build the second leg of the project.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to the opposition motion.

Before I do that, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who have been reaching out to me to express their concern over the fact that my parents are two of the approximately 230 people who are stuck on a cruise ship off the coast of California. They are doing well and they are healthy but they are suffering a bit from cabin fever. They are looking forward to getting back into Canadian hands and back home soon and then being quarantined in Trenton for a while.

I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. The premise of the motion wants to hit on the economic performance of the government in the last session of Parliament and the beginning of this one, and I am happy to talk about that.

We have seen record amounts of success. Unemployment has dropped to the lowest it has been in over 40 years, since we started recording unemployment. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is the best amongst the G7 countries and continues to remain low. Canada has been the leader in economic growth of the G7 countries in the western world. This is a result of hard work by Canadians and a government that supports them.

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Through this we have seen a dramatic drop in our poverty rates. One million fewer people are now in poverty compared to when the Liberals came into power in 2015. I would argue that this has a little bit to do with policy and a lot to do with Canadians, how Canadians are investing and making the decision to be part of an economy that they believe in and that they trust.

In my opinion, that is where government comes in. Government comes in with respect to putting the right policies in place to give Canadians the confidence to succeed and help to create an economy that we can be proud of and an economy that produces results like dropping the unemployment rate and fewer people living in poverty.

When we look at some of the things that were done over the last mandate, we can talk about making investments in Canadians that matter. We strengthened the middle class. We brought in a tax cut that actually targeted the middle class based on how much people were making.

We wanted to make sure that the middle class had a tax cut, because we know that when the middle class is strong, the economy is better for everybody. The economy is better for people who are struggling. We have seen that people have been lifted out of poverty. The economy is better for people who invest in the markets. We have seen the markets over the last five years continue to rise and people's investments are doing well. We have seen job numbers go up. We have seen people, particularly women, whom I will talk about later, getting involved in the workforce that they previously did not participate in. This is because we are investing in the future.

We decided consciously that the 1% have to pay a bit more so that we can give a break to the middle class. By doing that, those 1% will probably end up better off because we have a healthier economy and a healthier middle class.

Our government also brought in the Canada child benefit. This is a benefit geared at parents. Rather than giving the same amount to every child regardless of how much money the parents make, which is what unfortunately the universal child care plan did under the previous Conservative government, our approach said that depending on how much money the parents make will result in how much money they will get in this benefit.

When a cheque of a few hundred bucks or a couple of thousand bucks is given to a millionaire over a year, what is that person going to do with it? That person is going to put it into a tax-free savings account. That person is going to invest it. That person is not going to put it into something that would necessarily help to stimulate and work the economy. However, when we give that same money to middle-class people, when we give that same money to people who are struggling, when we give that same money to a single mother, those people are going to spend that money and that helps to stimulate the economy. That helps to drive our economy forward, which is better for everybody.

I have talked about a couple of things that we did in the previous session of Parliament. What are we talking about doing now to continue to invest in Canadians?

• (1710)

One of the things is reducing the basic personal income allowance to \$15,000 by 2023. This would result in cutting taxes for almost 20 million Canadians, putting \$3 billion back into the pockets of people in 2020 and up to \$6 billion by 2023. It would result in 1.1 million more Canadians who would pay zero federal income tax. This is important because we are investing not in the 1%, not in people who do not need to be invested in. We are investing in the people who actually need it.

I heard one of the Conservative members a few minutes ago asking about why money was being spent, and how we were spending more money that people would have to deal with later on. This discussion, the question and the answer, underscore the fundamental difference in fiscal policy between Conservatives and Liberals. A Conservative believes in waiting for a problem to arise and then throwing money at it to try to fix it. The Liberals believe that the solution is to actually invest in people at the forefront.

I will accept that as a nervous laugh coming from a couple of the members across the way, but it is a reality. Conservatives refuse to actually invest in people. What they want to do is wait for a problem to arise and then try to throw money at it. The Liberal approach is much different. We would rather invest in Canadians at the forefront, giving them the tools and the resources they need to help grow our economy so that everybody is better off. It is very simple.

The “every person for himself or herself” mentality is what Conservatives historically like. I come from a riding where we had an extremely progressive Conservative, Flora MacDonald.

Members could give her a round of applause if they want to. They are willing to make so much noise when I say other things.

Again, there is a key difference here. I know that Conservatives in the House like to invoke previous Conservative times, but that was genuinely a progressive Conservative party. Flora MacDonald even said, during the Stephen Harper years, that she no longer considered herself to be a Conservative because the Conservatives had lost the progressive way.

This is where I come back to the point that it is about investing in people. Progressives believe in investing in people. They do not believe in necessarily waiting until a problem presents itself and then trying to jump all over the problem as a reaction to that.

One of the things I said I would touch on is where a lot of the impact and a lot of the growth have come from in our economy over the last five years. The increase in participation of women in the workforce accounts for one-third of our per capita economic growth. That suggests that there is a massive untapped resource there, to see people's abilities come forward, and in particular for women to become more vibrant and more pronounced in the workforce and to become part of the labour force in a way that we have never seen before.

Whether we are talking about child care or about investing in businesses and entrepreneurship that are led by women, these are the kinds of investments that are going to lead us to an untapped resource that exists right here within our country now, and that is by investing in women.

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However, women still face barriers that we are going to have to overcome as a society, and the House will be charged with doing that. One of those barriers is that women often earn less than men and more likely are finding part-time work. We want to see a world where women match men in participation and in income.

These are amazing opportunities as we look forward to ways to continue to build our economy, continue to strengthen our middle class and make sure that we have the proper tools in place so we have economic resiliency to last well into the future, even when recessions come, as we know one will at some point. These are natural occurrences in the economic cycle and we need to be able to deal with them.

• (1715)

I am suggesting today that we have been putting those tools in place over the years so that we can properly deal with economic uncertainties when they arise. We have the fiscal firepower to deal with this, and that is exactly what we will do.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about today is a motion that the government release to the House, within 45 days, documents provided to it about any warnings that the government has been given about how it is managing the economy on any potential economic downturns.

I would like to talk to my colleague briefly about the new CUSMA. The government had economic impact studies that it started before 2017, and it did not give the economic impact studies to committee until one day before the end of the shutdown of the study. We all know that, before the election, the Liberal government said the new CUSMA was going to be a win-win-win, a great victory for Canada. It told auto workers it would be a win-win-win for them, but the Liberals' own studies are showing that this is going to be a \$1.5-billion hit for the auto sector and decrease production by 1.7%, so the government really does not have a strong record on transparency.

I am wondering if the member will support the motion, because all we are asking for is documents the government has. Will it share them with Canadians, please?

• (1720)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I will go to the last part first. I am very much interested in listening to this. I have had an open mind about this the whole time I have been participating in the debate today, and I will definitely come to a conclusion after I have the opportunity to hear everybody speak.

The member specifically talked about some of the economic impacts of this and what the Conservatives are looking for specifically in the motion. We know that this is political gamesmanship when they are only asking for half of it. They did not ask what the government did in response to any information it got. All they want to know is what the government got. I would expect that, if I owned a personal business and I got information that suggested that my business, or in this case the government, might be hurt, I would probably want to know what I was also going to do in response to that.

Of course, that was not asked for, because all the Conservatives want is to know what the warnings are so they can jump all over those in a political manner.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to give my colleague a chance to expand a little on something he was saying, that being the difference between the approach taken by the Stephen Harper government and the approach our government has taken.

We all know that during his time as prime minister, Mr. Harper rang up over \$150 billion in additional debt and, at the end of it all, we were technically in a recession in the summer of 2015. We had very low growth and very stagnant employment figures. Now we turn in contrast to investments as opposed to stimulus, and the results have been very different.

I would like my colleague to give us a sense of what those differences are.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, that is what I was trying to get at when I was being heckled.

It is the fundamental difference between investing in people so that problems do not happen and trying to react once problems do happen. I was a municipal politician at the time. I saw the way that money from Ottawa was being cut for municipalities at the time.

I would suggest that this government has taken a completely different approach to investing in people. This government is not necessarily waiting for all the problems to get there before it tries to deal with them, as the previous government did. This government has decided proactively to invest in people so that we can grow our economy now and not necessarily have to wait for a recession to grow our economy.

If Conservatives want to compare the records, and if they are going to be honest about it, they are going to look at the whole picture. Unfortunately that is something they are just not interested in doing, in my humble opinion.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his excellent comments and his bid at comedy.

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

In all seriousness, we are facing an economic crisis. The TSX dropped over 1,600 points today. It is serious. What is more, the TSX dropped 31% more than the Dow. Across the border to the south, their economy has been roaring. The Dow has been outperforming the TSX. They are a natural comparison in the United States. Our stock exchange, the TSX, dropped 30% more. Why is that?

I ask every member, in all seriousness, to consider that. Why is our stock market bleeding a third more than the market to the south?

To carve through the demagoguery and clarify the economic reality that the other side is desperately trying to obscure and obfuscate against, including the finance minister, who will not comment on whether we are heading into a recession or on the finances of our country, is a problem.

In order to go there, I think we have to start at the beginning. Any capitalist economy is cyclical, it is true. It goes through a series of expansions and contractions. There are various economic theories. There is the Keynesian theory that says when times are good, we should save more money, we should raise taxes and decrease spending. In bad times, we should spend more and cut taxes to give stimulus to the economy. However, there is a more free market, laissez-faire theory that says to keep spending low, keep taxes low and the private sector will overcome and come to equilibrium.

The last five years have not borne a resemblance to any economic theory known. It has just been spend, spend, tax more and spend in the good times. The Liberal government's attack on businesses, the institution of the carbon tax, its weak leadership, failure to address Canada's productivity gap and reckless spending have left our country without many of the resources that are required to counteract the effects of a recession.

Small business is the very heart of our country. Nearly 70% of private sector employees come from small business. These individuals have had to deal with increasing regulations, increasing taxation, and, worst of all in my opinion, the finance minister had the chutzpah to call these individuals, who are some of the most honourable, hard-working people I have ever met, tax cheats. In my mind, that is utterly reprehensible.

In my local riding, we have seen the impact of the Liberal government's policy of taxation, which has meant the closure of the Weston bakery and of Saputo in the riding next door to me. It is costing us real jobs, and it is having a real impact on the people in my riding.

Another detrimental impact, a self-inflicted wound, is the carbon tax. The carbon tax has been an unmitigated economic disaster. It has increased the cost of inputs into our businesses, making our businesses less competitive. Many of our foreign competitors do not have to pay a carbon tax, so they have a competitive advantage, most notably those in the United States. I repeat, the TSX dropped 30% more than the Dow.

Could the carbon tax have something to do with it? I think so. The carbon tax has a negative, insidious multiplier effect. We have more and more carbon tax, which makes our products more and more expensive, and our economy less competitive.

In my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South, which I think is the greatest riding in Canada, the agricultural sector is incredibly important. In the agricultural sector, we have seen farmers lose 12% of their net income because of the carbon tax. Once again, the TSX is down 30% more. Why is that?

• (1725)

It is self-evident that a more productive economy is a more stable economy, so we need to pursue an economy that is more competitive and more productive.

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As we have seen over the last five years, businesses have invested 20% less. We have seen Warren Buffett pull out of Canada. Teck Frontier has decided not to go ahead with its tar sands expansion. Over and over again, we see less capital being invested in Canada. Could that have something to do with why the Dow Jones is ahead of the TSX by 30% today?

At the heart of many of our economic problems is a serious structural competitive issue. In Canada, we measure productivity globally by the amount each worker contributes to GDP per hour. In Canada it is a low \$50; in the United States it is \$60; in Switzerland it is \$65; and in Ireland it is \$84. Why does productivity matter? Is this just the Conservatives talking about numbers? No. This has a real impact on human beings. It is for the people of Canada that productivity matters. The average wage earner in Canada earns \$19 an hour. The average wage earner in the United States earns \$23. In Switzerland, the average wage earner earns \$33. Are these related? I think so.

When we look at the impact of government on the economy, the productivity gap, the loss in our stock markets today and the broader picture, we see that Canada is falling behind. Could that also be related to the fact that the average Canadian now spends more on taxes than on food, clothing and shelter combined? The idea is to save for a rainy day, but the government has not done that itself and has also made it impossible for Canadians. The average Canadian is \$200 away from insolvency every month, 50% of them.

The other major issue is the weak leadership we have seen from the Prime Minister. Our weak economy is a direct result of the Prime Minister's weak leadership. His dithering and dialogue failed to effectively lead our country through the blockades and trade disputes. The economic impact of the blockades has yet to be determined, but it will no doubt be in the millions of dollars.

In my riding, I have had a lot of conversations with business owners and individuals alike who have struggled with the impact of the blockades. They cannot get their goods to make other goods and they cannot ship their goods. This is impacting all Canadians, and the folks in my riding are hurting. Some of the businesses will not be able to make payroll this month because of the blockades. If the Prime Minister had stood up 19 days before with the vast majority of the Wet'suwet'en people and the vast majority of hard-working Canadians and shut the blockades down, all of this hardship would have been avoided.

When we look at the overall picture, there is no question that today is a bad day for the global economy. We are looking straight down the barrel of a downturn. The government did not act with the due diligence that it should have.

Business of Supply

As a key device, according to Keynesian economics, a government can counteract an economic downturn with deficit spending. However, when we spend the cupboard bare, there is nothing else to grab from there.

The Prime Minister talked repeatedly, during his 2015 campaign, about the importance of maintaining a balanced budget. He was on record saying that we needed to have a balanced budget. Indeed, as he famously said, “the budget will balance itself.” Of course, budgets do not balance themselves and we are left with a \$30-billion structural deficit, in addition to over \$100 billion of deficit spending.

My friends across the aisle like to say that Stephen Harper had billions of dollars in deficit. We were going through the worst global recession in the last 50 years and he balanced the budget so we could outperform the rest of the G7. The Conservatives took the necessary steps. I stand by Prime Minister Harper's record. Now we see the opposite. When times are good globally and economically, what do we do? We sing, dance, spend and tax, over and over again, leaving our cupboard bare.

I feel as though we are watching the economy go over the edge and the Conservative Party is yelling for us to stop, hit the brakes and change direction, but you refuse. We will go over the cliff. For goodness' sake, we need to change direction. We need to go forward with a more productive and efficient economy, and not slide into a further—

• (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to let the member know that although his time is up, maybe he will be able to use his time in questions and comments to get more of his points across.

I also want to remind him that he should not use the word “you”, because he should be talking through the Speaker as opposed to individual members.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of conversation about cupboards, and I think that came from the member for Carleton, who has used that analogy. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that there are enough goods in the cupboards for us to weather the economic storm related to coronavirus.

Would the member opposite care to opine on this? Is the Parliamentary Budget Officer correct or does he somehow not have the right facts in front of him?

• (1735)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, toward the end of last year, we grew at 0.1% to 0.3%. That will almost certainly make our debt-to-GDP ratio go up. We are spending billions of dollars. I do not think it is unreasonable to say that if we did not have our sizeable \$30-billion deficit and a declining GDP, we would be in a better position today to handle an economic downturn.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, all throughout the day, the Conservatives have been talking about and speaking against government spending. It has been interesting. I

would like to point something out and invite the member's comments.

The Canada Development Investment Corporation, which is the parent company to TMX, admitted in its second quarterly report that TMX is a risky project with no guaranteed economic returns. If we account for items like interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization, it would leave a net loss of \$140 million annually. As we know, this project is now costing taxpayers to the tune of \$12.7 billion for the construction of the expansion. That means taxpayers will be on the hook.

If the Conservatives are against government spending, could the member tell the House that he is against the TMX project? It was purchased with taxpayers' money and now taxpayers' money is being spent on the expansion.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, to the member's comment, no, I will not be making CBC News tonight in talking out against the TMX.

I will agree wholeheartedly with the member that it was a foolish move for the government to purchase it. When the government selects winners and losers in the economy, it has been proven over and over again that we are all losers.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech and in it he talked about how investment was fleeing Canada. What are the facts? Global investment in 2018 was up 60% year over year. In 2019 it was up 19% year over year. In fact, in 2019 we had \$66.8 billion of investment in Canada from global firms.

Could the hon. member perhaps correct what he was saying and speak about the fact that companies are, in fact, investing in Canada because they see it as a good place to put their money?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, the facts are clear here. Canada's economy is grinding to a halt. At the end of Q4, before the effects of blockades and COVID-19, we were at 0.1% to 0.3% growth. The Canadian economy is suffering. About \$200 billion has been left out in products from Alberta.

Alberta is struggling and Canada is struggling, and there is no doubt that the actions of the Liberal government have created this.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about the Prime Minister's weak leadership. I want to come back to transparency.

I am on the international trade committee and we just finished with CUSMA. The Liberals knew back in 2017 that this was not a good deal, but they said it was a win-win-win. From their own numbers, this will be a \$1.5-billion hit to the auto industry and will decrease production by 1.7%.

Why is it so important that we get the information from the government, especially now with the economic downturn?

Business of Supply

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, we are in a minority government and information has never hurt anything. It has been said before that sunlight is the world's best disinfectant, so why not put a little sunlight on the reports the government has about the potential upcoming economic downturn?

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to stand and speak in the House today. I stand on behalf of all Kootenay—Columbians who are struggling to get by and looking for some meaningful action from the government to help make their lives better.

I must begin by bringing the government's attention to a dire economic situation in the village of Radium Hot Springs. This community is a wonderful gem within my riding. It is uniquely located at the edge of Kootenay National Park and overlooks the beautiful headwaters of the Columbia River.

The good people of this village and businesses within it depend heavily on tourism dollars generated by the hot pools located in Kootenay National Park. These pools were closed on January 11, 2020, until further notice due to a structural safety concern, and they remain closed today. The economic impact on the village of Radium Hot Springs as a result of the closure continues to be severe, with job losses expected. Timely repairs and upgrades are needed, and they need to become a priority for the government, which must take action to expedite the process of repair that has been delayed by the procurement process.

The end result of the delay is a severe economic hardship on the people and economy of Radium Hot Springs. My constituents are wondering when the minister responsible will create an expedited solution that will lead to the reopening and stabilization of the local economy.

We have been elected to represent our constituents, and there is a need to acknowledge the hard work and diligence of all members of the House. All of us, those currently serving and those who have come before, are passionate Canadians possessing a desire to create a better future for those who call this country home.

I naturally gravitate to constructive dialogue and positive action stemming from good discussion. However, today requires something different. The role of Her Majesty's official opposition must create room for constructive criticism. Discussion about the economy, recessions and wasteful spending are at the top of my mind for my constituents. I am here on their behalf with questions for the government. My riding of Kootenay—Columbia depends on both industry and tourism, and with its proximity to Alberta, we have felt the economic difficulties created by the government.

The Prime Minister cannot blame the current economic position on the coronavirus. Our country's economic growth slowed to 0.3% in the fourth quarter of 2019, the worst performance in almost four years. That was all before the impact of illegal blockades or the coronavirus.

The Liberal government's lack of accountability has weakened the Canadian economy. Investment is falling and jobs are leaving Canada. In some cases this is from a blatant lack of leadership on the part of the Prime Minister, who places a higher value on a UN seat than on leading our country through a blockade crisis. In other

cases this is from the government's wilful dismissal of the west's resource sector. In either case, Canadians deserve more from their government. Investment in plant and equipment by Canadian businesses has dropped 20% over the past five years, the worst performance in more than five decades. Since 2017, over \$192 billion of investment in the energy sector has been cancelled.

At a recent meeting, the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce expressed a genuine concern that we are blindly moving into a recession similar to that of 2008. The chamber is reporting that foreign investment in the Kootenay region is dwindling and that there is a general drop in confidence within the business community.

These issues are directly tied to the government's approach to dealing with small business owners, who the Prime Minister has referred to as tax cheats. Tax rules for small businesses, implemented by the government, make it impossible for them to operate.

Thousands of businesses across Canada, including those in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, will no longer qualify for the small business tax rate or will see it reduced. With new carbon taxes and increased CPP and EI premiums, businesses are facing difficulties. These tough new rules will also raise taxes on compensation paid within family businesses, which will have a devastating impact on families within my riding.

The former CEO of the Bank of England has warned that we are "sleepwalking" into a financial crisis. The Liberal government is both blind to it and wilfully unprepared. When will the government begin to listen and act in the best interest of Canadians?

We now have some of the most burdensome regulations on earth, which are strangling the energy industry and making it impossible to move the country forward in a way that allows us to make meaningful contributions, through the export of LNG for example, to reduce the impacts of climate change.

The government has implemented a taxation strategy that takes more from the paycheques of hard-working Canadians and then pickpockets the very same families through cancelled tax cuts, such as a cancelled family tax cut of \$2,000 per household, cancelled arts and fitness tax credits of up to \$225 per child and a cancelled education tax credit of up to \$720 per student. The list is too long.

• (1740)

As a result, 48% of Canadians are within \$200 of not being able to pay their bills and debt obligations; 10% of Canadians are within \$100; and 33% have no money at the end of the month and are unable to cover their payments. My constituents are barely making it by and these increases make it impossible to cover the bills. Canadians are falling further into debt.

Business of Supply

During the recent election, I was asked by constituents for tangible solutions the government could provide to make things a little easier. They were hopeful for any action that would help them obtain a more affordable life. If elected to govern, the Conservatives are committed to do more than just help them get by.

I made this promise to Kootenay—Columbians and look forward to the next election when Canadians will have an opportunity to choose a different path forward, one that will deliver tangible results and solutions that will actually help Canadians get ahead.

The Liberal government could have built a world-class infrastructure that would improve Canada's competitiveness and our quality of life. Instead, it squandered billions in an infrastructure plan that did not exist, according to the PBO. The Prime Minister's billions of dollars in spending did not result in any additional infrastructure built in Canada.

The government could have chosen to improve Canada's innovation programs to refocus research and development on commercializing products. Instead it created subsidy programs that have not created any growth.

My constituents are wondering why the government has created financial roadblocks for their families, while at the same time shelling out massive corporate welfare cheques, such as \$50 million to Mastercard, \$12 million to Loblaws and \$40 million to BlackBerry. That is \$102 million handed out to profitable multi-billion-dollar companies for projects these organizations would have undertaken anyway. In the case of BlackBerry, the CEO candidly admitted it did not need the money. From the perspective of a hard-working Kootenay—Columbia, imagine hearing the news that the Prime Minister gave \$40 million to an organization whose CEO said it did not need the money.

The Prime Minister's sky-high taxes, wasteful spending and massive deficits have put Canada in an incredibly weak position. The possibility of a made-in-Canada recession is becoming more real.

Despite a healthy Canadian economy, boosted by a booming southern neighbour, soaring real estate prices and record low interest rates, the government still managed to add \$72 billion to the national debt during its first four years in power.

What is worse is that so much of the money has been wasted. There is no evidence that there is any increase in growth. There is little to show for it. Never before in Canadian history has so much been spent to achieve so little. It is unprecedented for a government to have a \$187 billion infrastructure program that the Parliamentary Budget Officer said resulted in a zero increase in infrastructure built in Canada and no increase in GDP growth because the infrastructure plan did not exist.

Imagine spending \$1.6 million to renovate the offices of ministers, \$23 million to buy cars for a G7 summit and \$8 million for a skating rink. Imagine promising to spend \$150 million on subsidies to help people go camping.

Let me be clear. I love the idea of investing in the outdoors and fostering the reality of spending more time enjoying the great outdoors. However, practically speaking, imagine the government telling a family that is barely making ends meet that it will give

it \$2,000 if it goes camping in the Laurentians. The government is out of touch financially and it is out of touch with Canadians families.

When a recession hits, deficits soar as the economy's automatic stabilizers kick in. Government revenues fall because people are earning less and paying less in taxes, while spending surges on unemployment insurance and other programs. If we start with a \$30-billion deficit and Canada goes into a significant recession like we saw in 2008, that deficit can grow to \$60 billion or \$70 billion. That is before the government has to spend the money to stimulate the economy to get us out of the recession.

In the lead-up to the global recession from 2006-08, the Conservative government paid down \$37 billion in debt. This gave Canada more financial resources to navigate the storm. Canada came out of the crisis faster and with a stronger growth than any other G7 country.

That is a true example of leadership and that is what Canadians and those in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia expect from the government. They expect the government to be open and transparent and to provide the documents that shed light on the spending of taxpayer dollars.

● (1745)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I listen to the Conservatives, they tend to forget the global economic meltdown that took place in 2008. If we look at the Stephen Harper economic update in November of that year, we will find it was completely ignored. There was not a word with respect to what was happening to the economy. If it were not for the diligence of the opposition, there would have been no acknowledgement by Stephen Harper that a recession was taking place.

I wonder if my friend and colleague could explain why there seems to be a double standard? When the Conservatives were in government, they completely ignored their responsibility to the House. Compare that to what we are doing with respect to providing transparency and accountability on a daily basis.

● (1750)

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Speaker, at that time, it was a minority government and the other parties were pushing that government. That is why, as you were talking about, there was no leadership at that time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that I was not talking about that. I remind him that he is to address his questions to the Chair and not to individual members.

Business of Supply

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague if he remembers this. The parliamentary secretary has stood a few times today. On one hand, he recalls how the previous Harper government wanted to keep a line on spending back in the fall of 2008 after the election. On the other hand, the Liberals like to remind the House about the deficits the government had to incur after 2008.

It was in December 2008 when the leader of the Liberal party, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the NDP all signed an agreement forcing the government of the day, a minority, to spend billions of dollars. In fact, some Liberal MPs were basically on their knees, begging for deficits of the government.

An hon. member: I'm sure that's how it went down.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That is exactly how it went down.

Could my colleague please speak to why we should save during the good times so we can invest during the tough times?

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Speaker, yes, we should be saving at this time for what is coming ahead.

As I said earlier, we are sleepwalking into a crisis and the government is not aware of that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member this question, because the issue around transparency and accountability of course is related—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I am sorry I have to interrupt. Other people are interrupting the member while she is speaking. I want to remind members that when someone has the floor to be respectful and allow that person to speak. I am reminding members on both sides of the House.

The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, I know the Conservatives like to think of themselves as a group that aspires to be transparent and accountable to Canadian taxpayers with respect to their money. However, on the question around the TMX project, what we do know is that it is financed by Canadian taxpayers and is managed by Export Development Canada, which is used only for high-risk projects, because they do not qualify for typical commercial financing.

This is what the Liberal government is doing with the TMX project. To that end, would it not make sense for the government to be open and transparent and to ensure that all of its business plan, if there is one, and I believe there is not one on the TMX project, is tabled in the House? Would that be something the Conservatives would support in the spirit of this motion?

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Speaker, we fully support the TMX pipeline. We believe it did not need to be purchased by the government, but we do fully support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

We support this motion, where we see two important trends. The first is transparency, which we obviously support. In her remarks, the member for Laurentides—Labelle clearly stressed the benefits of transparency in politics. The Bloc Québécois always makes a point of being transparent in its political actions.

Second, the motion talks about the current federal deficit. Racking up such a deficit in a time of economic prosperity is no small feat and makes no sense. Historically, the creation of the Canadian federation and the Constitution left an indelible mark that has had negative and even harmful effects on the budgets of Canada's provinces and Quebec. I am talking about the fiscal imbalance. This expression began to be associated with a very simple situation: the needs were in the provinces and Quebec while the money was in Ottawa.

Back then, the provincial and Quebec governments had recurring deficits because the federal government was getting extremely high revenues from various forms of taxation without doing much spending. People who know about fiscal imbalance have said from the start that the truth first came to light in 2003. Quebec was actually the first to catch on. That is par for the course, as Quebec tends to figure lots of things out before anyone else, including the fact that Canada is dysfunctional.

The other provinces confirmed it was true, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer constantly tells us himself that there is a fiscal imbalance between the federal government, the provinces and Quebec. To prove that I am right, the fiscal imbalance was first mentioned not in 2003 but way back in 1902. As far back as 1887, the Canadian provinces were saying there was a fly in the ointment of the Canadian federation, as Marjolain Dufour would put it. In spite of this fiscal imbalance, the federal government continues to rack up one deficit after another. It beggars belief.

The amounts paid for health care are an example of the fiscal imbalance. Everyone in Canada, except the federal government, agrees that the figures are too low. The Liberals want to spend, spend, spend but are cracking down on the provinces. In the Thompson report, published in 2014 in Quebec by the Groupe d'experts pour un financement axé sur les patients, a panel of experts in support of patient-focused funding, noted that an aging population, population growth, technological improvements and inflation are driving up health care costs by an average of 5.2% a year—and this is just to maintain services. The federal government, however, gives the provinces just 3%. That is what you call a fiscal imbalance. The federal government continues to rack up deficits, which is about as amazing as putting a grasshopper on a pogo stick.

Business of Supply

My colleague from Joliette, who is an economist, talked about the current economic situation. Theories developed by John Maynard Keynes in and around 1936 taught us that it is important to stabilize the economy and spend more in times of economic crisis. To avoid going into debt, governments should spend during economic crises. In contrast, in times of economic prosperity, governments should cut now-unnecessary spending and use the surplus to pay off previously acquired deficits. Basically, governments should run deficits during recessions and pay off debts when the economy is growing, but the Liberals run deficits during periods of growth. I am not making this up.

• (1755)

Such is the current federal government's management. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, in Canada, deficits at the federal level are rather rare, but this government manages to run deficits anyway. I must tip my hat and say that I am very impressed by the government's management of the public purse. I am being sarcastic, of course.

In 2015, when the Prime Minister was running for office, he promised to take advantage of the low interest rates to run deficits to improve infrastructure. His government was going to rebuild Canada and use these investments to provide services to the public. Wonderful! He said there would be deficits at the start of his term and then a return to balanced budgets. That is not so bad.

As it turns out, there were successive deficits. They dug a \$100-billion hole during their first term in office and, on top of not eliminating the deficit, they announced an even bigger deficit while promising more of the same in the next election. Not to worry, everything is fine and dandy. The Liberals continued to run deficits at a time when everything was going well. The clouds now hanging over our heads were yet to arrive.

If governing means anticipating events, if a good government is one that can foresee what is coming, then this government leaves much to be desired, as we saw during the rail crisis.

Let's take a look at what is happening today. The Liberals ran up chronic deficits with chronic spending. Instead of investing in infrastructure and then stopping to reduce the deficit, they continued with their chronic spending. The hole just kept getting deeper with each passing year, and their brilliant idea was to keep digging.

What will they do now when the stock exchange is in free fall, there is the threat of the coronavirus, and the rail crisis has become a serious crisis because people are unable to plan ahead? The problems are piling up. This government is unable to respond when the need arises. This government is unable to tell us when it will stop running up deficits or when things will start getting better. That is a problem. There is no transparency. The Bank of Canada has lowered its prime rate by 0.5% to help the government avoid an even deeper economic crisis. That is where things stand with this government.

To look at them, we get the impression that the Liberals do not realize that they are a bunch of amateurs. That is unfortunate, because the people of Quebec and the rest of Canada are the ones paying the price.

We will be voting in favour of the motion and hope to get some answers to understand how this government is managing our public finances. One does not ask for directions from someone who is lost. Of course, the sharing of this information will help us understand the extent to which the government's lack of vision is characteristic of what the Liberal Party of Canada has always stood for.

• (1800)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech. The Bloc Québécois doomsayers are out in full force today. What the member failed to mention is the tens of millions of dollars that have been given to parents in ridings across Quebec to help with the cost of child rearing; the unemployment rate of 4.5%, the lowest it has been in the member's lifetime; and the nearly 300,000 jobs that have been created in Quebec since we took office.

I would like to ask my colleague opposite and all the Bloc Québécois doomsayers to confirm that they failed to mention in their speeches some of the good things that have been done for Quebec since 2015.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his questions.

People usually think of me as an optimist, but the member opposite just called me a doomsayer. I absolutely cannot accept that.

As for the money going to Quebec taxpayers, I can tell my colleague that if he tries to seek treatment in Quebec, he will find out that certain things need more money spent on them than they are getting at present. People who need health care are paying the price for the government's inaction.

The government is not listening to the provinces. It does not understand that the cuts to health transfers are leaving the health care system increasingly vulnerable.

I would like to be able to tell my colleague he is right about the unemployment rate and my age. However, I am older than I look. I was born in 1966, so I have seen lower unemployment than this. Statistics Canada's own data shows that the unemployment rate was lower from 1966 to 1976.

My final point—

• (1805)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry. I must allow time for other questions.

The hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

Business of Supply

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris-Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from La Prairie for his comments about the disaster the government is creating. He mentioned how the Liberals promised they would only run a \$10-billion deficit in 2015 and that by 2019 they would balance the budget and yet they have not. That continues to skyrocket.

Another thing the member talked about very briefly was the rail blockades. In Quebec, people have had big challenges with the rail blockades. There is a reduced amount of propane that has been able to get to farmers to help them in drying their grain. That is having a big impact on Quebec farmers. I would be interested to hear how the member sees that piling up for further and further deficits.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and his question.

He is right. It is unbelievable that some members on the other side boasted about how the rail crisis was managed. They found a way to brag about it.

People will say that they were patient. They were not patient. They let the issue drag on. That is not the same thing. It took them 20 days to wake up. During the first 10 days, the Prime Minister was on vacation and did not want to be bothered. During the following 10 days they did not really know what to do, so they passed it off to the provinces. In the last 10 days, they realized that the Bloc Québécois's proposals actually made sense and decided to try those solutions 20 days too late.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, just on that issue, the truth of the matter is the Conservatives failed to address the issue. Had they actually listened to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Delgamuukw* regarding engaging with the indigenous communities and the leadership about a path forward on the question around land and title and governance, we might not have found ourselves in this situation. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals have failed Canadians on that score.

Regarding this motion, does the member not think the government should be providing all the information that it has with respect to the Trans Mountain expansion, so that Canadians will know what is happening in terms of their tax dollars? Should the government also provide the business plan so that we know whether there really is a business case for the TMX?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

Trans Mountain is obviously very problematic. The government will have to answer to the public. We want to get these figures to know how much an outmoded industry has been subsidized and how much Quebec taxpayers have paid to prop it up.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Ô Madam Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to speak to the motion moved by my Conservative Party colleagues as part of the business of supply.

We know that the agenda of the House could be affected by the result of the vote that will be held this evening on whether to adopt the motion that our Conservative colleagues moved in the House on Friday, February 28.

I must commend the Conservative Party staff for their sophisticated expertise and mastery of the most subtle technical details of the parliamentary procedure that guides our work. Unfortunately, the official opposition's tactics are not always in line with the public will that was expressed on October 21 and the anticipated impacts of the general co-operation among all parties under a minority government in this House.

For the benefit of my colleagues and, more particularly, the thousands of individuals who follow our work via various platforms, I would like to read the motion exactly as it is worded in order to better frame my argument to show that this motion is irrelevant. The motion proposes, and I quote:

That an order of the House do issue for any document prepared by any department, agency and Crown corporation since November 4, 2015, discussing warnings or concerns of economic downturns, their potential impact on the fiscal framework, or advice or recommendations on how to deal with them; and that the documents be provided to the House within 45 days following the adoption of this motion.

Honestly, Madam Speaker, if you and I could have dreamed up a better fishing expedition, we would have wasted no time assembling our best gear. We could have shared some exceptionally convivial moments.

I believe a digression is not uncalled for here. Members will agree that, since Parliament resumed, the Bloc Québécois has made phenomenal strides for Quebec thanks to the hard work of our leader's team and our sincere dedication to Quebec's best interests at the federal level.

Since day one of this Parliament, the Bloc Québécois has emerged as the locomotive powering opposition to the Liberal government, no dubious pun intended in relation to the Prime Minister's disastrous leadership in recent weeks.

Virtually all of the most influential and distinguished commentators from the most prestigious media outlets in Quebec and Canada agree on the Bloc Québécois's judicious, informed positions. In fact, many have mentioned that at times the leader of the Bloc Québécois looked like the true prime minister of Canada, thanks to his level-headed and sincere approach, which reflects the approach Quebec has been taking towards first nations for decades.

That is the end of my digression, and I thank my colleagues for indulging me. Please excuse my unbridled enthusiasm, for when I speak to the role of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa, my pride and passion overtake the normally modest character of my interventions in this august chamber.

Business of Supply

Obviously, parliamentarians' attention must be laser-focused on the fears and reactions linked to the fragile economic indicators flashing in financial markets, rather than on blatant attempts to distract people, as our colleagues are doing in the most crass, partisan way.

Modernity brings about change among all walks of life. From this time of economic uncertainty and social upheaval will come brighter days. I believe that, and it is my sincere wish for my colleagues from western Canada.

I also urge them to study all the initiatives developed by Quebec over the past 60 years to diversify its economy and its unparalleled approaches that have prepared it to embrace the 21st century and not be left behind.

• (1810)

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find it very interesting that my colleague describes the Prime Minister and the Liberal government's leadership as disastrous and says we should be focused like a laser on financial markets, yet has no particular interest in how we came to be where we are, whether there were warning signs or whether there were steps that could have been taken by the disastrous leadership of the government.

I do not understand how he is reconciling his two points, other than saying how wonderful the Bloc is. If the member really believes the leadership of the federal government has been so disastrous, I would like to know how we are to determine how disastrous it is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Clearly, we have repeatedly criticized the government's lack of leadership. We know that it wanted to blame Quebec and the different provinces at the beginning of the crisis. We definitely presented concrete measures and solutions to resolve the serious problem of rail blockades.

As already mentioned, we will vote in favour of the motion moved today. The government must answer our questions.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. I would like to offer a bit of a history lesson.

We did indeed go through a financial crisis in 2008. The Conservative Party's response, praised in my colleague's speech, consisted of making cuts, dismissing public servants, and then making even more cuts. They later had to redeem themselves with support from the Liberal Party.

Today, the Liberal Party is taking an entirely different path. I would therefore ask the hon. member to clarify something. Which path does he want to take?

• (1815)

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague across the way for the question.

The Liberal Party has run up huge deficits over the past few years. Instead of giving money to the banks and finding solutions to stimulate the economy, we need to go back to the drawing board.

With today's motion, we wish to truly get answers to our questions.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., and this being the final supply day of the period ending March 26, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 19*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultair	Aitchison
Albas	Alghabra
Alleslev	Allison
Amos	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Bachrach	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste

Business of Supply

Beaulieu	Beech	Lewis (Essex)	Liepert
Bendayan	Bennett	Lightbound	Lloyd
Benzen	Bergen	Lobb	Long
Bergeron	Berthold	Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
Bérubé	Bessette	Lukiwski	MacAulay (Cardigan)
Bezan	Bibeau	MacGregor	MacKenzie
Bittle	Blair	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas	Maloney	Manly
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Block	Martel	Martinez Ferrada
Blois	Boudrias	Masse	Mathysen
Boulerice	Brassard	May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Bratina	Brière	Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
Brunelle-Duceppe	Calkins	McColeman	McCrimmon
Cannings	Carrie	McDonald	McKay
Casey	Chabot	McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Chagger	Champagne	McLean	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Champoux	Charbonneau	McLeod (Northwest Territories)	McPherson
Chen	Chiu	Melillo	Mendès
Chong	Collins	Menicino	Michaud
Cooper	Cormier	Miller	Monsef
Cumming	Dabrusin	Moore	Morantz
Dalton	Damoff	Morneau	Morrison
Dancho	Davidson	Morrissey	Motz
Davies	DeBellefeuille	Murray	Nater
Deltell	d'Entremont	Ng	Normandin
Desbiens	Desilets	O'Connell	Oliphant
Dhillon	Diotte	O'Regan	Patzer
Doherty	Dong	Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Dowdall	Dreeshen	Perron	Petipas Taylor
Drouin	Dubourg	Plamondon	Poillievre
Duclos	Duguid	Powlowski	Qualtrough
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Ratansi	Rayes
Duval	Dzerowicz	Redekopp	Regan
Easter	Ehsassi	Reid	Richards
El-Khoury	Ellis	Robillard	Rodriguez
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Rogers	Romanado
Falk (Provencher)	Fast	Rood	Ruff
Fergus	Fillmore	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Sahota (Brampton North)
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Saini	Sajjan
Finnigan	Fisher	Samson	Sangha
Fonseca	Fortier	Sarai	Saroya
Fortin	Fragiskatos	Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Fraser	Freeland	Scheer	Schieffe
Gallant	Garneau	Schmale	Schulte
Garrison	Gaudreau	Seeback	Serré
Gazan	Généreux	Sgro	Shanahan
Genuis	Gerretsen	Shields	Shin
Gill	Godin	Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Gould	Gourde	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sikand
Gray	Green	Simard	Simms
Guilbeault	Hajdu	Singh	Sloan
Hallan	Harder	Sorbara	Soroka
Hardie	Harris	Spengemann	Stanton
Hoback	Holland	Steinley	Ste-Marie
Hughes	Hussen	Strahl	Stubbs
Hutchings	Iacono	Sweet	Tabbara
Jaczek	Jansen	Tassi	Thériault
Jeneroux	Johns	Therrien	Trudeau
Joly	Jones	Trudel	Turnbull
Jordan	Jowhari	Uppal	Van Bynen
Julian	Kelloway	van Koeverden	Van Popta
Kelly	Kent	Vandal	Vandenbeld
Khalid	Khera	Vaughan	Vecchio
Kitchen	Kmiec	Vidal	Viersen
Kram	Kurek	Vignola	Virani
Kusie	Kusmierczyk	Vis	Wagantall
Kwan	Lake	Warkentin	Waugh
Lalonde	Lambropoulos	Webber	Weiler
Lametti	Lamoureux	Wilkinson	Williamson
Larouche	Lattanzio	Yip	Young
Lauzon	Lawrence	Yurdiga	Zahid
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre	Zann	Zimmer
Lehoux	Lemire	Zuberi— 315	

Business of Supply

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Dhaliwal

Marcil— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

OPPOSITION MOTION—ADDITIONAL ALLOTTED DAYS

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(17), the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar relating to the business of supply.

• (1850)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 20)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif

Aitchison

Albas

Alleslev

Allison

Angus

Arnold

Ashton

Bachrach

Baldinelli

Barlow

Barrett

Barsalou-Duval

Beaulieu

Benzen

Bergen

Bergeron

Berthold

Bérubé

Bezan

Blanchet

Blanchette-Joncas

Blaney (North Island—Powell River)

Block

Boudrias

Boulerice

Brassard

Brunelle-Duceppe

Calkins

Cannings

Carrie

Chabot

Champoux

Charbonneau

Chiu

Chong

Collins

Cooper

Cumming

Dalton

Dancho

Davidson

Davies

DeBellefeuille

Deltell

d'Entremont

Desbiens

Desilets

Diotte

Doherty

Dowdall

Dreeshen

Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)

Duvall

Epp

Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)

Falk (Provencher)

Fast

Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)

Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)

Fortin

Gallant

Garrison

Gaudreau

Gazan

Généreux

Genuis

Gill

Godin

Gourde

Gray

Green

Hallan

Harder

Harris

Hoback

Hughes

Jansen

Jeneroux

Johns

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Savard-Tremblay

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Shields

Shipley

Singh

Soroka

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Strahl

Sweet

Therrien

Uppal

Vecchio

Viersen

Vis

Warkentin

Webber

Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Amos

Anandasangaree

Arya

Bagnell

Baker

Beech

Bennett

Bibeau

Blair

Bratina

Casey

Champagne

Cormier

Damoff

Dong

Dubourg

Duguid

Dzerowicz

Ehsassi

Ellis

Fillmore

Fisher

Fortier

Fraser

Garneau

Gould

Guilbeault	Hajdu
Hardie	Holland
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Jaczek
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Kelloway	Khalid
Khera	Kusmierczyk
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
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Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lightbound	Long
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MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Martinez Ferrada
May (Cambridge)	McCrimmon
McDonald	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
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Morrissey	Murray
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Oliphant	O'Regan
Petitpas Taylor	Powlowski
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Sahota (Brampton North)
Saini	Sajjan
Samson	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schieffke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
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PAIRED

Members

Dhaliwal

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The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Therefore the study of the motion to concur in the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, and interim supply for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2021, scheduled for later this day is postponed to a later date.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you know, marine pollution is increasingly becoming an urgent

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global problem, impacting marine animals, millions of seabirds and even salmon on the west coast of British Columbia.

We had a spill on the west coast of British Columbia four years ago where 35 shipping containers spilled. The Government of Canada had no action plan to address this problem. In fact, those marine cargo shipment containers spread all up and down the coast and it was left up to local people to deal with this difficult challenge.

We know we are shipping plastic and debris to the Philippines and it has become a diplomatic problem for us. Finally, after our pressure, that pollution and that waste was shipped back to us. We know that in Malaysia, they are concerned about the first world shipping their problem to developing nations.

• (1855)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but there seem to be people in here who believe that the House is not sitting. Contrary to that, the House continues to sit at this moment for the late show, and I would ask members to take their conversations outside.

Once again, I ask members to exit the lobby if they are not staying in here for the business we are hosting right now.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, we know that we are facing a global crisis right now when it comes to marine plastic pollution and the impact it is having on our oceans. Right now we are seeing over eight million tonnes of plastic pollution entering our oceans every year globally. This plastic pollution is killing hundreds of thousands of marine animals and millions of seabirds. It is a huge problem not just globally, but certainly here at home as well. When we talk about the state of our oceans and our duty to protect them, it is for the species that do not have a voice.

There was a spill off the west coast of British Columbia four years ago. Thirty-five large shipping containers spilled into our waters and the Government of Canada was nowhere to be seen. It fell on the backs of local communities and local stakeholder groups like Clayoquot CleanUp, which is now called the Coastal Restoration Society, and Surfrider Pacific Rim, to take on the challenge of cleaning up the marine debris that spread throughout our coast.

We are also hearing about our garbage ending up in places like the Philippines. Members may recall the Philippines declared war on Canada because of the government's inability to deal with a problem, and it grew into a diplomatic relationship issue. The Philippines did not want our garbage, and it sat in a harbour there for several years. We are hearing that our garbage is ending up in Malaysia. Children are living in plastic garbage slums, and it is our plastic and our garbage. It is disgraceful and embarrassing for all Canadians. Children should not be living among our garbage in developing nations. It needs to stop. It can stop.

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The Government of Canada has signed a part of the Basel Convention whereby it has to get permission from developing countries to stop shipping its garbage to developing nations. What we want is the government to not even seek permission, but to actually stop shipping our garbage to developing nations. It needs to stop. It is the responsible thing to do.

I do want to applaud the government for hearing our voices and feeling the pressure from us calling on the government to take on this huge issue. We worked with the government and the Minister of Environment when he was the parliamentary secretary. He came to Victoria for a meeting with me and the former member for Victoria, Murray Rankin. We met with the University of Victoria Environmental Law Office, which had produced a report on the seven ways to address marine plastic pollution. The government did encapsulate some of those recommendations. It has taken some action when it comes to dealing with ghost and derelict fishing gear.

The government has talked a great bunch about single-use plastics, but we still have not seen any action or commitments. Despite the fact that nations and jurisdictions around the world have taken action, this is still falling on the backs of local governments and provincial governments.

The environment and the species in our environment cannot wait any longer. We are calling on the government to make an announcement about its single-use plastic commitments and to commit to dealing with industrial-use plastics.

I look forward to hearing from the parliamentary secretary. I look forward to continuing to work with the government on dealing with this urgent matter.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it has been a pleasure discussing this with my hon. colleague on numerous occasions. He is working hard on this matter, and I appreciate that greatly.

Canadians want us to address plastic pollution. We agree, and are doing our due diligence to advance the best solutions for Canada in a timely manner. The Government of Canada has made getting to zero plastic waste one of its environmental priorities. To do so, we are taking action through a comprehensive approach.

Since the motion was approved, I am very happy to report that progress has indeed been made. On February 1, we published the draft science assessment on plastic pollution for public comment. This report will guide future research and inform our decisions as we follow through on our commitment to ban harmful single-use plastic, where warranted and supported by science, as early as 2021, and take other actions to reduce plastic pollution. This is the first step in accessing our regulatory tools under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

We do not take lightly the decisions around the role government should play in the management of single-use plastics and other plastic products. The development of any regulatory measure, including which products will be targeted, will be informed by science and socio-economic considerations.

We will also continue to engage and consult with stakeholders throughout the development, management and review of potential regulations or other measures. These efforts are part of a comprehensive agenda to reduce plastic waste and pollution. We are developing a range of complementary actions, which include encouraging better product design for longer product life, recyclability and recycled content; increasing the collection of plastic waste; and making producers responsible for the waste their products generate.

We are also greening our federal operations by eliminating unnecessary single-use plastics, procuring sustainable plastic products and working toward our commitment to divert 75% of our plastic waste by 2030.

In 2018, Canada launched the Canadian Plastics Innovation Challenge to help small and medium-sized businesses find new ways to reduce plastic waste and turn waste into valuable resources. Eight challenges were completed in 2018-2019, providing over \$11.8 million to 18 Canadian small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. Three finalists for 2019-2020 were announced this February. The federal leadership toward zero plastic waste initiative includes grant funding of \$2.6 million for Environment and Climate Change Canada to undertake new Canadian Plastics Innovation Challenges over the next three years, beginning in fiscal year 2019-20.

We are also investing in science, innovation and deployable solutions, such as through Environment and Climate Change Canada's recently launched funding opportunities, one for advancing science and the other for targeting community-level solutions. The Government of Canada is providing grants and other supports for community activities such as shoreline cleanups, and for accelerating research on the life cycle of plastics and on the impacts of plastic pollution on humans, wildlife and the environment. This complements the investments by Fisheries and Oceans Canada to support projects that help prevent and retrieve lost fishing gear.

We have also worked with the provinces and territories and launched the Canada-wide strategy on the zero waste plastic and phase 1 action plan. We are working together to implement these commitments, including by creating a road map to address single-use plastics, guidance for consistent policies to make companies that manufacture or sell plastic products responsible for their end-of-life management, and national targets and standards for plastic products and packaging.

We are taking action. Internationally, we have garnered support from 26 governments and from 67 businesses and organizations that have endorsed the Ocean Plastics Charter, committing to take action along the life cycle of plastics.

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We are committed to taking action on this issue. We have already started. We are going to get it done.

• (1900)

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the government and all parties in this House for supporting my motion No. 151 to tackle marine plastic pollution.

The Liberals need to take action. They need to make announcements of what they are going to ban when it comes to single-use plastics and take real action when it comes to industrial-use plastics.

My colleague from the Conservative Party from York—Simcoe tabled a bill to ban the export of certain plastics to developing countries. I applaud him for that, but all the government needs to do is tick a box at the Basel Convention to stop it now. It does not even need to wait for this bill. It is something that the government could address.

Right now, we need urgent investments for marine debris cleanups, for working with indigenous guardians and their programs, and for salmon restoration projects that could help protect our wild salmon in the salmon emergency we are in.

We look forward to working with the government, but we want to hear concrete commitments and timelines on when it is going to address these issues.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, in regard to the movement of waste internationally, Canada is party to three international agreements that outline the requirements for exports, imports and transit of hazardous waste and hazardous recyclable materials. We take our obligations under these agreements very seriously.

In May 2019, Canada actively supported the negotiation and adoption of amendments to the Basel Convention, which my hon. colleague mentioned, to strengthen controls on the transboundary movement of plastic waste. Domestically, Canada has a comprehensive regulatory regime in place to control exports of hazardous waste and comply with international obligations. We are taking action to improve compliance with this regulatory regime through measures such as communicating requirements to Canadian companies.

We are also setting up an ad hoc committee that will work to prevent illegal waste exports. Canada respects the regulatory decisions of other countries to control waste imports, and as such seeks their consent before allowing waste exports from Canada to be shipped to those countries.

I would like to further state that I appreciate all the work that my hon. colleague has done on this issue, and I look forward to collaborating with him further.

• (1905)

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, how does one become a judge in Canada? One would think individuals would take the LSAT, go to law school, get a good job, establish a career that demonstrates their ability and their merit year after year, and maybe they would be deemed fit to be appointed to the bench. Ideally, that

would be the process that a young person with judicial ambitions would undertake. Under the Liberal government however, the reality is that if individuals want to become judges, they better be Liberals. If they want to expedite the process, being related to a Liberal member or being a max donor sure helps.

The Liberal record on partisan judicial appointments is horrendous and completely does away with the government's claims, "All judicial appointments follow our new, open, independent, transparent and merit-based process." The way it works with the Liberal government is that prospective candidates are recommended by Liberal members or other members of the Liberal elite, like the wife of a currently sitting member of Parliament who sits on the Queen's Bench in Manitoba.

The prospective candidates are then checked against their score on Liberalist, a Liberal database, to make sure they are Liberal enough to make the cut and that their donation records are up to date. If the fact that a sitting judge is telling ministerial staff who should be appointed to the bench, and where, does not raise red flags, then the fact that they are being graded on their partisanship should.

It is no secret that the Liberals always put their friends before the rest of Canadians. No clearer example of this can be found than that of the President of the Queen's Privy Council, the member for Beauséjour, letting his family and friends jump the queue as we saw with clam scam, where the member awarded a lucrative fishing contract to family when he was the minister of fisheries. With that track record, it is no surprise that five of six recent judicial appointments in New Brunswick have personal connections to that member.

A neighbour, a family relative and three lawyers who helped retire debts from his unsuccessful 2008 leadership bid were all appointed to the bench in New Brunswick, again raising red flags that the Liberals' merit-based appointment process might not be so merit-based after all, and that they are indeed partisan patronage appointments.

It really comes down to ethics. We have seen that the Liberal government seems to throw ethical considerations by the wayside and step over the ethical line repeatedly. Again, it is no surprise that the Liberal appointment process is certainly not merit-based but is in fact an exercise in partisanship. That is exactly why Canadians are losing faith in public institutions that they pay for and that they expect to operate at the highest ethical level.

We have witnessed a steady degradation of the public trust over the last five years. Canadians are left with a feeling that two sets of rules exist in Canada: one for the governing class and one for those they govern. Canadians deserve to have confidence in their public institutions and deserve to have a government that upholds those institutions.

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When will the Liberal government realize that very thing, and put everyday Canadians ahead of their friends?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his contributions in the last Parliament in the justice committee and for raising this important issue this evening.

Devoting time to considering judicial appointments and the judicial appointment process is critically important. A high-quality superior court judiciary is essential to the fair and effective functioning of our justice system.

We on this side of the House are proud of the merit-based, diverse appointments that we have made. Since taking office, we have made 350 outstanding individuals, who reflect the face of Canada, eligible to serve on our superior courts either through direct appointments or through elevations.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

As all members of this House can attest, we are fortunate in Canada to have a strong and independent judiciary. Canadians know they can turn to the courts to resolve their disputes and uphold their rights and freedoms. They know that the judges that serve them are not beholden to other branches of government nor to any powerful groups or interests in society.

However, we cannot take this for granted. Every single day we must strive to uphold the institutions and values that make it possible to live in a free, just and democratic society. Fundamental to upholding these institutions and values is working to ensure that the public has confidence in the justice system.

[*English*]

That very point was made by the member opposite, ensuring the public has confidence in the administration of justice. That is actually outlined in the Constitution. It is such a fundamental precept.

[*Translation*]

This includes trusting that there is a rigorous process in place to appoint judges. To bolster this trust, our government in 2016 introduced important reforms to strengthen the superior court appointments process.

[*English*]

What has that process resulted in? We overhauled that process and we did it deliberately. We wanted to ensure the bench reflected the Canadians who the bench serves. What we have done in elevating 357 judges, 293 who are new appointments and 64 elevations, is appoint 53% female judges. By contrast, the previous government appointed 32% women to Canada's superior courts. Of the judges appointed under our process, 3% are indigenous, 8% are racialized Canadians, 5% identify as LGBTQ2 and 33% are functioning bilingual.

Why is this important? Why am I listing these statistics and putting them into the record for tonight's discussion? Because I agree with the member opposite. Canadians need to have confi-

dence in the administration of justice, Canadians watching tonight and Canadians right across the country.

How do we ensure that confidence? We ensure that litigants who appear before our courts see themselves reflected in those courts, and that means Canadians of all backgrounds, all races, all religions, regardless of their sexual orientation, should be able to see themselves in front of that bench. We are doing that with these appointments.

To state that people better be Liberal in order to get appointed is patently false and does not denote the actual record, which is that we have appointed people who have been involved in political affiliations, political donations or political partisan activities from all major parties in the country. We are proud of that record.

We are ensuring we have a qualified bench, a meritorious bench that continues the tradition of fine judge-making in the country, which we are known for around the world.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, it is admirable and it is laudable that the government does endeavour to have a judiciary that reflects the face of the people who are served by the judiciary.

However, it can do that without just picking Liberals. We know it is a matter of public record that the Liberals vet their appointments through their database, through their partisan database, their fundraising database, their volunteer database. That is not in the best interests of democracy. It is not in the best interests of an independent and unbiased judiciary. That is what we are talking about.

What we are looking for from the Liberals is non-partisan appointments. When are they going to put Canadians ahead of their friends?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, what I would put for the member opposite and, indeed, to all parliamentarians is the track record of the previous government's appointments, when previous elected officials to this chamber were elevated to spots on the superior court versus what we have done.

We have put in place 17 judicial appointments committees around the country. We ensure those appointments committees are diverse with respect to their composition. There are representatives from law societies, from the superior courts themselves and from the chief justices of the various provinces. They make recommendations, "not recommended", "recommended" or "highly recommended".

The Minister of Justice has done exactly what the previous minister of justice did, which is only appoint from the pool of "recommended" or "highly recommended" officials. I will say what I said earlier. Are there people who have been involved in political activities through being engaged in their communities? Yes, there are. There are those who have touched all the parties in the country. That involvement is a good thing. We want fine jurists, and that is who we are appointing.

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• (1915)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am following up on a question I asked the Prime Minister earlier in which I raised two distinct issues. I spoke a little about Canadian participation in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and I also spoke about the Prime Minister announcing four years ago that Canada was in the beginnings of extradition discussions with the Government of China. I want to follow up on and highlight both of those very important issues again. I look forward to the feedback of the government on them.

First, as I pointed out at the time, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is part of a colonial project to expand Chinese government control and influence throughout Asia. In spite of the very clear objectives, briefing documents sent to the government by the public services pointed out that this is part of a belt and road initiative, which promotes values, economic security and ideas of human rights that are contrary to Canadian values and principles.

In spite of that, the Liberal government chose to bring Canada into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which means that we put over 400 million hard-earned taxpayer dollars into this bank. This bank is a vehicle for expanding the strategic influence of the Chinese government through which the Chinese government promotes models of governance, ideas about human rights and economic securities that are contrary to our values.

Why in the world would Canada participate in this? Why would Canadians want to see their dollars going to this type of a development bank? We have heard a couple of responses from the government on that. Sometimes we hear the government saying that this is about creating opportunities for Canadian companies, that maybe Canadian companies could get contracts with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank if we put taxpayer money into it.

Even if that were true, I do not think that this sort of backdoor corporate subsidy through the Chinese government is a very effective way of supporting Canadian businesses. In any event, it is not true. As I was able to establish when I visited the headquarters of the AIIB in Beijing, it has an open procurement policy so Canadian companies are welcome to bid on projects whether or not Canada is a member of the bank.

The government says it is important for us to be promoting development, participating in multilateral institutions and so forth. Yes, it is important for us to be participating in multilateral institutions that reflect and promote our values, not ones that are seeking to promote strategic interests in a model of government which is contrary to our values.

It is very sad to see how the Chinese government today is replicating colonial techniques in other parts of Asia that were tragically and wrongly used against China in the 19th century, and that it is inflicting the same humiliation on other countries. I think everyone can understand that it is not right and that Canada should not participate. In the exchange that took place previously in the House, the Prime Minister completely mischaracterized our participation in the AIIB.

I also raised the issue of extradition. Four years ago the Prime Minister announced the beginning of extradition discussions. At the time, when I asked the question in the House in the last month, the Prime Minister responded by saying that China does not meet the criteria for an extradition treaty. This is heartening because frankly it is obvious that the Chinese government does not meet the criteria for an extradition treaty. It did not four years ago, and it does not today.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary why is it that any discussions took place, because at the Canada-China committee our public servants confirmed that discussions did take place. When it was as obvious then as it is today that the criteria are not there, why was the door even opened? Canadians deserve an answer on that as well.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, through you, I want to thank the hon. member for his questions, particularly regarding the extradition discussions with China.

Let me be perfectly clear. Canada is not considering an extradition agreement with China. Canadian and Chinese officials have routinely discussed legal co-operation issues, including as part of the Canada-China national security and rule of law dialogue. During previous dialogues, Canadian and Chinese officials have held discussions on many issues of mutual interest in the areas of legal co-operation and rule of law matters. This has included counterterrorism, cybersecurity, combatting transnational organized crime, and international and regional security challenges. In the course of this dialogue, China expressed its interest in exploring an extradition agreement with Canada. That is not unusual.

Canada is a popular destination for travel and immigration. As such, we are regularly approached by foreign countries interested in joining the ranks of the 80 countries with which we have bilateral extradition agreements. If a treaty with a particular country is assessed to be in Canada's interest, this can lead to a formal negotiation process and eventually a new extradition treaty could be undertaken. Other times, when Canada does not feel a treaty with a given country is necessary, is possible or is in Canada's best interest, extradition treaty proposals do not move past an exploratory phase and are not acted upon.

In accordance with our values and laws, Canada expects its extradition partners to uphold the highest standards of due process and fair treatment in their judicial and correctional systems. These are the key elements in the extradition treaty agreement.

In the case of China's expression of interest, while early discussions did take place, no decision was ever made to engage further, to the point of formal negotiations.

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Nevertheless, China continues to be an important partner for Canada. China is Canada's third-largest merchandise trading partner and an important market for Canadian businesses. China is an important source of foreign students and tourists, who make important contributions to the Canadian economy.

Canada and China have many differences. That is perfectly clear. However, where there are differences, we will continue to have appropriate engagement. Canada places great importance on our relations with China. We will engage continually with the Government of China in a way that is in Canada's best interest, all the while defending Canadian values and advancing our interests.

With respect to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, I would simply say that our government is a pro-business government that looks for opportunities for Canadian businesses to engage in projects around the world in every way we can. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is one such opportunity. We will continue to support Canadian businesses so they can grow, expand and create prosperity in this country.

• (1920)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I have three brief points of follow-up for the parliamentary secretary.

With respect to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, I pointed out explicitly that those opportunities already existed for Canadian business because the AIIB has an open procurement policy. We still have not heard from the government as to why we joined the AIIB and spent over \$400 million of taxpayer money to do so when businesses already had the opportunity to apply for contracts. Was the government unaware of the open procurement policy of the AIIB? Did it not do its due diligence at that basic level? Why did we put \$400 million plus into this?

With respect to engagement, we heard some great testimony today at the Canada-China committee about how engagement is im-

portant and must be a means to an end, not an end in and of itself; that is, we engage with other countries in order to advance our values and interests, but we do not see engagement as an end in and of itself. That is very important.

On the issue of extradition, there was a joint communiqué issued that said, "The two sides determined that the short-term objectives for Canada-China cooperation on security and rule of law are to: start discussions on an Extradition Treaty and a Transfer of Offenders Treaty as well as other related matters".

I would like to know why that joint communiqué was sent, given what the parliamentary secretary said.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, let me be clear. Canada is not negotiating an extradition agreement with China. Canada is an independent sovereign nation. We recognize that China is and will continue to be a major player in international affairs. It is in Canada's best interest to engage appropriately with China. Canadians have decided who is best to engage with China as a government. Canadians have elected this government to do that. Canadians have put their trust in us to do that in a way that protects Canadian values, and in a way that assures that we will be engaged in human rights and those activities that Canadians value.

Despite our differences, we will continue to have a meaningful relationship that is in Canada's best interest and, at the same time, in the best interests of Canadian businesses.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:25 p.m.)

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