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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

The House met at 12 p.m.

Prayer

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Colleagues, before we begin our proceedings, I would like to say a few words regarding the special measures in place today.

[*English*]

Pursuant to orders made on Tuesday, May 26, the application of Standing Order 17 will be suspended for current sittings to allow members to practise physical distancing. Members desiring to speak and address the Chair may do so from any seat in the House.

[*Translation*]

In addition, as members know, this will be a hybrid sitting of the House. Some members will be participating via video conference and some will be participating in person.

[*English*]

I remind all members that in order to avoid issues with sound, members participating in person should not also be connected to the video conference. I would like to remind those joining via video conference that when speaking, you should be on the same channel as the language you are speaking.

Finally, I ask that all members who are tabling a document or moving a motion to sign the document and bring it to the Table themselves.

PRIVILEGE

RESPONSE BY THE PRIME MINISTER—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on July 20, by the Leader of the Opposition concerning remarks made by the Prime Minister in committee of the whole regarding an investigation headed by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. The Leader of the Opposition maintained that the Prime Minister had deliberately misled the House in his response to questions about his past co-operation on the investigation into SNC Lavalin matters. This question of privilege is related to the one that the Leader of the Opposition initially raised in the committee of the whole on July 8, 2020. However, he felt that, due to

exceptional circumstances, the Chair should consider the matter even in the absence of the committee report.

[*Translation*]

On July 21, 2020, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons presented arguments suggesting that the question of privilege was not valid, but he did not address whether it was appropriate to raise the matter with the Speaker directly.

Let me address this procedural issue first.

[*English*]

I accept that the particular circumstances of this situation, notably the challenge surrounding the committee of the whole format, do make it appropriate to bring the matter to the Speaker. While this is clearly an exceptional case, I do wonder if it would be useful for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to look into this issue of questions of privilege arising from committee more thoroughly, since, as the Leader of the Opposition noted, it is ultimately within Parliament's authority to defend members' privileges.

[*Translation*]

In the second part of his question of privilege, the Leader of the Opposition focused on the responses from the Prime Minister that he felt were misleading. He rightfully noted that there are three criteria that the Chair must assess in order to determine whether a statement sought to deliberately mislead the House. I will take them in turn.

[*English*]

The first criterion is whether the statement was in fact misleading. In the response at issue, the Prime Minister said that the government had taken “the unprecedented step of waiving cabinet confidentiality and of waiving solicitor-client confidentiality in the situation so that the Ethics Commissioner could fully investigate the matter at hand.”

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The Leader of the Opposition noted several passages of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's report which referred to the latter's "inability to access all Cabinet confidences related to the matter" and which led him to conclude that he was "unable to fully discharge the investigatory duties conferred upon" him. The report also suggests that some witnesses felt constrained by what they could say during the course of the investigation because the waiver of cabinet confidence was limited. These elements of the report led the Leader of the Opposition to conclude that the Prime Minister had misled the House in stating that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner had been able to fully investigate the matter.

[*Translation*]

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader argued that the Prime Minister's response was being taken out of context and that it referred to the unprecedented step that the government had taken in waiving access to cabinet confidences and solicitor-client privilege in the context of this investigation.

• (1210)

He further argued that the commissioner had himself stated that he had "gathered sufficient factual information to properly determine the matter on its merits".

[*English*]

The second criterion is whether the member making the statement knew it to be incorrect. The Leader of the Opposition argued that the Prime Minister must have known that the statement was incorrect because he would have been aware of the contents of the commissioner's report and that he had been questioned extensively in the House on the extent of the government's co-operation with the investigation. In return, the parliamentary secretary's assertion was that, in the context the response was provided, it was not incorrect at all.

[*Translation*]

The third criterion is whether, in making the statement, the member intended to mislead the House. The Leader of the Opposition did not provide any argument about what he viewed as the Prime Minister's intent, while the parliamentary secretary's contention is that the Prime Minister was speaking about the rationale for waiving certain privileged information in relation to the commissioner's investigation.

[*English*]

In reviewing these arguments, it appears to me as though there is a disagreement as to the meaning and the context of the Prime Minister's comments. It is reasonable for members to disagree as to what constitutes a full investigation or full co-operation and thus it is not obvious to the Chair that the statement was clearly misleading.

As a previous Speaker noted in a ruling that he delivered on April 30, 2014, "Members must recognize and accept the existence of differences of fact and interpretation, which have always been a part of the normal cut and thrust of debate and question period." I cannot therefore conclude that the first criterion was met.

If one cannot conclude definitely that a statement was misleading, it would be difficult to conclude that the member making that

statement knew it to be misleading and, as a result, that the member intended to mislead the House in making it.

Therefore, based on my assessment of these three criteria, the threshold for finding a prima facie question of privilege has not been met.

[*Translation*]

I thank the members for their attention.

[*English*]

Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, May 26, the House shall now resolve itself into a committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OTHER MATTERS

(House in committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters, Mr. Anthony Rota in the chair)

The Speaker: The committee will begin its proceeding with the questioning of ministers on matters relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters for a period not exceeding 95 minutes.

[*English*]

The Chair will call members from all recognized parties and one member who does not belong to a recognized party in a fashion consistent with the proportions observed during the special committee on the COVID-19 pandemic. Each member will be recognized for not more than five minutes, which may be used for posing questions to a minister of the Crown, and members are permitted to split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Please note that we will briefly suspend this part of the sitting partway through to allow members and employees who provide support for the sitting to replace each other safely.

[*English*]

We will now begin with the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have before us with the WE corruption scandal is an organization that receives sole-sourced contracts from the government, from the taxpayer. The organization then sets up a real estate company and gobbles up over \$40 million worth of prime downtown Toronto real estate. It also pays members of the Prime Minister's immediate family cash for speaking engagements. It also provides a huge platform for Liberals to do their campaigning. The organization even did an election-style ad promoting the Prime Minister.

Government Orders

However, it gets into trouble. Red flags start going up about its bank covenant, members of the board resign and so it lobbies the government and the government gives it another sole-sourced contract from which it can take \$40 million worth of administration.

Canadians, rightly, are concerned by this kind of “You scratch my back, I scratch your back” type of relationship with a Liberal-friendly organization. Therefore, I have a series of very simple yes or no questions to help Canadians understand the depths of this scandal.

Was the Prime Minister aware that the agreement he signed with this organization was not with the WE Charity itself but was with a shell corporation that has no assets and no history of charitable work?

• (1215)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as was made clear at committee, the non-partisan public service recommended this approach as the only way to deliver this program in the timeline required this summer during COVID. Last week, I acknowledged that I should have recused myself and I apologized.

However, our goal was and is to provide opportunities for students to serve in their communities right across the country in this unprecedented time. Obviously the way it unfolded was regrettable and the program is no longer unfolding, as we have said.

In regard to aspects of the WE Charity Foundation, the public service worked to find the best possible delivery of this program to get student grants for volunteer hours. The public service worked with the WE organization to develop the agreement and the work was done and negotiated at the officials' level in those details.

We have consistently approached it as a way of empowering young people across the country, the way other governments of all stripes have worked with this organization in the past.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, that did not answer the question.

Was the Prime Minister aware that this agreement was being signed with a shell corporation with no history of charitable work, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the details of the agreement were worked out at the officials' level.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has to understand that it is not about his recusing himself from this decision. The Clerk of the Privy Council himself said that it would be impossible for the Prime Minister and the finance minister to recuse themselves from giving a sole-source contract to an organization with such close ties to the Liberal Party and his immediate family.

Was the Prime Minister aware that the sole stated purpose of the shell corporation that signed the contracts was to hold real estate?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, as I said, governments of all stripes, including Stephen Harper's government, worked closely with this organization to deliver opportunities for young people. When it came to negotiating the specific contract with this organization, the civil service worked out the details of that.

The Speaker: I am just going to pause and stop the clock for a second.

I understand it is very emotional and it gets very tense in here sometimes, but coaching somebody with answers probably is not the right way to have these sessions. I just want to point that out to those who are shouting across from one side or the other.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister or anyone in his office receive the unsolicited proposal that Craig Kielburger sent to officials on April 9, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: No, Mr. Speaker. We moved forward on creating a program that would get young people to serve right across the country. The civil service made recommendations around which organization we could partner with.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister or anyone in his office receive the proposal that included the student grant program that was sent to the finance minister's office on April 21, a day before the announcement was made, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, throughout my career and throughout the life of this government we have been focused on giving opportunities to young people in a range of ways and we have continued to look to do that during this COVID crisis.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, he answered “no” to the previous question, but he could not answer yes or no to that question, so I wonder what that means.

Did the Prime Minister or anyone in his office speak to WE or anyone at WE prior to his April 22 announcement on the student grant?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, giving opportunities to young people through service and volunteer work across the country has been important to this government for an awfully long time. We will continue to look to create opportunities for young people.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this committee meeting on COVID-19 is to ensure that we are doing all we can to protect people's health and safety and help the economic recovery.

Government Orders

But what are we talking about? The only thing we are talking about is a situation that could be extremely bad for the management of the Canadian government. Is the Prime Minister concerned about how little time that leaves him to manage the country?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker, I am not concerned.

Yesterday, we passed an essential bill that will ensure that the emergency wage subsidy applies to more businesses and for a longer period of time. Last week, we negotiated a \$19-billion agreement with the provinces and territories for a safe restart.

We are continuing to work on things that count for Canadians. It is up to the opposition parties to choose what they want to ask questions about.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, when I do not have time to do something, I pay someone else who can do it better than I can.

The legislation we passed proves that Parliament and Canada do not need the Prime Minister as such, given his current state of mind. I am sure people know where I am going with this.

Was the Prime Minister aware that another not-for-profit organization wanted to get into real estate and that it would be getting millions of dollars from Canadians and Quebecers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the public service worked out the details of the arrangement.

I want to emphasize that, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have taken a creative and robust approach to delivering assistance to Canadians during this unprecedented situation. We have provided tremendous support to our seniors, our entrepreneurs, our families and our children, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to speculate on the outcome of any work to be done. The opposition parties are asking questions, the committees will be asking questions and the media will have some questions. We will get to the bottom of this.

Is the Prime Minister telling us that he is putting in the time to manage the WE scandal or that he is not doing his job and not dealing with it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, a prime minister has a great deal of work to do and I am managing numerous files concurrently.

The main issue I am dealing with is of course this pandemic, the economic and health crisis currently facing millions of Canadians. We are delivering for them.

Furthermore, I am also getting ready to answer any other questions the media, Canadians and the opposition parties might have. I can assure this House that my time is very well managed.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, how many meetings organized to handle the WE scandal has the Prime Minister attended?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I attend many meetings on various topics every day.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, how many meetings has the Prime Minister attended and approximately how many hours a week in total has he spent on managing the WE scandal, which clearly involves his family and maybe even himself?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the answer to that right at my fingertips. We will have a look and I will try to provide my hon. colleague with a better response that will show that my time is spent on delivering to Canadians.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, we are all waiting for the time when Parliament and the machinery of government can again properly focus on managing the real crisis, the health crisis, which is the most important thing to Canadians and Quebecers.

Until then, no matter what anybody says, the Prime Minister will have to devote a lot of time and attention to the scandal and will be preoccupied with anticipating and managing this crisis. Accordingly, not speculating on his personal involvement and because Parliament will be asking questions, should the Prime Minister not step aside temporarily and allow someone else with the necessary focus to run the country in his place?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I would not want the hon. member opposite to judge my mental focus. I can assure him that the work I do is focused on the well-being of Canadians. However, the opposition parties are spending far more time on this issue than on anything else.

I can assure the hon. member that I am focusing on Canadians, on the programs we are delivering to them and on the historical assistance that we are providing to Canadians during this unprecedented crisis.

• (1225)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the stories told by Rideau Hall employees are troubling. The Prime Minister has a role to play. Will he show leadership and launch an independent investigation?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians, especially members of the public service, have the right to a safe and secure workplace. That is extremely important.

That is why, on June 22, we established a program to increase protections—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby South.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, the stories shared by the workers at Rideau Hall are so troubling that the Prime Minister has a role to play. The Prime Minister can show leadership.

Will the Prime Minister show leadership and launch an independent investigation?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, obviously every Canadian has the right to a safe, secure workspace that is free from harassment. That is extremely important. That is why we moved forward on June 22 with announcements on strengthening the oversight in federally regulated agencies and environments, including the public service.

Government Orders

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I want to switch gears on the next question.

What is the government's plan for the CERB at the end of August?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, given this unprecedented pandemic, we had to bring in a program to help millions of Canadians who lost their revenue. We will continue to support Canadians in different ways moving forward.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a plan.

I met a couple who works in music production. They support concerts by helping to set up the stage. They lost their jobs and have no hope of returning to jobs. What is the plan for that couple?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, this government has been there for Canadians through this pandemic, and we will continue to be there for Canadians and support families like theirs through this difficult time.

We know that the relaunch is beginning to happen in some sectors, but not everyone has a job. We will—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, that was pretty vague, so let me ask this more directly. Will the Prime Minister extend the CERB, or will he end it at the end of August?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic, we have responded to the needs of Canadians by adjusting programs and extending programs. We will continue to support Canadians through this pandemic.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, there was no answer there, but I will ask another more specific question. Will the Prime Minister commit to fixing EI so that it applies to all Canadians and they can use it when they need it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic, this government has been there for Canadians. Eight million Canadians are receiving the CERB and millions more are on the wage subsidy. We will continue to support Canadians as the recovery happens and the economy gets going again.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. People are seeing a Prime Minister who seems more interested in helping close friends by giving millions of dollars to WE Charity. They are still worried about their futures, and they do not know if the Prime Minister is focused on helping them or just helping his close friends.

Will the Prime Minister commit to improving EI and extending the CERB to ensure that people are not left in the lurch come the end of August?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, what we have done since the beginning of this pandemic has been there for Canadians. We have been investing and supporting Canadians who lost their jobs, who lost their paycheques, who are facing uncertainty. Eight million Canadians are receiving the CERB, and there are millions more on the wage subsidy.

We will continue to be there to support Canadians through this pandemic. That is what this government is focused on, regardless of what the opposition seems to be focused on.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, those millions of Canadians need to know that there is a plan at the end of August. I am simply asking a direct question: What is that plan?

Will the government improve EI to help all Canadians? Will the government extend the CERB? People need to know. Will the Prime Minister answer the question?

• (1230)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, from the beginning, we have welcomed the questions and proposals from opposition parties on improving the various programs we have put forward, and we have incorporated many of them.

I can assure Canadians that we will continue to support them in this recovery. We will be there as we have in the past. We will be there for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is the Prime Minister aware that the volunteer program agreement was signed with a WE Charity shell corporation that has no assets, no history and no record of charitable work?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, our goal remains to help Canadians during the pandemic.

The public service negotiated this contribution agreement and made a recommendation that I accepted.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, was the Prime Minister aware that the sole purpose of this shell corporation was to hold real estate?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, we will continue to ensure that Canadians have the necessary programs and resources. The members opposite clearly have questions about the WE organization. They have to ask them—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, coincidentally, the day the Prime Minister announced the volunteer grants, WE presented its plan to the government to distribute this money. This was a \$900-million plan.

Can the government confirm whether this is true?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we have announced a number of programs for Canadian youth to ensure that students have the resources they need. We know that the pandemic has affected all Canadians, including students.

Government Orders

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, did the WE organization and the Prime Minister work closely together to develop the volunteer grants program behind closed doors?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as I have said on a number of occasions, the public service made a recommendation. It worked to ensure there was a plan to help students during this pandemic. We accepted its recommendation.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, was the Prime Minister aware of WE Charity's financial problems, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the public service negotiated this contribution agreement with the WE organization.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, would the contract awarded to WE Charity have paid off most of its debts to its creditors?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it was a contribution agreement that was negotiated with the organization, and since the Standing Committee on Finance asked us to testify, we did. The public service also answered these questions.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, is it not true that the volunteer grant program was a way to return a favour in order to save WE Charity from its financial troubles?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the aim of the Canada student service grant was always to connect post-secondary students and recent graduates who want to support their communities' COVID-19 response.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, what provision allowed the Prime Minister to avoid holding a public tendering process for such a big contract?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a pandemic that is affecting all Canadians. We worked with the public service, which we know works very hard. The public service received a project from our government, an idea, and made a recommendation.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, when did the WE Charity contact the government or the Prime Minister to provide a draft of the Canada student service grant program?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the public service appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance and answered those questions.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, given all of the scandal surrounding the grant program, does the Prime Minister still think it is relevant?

• (1235)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we know that we need a range of programs to get through this pandemic. Canadians across the country have many needs. We will continue to respond to those needs.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, will it be up to the public service to roll out this program?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we know that those questions were asked yesterday before the Standing Committee on Finance. We will always work to ensure that our programs are there for Canadians.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, that story seems very suspicious.

Why would the government give money to a shell corporation without any accountability to our government?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Canadians are asking for information. We want that information to be accessible to everyone and we will continue to answer questions. That is why we appeared in committee to answer questions. We know that the public service is working very hard, and we will continue to work with the public service for Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

The website iwanttohelp.org is the platform set up for Canadians to apply for the Canada student service grant. When Canadians apply on iwanttohelp.org, is their information kept on Canadian servers?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for that question because it is an example of the type of question that was posed between my office and public servants to ensure, within the contribution agreement, that we always maintain the health, safety and security of Canadians. As we know, the contribution agreement is proactively disclosed and will be available for all.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I hope that answer will also include whether or not the information is on government servers.

With what the government is saying with respect to WE, it either has a deeply flawed decision-making process for billion-dollar projects or it routinely allows billion-dollar conflicts of interest to simply slip by. Either possibility is troubling. My question is for the finance minister: Which is it?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we have been clear that our focus as a government is to deliver for Canadians during this very challenging time. I will remind the member that we have an Ethics Commissioner who is doing that important work. We have agreed to ensure the Ethics Commissioner receives all the information necessary.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, did the minister ever discuss the WE deal with the Prime Minister?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, when I was asked to appear at committee, I was able to share the timeline of events that took place. When it came to ensuring this program could be delivered, the public—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Government Orders

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, did the minister discuss this with the finance minister?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the public service made a recommendation, and I accepted the recommendation. As has been noted, this was a conversation that took place at cabinet at that point—

The Speaker: The member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfortunate that the Liberal government and Liberal politicians seem to be quick to throw hard-working public servants under the bus.

I have heard from a number of farmers and certified seed growers in my constituency who are concerned about the prospect of what are called “trailing seed royalties”. Can the Minister of Agriculture commit to full consults with producers on this issue?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure my colleague that I am following this file very closely. We are working with the various stakeholders, including the producers who have a stake in the matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to recent reports, the Canadian Football League has sent the heritage minister a new request for a \$42.5-million relief package from the government. Apparently, the money would be used to cover the salaries of players and operating costs.

Does the government intend on giving the Canadian Football League this money, as requested, by tomorrow?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that for many Canadians professional sport is a facet of their daily life and we certainly respect that. Through Sport Canada, our government funds amateur and youth programs across the country. Sport Canada does not provide funding to for-profit independent leagues or those outside Football Canada's mandate. We encourage organizations in need of assistance to talk to their financial institution to see what options are available to them.

• (1240)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, I take it the answer to the Canadian Football League would be “no”.

The other question I have is this. Earlier this month, the government granted exemptions to allow hundreds of foreign National Hockey League players to enter Canada, specifically in Toronto and Edmonton, to allow them to participate in the upcoming NHL playoffs. Many of these players are coming from countries with far worse COVID-19 conditions than ours.

What steps is the government taking to protect Canadians, especially in Toronto and Edmonton, so this does not cause further breakouts of COVID-19?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, we know Canadians are eager to see their favourite sports team return to play. PHAC has assessed the National Hockey League's plan for pre-season training. When fully implemented, this plan offers robust measures to pre-

vent new cases and the spread of COVID-19 in Canada. The league has obtained a written commitment from both these cities and public health authorities to support the proposed measures.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Steveston—Richmond East.

My question is for the Minister of Immigration or the Minister of Public Safety, and it is regarding the Auditor General's revelation of a backlog of 50,000 individuals ordered removed from Canada and the 35,000 of these individuals who are now missing across Canada. What is the plan to locate and prepare these missing 35,000 individuals ordered removed in the post-COVID period?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking the Auditor General for her work on this report. We accept her findings and her recommendations, but let me also ensure the member opposite that this was not a revelation. It is something we have been working on diligently over the past five years.

Our government is committed to a robust and fair refugee system that provides protection to those who need it most, while always protecting the safety of Canadians by keeping our borders secure. Everyone ordered removed has been given due process. Once all legal avenues have been exhausted, removals of inadmissible persons have continued to increase annually. Each year—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Thornhill.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, that is certainly a sad commentary on what the government has been doing for the past five years.

My next question is for the Minister of Immigration. I understand the minister's office has received hundreds, perhaps thousands, of requests, some of them very emotional, regarding spousal and family reunification with non-Canadian partners and their adult children. One Facebook group, called Advocacy for Family Reunification at the Canadian Borders, claims 3,000 members who are currently separated from their loved ones. Their applications have been delayed by COVID-19.

I ask the minister this: Where does that program fall within your governmental priorities?

The Speaker: I want to interrupt for a moment and remind the hon. members that when they are placing questions, or even answering them, to speak through the Chair and not directly to another member. I know it is a more laid back in committee, and we have a tendency to get chummy and friendly, but maybe remember to put it through the Chair.

The hon. minister.

Government Orders

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would begin by emphasizing that we understand that this has been a very challenging and difficult time for families. Notwithstanding the challenges of COVID-19, my department has worked very diligently to find new, innovative ways to reunite families. We have also created an exemption at the border to help reunite families without in any way compromising the health and safety of Canadians. We continue to work with all members to achieve that goal.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, international students enrich the learning experience at colleges, universities and schools across Canada, and they help enrich Canadian society even further. They also contribute \$22 billion annually to the economy, which supports 170,000 Canadian jobs.

Given that the order in council made March 26 does not apply to holders of a valid student permit as defined in part 2 of the immigration and refugee protection regulations, nor does it apply to persons whose application for a study permit was approved under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, will the Government of Canada permit minor children who are enrolling in K-12 international programs in Canadian public schools and who are in possession of a valid study permit, including those issued after March 18, to enter Canada to pursue their studies?

• (1245)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I will begin by agreeing that the international student program is a tremendous economic driver that contributes over \$21.6 billion every year to the Canadian GDP. That is one of the reasons we created an exemption at the border without in any way compromising the health and safety of Canadians as we continue to manage COVID-19.

I do have a slight clarification for my hon. colleague. There are indeed exemptions that are currently in place and we are looking very actively at continuing those in close coordination with provinces, territories and designated learning institutions.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been on record saying that the government chose WE Charity to administer the Canada student service grant because bureaucrats recommended it as the only organization capable of delivering such a program. Since then, we have learned that this is an entirely false statement.

In fact, it was a different charity called WE Charity Foundation that was contracted. It is an organization that only received charitable status one year prior to the contract date, and that had zero track record. That charity's stated purpose was to "hold real estate". This is either gross negligence or blatant incompetence from a government that claims to fight for Canadians during a global pandemic. I would like to know which one it is.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have to answer neither. The public service worked to find the best possible delivery of this program to get grants to students for their volunteer hours. The public service worked with the WE organization to develop this agreement. The work was done and negotiated at the official level. Obviously, the program did not unfold as was intended and the organization is no longer delivering the program.

As was referred to his colleague prior, in regard to the work the public service does, we are talking about the non-partisan, very professional public service, which is delivering a vast number of programs that have helped millions of Canadians. It is important that we all acknowledge that it is an unprecedented time and everyone is working hard to deliver for Canadians.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

We know that COVID-19 is top of mind for all Canadians, but constituents in my riding need to have some help with some other health-related concerns. Currently, a loophole in the federal medical marijuana regulations is allowing large-scale grow ops to emerge without any of the protocols to which the regular licensed marijuana producers are subject to. Area residents are forced to deal with light pollution, an overwhelming smell and safety risks. We also have reports that these operations are fuelling the black market. Will the minister please tell us what steps she is taking to close this loophole?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians have confidence that we are properly regulating the marijuana industry, including producers of medical marijuana. I take this very seriously, and it is a priority for me. I will endeavour to look into the specific complaints and come back to her office with some resolution.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, according to reports, the Liberal government failed to request up-to-date housing reports before approving migrant workers to come to Canada. Since then, we have seen outbreaks on farms that have put our food supply and the safety of workers at risk. With COVID-19 on the rise, why did the minister not request up-to-date housing reports?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, employers of temporary foreign workers have an important role to play in helping prevent the introduction and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Temporary foreign workers entering Canada must comply with all public health requirements, including a mandatory 14-day quarantine. These rules are important for maintaining public health and safety.

In addition, employers of temporary foreign workers are also responsible for their workplaces—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk, a very short question and, hopefully, a very short answer.

Government Orders

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, that did not answer the last question.

Business owners in my riding are already saying that the changes to the wage subsidy program have made it even more difficult to apply. I have one who is saying it is not worth it because the cost for the accountant would be greater than the potential benefit. Why is the government determined to leave small business owners struggling, instead of making it simpler and easier for them to get ahead?

• (1250)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that it is very important for us to get the support needed for businesses that are struggling through this pandemic challenge. We know the broadening of the wage subsidy program and its extension for a longer duration is going to support businesses, and we are committed to ensuring that we help business owners calculate the support they will get through this really challenging time. We think this is a very important—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, has the Liberal Party ever received any personal data of young Canadians from any of the WE entities?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the CSSG, we did collect data to ensure that the most vulnerable populations would be able to participate. In regard to the specific question, I can ask and get back to him.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, in the finance committee, just moments ago, there were allegations that WE has transferred data to the Liberal Party of Canada. When they were asked, WE officials refused to actually answer the question, so I am going to ask specifically again: At any time, has WE or any of its entities sent data to the Liberal Party of Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the premise of that question is entirely false.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I am actually referring to testimony that just happened at the finance committee, where it has been alleged by one of the witnesses that WE has transferred information, the personal data of Canadians, to the Liberal Party of Canada. When WE was asked about this directly, it refused to answer, just like the government is refusing to answering.

Can we have a clear answer? Can we shine some light on this issue? Yes or no, has the Liberal Party of Canada ever received the data of Canadians from WE?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I can hear the interim leader of the official opposition yelling at me. I will answer the question.

Members of the finance committee have asked us to appear. At my first opportunity, I was there to answer those questions. Members of all parties passed a motion to ensure that information would be available. Officials have been appearing. What we hear from the member's question is that obviously those answers are being provided, because we also want to ensure that Canadians receive this information.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, it is either a yes or a no. The fact that the Liberals are refusing to respond with a no means that the answer is obviously yes.

Therefore, my question is this: How much information has the government received from WE, and when did it receive it?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the member refers to allegations with a predetermined outcome. That is the Conservative way.

On this side, we will stay focused on Canadians to ensure that they have the programs and resources they need. When members of the finance committee, members of all parties, asked us to appear, we appeared because we respect the democratic institutions and our processes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Abbotsford.

Per section 25 of the Investment Canada Act, has the minister notified Huawei of his intent to conduct a national security review of Huawei's announced prospective investment?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite full well knows, with regard to any 5G deployment and anything that pertains to protecting Canadians, we will take appropriate measures to make sure that we come forward with an appropriate decision that is in the best interests of Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, per section 25 of the Investment Canada Act, has the minister notified Huawei of his intent to conduct a national security review, yes or no?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, all such transactions taking place in Canada are subject to a national security assessment and we will make sure that continues going forward.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, on what precise date did the minister notify Huawei of the intention to conduct a national security review?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to remind the hon. member that when it comes to the deployment of 5G or any transactions occurring in Canada that are subject to the Investment Canada Act, all of the appropriate processes and procedures will be followed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, the reason I am asking these questions is that the process I am referring to only has a 45-day window to complete the national security review and provide a recommendation with regard to the project.

Did the Prime Minister include the Time Limits and Other Periods Act in Bill C-20 as a way to kick the Huawei decision down the road for another six months?

Government Orders

• (1255)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite full well knows that we are engaging with the telecommunications sector, that we are working with our allies and national security experts to make the appropriate decision on behalf of Canadians to ensure that their interests are protected and they are continually protected going forward. That will always remain our priority.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, does the minister intend to use the Time Limits and Other Periods Act provisions in Bill C-20 to kick the Huawei decision down the road for another six months?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do our due diligence when it comes to the deployment of 5G in Canada. We have been very clear that this is an important technology and that it needs to be deployed in a very safe and secure manner. That will guide our decision-making process.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to know how deeply the Prime Minister was in bed with the WE organization. We know that the Prime Minister's family received hundreds of thousands of dollars in speaking fees, and, of course, he returned the favour by giving one of the charity's shell companies almost \$1 billion to run a volunteer program.

To the Prime Minister, has any member of his extended family ever been a principal or a shareholder of, or held any financial interest in, ME to WE Social Enterprises Inc., ME to WE Asset Holdings Inc., Global Impact Fund Inc., ME to WE foundation or any other related corporations, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have put out a suite of programs to deliver for Canadians and we want to ensure that all Canadians, including students, have programs and resources available.

When it comes to the CSSG, the non-partisan, very professional public service made a recommendation. I accepted that recommendation. It appears there is a new Conservative member who has questions for the organization, and I believe those questions should be directed to the organization so it can talk about its practices.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, that was no answer. After everything we have seen with this scandal, the government will not tell us to what degree the Prime Minister's family holds a financial interest in a tangled web of for-profit activities of the Kielburgers' WE Charity.

I will ask the question a little differently. Has anyone in the Prime Minister's extended family ever held a financial interest in or been a shareholder or partner in a for-profit venture or corporation involving Marc Kielburger, Craig Kielburger, or both, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, my focus and our government's focus has been on Canadians to ensure that they have the programs and resources they need. Within our democratic institutions, we have officers of Parliament that one reports to in order to provide a lot of this information to ensure that it is there.

Yesterday, the Clerk of the Privy Council was at the finance committee and explained that before I was the Minister of Youth, the Prime Minister was the minister of youth, and prior to that was the critic for youth, because when it comes to the youth of our country,

not only are they the leaders of tomorrow, but the leaders of today. We will represent them. We will ensure that they have the programs and services they need. They will remain our focus.

We will stay focused on Canadians while the Conservatives continue to try to divert, distract and whatever else they are doing. We know we are in the midst of a pandemic. We need to deliver for Canadians. That is what we are here to do.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Chair, we are in the middle of a pandemic. Now more than ever, we need our government and we need it to be effective, but the Liberal government created a sponsorship program to help Trudeau family friends. We are not okay with that.

This is about scholarships, student assistance and volunteering. We agree that those are all good things.

The problem is that the program was handed over to an organization linked to the Trudeau family, an organization that, in recent years, has paid over a quarter of a million dollars to the Trudeau family for little speaking engagements.

The government claimed that it gave the program to WE Charity because it had no choice: WE Charity was the only organization that could administer the program. Day after day, as witnesses appeared before the committee, it became increasingly clear to us that that was not true. Many other organizations could have done it. The public service could have done it.

Here is the question I would like one of the ministers to answer: Why was there no call for tenders?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, as I said, we came up with an idea for a program that would have another program to help students, and the public service made a recommendation.

Yesterday, the member opposite heard the testimony of the Clerk of the Privy Council, who said that they did their work and submitted their recommendations.

The member asked what programs we created.

[*English*]

As of June 28, the CERB has supported 8.16 million individuals; the CEWS has supported three million employees; approximately 3.7 million families have benefited from the CPP top-up of \$300; and 12 million individuals and families have received the special—

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Chair, why was there no call for tenders?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, we have a professional public service.

Public servants work very hard. They made a recommendation and have answered those questions. During the pandemic, there were a lot of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Chair, why was there no call for tenders? This is the third time I have asked this question.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, because the public service recommended that organization. We asked some questions and we accepted the recommendation. That is why.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Chair, that is nonsense. Initially we were told it was because they did not have time. They said the tender process would have taken too long and the WE Charity could do it. We learned in committee that, in early April, the WE Charity sent an unsolicited proposal for a program and it was left at that.

On April 19, Rachel Wernick called Mr. Kielburger to ask him to transfer his proposal and make an offer on the student grant program. Three days later, Mr. Kielburger sent his proposal to Ottawa.

Why did the government not take the time to issue a call for tenders?

It might have taken three weeks, but at least it would have been done by the book, which would have avoided the perception that the government was paying \$43 million in taxpayer money to friends of the Trudeau family.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, the member opposite is confusing matters on purpose. He was at committee and heard the testimony. I knew that the Conservatives like these types of tactics, but I now see that the Bloc Québécois uses them as well. We are here to do a job.

[*English*]

As I mentioned yesterday, the unsolicited proposal that came to my office was not the CSSG. I repeat, the unsolicited proposal that came to my office was not the CSSG. The organization has put it into the public forum. The member can look at the details.

I would encourage him to stay focused on Canadians and Quebecers. There are a lot of needs out there. Let us keep delivering for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Chair, what I said was that in early April it was not a proposal for managing the grant. I acknowledge that. However, on April 19, Mr. Kielburger was called and three days later, on April 22, he sent a proposal.

I will repeat my question: Why did they not issue a call for tenders?

• (1305)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, it was because the public service made a recommendation. The member opposite has this information because of the witnesses who were able to testify before the committee. The Standing Committee on Finance asked me to testify and I appeared. I provided information.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Chair, yesterday, the president of the public service union told me that there was no problem, that it could have handled it with the public service and that, if they had, the money would be out the door as we speak and people would be working.

Why did they not issue a call for tenders?

If the Liberals want to do business with the public service, let them. They gave this to friends of the Trudeau family. We can look for an explanation, but there is none.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, our government will continue to help Canadians during the pandemic. We know that everyone has been affected, including students. We are going to make sure that they have the necessary programs. We will be there for Canadians during the pandemic, as we have been ever since we formed government.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills.

Prince Edward Island has a seasonal economy. The dominant sectors are farming, fishing and tourism. Workers in these sectors produce world-class food and experiences that land on the plates and in the hearts of millions every year. They take pride in their work, and with good reason.

In 2014, the Harper government made the political decision to divide Prince Edward Island into two employment insurance zones. As a result, seasonal workers in the Charlottetown zone have to find more work to receive less EI benefits than their fellow islanders in the other zone. This has unnecessarily pitted seasonal workers against each other and created a system that incentivizes dishonesty. Despite seven years of advocacy for change, a review of these EI zones has either never taken place or has taken place without any public input. Now, in the midst of a global pandemic, the seasonal workers are scrambling to rack up enough hours to qualify. If they fail, they will face a long and cold island winter with no income.

Will the minister commit to helping these seasonal workers by reverting P.E.I. to one zone and providing additional emergency supports?

Government Orders

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, Canadians expect and deserve an EI system that is responsive to their needs. That is why our government has reduced the waiting period for EI from two weeks to one week, expanded the working-while-on-claim provisions and made them permanent, and created new EI provisions for workers in seasonal industries. This includes a pilot project that provides up to five additional weeks of EI to eligible seasonal claimants. We are committed to making this pilot project permanent. We are aware of the impact that COVID-19 has had on workers in seasonal industries, and that is why we improved access to the CERB by extending this benefit to include seasonal workers so more Canadians can get the help they need now.

We are also aware of the impact that COVID-19 has had on some Canadians meeting the eligibility requirements for EI regular benefits. We are evaluating various options to ensure that Canadians, including those in seasonal industries, continue to have the supports they need. EI—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Chair, this pandemic has amplified innovation for commerce, for social justice and for communicating with family and friends through the Internet. We live in a world where the majority of Canadians rely on the Internet for work, social activity and entertainment. Canadians are spending more and more time online than ever. Unfortunately, the virtual space has also seen an amplification of criminal activity. Vulnerable populations are being exploited now more than ever, especially through crimes of human trafficking and child exploitation.

The RCMP's National Child Exploitation Crime Centre has seen an increase in sexual exploitation cases online. Perpetrators are taking advantage of children who may have limited supervision. Child exploitation is on the rise, and human trafficking for sex and labour continues during this pandemic.

Could the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness please update the House on measures that this government is taking to make the virtual world safe for all children and to combat exploitation and human trafficking?

• (1310)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for her unrelenting advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable people in our population, including, of course, women and girls.

The issue that she raises of the sexual exploitation of children in particular is the most heinous of crimes. It can leave survivors with long-lasting and lifelong consequences. We know that many people during the pandemic have become increasingly vulnerable, and as the member has indicated, the RCMP is seeing, as we are internationally, an increase in online exploitation during the period of isolation imposed by COVID-19.

I want to assure the members in the House that we are making significant investments in prevention by raising awareness of this

serious issue and working to reduce the stigma associated with reporting. At the same, we are providing the necessary resources to police to enhance the capacity of the Internet child exploitation units and inform the work of prosecutors to bring these heinous criminals to justice.

We have also joined with our Five Eyes partners in the adoption of voluntary principles, bringing in international co-operation to deal with child exploitation. We are funding the National Human Trafficking Hotline, currently accessible by phone, text or email 24/7, to connect survivors of human trafficking to the services and programs they need.

There is more that we need to do, and we will be addressing this in the coming weeks through the development of a national strategy to deal with violence against women and girls.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Child care is essential for restarting our economy. Women have been the hardest hit by COVID-19, and they are the ones who will bear the greatest burden when it comes to child and family care. Any economic recovery must include a rigorous child care plan.

Will the government help women get back to work by committing to invest \$2.5 billion in child care this year?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, I completely agree with the hon. member that we need to reinforce the child care sector to enable parents, especially mothers, to go back to work.

We are moving ahead with our bilateral agreements on early learning and child care, and are transferring \$400 million to the provinces and territories. In addition to that, early learning and child care assistance to the provinces and territories is part of our safe restart agreement, with funding in the amount of \$625 million. Therefore, just this fiscal year, there will be over \$1 billion for EL-CC.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, that is not \$2.5 billion.

Quality, affordable child care was difficult to secure in Alberta even before the pandemic. Providing families with guaranteed, safe, standardized and affordable child care could dramatically help Albertans.

Will the minister commit to an ongoing child care program, like the Canada Health Act, that ensures quality, affordable child care is available to all Canadians, no matter where they live?

Government Orders

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, what I can commit to the hon. member is that on this side of the House we will continue to be ambitious and build on our progress of creating 40,000 affordable child care spaces. We are committed to creating an additional 250,000 before- and after-school spaces that are affordable for families.

We are continuing our investments, with \$7.5 billion over the next decade in direct investments for early learning and child care and the establishment of an early learning and child care secretariat on a national level to share best practices and data and ensure that every single child has the best possible start.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, in Alberta, provincial support for child care during the first two months of the pandemic was ranked as the worst in Canada. It is vital that all federal funds that go to provinces must go toward creating affordable universally accessible child care.

How can we make sure that Jason Kenney and the UCP will use the federal dollars provided to create new, affordable child care spaces?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, in addition to our ambitious targets and key funding supports for early learning and child care with the provinces and territories, we work together, through the early learning and child care agreements, with the provinces and territories. We also have a pan-Canadian framework that we and the provinces and territories have to abide by. That is our assurance.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Chair, there is not one pandemic in Canada; there are two. The number of Canadians dying from opioids in our country is staggering and growing. Over 15,000 mothers, fathers, sons and daughters have died in the last four years alone, and June saw the most opioid deaths in British Columbia's history.

What is the Liberal plan to address the overdose pandemic ravaging our country?

• (1315)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, I share the member's complete devastation over the numbers of opioid overdoses coming out of B.C. Of course, we have known about this crisis for a very long time, and the Liberal government has taken strong steps over the last four or five years to ensure that communities and provinces have the tools they need, including expansive harm reduction supports, access to safe supply and funding for not-for-profit and health-based organizations that are working with people who use substances.

Our government will ensure that we continue to make all tools available to the provinces and territories as they work to support citizens—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Chair, it is not working. The cause of the opioid carnage is clear for all to see: a toxic street supply sold by criminals who do not care about poisoning Canadians.

Public health officers, police chiefs and now premiers are calling on the government to do the right thing and act with logic, compassion and courage to decriminalize drug use and medically regulate a safe supply.

When is the government going to listen to the experts, respect the evidence and treat addiction as a health issue, not a criminal one?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I would argue that this is exactly what the Liberal government has been doing for five years: working with experts, listening to experts and working with communities to make sure we have safe supply, safer consumption sites, overdose prevention programs and increased access to prescribed medications that support substance use recovery. We have been looking at other ways besides enforcement to deal with problematic substance use.

We know on this side of the House that this is, in fact, a health issue, not an issue of criminality. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories to ensure that they have all the tools they need to save more lives.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the dean of our caucus, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

I have a question from Darryl in my riding, who runs a small business. When he looked at the CEWS program, he noticed that the information provided on the website would make it more difficult and more complex for him to hire more people. Let me explain. The program requires a company to have reporting periods. If he hires a person on the 15th day, he does not get any money from the 1st to the 14th days. That is usually not a problem, as we do not pay a business when it is not hiring people, but it means that if he hires someone after the middle of the reporting period, he misses out on two weeks to support those wages.

My question is for the finance minister. Will the changes in Bill C-20 address this issue?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think we all share the goal of providing support for businesses so that they can employ more people as we move out of this crisis carefully and safely.

The program, as we have designed it, allows for an expansion of the number of businesses that can use the wage subsidy to get employees back to work and a lengthening of the time they can have it so they can have more confidence.

Government Orders

We recognize that there is clearly a need to communicate this effectively. That is something we plan to do with a calculator, and businesses can use it. Of course, we will continue to support businesses as they hire back employees in the future. That is certainly our ongoing goal.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, Darryl would say that you don't need a calculator but a degree in quantum computing to understand what is inside Bill C-20 and how it changes the CEWS program.

I want to know something for his specific situation, which is in example 22 on the website. Perhaps there have been temporary lay-offs or furloughed employees, or there are employees on shifts. If they do not work for two weeks, their entire wage for the 30-day reporting period is not eligible if a business brings them back, which is a real pain for businesses that are trying to keep their operations going.

Again, to the finance minister, do the changes in Bill C-20 address this particular business issue?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, again, we know from the work we have done that this will significantly expand the number of employers able to use the wage subsidy and significantly expand the number of employees who will be able to get back to work. We will continue to work with employers to make sure that we understand how this can best be utilized by—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

• (1320)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Chair, will the defence minister table for the House a copy of the briefing notes he was given January 17 on the COVID outbreak?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Chair, as the crisis has developed, we have monitored the progression of the outbreak in China. While we do not comment on specific intelligence reports, I do receive regular briefings to ensure the safety and security of Canadians as well as—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, a viral outbreak is not a secret, so why does the minister not redact what he must to protect sources and table the briefing notes in this chamber?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Chair, our government makes decisions based on sound intelligence, just as we did with the downing of the Ukrainian airliner. We will continue to do so, making sure that Canadians are safe.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, in the minister's mandate letter, the government promised to be more transparent and respect Parliament. What is he trying to cover up?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Chair, the member opposite may not know this, but I have actually regularly briefed all critics on the many crises that we have dealt with in 2020. I will continue to do so.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, why is the minister covering up the heads-up he was given?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Chair, I can assure the member that we make decisions based on sound intelligence, just as we did with the downing of the Ukrainian airliner. We will continue to do so to keep Canadians safe.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, what did the briefing say about human-to-human transmission of the virus?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Chair, as I stated, when it comes to specific intelligence reports, we do not comment. One thing I can assure the member is that we make decisions based on sound intelligence to make sure that Canadians are safe.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, did the briefing indicate any concerns over China's transparency regarding human-to-human transmission?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Chair, as I stated, we do not talk about intelligence reports, for obvious reasons. However, one thing I can assure the member is that we make decisions based on sound intelligence to make sure that we keep Canadians safe. We have done so. We have dealt with many crises since I started—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, with a very short question.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, there was a sole-source contract for \$24,990 with WE Charity from the Public Health Agency during last year's election. What was it for?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, I believe that is the question the member asked yesterday. As I stated in the House, we will get the information and make sure the member has it.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Beauce.

The list of questions about the Liberal government and its relationship with the WE organization grows, and here is another one.

In 2017, the Liberal government paid over \$13,000 to the WE organization to help secure the appearances of Canadian talent at WE California that year. One of the speakers at the event was Canadian Lilly Singh, who in 2015 called the Prime Minister her dashing Prime Minister on Facebook and proclaimed to have a #mancrush on Instagram.

This begs the question: How many friends of the Prime Minister have been paid by taxpayers thanks to his government's relationship with the WE organization?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am not sure where these questions are going. We will ensure that information will be made available. When I was at committee, I said that we would make as much information available as possible. The clerk was there yesterday. He also committed to making that information available.

However, let us talk about Canadians. Let us talk about our Canadian friends.

Since June 28, 8.16 million individuals have received the CERB; three million employees have received the CEWS; 3.7 million families have benefited from the CCB top-up of \$300; 12 million individuals and families received the special one-time payment through the GST credit; and over \$1.4 billion were given to over 6,000 students through the CESB.

We will deliver for Canadians during this—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies.

• (1325)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, that was a question about WE, not about what the government was supposedly doing.

Airlines in the north provide critical services to remote fly-in communities, including supplying food and providing access to health services. To help ensure these services continue uninterrupted, the Northern Air Transport Association has recommended that the government suspend federal excise and carbon taxes.

Is the Minister of Finance considering this recommendation, which would help alleviate the negative financial impact the pandemic has on this vital industry?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, our government has been working with the Northern Air Transport Association and all airlines that supply the north with vital supplies, including medicines, food and people to go up there and provide essential services. We will continue to do that.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Chair, the recently released Senate report on the federal government's COVID-19 response recommends that the government work with the territories to ensure that northern airlines have sufficient financial support and access to gateway routes.

Could the Minister of Northern Affairs please outline what further action the government will be taking to protect this vital transportation network, given this recommendation?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, we have been working very closely with northern airline organizations and with the territories. We have already provided \$17.3 million to the three territories, and we were working on finding solutions for the ongoing need to resupply the north.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Chair, my office is trying to help the largest possible number of businesses in my riding. However, the system for immigration and temporary workers is highly problematic. The labour market studies take far too much time. To my knowledge, these requests previously went di-

Government Orders

rectly to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Now, they also need to go through Employment and Social Development Canada.

I know that baseball training camps just started, but ministers should not just be tossing the ball around.

Seriously, how does the government explain the delay in processing applications, and what does it intend to do about it? I am looking for meaningful action, not just rhetoric.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to start by correcting my colleague. Unfortunately, we are not playing baseball.

To answer his question, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada continues to process work permit applications, prioritizing resources to high-demand occupations, such as agriculture and food. As for temporary workers who were already in Canada and have been affected by COVID-19, we already have additional strategies in place to address labour rights, restoration of status, and time frames for documentation.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Madam Chair, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Supply-managed farmers in Canada's agriculture sector have been waiting patiently for the compensation they were promised under previous international trade deals. The Liberal government included compensation for these farmers in its platform, as well as in the minister's mandate letter, to make up for its poor international negotiations.

Will we ever see an actual payment schedule that will enable these farmers to plan for the future and position themselves to kick-start Canada's stagnant economy? I want a date.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Chair, members will recall that we committed to give dairy farmers \$1.75 billion in compensation for the Europe and trans-Pacific deals. They have already received \$345 million, and the second payment will be made this year. I can assure the member that we are just as strongly committed when it comes to the deal with the United States and other supply-managed sectors and processors.

[English]

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Yorkton—Melville.

Government Orders

Does the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion know how many jobs were denied across the country by the over-prescribed Canada summer jobs program in 2020?

Hon. Ahmed Hussien (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, we are proud of the Canada summer jobs program. We know its value to young people. We are ensuring that more employers use it. We know the value it has for young people to obtain relevant experience to their future careers.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, does the minister know the overall monetary value of the jobs that were denied across the country in the Canada summer jobs program in 2020?

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: Madam Chair, we have approved over 70,000 Canada summer jobs for young people this year. We are ensuring that more employers take part in the program. We know the value that program brings, not just to employers but, more important, to the young people who take part in it.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, I can answer that question for my riding in northern Saskatchewan: Nearly \$1.5 million were left on the table. That represents hundreds of job requests to hire students through the Canada summer jobs program that were denied by the current government.

Instead of simply using a program already in place that not only helps young Canadians, but is a lifeline for struggling community programs, small businesses and not-for-profit organizations that do not hold investments in Toronto real estate, the government looked to politically benefit itself.

Let us think of all the jobs that could have been created for these students, the opportunity provided and the value added to their communities if the government had simply used the existing Canada summer jobs process instead of creating a sole-source contribution agreement that would have put more than \$43 million into the pockets of the Prime Minister's friends.

Could anyone on that side of the House explain to my constituents why cabinet was prepared to pay students to volunteer at less than minimum wage, and yet the requests for the Canada summer jobs program by the people of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River were either denied completely or substantially underfunded?

● (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will have a short answer from the minister.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, that is a really long question from the member.

What is clear is that we have put out a suite of programs to respond to the very challenging and unprecedented time. When it comes to the suite of programs for students, it is no exception. What we did with the student measures was to ensure they were stackable, recognizing that the expenses in the fall for post-secondary education were high.

Every step of the way, since we have been responding to this pandemic, we have continued to listen, engage and of course correct the Canada summer jobs program that has become a success. The changes our government made were to encourage employers to hire students. How did we encourage employers to hire students? By increasing the wages to 100%—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Chair, on June 15, I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs if he was aware of the practice of red-flagging the files of veterans and his response was, “I am not aware”. However, two weeks earlier, June 2, he signed a letter thanking veteran Shane Jones for emails that included ATIP information that confirmed he was having issues with VAC because of a red flag on his file.

Again, is the minister aware of the practice of red-flagging the files of veterans?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Chair, the focus of Veterans Affairs is, and always is, the care, compassion and respect for veterans and their families. I obviously cannot speak about specific issues, but I would be happy to discuss this with my hon. colleague at any time.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Chair, are veterans informed when a flag is placed on their file?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Madam Chair, as I indicated quite clearly for my hon. colleague, it is not a place to discuss issues like this which concern security. I would be very pleased to discuss this with my colleague at any time, but what we always have to focus on is—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Sorry for the interruption, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Chair, are veterans services and funding impacted by a flag on their file?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Madam Chair, again, I can tell my hon. colleague that we always deal with veterans with care, compassion and full respect to ensure—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Chair, can a flag be removed?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Madam Chair, I feel it is not the place to discuss this issue at all. We have to be careful and ensure that—

● (1335)

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Chair, when cleared of wrongdoing, should a veteran have to hire a lawyer to have a flag removed?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Madam Chair, again, I would tell my hon. colleague that issues like this need to be discussed clear of the House of Commons. We want to ensure that we deliver care, compassion—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Skyview.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Manning.

On April 22, the Prime Minister announced funding for the Canada student grant program. On April 23, one day later, the grant was promised to the WE organization and his close personal friend. Therefore, we know it pays to be friends with members in the government.

We can contrast that with the promise the Minister of Finance made to the oil and gas industry. It has been 99 days and still nothing. Where is the support?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, we have been clear that we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Canadians from coast to coast. We know that all sectors have also been impacted. Our government has continuously worked with provinces, territories and municipalities to respond to these various challenging needs, including within the natural resources sector.

We will continue to deliver for Canadians.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, let me make it clear who the question is for: the Minister of Finance. It has been nearly 100 days. It is not assistance if employers cannot or will not be able to access programs. The oil and gas sector needed assistance before the pandemic. Things have only worsened.

What do my constituents in Alberta need to do to get assistance?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Chair, yesterday the House voted in favour of an expansion of the wage subsidy program. These changes will expand essential supports going into December for a lot of hard-working Canadians, the energy sector included. These changes will further assist the liquidity needs that will prevent further layoffs and will ensure that we continue to support our energy workers, regardless of where they are in this country, but we know particularly in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, to the Minister of Environment, to make matters worse the Liberals are saying projects have to reach net-zero by 2050 in order to be approved. As oil and gas begins what will be a long and difficult recovery, the Liberals are once again causing uncertainty, shifting money and jobs to the other oil-producing nations.

I will ask again: Where is the support for this crucial industry?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Chair, I would agree with the hon. member about how crucial this industry is, but I would disagree with the premise that net-zero makes us less competitive. If one talks to Cenovus and many of the other major players in the oil

patch right across this country, they will argue that making sure we adhere to net-zero is, in fact, a competitive advantage.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Chair, on the sole-source contract for the WE organization, has the government secured the data for the students and teachers, and where is that data?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, it was a contribution agreement that was negotiated between the public service and the organization. As the member knows, and as I have testified at committee, contribution agreements are proactively disclosed and will be available in the public forum.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Chair, I am not asking about that. I am asking a specific question. Yes or no: Is there an area in the contract where the data of Canadians is protected?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, once again, it is a contribution agreement. Officials who were at committee to testify were able to provide the differences between them. I encourage the member to check out the testimony. Yes, we did—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Edmonton Manning.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Chair, I ask the minister to tell us, in the contract between the government and the WE Charity, if the data of thousands of Canadians, students and teachers, is protected. Is it yes or no?

• (1340)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, I believe I have answered that. Part of my conversations and back and forth with officials was to ensure the health and safety and security of Canadians, and I would assume those details are in the contribution agreement. We will remain focused on Canadians.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Chair, was the Prime Minister aware of the vast real estate investment or real estate holdings of the WE organization?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, once again I refer the member and all Canadians to the testimony of the clerk yesterday at the finance committee. Members of all parties passed a motion to ensure this information was available. The clerk of the committee, as well as my deputy, have provided answers on the record for all to see.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Chair, what would that answer be, if the minister could advise us?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, the answer will be publicly available and will remind everyone that it was a recommendation by the public service. The non-partisan and professional public service does its due diligence, and I am confident it did its work before making a recommendation.

Government Orders

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: Madam Chair, is the minister aware the WE organization has zero experience managing a contract of \$900-plus million?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, our public service is very hard-working and really well informed. It knows when it is able, and has the capacity, to deliver programs and when we need to use a third party. I accept that—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Vancouver Granville.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Madam Chair, as has been mentioned today, B.C. tragically recorded 175 deaths related to drug overdose in the month of June. The opioid crisis is not new. This question is not new.

Recently, many voices, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Premier Horgan and Dr. Bonnie Henry have been calling on the government to decriminalize simple possession of illicit drugs and to introduce a health care approach that diverts people from the criminal justice system.

When will the government act?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, as the member opposite knows full well, the government has acted to reduce the harm for people who use substances. This started, by the way, with reversing quite a bit of harmful policy put forward by the Harper government that criminalized people who used substances and made getting effective treatments, including harm reduction supports, even more difficult.

We will always stand up for a health-based approach to substance use, and I commit to continuing this work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to truly understand the full range of tools they wish to utilize to help ensure more people—

• (1345)

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Vancouver Granville.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, while I can appreciate the efforts made by the government in terms of family reunification, not enough progress has been made on the exemptions to travel restrictions for family members.

Can the government please present a clear timetable for when foreign-national committed partners and adult children of Canadians will be allowed to reunite with their families in Canada? All of them would be willing to sign affidavits and quarantine for the necessary time.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, this has been a very challenging time indeed for families. My department is working diligently to find innovative ways to ensure that as many families as possible are reunited. We continue to work with members from all sides of the House to accomplish that objective.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, I understand the government will be releasing a discussion paper and possible draft UNDRIP legislation mirroring Bill C-262. I trust the government is aware that fundamental to the declaration's articles are the mini-

mum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples.

Accordingly, to demonstrate the government's intent in legislating UNDRIP into Canadian law, and given the unfolding situation in Haida Gwaii and the refusal of the Queen Charlotte fishing lodge to respect the council of the Haida Nation's COVID-19 restrictions, I ask: Does the government recognize and support the right of the nation, i.e. its jurisdiction, to protect its homeland and the safety of its people, and in particular, its elders?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for her work in this area when she was minister prior to my time as minister.

It is in my mandate letter that we implement the declaration before the end of this calendar year. It remains a priority for me. Once we have done that, we will be able to better address the kinds of questions that she is raising now. We feel the declaration will help reframe the relationship between people in Canada in a positive way moving forward.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Chair, there is nothing more essential than good governance, especially in a crisis. Canadians want parliamentarians to work together in the spirit of non-partisanship in order to support the government, and the House to do what is needed to address the social and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Yesterday, Bill C-20 was an example of that.

That said, given recent controversies, and in light of the PROC committee report released yesterday and all of the other issues facing Canadians, will the government commit to reassess, in terms of transparency, accountability and good governance, and commit to bring full Parliament back in the fall?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

It is our government's intention to bring Parliament back in its normal form as soon as possible. Obviously, we always take into consideration public health guidelines. If the guidelines indicate that we cannot all be here, we will find a way to vote remotely. That is what the government wants and I think that is what the NDP and the Bloc Québécois want, too.

Again, I wonder why the Conservatives will not agree to move in that direction even though that is the way to go if we want to conduct parliamentary business and vote remotely.

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[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor West.

As our economy starts to reopen, small businesses are forced to take on extra debt to adapt to the new normal. In just 10 days, their rent is due again and they will still need help. Although the CECRA has been extended, it has not been fixed. Just 12% of landlords have actually gotten rent relief for their commercial tenants.

Will the government fix this mess of a program and let tenants apply for the CECRA so their businesses can survive?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, we certainly recognize that there are important programs that have been put out, including the CECRA program to support small and large businesses. The CECRA program is increasing in terms of the firms that are using it.

Of course, the thing we all agreed to yesterday, the expansion of the wage subsidy and the lengthening of that program, will have an enormous positive impact on businesses trying to hire back employees. We see that all these programs have to be looked at together and we do continually look at these programs—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, wage subsidies, more debt and loans will not help businesses pay rent. Extension of programs that business owners cannot access certainly will not help pay rent. The Liberals keep saying they are here for small business, but they are not listening to what business owners saying they need.

Will the government allow tenants to apply directly for CECRA?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we are in fact trying to listen both to members, like the member's question here, and to small and large businesses. This program has been elongated. We have added a month to it, which has provided more security. We have looked at how we can best deliver other supports to small and large businesses. This does include a concessional part of loans, as well as expanding the wage subsidy, which will have a very important impact.

We will continue to consider changes and improvements, and we appreciate the member's insights and ideas in that regard.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Chair, the federal government is responsible for temporary foreign workers, including farm workers. When the COVID-19 pandemic first became real, why did the government weaken safety standards?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, we did not do that. I acknowledge the hon. member's concern for temporary foreign workers. We are concerned about them and we hold employers—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Chair, the government allowed farms to send in three-year-old reports. It suspended inspections and only conducted audits remotely. Why?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, since the very beginning of this pandemic, we have taken a number of substantial and impor-

tant steps to ensure that both Canada and employers could safely welcome temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Chair, which minister changed the policy?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we will always be there for temporary foreign workers and we value their contributions to our economy.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Chair, there have been 32 COVID complaints to the government and not a single farm has been found in violation of the pandemic rules. Windsor Essex has over 300 workers quarantined in hotels. Five are in ICU and some have died. If the farms were safe, why are workers now infected living in hotels and not living in the substandard housing that was approved by the government?

● (1350)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we are a country that is dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of all workers, including temporary foreign workers. This includes working with provinces and territories to improve housing for foreign workers in Canada. We are committed to implementing additional measures that will protect the health and safety of all workers, including temporary foreign workers helping to protect the food security of Canadians.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Chair, when the outbreak was devastating our long-term care homes, federal personal assistance was sent immediately.

Why is the same not being done for these workers? Is it because they are from Mexico, Guatemala, Saint Lucia, Jamaica and Barbados?

Why did the government take a knee on their public safety?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I reject the hon. member's assertion. We recognized that there was more to do to protect the temporary foreign workers in Canada and we are committed to looking at steps in addition to the substantial number of steps that we have taken to ensure that both Canada and employers can safely welcome temporary foreign workers.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Chair, I will use my five minutes to draw everyone's attention to this issue.

I will get straight to the point. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner found the Prime Minister guilty on two occasions, but then what happened? The Prime Minister kept doing the same thing. Two guilty verdicts is like two strikes. It means he should be careful, because strike three means the player is out.

Yesterday, I talked about judgment and my concerns. Today, I would like to know if the Prime Minister's entourage and cabinet saw what happened.

Here is my question: Did they see the red flag?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois seems to be out of ideas.

Previously, Bloc members asked questions about soldiers and long-term care centres. We satisfied their expectations, so they did not ask any more questions about that. Then they asked questions about the emergency wage subsidy. We fixed that problem, so they do not have any more questions about it. Then they asked questions about seniors and people with disabilities. Once again, we did what was expected of us and more.

I think the Bloc members are asking those kinds of questions because they are out of ideas.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I will ask a different question.

What is a conflict of interest?

I will continue speaking so he has enough time to answer with three or four sentences. What is a conflict of interest?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, regarding the Prime Minister's work, it is important to point out everything he has done to ensure that our seniors can get financial support, that those who have lost their jobs can get the CERB, that our businesses can get the wage subsidy. That is where the Prime Minister and the government are focusing their efforts. We are meeting the needs of Canadians.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, once again, let us look at the facts. The Liberals are in government. Every administrator has been through this. People back home are asking me why it is that when they sit on a board, they have to disclose any personal information that could lead to a potential conflict of interest. What is happening here? We are talking about nearly \$1 billion of our money.

I will ask the question again. What is a conflict of interest?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, the government has always worked with the officers of Parliament, whether it is the Ethics Commissioner or any other officer. Throughout all of this, we remain focused on the priorities of the Government of Canada. The priority is to get through a pandemic. We are definitely still in a pandemic. It is not over. We must continue to help our families,

our seniors, our children, persons with disabilities. That is what we are focusing on. The entire government is focusing on that.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I did not get an answer, but I have another question.

Are cabinet and the entire government complicit in what happened with a failure to disclose information that may soon be found to have violated the Conflict of Interest Act?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, we are wading into conspiracy theories. All kinds of plots are being suggested.

The government is here for one thing: to ensure the well-being, safety and health of Canadians, especially during a pandemic. We have put very strict measures in place to promote the health and safety of Canadians, but also to help all those who have lost their jobs, those who had to stay home to take care of someone who was sick, those were sick themselves. We will not apologize for taking action on behalf of Canadians, for Canadians.

• (1355)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I am going to tell you something because just one hour ago I was at the Standing Committee on Finance. I understand what is happening. We are not getting answers, we cannot get at the truth. One witness announced that the government was receiving personal data for partisan purposes for the Liberal Party. I would like someone to explain that to me since we are talking about a scandal. What happens after the second strike?

It is no longer a scandal that we can attribute to the Prime Minister alone. Could this not be considered a Liberal scandal?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, the answer is no.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I have some time left. On behalf of the 37 million Canadians, all Quebeckers and my constituents, I invite the government to quickly shed light on this matter.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I would like to say to my colleague that all Quebeckers are included in the 37 million Canadians.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will now take a short break so that the staff can safely change positions.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 1:56 p.m.)

[English]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 1:58 p.m.)

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

Government Orders

Many families continue to be separated from their loved ones due to the necessary border closures, but while we continue to hear of foreign nationals finding loopholes to sneak across the borders, many family members are still separated from their loved ones. This includes Sarah Campbell from Stratford, whose British fiancé is unable to come to Canada. It was bad enough they had to cancel their wedding, but now, after her recent diagnosis with thyroid cancer, her fiancé is unable to join her here in Canada. Her pleas to the Minister of Public Safety have been met with apathy.

Will the minister commit to providing guidelines to allow for the entry of those in long-term relationships on compassionate grounds?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, frankly, I reject the suggestion that we have responded to these many issues with any apathy at all; rather, we have worked diligently on them.

Our first priority has to be the protection of the health and safety of Canadians. That is why we have implemented these very reasonable restrictions. However, we have also worked very closely with individuals who are seeking to reunite with family members, and in a compassionate way, always keeping in mind the safety, security and health of Canadians.

• (1400)

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, when my constituent contacted the minister's office, she was told that there was nothing he could do and that she should instead contact my office.

Now, I am happy to take over the running of his department, but until that time, will he do his job and ensure that those in compassionate situations are able to reunite with their loved ones?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I would not speculate on the member opposite's capability of doing this job or any other.

What I will say is that my office has been working very, very diligently with people right across the country and with members from all sides of this House. MPs have contacted my office, and we have worked very closely with them. We will continue to do so. A lot depends, of course, on the way in which a member approaches—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Perth—Wellington. A very short question, please.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, the lack of compassion from the Minister of Public Safety is, quite frankly, galling. This individual has contacted his office and the Prime Minister's office on multiple occasions and yet has failed to receive a response on this matter. We are talking about a young woman suffering with thyroid cancer, and the minister is showing no compassion to her British fiancé.

Will the minister commit today to following up on compassionate grounds?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, what the minister will commit to, as we have done right from the outset, is that we are doing our very best to ensure that all Canadians are treated with care and compassion. We will never relent on our commitment to keep Canadians safe. That is why we have implemented these very sensible and reasonable restrictions on non-essential travel at the border.

There are some exceptions, and we have tried to deal with them, in every case, in an exceptional way, to deal with people with compassion, but we will not compromise the health and safety of Canadians.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here today. I heard you earlier reference the House as being very emotional and tense. It is no wonder, after I watched the last interaction and the one before that with the Bloc member and the Liberal House leader, where she raised legitimate concerns that we are all hearing from our constituents about this scandal and a billion dollars, of taxpayers' dollars that was not managed appropriately. It was written off as a conspiracy theory. It would be interesting, certainly to my constituents and Canadians across the country, to know that their government views these legitimate concerns as a conspiracy theory.

I wonder if the Prime Minister would speak and tell the House whether he holds the same view that he held as opposition leader in 2013, when he tweeted, "RT to call on the Prime Minister to testify on the PMO Ethics Scandal under oath."

Does the Prime Minister hold the same view he held then?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear that when it comes to officers of Parliament, we will always comply with their offices. We know that there is an ethics investigation taking place, and we have stated publicly that we have confidence that the commissioner and his office are able to do that work.

When it comes to the finance committee, members of all parties passed a motion and they actually asked for witnesses to appear. I appeared at the first opportunity. Right when we received that motion, I did not hold back or find excuses. What I did was work with the committee to make sure I was available right away. They wanted officials to appear; we made sure that officials were appearing.

Yesterday, the finance committee met so that witnesses could appear; today, the finance committee is meeting. These are public meetings so that Canadians can receive these answers.

We take this matter very seriously, as we do the health and safety of Canadians. We will remain focused on Canadians.

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister remains focused on some Canadians, at least.

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Back in 2013, again as the opposition leader, he tweeted, “Take a minute to raise the bar on openness and transparency.” Clicking on that link led to a Liberal fundraising site where there were links to the Laurier Club and something called the “victory fund”. On that page, he said, “Canadians know the difference between right and wrong. Now I want your ideas on how we can ensure that our representatives in Ottawa play by the same rules as everyone else.”

I am wondering if someone on that side, perhaps the Prime Minister, can tell us whether anybody who does not donate to the Liberal Party has the same opportunity for input.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it is important that the record show that the Prime Minister, back when he was sitting in the third party opposition benches, one of the first things he did as a Liberal member of Parliament was to bring forward proactive disclosure to the floor of the House of Commons. What he also did was ensure that, as a government, we move the dial to make sure that information is open and transparent. We had to bring the Conservatives kicking and screaming along the entire way, so it is kind of interesting that they have these questions today.

Yes, programs, policies and legislation are in place. There are acts that are followed, and we have officers of Parliament so they can get to the bottom of this and get that information. We will ensure that we stay focused on Canadians. Any information that Canadians and members are looking for, we have been more than willing to provide.

• (1405)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there is a serious problem with the sound system in here. I asked why the Public Health Agency of Canada put a contract out to WE during the election period, and the minister thought I said, “the Privy Council Office”, which was yesterday.

Therefore, I ask that the sound system be corrected, or better yet, they should bring back Parliament in its entirety, and dispel virtual voting.

The Speaker: I will look into the sound system and see if there are any issues with the sound. I know it was breaking up for a while in translation.

Part of that was debate, but I appreciate the input.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 9

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, May 26, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings. The committee will now study Motion No. 9 under Government Orders.

[*English*]

Before we begin the debate, I would like to remind the hon. members of how it will unfold.

[*Translation*]

The proceedings will be conducted pursuant to the terms of Standing Order 53.1. Each member speaking will be allotted 10

minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments.

[*English*]

Members participating via video conference who wish to ask a question or make a comment at the end of the speech may so indicate to the chair by using the “raise hand” feature on the video conference platform. However, members participating in the chamber may rise as they normally would.

[*Translation*]

The debate will end after two hours and 20 minutes, or when no member rises to speak.

[*English*]

We will now begin with the take-note debate.

The hon. member for Kanata—Carleton.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we live, how we work, how we interact with other people. Over the past six months, the pandemic has taken an especially heavy toll on Canadians who are members of vulnerable populations. We have learned that COVID most negatively impacts our most vulnerable—seniors, people experiencing homelessness, Canadians with disabilities, racialized Canadians, persons who use substances, and persons with mental health challenges—along with those who work to support them. As restrictive public health measures are lifted and our economy reopens, we must remember there are vulnerable people in our communities, as well as those who support them, who will continue to need our help in order to stay healthy.

Our government is responding to these needs through funding provided to the provinces and territories under the safe restart agreement, which was just announced by the first ministers on July 16. The agreement is far-reaching in its intent and scope. The \$19-billion commitment will help provinces and territories, which have had to respond to COVID-19 in unique ways and have already made major investments, and will continue to do so, in critical areas, including health care and vulnerable populations. It includes funding over the next six to eight months to support capacity in health care services, procurement of personal protective equipment and support for Canadians facing challenges related to mental health, harmful substances or homelessness.

The funding will also support infection prevention and control measures to protect vulnerable populations, including residents at long-term care facilities and those requiring home care. This money will complement the Public Health Agency of Canada's ongoing efforts to provide guidance to health care providers, facility directors and administrators on resident care within long-term care homes.

Funding provided under the safe restart agreement will also be used to support other vulnerable populations, such as homeless Canadians and those living in remote or isolated communities.

The agreement is an example of the extraordinary federal-provincial-territorial collaboration that has characterized our collective response to this pandemic. It is an indication of our deep and ongoing commitment to protect the health and safety of all Canadians.

The safe restart agreement is the latest in a series of actions that our government has taken to support vulnerable populations throughout this crisis. Access to support or prevention programs by those fleeing family and gender-based violence has become more difficult in the context of community lockdowns and social distancing practices. In recognition of this, our government has announced new initiatives to help reduce the impacts of abuse and violence within vulnerable families. A \$7.5-million investment has been made in the Kids Help Phone to help support mental health and crisis support for children and youth, an acknowledgement that without school, children may be particularly at risk.

There is also \$50 million in new funding being provided through the Reaching Home program to women's shelters and sexual assault centres, including \$26 million to women's shelters across Canada to distribute to shelters right across the country, \$4 million to the Canadian Women's Foundation to distribute to sexual assault centres, and \$10 million to support Indigenous Services Canada's existing network of 46 emergency shelters on reserve and in the Yukon.

These measures will complement other economic and financial measures to assist vulnerable individuals and families through this crisis, including the enhancement of the Canada child benefit and support for the charitable sector.

Our government also recognizes the significant and unique challenges faced by black Canadians and other racialized populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

● (1410)

As the crisis has unfolded across the country, it has become clear that we need more information on certain groups at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19. As a key social determinant of health that can affect an individual's access and willingness to seek medical care, racism is a public health issue.

Canadians who, before the pandemic, were at greater risk of poor health owing to systemic discrimination are likely to be at greater risk of suffering COVID-19's direct and indirect consequences. Given this, the Public Health Agency of Canada and partners are undertaking a number of activities to improve Canada's knowledge on the impact of COVID-19 on racialized communities.

Canada has recently established a new national COVID-19 dataset, approved by Canada's special advisory committee on COVID-19. This dataset includes race or ethnicity as a key variable to be collected in the national COVID-19 case report form, which is used by the provincial and territorial governments to report COVID-19 cases to the Public Health Agency of Canada. Until now, with the exception of a section for identifying and classifying cases as indigenous, data on these variables was not collected. Thus, this new dataset represents an important advance in Canada's

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ability to track the relationship between COVID-19 and race or ethnicity. However, it may take some time for all jurisdictions to be able to collect this data.

The mental health impacts of systemic discrimination can also have negative implications for physical health. Our government is working to advance knowledge of the intersections between the mental and physical health of black Canadians through an initiative on promoting health equity called the mental health of black Canadians fund. This fund is supporting projects that generate knowledge, capacity and programs that promote mental health and address its determinants for black Canadians. All funded projects are led by black Canadian experts or organizations, and they are informed by the mental health of black Canadians working group, comprising experts in research, practice and policy from diverse black communities right across the country. Funding recipients have demonstrated great resiliency during the COVID-19 pandemic and are working to continue planned activities in the pandemic context.

We also recognize that public health measures have taken their toll on the mental health of Canadians, with feelings of isolation, lack of access to usual support networks and living in fear of the uncertainties caused by the pandemic. Targeted mental health initiatives such as this are in addition to the broader supports that have been developed to help Canadians stay healthy and informed during this difficult period. For example, the Wellness Together Canada portal was developed to link Canadians to mental health and substance use supports. As of July 10, more than 283,000 Canadians had accessed the portal.

Under COVID-19 and the mental health initiative, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research has also launched, in partnership with four provincial research agencies, a funding opportunity to better understand mental health, including substance use of both individuals and communities due to the pandemic.

In parallel with the COVID-19 pandemic, many communities continue to struggle with a second public health crisis, namely the devastating impact of substance abuse and the overdose crisis. The pandemic has exposed people who use drugs to additional barriers when it comes to accessing health and social services. While necessary public health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 may sadly also have had unintended consequences, including increased toxicity of the illegal drug supply and reduction in the availability of life-saving services.

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We have made it easier for people to access the medications they need, such as those necessary for opioid agonist treatment, such as Suboxone and methadone. Pharmacists now have the ability to extend and renew prescriptions.

• (1415)

We are supporting community-based projects across a wide variety of topics and we will continue to do whatever is needed to help and protect Canadians.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, the member highlighted a lot of really critical pieces of how people have been dealing with COVID-19. You mentioned support for shelters, individuals, racialized minorities, mental health issues and you also mentioned federal-provincial-territorial collaboration. On that note, there was one thing I noticed that might have been missing from that discussion. I wonder if you could speak about whether or not you believe that safe, affordable housing is a right and whether you support a rent freeze as families and individuals navigate COVID-19.

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members to place their questions through the Chair. I am sure they do not want my opinion. I am sure they want the opinion of the person who made the speech.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I think we have done a good job actually in working together at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, and I want to see more. There are some issues that really demand that level of collaboration of us all, and the shortage of affordable housing is one of those issues. We are working on it. We have made tremendous progress, but we do acknowledge there is still more work to do.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge and thank the member for her service to this country as a veteran. As such, I would like to ask the member for her perspective as a veteran in this country if she feels that \$600 is sufficient to meet the needs of our most honoured Canadians, our veterans who are living with disabilities.

• (1420)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I have worked really hard to try to improve the supports for veterans in this country and we have seen improvement, but it is like many other things, in that there is still more work to do. In this case, getting some money out there quickly to people who really needed it right away was absolutely key, but I also believe that supports for the seriously disabled veterans need to be improved.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. It touched on a number of very specific issues, including preventing the use of hard drugs, but also mental health issues, which are very important in the context of COVID-19 and have played out in ways that may be hard to predict.

In light of this, I submit to my colleague that it is important to recognize the role that Quebec and the provinces can play in these

very specific issues, which are generally related to social services and health.

Furthermore, I would like to know whether she thinks there was any useful or legitimate reason for the federal government to impose conditions before it would transfer money that is critically needed for dealing with these problems, which are so pressing right now.

Would she not agree that the federal government should just have gone ahead and transferred the money, knowing that the provinces and Quebec are best equipped to deal with the current concerns?

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, it is a difficult issue. The federal government is trying to make sure that services and access to mental health treatments are fairly equal across the provinces. We do not want it so that in one province they are fully supported and in another province they are not. That is what we are trying to do. We are trying to make sure that the level of support is equal across the country, because some provinces will need more in child care, will need more in mental health, will need more in addressing the opioid crisis than other provinces will. We wanted to make sure that at least we have that baseline standard right across the country. That was the reason behind that negotiation.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague and friend from Kanata—Carleton for a speech that really outlines what is happening and what we are doing for the most marginalized and most vulnerable here in our country.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic is laying bare those people who are most invisible, most voiceless and those who are the most neglected in our society. Our government has been there to try to make sure that we see that those communities, which have been the first and most impacted by COVID-19, are getting the help.

Could my colleague tell the House some of the ways the government programs are helping those in her riding of Kanata—Carleton, and across Ottawa and, of course, across the country?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I think we have worked really hard to address the issues the hon. member brought up.

Here in Ottawa, we try to work as an Ottawa team. We support and help each other to address the critical shortages that we see. Here, working as a team, means that an issue that is of critical importance to me may not be exactly as important or the same issue in Vanier or Orléans, but we work together. It is the idea of teamwork and finding a way to collaborate to make things better for Canadians, and that is what we are going to continue to do.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech.

It was just revealed at the finance committee that the Minister of Finance took a free trip from the WE organization last summer. I would note that it is not permissible to do sponsored travel while one is in cabinet. The minister just paid back the expenses for that trip today, on the day he was scheduled to testify before the finance committee.

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Does the Liberal member across the way have any comments on how she feels about such a blatant contravention of the rules by her finance minister?

• (1425)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I do not have an answer. I do not know the whole story. I think it is very important that we actually be transparent and that Canadians be able to trust in their government.

An hon. member: When you get caught, right?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: No, please, I am trying to respond respectfully to the question, and I think we should be able to have these kinds of difficult discussions without antagonizing each other. It is key, we know it is key, and I think it is important for us to accept and talk about these things respectfully.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been reported that this trip had a price tag of around \$41,000. I cannot help but think how many veterans that would have helped, how many people who are living in deep poverty and who are disabled would have helped.

We heard the previous speaker talk about trying to get money out the door as fast they could. The government had an opportunity to do that. Had it applied CERB universally to all people who needed it during this time without restraint, without delay, we would not be four months into this crisis with the people needing it the most still struggling to get by.

How does the hon. member feel about a minister taking a \$40,000 trip at a time when people are struggling to get by and the Liberals are patting themselves on the back for a \$600, one-time donation to the most vulnerable Canadians?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, this was an unprecedented crisis that really demanded a unique response, which depended on our agility and ingenuity to make it happen. Is it perfect? No, it is not perfect. Nothing ever done in the House ever is, but when we talk about CERB, somewhere between 8 million and 9 million people have been helped. When we talk about the wage subsidy, it is another 3 million people. When we talk about getting GST credits out there, that is more people. That was our aim: to help as many people as we possibly could through this crisis.

Things will change, because we are learning as we are going through this, but helping people was our first priority.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this take-note debate, because there is so much of which to take note.

First, it was satisfying to see the members of the House, proven by our attendance here under almost normal procedures and practices, on Monday and Tuesday for debate and passage of Bill C-20 and to correct and improve emergency funding for the wage subsidy program and one-time payments for persons with disabilities, who were, like seniors and students, somewhat of an afterthought for the government in its COVID emergency funding programs.

The Monday and Tuesday sittings, unlike this now outdated hybrid talking shop, has proved that we can endure a prolonged arrhythmia that has been imposed on the beating heart of our Canadi-

an democracy by the Liberal government, which finds transparency and accountability inconvenient.

As many, if not most, communities in Canada, certainly in the national capital region, return slowly, with precautions, to normalcy, surely this place should do the same. I hope we will have more members physically present for more days at a time and more committees meeting regularly in place with appropriate safety measures.

I would also like to take note of the exemplary service of my Hill and Thornhill constituency office staff during the lockdown, Michael, Judith, Braydon, Beverley and Perri-Anne, working largely from home to serve the range of extraordinary requests for assistance, assisting folks stranded abroad, employees and employers trying to navigate the ever-changing range of emergency funding programs, visa and passport issues, families divided by non-essential travel restrictions, the interruptions of wedding plans, funerals and university studies, the distribution of personal protective equipment and support for food banks.

The lockdown caught us in the midst of relocating our constituency office from Clark and Yonge in Thornhill to Centre Street just west of New Westminster, but we completed the move, finally, in June and are up and running, although not yet accepting visitors inside the office. The major limitation of normal services now involves passport renewal and visa support, awaiting the reopening of Service Canada and other agency offices.

Absolute normalcy, whether in our ridings or on the Hill, is still some time off. However, as we encourage, as parliamentarians, employers to reopen and resuscitate dormant sectors of Canada's economy, so too do we in the official opposition encourage the Liberal government to revive, as I have said, this place, the beating heart of our Canadian democracy. The Liberals prefer government by news conference and sermons from the PM's cottage stoop, but it is time to get back to parliamentary basics, which brings me to another matter of which I want to take note.

For decades, in power and out, the Liberals have advocated—

• (1430)

The Speaker: I will interrupt the hon. member for a moment. We seem to be having trouble with sound today, but I think we are back up and running.

I will let the hon. member continue.

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Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, would you like me to start from the beginning or could you tell me precisely where we lost sound?

The Speaker: The hon. member can continue from where he left off. I believe the sound issue was for one case, in particular. I do not see it being a unanimous problem, so hopefully we will get that fixed.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, for decades, in power and out, the Liberals have advocated the replacement or reduction of many of our parliamentary practices and procedures. They regularly float the idea of a four-day work week, no Fridays, and since the mid-1990s, they have pushed for electronic voting in the House of Commons. They said that it would free members and ministers for travel and work outside the House.

Now, under the guise of a health precaution in the time of COVID, the Liberals in the past couple of months have pushed in the procedure and House affairs committee for major changes in the way government is done, including remote electronic voting that would be permanent.

The Liberals claim that remote voting is just a pandemic measure, but some Liberals are saying, on the record, that they want to vote from afar so they can spend more time in their ridings. Others have made it clear they are looking for a digital voting application that would effectively be permanent modernization.

Though the majority on the procedure and House affairs committee recommended that various voting procedures be tested before being adopted, the Liberals have pushed ahead with their web ambitions, propped up by the Bloc and the NDP, ignoring what is going on in other legislatures in Canada and other democracies.

At Westminster, the mother Parliament, the House has adopted physical distancing to its regular voting process; applied attendance limits; authorized remote voting, then reverted to in-person voting; and tried proxy voting, then returned to lobby-based voting. As well, all committees have been productive while experimenting with these various procedures, while our Canadian House has been dormant, with neutered sessions like this, and a few days devoted to compressed sittings to pass and correct emergency funding legislation.

During this time, Ontario's legislative assembly continued its spring session until today, with a new voting procedure in lobbies. British Columbia's legislative assembly resumed June 22, with hybrid sittings, and is expected to sit until mid-August. Saskatchewan's legislative assembly sat, with attendance limits and using a proxy voting procedure, from mid-June until July 3. Alberta's legislature will continue its spring session until tomorrow. The only provincial legislature without effective pandemic sittings worth noting is Nova Scotia's. It is the only one with a Liberal majority.

We may have had reason in March and April to suspend proceedings, but arguments for resumed sittings in May were valid, and those arguments are much stronger today. Our Conservative members on the procedure and House affairs committee were reassured by the House administration's analysis, showing that 86 members plus the Speaker could be seated in this chamber in full compliance with physical distancing. While members from distant ridings may

have to adapt to multi-week blocks without the usual weekend flights home, this would be, as my colleagues on committee have observed, a trifling sacrifice compared to the hardships of Canada's earliest parliamentarians.

Therefore, safe, responsible, in-place voting is responsible and you, Mr. Speaker, have offered six different voting methods, each compliant with public health guidance. Our Conservative plan for safe, responsible House sittings would bring Canada's democracy out of its Liberal-induced coma and would have the government properly held accountable.

The final matter which I find worthy of taking note involves the Prime Minister's ethical failings, ethical failings which have infected others in his cabinet and caucus.

When our Conservative government created the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, it was thought that the commissioner's investigation of violations of the Conflict of Interest Act or code by ministers or members required no major penalties, that naming and shaming of a minister or a member's ethical breaches would prevent further violations. As we have seen over the past five years, naming and shaming simply do not work with a shameless Prime Minister.

● (1435)

We have had two major investigations of the Prime Minister which reported in findings of major conflict of interest violations. Let us remember that there are still loose ends to both the "Trudeau Report" and "Trudeau II Report".

In the case of the first report, a Federal Court ordered the current Commissioner of Lobbying to review the decision by her predecessor to not investigate the lobbyist in the matter of the Prime Minister's illegal vacation. That order is still pending, although it was suspended when the Prime Minister's Office immediately appealed that Federal Court ruling.

In the case of the second report of the SNC corruption scandal, the Ethics Commissioner concluded that while he gathered sufficient factual information to find the Prime Minister guilty of violating the Conflict of Interest Act in attempting to improperly influence his attorney general, directly and indirectly, he was "unable to fully discharge the investigatory duties."

Also, the Liberals often choose to forget the \$100 fine imposed by the commissioner on the Prime Minister for failing to report receiving a gift of expensive leather-wrapped sunglasses in 2017.

Now there is the WE to me to he to his scandal, which the Ethics Commissioner is now again investigating the Prime Minister, a scandal that has cast a long shadow on others in cabinet and the PMO.

This scandal is yet another powerful reason for the restoration of all the practices and procedures of the House.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for talking about how we can try to safely resume our activities as parliamentarians and at the same time ensure we do not become vectors for spreading the virus.

As an Ottawa MP, I am very concerned when it comes to members from 338 parts of the country travelling by airplane to Ottawa, possibly staying in hotels and going to restaurants. Also, many of the staff, those in security, the pages, clerks and the interpreters, live in my riding in Ottawa. They are taking public transit and are possibly being exposed.

I love being in the House. There is nothing more honourable and better than being here with other parliamentarians, but we are in a pandemic and we have to be responsible.

The member talked about electronic voting. I do not know if PROC has looked at this, but I would ask my hon. colleague to consider looking at two separate Standing Orders: one set of Standing Orders could be for normal times and one set for when we are in a pandemic, when we could very well become the vectors of infecting other Canadians by being too close together in this chamber. This way we would not have the issue, as the member mentioned, of having something that may be permanent, which would replace the very important face to face we have in normal times, but it would be a set of rules that would allow us to keep ourselves and our constituents safe.

• (1440)

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for a reasonable suggestion, which unfortunately, in the House procedure committee, was pushed aside by the Liberal members on that committee, who were supported by the Bloc and the NDP.

Our issue is in regard to remote voting. It is not so much that we are against remote voting, but we have great concerns with the web-based system Liberal members have been proposing since 1997. We have seen in other legislatures and democracies video-based voting, using the technology we are using here today in the hybrid House, which would be equally effective here and certainly verifiable. We have security provisions with regard to who participates in these hybrid sessions. It is one of the six alternative voting procedures our Speaker has honourably presented to the committee.

Unfortunately, the Liberal members on PROC, again, supported by the Bloc and the NDP, have bowled ahead with this vision of voting via smart phone, on an iPhone, which we simply, in the Conservative Party, find unacceptable.

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We also wish, and we discussed this at PROC, that we followed the mother parliament in the United Kingdom, where a variety of approaches have been tried, such as voting electronically, voting by video and voting in the lobby, one at a time, safely distanced from each other. As well, with regard to your point, which is a good point, about our far-flung members, some of them have underlying health problems or family members with underlying health problems, and now that social spacing is no longer allowed on our national airlines, there are considerations. Those alternates of video voting or voting by other means have been put forward and were discussed.

The official opposition's basic issue with the majority report, the Liberal, Bloc and NDP report from PROC, is that it did not adequately consider or test other approaches.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

Over the past few days we have heard a lot about the WE Charity matter. The Bloc Québécois wants the Prime Minister to take a step back, temporarily bow out and let the Deputy Prime Minister focus her attention on COVID-19.

As my colleague pointed out, our democratic processes have fallen to the wayside during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when we should be working twice as hard to help people. The Prime Minister is embroiled in a situation that, in my opinion, is similar to that of the sponsorship scandal, although I hope that is not the case.

I would like to know whether my colleague agrees with me that the Prime Minister must temporarily bow out so that we can focus on what is important to Quebecers and to Canadians.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is quite correct in remembering the Liberal adscam, the scandal that led eventually to the fall of a previous Liberal government.

We have just learned this afternoon that the finance minister has admitted to one of the greatest violations of the Conflict of Interest Act, accepting a sponsored vacation from the WE organization of which we continue to learn every day even more concerning details.

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As I said in my remarks, yes, the Prime Minister appears to be guilty and we will wait for several months. Seven months is the average time for an investigation by the Ethics Commissioner. It was somewhat longer in the first “Trudeau Report”, because the Prime Minister found it inconvenient to meet with the then ethics commissioner, Mary Dawson. That became close to a year-long investigation. However, I would hope that the Prime Minister, his ministers and others in his Liberal caucus make themselves available soon so we can resolve these issues.

While we have not taken an official position that the Prime Minister step aside, his behaviour and performance over the last five years has proven him unfit to lead this country. We would certainly urge those in his cabinet who are not also complicit in his violations of the Conflict of Interest Act to take charge and to ensure that more due diligence is done with the treasure that the government is administering in emergency funding during the COVID pandemic. The close to \$1 billion in this scandal raises the question of how many of the other emergency programs might be found to have similar violations and potential to be investigated.

• (1445)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of my colleague something that happened right here as I was asking questions.

I was asking the Minister of Veterans Affairs if he was aware that flags were being placed on the files of veterans. He said that he was unaware, yet he sent a letter to a veteran, explaining concerns about that.

All my questions were simple, requiring quick yes or no answers. Was he aware? Are veterans informed when that happens? Are veterans services and funding impacted when there is a flag on a file? Can a flag be removed when it is clear that there was no wrongdoing? Does a veteran have to hire a lawyer to get that flag off? I asked all kinds of questions like this. Over and over again, the response from the minister was that this was not the place to discuss these issues. I sense that the attitude of the Prime Minister is permeating everywhere, that ministers do not want to have to respond to real, sincere, succinct questions for which they are accountable.

I am wondering if you would like to comment on that as well.

The Speaker: I want to remind the members to place their questions through the Chair, not to the Chair. I am sure nobody really cares about my opinion. I just want to ensure we get the opinion of the person who is giving it.

The hon. member for Thornhill.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I do sometimes get carried away when it comes to the Prime Minister's ethical behaviour or unethical behaviour.

We have known for some time that ministers answer important questions in the House, such as the questions the member asked in this hybrid Parliament. The excuse is always that it is question period, not answer period and the answers are generally deflections or non-answers. I think that once we get more of the committees up and running and in full operation, with full attendance under normal parliamentary rules, we will get revealing answers, which I think the veterans affairs minister would have felt compelled to

give in committee, as the finance minister revealed his very serious violation of the Conflict of Interest Act this afternoon with his acceptance of sponsored travel.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to go back to the subject I talked about during members' statements on Monday. This time I will have 10 minutes to speak rather than just 60 seconds, so I can add some context to my remarks.

My statement on Monday was mainly about the delays in immigration processing, which were already way too long before the pandemic. Those delays are even more problematic now, since they are having even more dramatic consequences for families that are separated from their loved ones and deprived of their support because of the time it takes to process their applications.

To begin I would like to talk a bit about my professional experience because then the link will become clear. Before being elected to this place, I had a short but very rewarding career as a young lawyer. During that time, I worked on international child abduction cases.

International child abduction happens when two parents have different nationalities and one of them decides to take the child out of the country, or refuse to return, without the other parent's consent.

Over the years, my mentor, who worked on this type of file for a long time, noticed that there was an increase in the number of cases of parental abduction. That is not because people are abducting their children more often but simply because, over the past 30 or 40 years, we have had the capacity for international mobility, which has resulted in more binational couples, more families where the parents are not of the same nationality. That is a growing phenomenon.

If we do not do something about the delays in sponsorship processing times soon, the problem could get worse in the coming years, because Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada will likely only get more and more sponsorship requests. We therefore need to nip this problem in the bud.

Over the course of my career, I also had the pleasure of working with immigration lawyers. Some of them decided to quit private practice for the greener pastures of legal aid. I want to give a shout-out to any of them who may be watching at home. When they made that decision, they were unable to keep all their files and I took over many of them, including sponsorship files. I was therefore able to see first-hand how the interminable delays and existing procedures were undermining the quick review of sponsorship files. Here are a few telling examples.

When I filled out sponsorship applications, I would take all the forms, put an ID sticker on each one, stack them in the right order, seal the file and send it to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. In many cases, the file was sent back with a note about a missing form. The returned file would be completely disorganized and would often include the supposedly missing form. If that happens when just one official has handled the file, I shudder to think what it would look like after passing through the hands of several officials.

I also frequently noticed a problem with the checklist of items required to evaluate a file. I would complete this list before sending the file. The official would check it, item by item, and return the whole file when he or she found that an item was missing. I would add the missing document and return the file. The official would continue to check the items on the list and send the file back again if another form was missing. I would then send the missing document.

In the meantime, a form might no longer be up to date and I would be asked to fill it out again. I had some clients in France who could easily sign documents. However, it was a little more complicated for my clients in Iran to sign the required documents. Another one of my clients was a member of the military in a jungle in Central America and his only means of communication was a satellite phone. Having him sign a document was a nightmare.

All of this happens just because the officials do not take the time to check the whole list before sending back the file. I have already pointed out these problems in committee.

It seems to me that the officials should open the files as soon as they get them. In fact, this is creating the false impression that the files are being processed more quickly than they really are. Sometimes it takes a year before the file is actually opened. Often the 12-month deadline is not actually met, but it is calculated from the moment the file is opened. In reality, the families are waiting much longer for their file to be processed.

There are also problems related to the fact that these are paper files. I occasionally received a file that was not addressed to me and had to do with a client I did not know at all. I have also found documents belonging to someone else in one of my files.

• (1455)

I have also heard some horror stories about paper case files. When a foreign visa processing office closed down for a move, someone discovered a whole bunch of files that had fallen behind a filing cabinet. They had been there for 10 years.

There is a real problem associated with paper files, and it is all the more pressing because of the COVID-19 crisis. Officials have not been able to telework because they are still working with paper files. As a result, applications have been languishing for months, adding to the existing delays.

That is one thing we absolutely must review quickly. It was already a problem before the crisis started, and it is even worse now. We need to push hard to get those files digitized.

Something else the crisis has taught us is that a lot of things can be done remotely. As we have seen, Immigration, Refugees and

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Citizenship Canada has started holding virtual citizenship ceremonies for new citizens.

An interview is often required at the end of the sponsorship process, to authenticate the relationship between the sponsor and the person being sponsored. Why could that not also be done via video conference? This is a legitimate question. That would address another problem that existed long before the crisis. I want to talk about a situation we are now seeing in Cuba. The office in Havana closed its doors and is no longer conducting interviews in person. Individuals are required to travel to Mexico or Trinidad and Tobago for their landing interview, the final step in the sponsorship process.

This seems like a good time to say that it would fix the problem if the government started processing permanent resident cases through video conference. This has been done for citizenship cases and citizenship ceremonies. As a lawyer specializing in international family law, I knew about Zoom long before the crisis started. Since abduction cases are often handled very quickly, with hearings scheduled close together, our clients were not always able to appear at their hearings. We used Zoom in those cases. If Quebec's civil courts were able to do it, there is no reason why Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada cannot.

No offence to my colleagues, but I must say that my current role as immigration critic is probably the best portfolio, because it involves so much compassion. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most heart-wrenching portfolios. Since Monday, I have been getting a lot of comments on my Facebook page. People have been reminding us how hard it is to live without their families, how hard it is for young children to live without one of their parents at a formative time in their lives, how hard it is to be separated from loved ones during a pandemic. It was true before the crisis, and it is even more true now.

We need to work together to address the issue of processing delays. I doubt that the parties are going to make this issue political or that every party is going to fight tooth and nail to defend a different position. I do not imagine that any of my colleagues would say that processing delays should be even longer.

We need to bite the bullet and decide together to make this a priority. We need to put more personnel, and therefore more money, toward dealing with immigration files.

That is one thing I would like to see in the next budget, since we have not actually seen the March budget yet. I would like to see more money to clear up the massive backlog, which just keeps getting worse, and bring in a computer system that would fix a lot of problems.

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Despite all that, I have not even touched on the issue of foreign workers, which has been a problem during the crisis. I have not even touched on how refugee cases are being handled, which has also been a problem during the crisis. I have not even touched on the issue of international students' applications.

Today I am making a heartfelt plea for everyone to work together to improve the whole immigration process, so that people will not have to make heartbreaking choices if ever there is another crisis. I am making this plea so that nobody ever has to choose between two equally distressing cases because we do not have enough resources to handle them properly.

I urge all my colleagues to work together to improve our immigration system.

• (1500)

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her speech, which was eloquent and clear, as usual.

What I took from her speech is that the delays are monumental. Of all the developed countries in the world, are there any examples of such a shift happening, and how did it happen?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, we do not have to look very far to see examples of when things have been done quickly. When Haiti was in crisis, we did it here. Processes that usually took 12 months were completed sometimes in as little as six weeks, because it was decided that a herculean effort was needed to process so many family reunification applications. We do not have to look very far.

There are also other examples elsewhere in the world, such as work permits. When someone has to move abroad for work, their spouse is automatically entitled to a work permit. They can start working immediately. In sponsorship cases here, I have seen it take up to 16 months to process work permits. We can look to many of our colleagues, and even ourselves, for examples. Clearly, where there is a will, there is a way.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Chair, I appreciated my colleague's speech very much. I am not as much of an expert in immigration as she is, and I learned a lot by listening to her, especially about the workings and procedures of the department and how certain procedures can apparently add delays to processing times.

However, I would like to come back to the issue of family sponsorship. This has always been a challenge for all governments. There are so many people who want to come to Canada to join their family. Two systems in particular have been tried over the years. There was the lottery system, which obviously had some shortcomings. It was replaced by a type of system involving a website where it was first come, first served. That also had its pitfalls.

I would like to know what the hon. member has in mind. Given all her knowledge on the subject, what solutions does she have for this problem that, as I said, has been a challenge for quite some time?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I sincerely thank my colleague for his question.

I do not claim to be an immigration expert. However, I do know that we should distinguish between the sponsorship of a spouse and the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. The government set a quota for the sponsorship of parents and grandparents and that is why we have a lottery or selection system. That is not the case for the sponsorship of a spouse, which does not have a limit. There is a distinction to be made between the two.

However, I do have a few recommendations to make about the sponsorship of parents and grandparents, since that is the question that was asked. In Quebec, for the sponsorship of a spouse, there is no assessment of the spouse's financial capacity. The sponsor does not have to prove that they are on fairly solid financial ground to sponsor their spouse. Other provinces set out specific amounts. In Quebec, the only stipulation is that the sponsor cannot be on welfare.

For parents and grandparents, sponsors must prove that they have enough income to support their parents and grandparents for a given period of time. Unfortunately, I noticed that with the lottery system, anyone can apply for the lottery without having to prove that they have enough money. There is not even a quick assessment of their financial capacity.

In some cases, I filled out sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents knowing full well that the applications would ultimately be rejected on financial grounds. These people were taking a spot from others who would have been able to sponsor their parents or grandparents. A simple pre-assessment could improve the system.

I think we could have a great many debates about which system to use. Is the lottery a good thing, considering that technologies are not the same around the world? This system gives an advantage to those who have faster access to the Internet. Many aspects are in need of review. It would be worthwhile to look at whether we can pre-assess a sponsor's financials.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Chair, I commend my colleague for her speech. I would urge my colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis to contact my colleague from Saint-Jean for help with his constituents' immigration files. He should not hesitate to reach out to her. She is very efficient and approachable, and she knows how to get files moving.

Like many of my colleagues in the House, I have immigration cases in my riding that have been delayed, that have been held up. Some are pretty heart-wrenching, because they are applications for family reunification. Some of these cases have been dragging on for years. In one case, Ms. Gaudreau of Drummond has been waiting nearly 10 years. Her partner is Cuban, and they have a special-needs child. His file has been dragging on for an unbelievably long time.

I can tell you about another case where a woman had a baby with her Cuban partner, and they trade off who travels to see the other. Lately, this gentleman has been unable to get a visitor visa because officials believe he will not want to go back to Cuba. However, since he has a child living here, I think it can be presumed that he would be willing to take steps to stay with his family.

That is what I am getting at. I feel like visa applicants and potential immigrants are often viewed in a bad light. I think that we should be trying to challenge that perception and change attitudes towards the whole immigration application process.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that, because this is an issue that I am beginning to be very concerned about, especially as regards my constituents.

• (1505)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for not putting any pressure on me with regard to managing and resolving cases.

The issue of whether someone does or does not need a visa to be sponsored is indeed a concern. During the crisis, we saw that sponsored individuals from countries where a visa is not required were able to come join their families, whereas those who were from countries like Cuba could not. I would like to point out that this was already the case before the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was not the pandemic that created this situation.

It has been suggested that a special visa could be created for these people. I think that idea is worth looking into, but I see where it might lead to problems.

It was suggested that this type of visa could be issued only after a security screening, an assessment of genuineness of the relationship and acceptance of the sponsor based on financial criteria. However, if all those steps are required to obtain a visa, why not just process the sponsorship application? If an individual already has to go through all those steps to get a visa, there is not much left to do in terms of processing the sponsorship application, so the process would become almost meaningless.

I am concerned that if the government starts issuing this type of visa, the prior existence of a sponsorship application could be used to deny a tourist visa. A sponsorship application should not compromise one's ability to get a visa, especially when the applicant has made it clear their goal is to immigrate.

Officials could justify not processing an application any faster on the grounds that at least the person has access to their family in the meantime. The problem is that, even if a tourist visa gives them access to their family, the visa prohibits them from travelling. They also have to pay higher tuition fees, and they cannot use the health care system.

All that could delay processing of sponsorship applications because that is the crux of the issue. We cannot let a band-aid solution distract us from the real problem: processing delays.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Chair, the member has been talking about the gaps in immigration. My question relates to the ruling today by the Federal Court that the safe third country agreement, which allows Canada to send certain refugee claimants back to the United States, is unconstitutional. Justice Ann McDonald explicitly states that the U.S. is no longer a safe country for refugees to be sent back to from Canada, and the court found that people's fundamental rights are being violated and that Canada is not a passive participant in these actions.

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Does the member agree that the government needs to address this immediately and that it should not appeal this decision?

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Saint-Jean has 10 seconds to answer the question.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, that is an important question, one that would be hard to answer in 10 seconds.

I have not had a chance to read the ruling, since we are sitting here today. However, I would remind my colleague that the Bloc has long supported either suspending the safe third country agreement with the U.S., not enforcing it for a few months, even scrapping it altogether. Perhaps that gives some idea of what our position will be once we have a chance to issue a formal response.

• (1510)

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to start my comments today by thanking the Government of Canada for bringing forward the legislation this week. I thank the members of the government for listening to and working with our leader, and with me and the New Democratic Party.

During this period of unprecedented upheaval and insecurity, it is vitally important that all parties, all politicians and, indeed, all Canadians work together to get through the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that it is only through our collective work that we can ensure that no one will be left behind and no one will fall through the cracks, and that we can rebuild our country and our communities in the months and years ahead.

There are great pieces in the most recent legislation, and I thank all parliamentarians for passing this bill. Nearly two million Canadians living with a disability will finally get support; small businesses will have more protection under the wage subsidy program; and people who mistakenly accessed the CERB will not have to worry about facing punitive actions.

I also want to applaud the members of the House for their flexibility and accommodating spirit that have allowed us to continue the important work of democracy in the face of COVID-19. We have had to be creative and nimble in the face of a reality that has turned our collective ways of working on their head. Our normal way of doing things was impossible; and, all things considered, we have done an admirable job of representing our constituents, working hard for Canadians and ensuring that our COVID-19 response was one we could all be proud of.

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However, let us not forget that we could have avoided so much stress and uncertainty over the past four and a half months. We could have implemented a universal support system that would have ensured that every Canadian was protected. That is what the NDP called for, and it would have gotten more help to more people, faster. It would have meant that people living with disabilities would not have had to wait over 130 days to get the support they desperately needed. It would have meant that students and recent graduates would not have had to bear the terrible burden of not knowing how they were going to afford to go to school in the fall and, let us be honest, it would have made the embarrassing spectacle that we are currently looking at with the government giving money to a certain foundation unnecessary. It would have made life easier. It would have made it less stressful for workers, families and seniors, and it certainly would have been a more elegant and simpler solution compared with the bit-by-bit, piece-by-piece rollout of support we have experienced.

I do want to talk a bit about some of my concerns with the COVID response and some of the things we need to continue to look at going forward.

First, we heard for weeks on end from the Prime Minister that people living with disabilities would get the help they needed to get through this pandemic. Then, when the government finally did bring a motion forward, it managed to leave out the majority of Canadians living with disabilities. The current government is very good at making promises. It is very good at announcing solutions. The only problem appears to be actually delivering on these promises.

This week, the government has brought forward a new program to help people living with disabilities, but once again it is not sufficient. It still leaves out many Canadians who need the support. The NDP voted for this legislation because it means that thousands more people in ridings like Edmonton Strathcona will get the help they desperately need, but once again too many people living with disabilities are being left out. The government must commit to working with the provinces to ensure that every Canadian who is living with a disability is protected and can live in dignity. Dignity is not negotiable. Dignity is a right of every Canadian, and people living with disabilities deserve no less.

My riding is also home to hundreds of small, independent businesses: restaurants, bars, creative shops, things that are not found anywhere else in the world. These businesses are crucial to our local economy, and I am worried that many of these shops that make Edmonton Strathcona feel like home are not going to exist in a few weeks. So many of these businesses, including the salons, the tattoo shops, the dance studios, clothing stores and gift shops could have benefited from the Canada emergency business account program, but they could not access those loans due to their business and employment structure. When the changes came, they were too little and too late.

• (1515)

The commercial rent assistance program has been a demoralizing experience for so many small business owners in my riding. For example, every day for the past three months I have heard from people like Claire, who owns a wellness clinic. She is eligible for the

CECRA program, but her landlord refuses to participate. Too many landlords like Claire's simply refuse to access the program, as it would take money out of their pockets.

Commercial rent assistance is a critical piece of this puzzle, and if the assistance had gone directly to tenants and businesses, rather than to landlords, we could have saved thousands of small businesses. Now those businesses may be gone. Those business owners' dreams are over and their employees are looking for work.

Within two days of the pandemic being declared, the government made tremendous efforts to ensure the liquidity of our financial system, guarantee export contracts and underwrite risks for very large businesses in Canada. We should have used that same initiative to support our small businesses.

My riding of Edmonton Strathcona is home to a number of universities, colleges, post-secondary institutions and campuses. The University of Alberta is the largest. It has a long and illustrious history of being a Canadian university that we can all be proud of. It is, in fact, the university that I am an alumni of, like many members of the House. However, the impacts of COVID-19 on universities and colleges in Alberta are dire. For example, the University of Alberta currently has an infrastructure deficit of over \$1 billion. With COVID-19 impacting tuition, revenue opportunities are important. Post-secondary institutions are at risk.

Let us not forget the students who attend these devastated institutions. Students and recent graduates need the support now. Actually, they needed that support in April. Do not forget that students and the Canadian Federation of Students have been asking since April for the federal government not to forget Canada's millions of students and recent graduates left behind during this crisis. This group noted that the Canadian youth unemployment rate reached an all-time high of 29.4% in May. August is a few days away. Students cannot afford to wait for more bungled programs that pay less than minimum wage. Let us find a way to ensure that students on the CESB receive \$2,000 a month, the bare minimum given to every other struggling person in Canada.

I want to thank the government for creating the Canadian emergency response benefit and for working with the other parties to include more people in the CERB. It has been a lifesaver for thousands of people in my riding, as I am sure it has been for thousands in every riding across this country, but we still have people who have been left out.

Yesterday, I tabled a petition in the House calling on the government to allow people who voluntarily leave their employment due to COVID-19 health and safety concerns to access the CERB. Canadians have the right to refuse unsafe work. That is fundamental, but do they really have the ability to refuse unsafe work?

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COVID-19 has changed our understanding of the workplace. In my province of Alberta we saw the devastating impacts of the virus, as workers have been forced to work in unsafe conditions. Hundreds of meat packers became sick with COVID-19 and three people died as a result.

Is this what Canada is about, forcing people to choose between their health, the health of their families and paying the bills? In March, the Minister of Finance said that people who were uncomfortable with the safety of their workplaces could apply for CERB, but that is not the case. In May, the deputy prime minister responded to my question on this matter saying that “no Canadian worker at any time should feel obliged to go to work in unsafe conditions”, but we know that that is not the case either. The Canada emergency response benefit should exist to help everyone.

Like so many Canadians, I am excited about the future of our country. We have an opportunity right now to restart. We have an opportunity to build back better, to create a Canada where all Canadians have support and the opportunities they need to thrive, a more equal Canada, a more just Canada that does not privilege corporate interests and big business, but instead protects workers and their families, that taxes the ultra-wealthy and does not allow our corporations to hide wealth in offshore accounts.

Let us build a Canada that finally respects our indigenous people and commits to UNDRIP and to true, meaningful reconciliation. Let us build a Canada that recognizes the racism that our racialized brothers and sisters face every day in this country and do what needs to be done to finally fix the systematic, institutionalized structural violence in our country. Let us build a Canada that takes climate change seriously—

• (1520)

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is time for questions and comments. I thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona, with whom we just spent two days on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, as well as doing some incredibly important work on the Uighurs.

I can see the member's commitment to her constituents and to making sure that people who are falling through the cracks are getting the support they need.

As we have been dealing with an unprecedented pandemic, I know that members of Parliament from all parties, through a phone call that was done every day at 4:30, through questions in the House and directly, have been bringing forward the ways in which programs need to be adjusted.

The programs are going out very quickly, and we normally would spend two or three years on them. We would have advisory groups, stakeholder consultations and policy analysis. It has been MPs who have been having to do that as the programs are rolled out to get them to Canadians quickly.

Could my colleague comment on some of the cross-party co-operation, and the ways in which individual MPs have been able to contribute to that process?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, I feel like we have done a really great job. We have tried to do the best we can. However, I will say one thing: I think there was a simpler, more elegant solution, and that was a universal benefit that was available for all people who needed it. That could have been rolled out very quickly.

I understand these are unprecedented times. This is incredibly challenging as we go forward, but the solution is clear. The solution is not supposed to be about how we can keep people from getting help. The solution is supposed to be about how we can get more people help, and get that help faster. That is what we really would have liked to see.

However, I agree that we have seen parties from across the floor, and throughout the House, work together to do what they can to help their constituents. I firmly believe that members of Parliament in the House of Commons have worked as hard as they can for the people of Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they should be proud of their efforts.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Chair, I very much enjoyed the speech from the member for Edmonton Strathcona. I always do, so I appreciate her work and her efforts. The member has been discussing a very important aspect, which is universal basic income, and how that could have come to the rescue of so many more Canadians.

Why does the member think the Liberal government is resistant to that idea?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, it is curious to me, because it seems like there was a very simple solution proposed and not accepted.

My only thinking is that perhaps the end goal was to limit who was able to access the benefits for COVID-19 and to limit who was able to benefit from these programs. That is very sad. That is very disappointing, because we know that when this pandemic hit, within only a couple of weeks people were not able to buy their groceries. People were not able to pay their rent. People were not able to pay their employees, and yet the inequality in our country meant that we also had people making billions and billions of dollars.

To me, that was the real catch: We do not necessarily need to protect big business. We do not need to protect the very, very wealthy. We need to protect the workers. We need to protect Canadians. We need to protect the families in our communities.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I want first to state how proud I am to serve alongside the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona who has been a completely passionate and courageous defender of her constituents and, of course, of human rights across the country.

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In her speech, she covered people living with disabilities, students, child and family services and workers. However, she was cut a little short, so I am wondering if she would like to take a moment and reflect on any areas from her statement that may have been left out, because I believe that she was doing a great job of capturing how we can build back better here in Canada.

• (1525)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, I also feel very honoured to work with my colleague, who is such a leader in our community.

I am thankful for the opportunity to talk a little more and say some of the things I did not get to say earlier. I wanted to include in my final statement that I want to be part of a government that builds back a Canada that takes climate change seriously by creating a diversified, strong economy and that protects workers and their families while creating a climate for our children and grandchildren.

At every critical moment in our history, we have seen what a Parliament that cares for and listens to its people can do in a crisis, but we should not need there to be a crisis to act. Over the coming months and years, we have an opportunity to build a better Canada, a Canada where everyone can live in dignity, a fair and just Canada. I am here to do this work with members for my constituents in Edmonton Strathcona, for people in Alberta and for all people in Canada.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Chair, I appreciate the heart expressed here today. You are talking about building back better. That is a term that is being used extensively now in the House. Is it in regard to the suggestions on how we move forward as an economy, beginning with the Corporate Knights?

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would ask the member to speak through the Chair.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, could I ask the member to repeat that? I could not hear over—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would ask the member to please repeat her question.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Chair, I am wondering about the term “building back better”. I have heard it used extensively within the context of the Corporate Knights organization, which is working on how our economy will come out of the COVID crisis. I am wondering if that is the member's reference.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Unfortunately, Madam Chair, no, that is not where that came from. In fact, we have been working within the NDP to develop what our strategy would look like for a new and better Canada.

I acknowledge what the member has said, and this is something we have heard from a number of different areas. One area I am particularly passionate about is our obligation around the world. When we build back better, one of the things we may want to consider is how we can support people around the world. Canada can take a stronger role in the world, making sure, as we go forward, that we recognize that until COVID is addressed all around the world, COVID will be addressed nowhere in the world.

We need a strong commitment to 1% of COVID spending going to our efforts overseas. I have worked very closely with other members of the House in asking for this.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Chair, I too am so proud to be able to work with the member for Edmonton Strathcona. She is an amazing representative.

This was not necessarily in her speech, but earlier today in the House, as members worked together, we talked a lot about child care. I have heard repeatedly, as the NDP critic for women and gender equality, that we are not going to restart this economy until we have a meaningful, universal, publicly funded system of national child care.

I would ask the member to comment on some of the programs that are unfolding, some of the asks that experts in that field have made of the government in the last few days and what we need to move forward in terms of a national strategy?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, that is an incredibly important question, and the work the member has done on this file has been phenomenal.

We know there can be no recovery without a child care strategy. We cannot leave women behind in our economic recovery from COVID-19. The NDP is asking, and many other groups are also asking, for \$2.5 billion to be put into a strategy for child care for this year. We are asking for that because we need to make sure that when our economy opens up, women can participate fully by being in their workplaces and not bearing the undue burdens of child care.

I am a mother. I have two children, who are awesome, and I can say that child care is something we all need to be looking at. It is very important to me that we look at it as a child care act, not something that we allow the provinces to run themselves, but something that we have strings attached to.

• (1530)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Chair, it is a pleasure to be here today to speak about our government's response during the COVID-19 pandemic and how we are working to support the re-opening of the economy, including the steps we took right here this week to move forward with a redesigned Canada emergency wage subsidy.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest challenges we will face in our lifetime. This is an unprecedented crisis, and our government has been working tirelessly to protect jobs and stabilize the economy to ensure that our businesses can prepare for better days and to provide some certainty to the workers and families who depend on the jobs at those businesses in these extremely uncertain times.

[English]

Our government has put in place a rapid and substantial COVID-19 economic response plan that is supporting Canadians and Canadian businesses and working hard to leave no one behind. We did this to ensure that Canada is well positioned to recover as public health conditions allow. Since March, the government has been taking actions through the COVID-19 economic response plan to support Canadians and their families in this very difficult time. The economic response plan is providing broad-based support that is keeping our economy stable and protecting jobs.

Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan includes more than \$230 billion in measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians and provide direct support to Canadian workers and businesses including liquidity support through tax and customs duty deferrals. This represents nearly 14% of Canada's GDP, making Canada's plan one of the most generous response plans in the world. The supports our government has put in place are making sure Canadians can pay their mortgages or rent, put food on the table and fill prescriptions. They help our workplaces remain in business during this time of incredible uncertainty.

Last week, the Prime Minister announced the safe restart agreement, supported by over \$19 billion in federal investments, to help the provinces and territories restart the economy over the months ahead while making Canada more resilient to possible future waves of the virus. We have already made major funding announcements and will continue to do so in many areas, including health care, child care and municipal services.

A pillar of our government's support has been the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The Canada emergency wage subsidy provides qualified employers with a subsidy for remuneration paid to employees. The CEWS protects jobs by helping businesses keep employees on their payroll and encourages employers to rehire the workers who were previously laid off. To date, this program has supported nearly three million workers.

Bold and ambitious programs like the Canada emergency wage subsidy are one of the key reasons Canada has stayed strong through this crisis. Measures like this one have been crucial to preventing worse outcomes. Without this support, millions might have lost their jobs and businesses would have lost workers. The important connection between an employer and employee would have been severed, leaving our businesses in a worse-off position and slow to recover, and leaving Canadians with uncertainty about whether, as things improve, they would have jobs to go back to.

Throughout this crisis, our government has actively monitored the situation and remained ready to adjust programs to meet the

evolving needs of this unprecedented crisis. That has included input from all 338 members of Parliament in the House.

In support of this objective, yesterday the House voted in favour of Bill C-20, which would see a redesign of the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The redesign takes into account the valuable perspective gained through our government's recent consultations with business leaders and labour representatives on how this program can best serve the needs of employers and employees as the economy restarts. Bill C-20 would extend the program beyond our originally announced extension of August 29, extending it to November 21, 2020, with the intent of providing further support into December.

- (1535)

The bill would also make the wage subsidy more accessible by making the base subsidy available to all eligible employers that are experiencing a decline in revenues, no matter how much. As I heard from a number of businesses in my riding, we had to make things more flexible, especially as they are beginning to open up and some are starting to make revenue again. By removing the 30% revenue decline threshold, we will also be able to support businesses that have been receiving the subsidy as they are returning to growth.

Our government recognizes that this virus is still with us and that economic recovery will be a gradual process. We want to make sure that no employer feels the need to choose between getting the support that they need and returning to growth.

With the bill, we are also proposing to introduce a top-up subsidy for the most adversely affected employers. This would help make the Canada emergency wage subsidy more responsive, with those who have had the largest decline getting more support and those who are recovering having gradual decreases as business picks up.

By reducing disincentives to create jobs and increasing revenues over the summer and into the fall, the redesign of the Canada emergency wage subsidy will support a strong restart for Canadians and employers.

I would now like to speak about other measures that we have put in place to provide support to Canadians during this unprecedented pandemic.

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The Canada emergency response benefit has been a crucial lifeline for millions of Canadian families. More than eight million Canadians have applied for this support. It has made sure that in the face of a historic emergency, Canadians have had the money for essentials. In my constituency, some Canadians were not able to buy healthy, nutritious food for their children because they had lost all sources of income. The fact that we were able to make this more flexible as we went along, so that people making less than \$1,000 who could not make ends meet were able to get the benefit, is a testament to the hard work of the members of the House.

We have also put in place a number of other measures to help families during this challenging time. Families received a special Canada child benefit top-up payment of \$300 per child in May. I want to take a moment to remind families that beginning July 20, which is this week, we are increasing the CCB once again, as we do every year. We have also supported 12 million low- and modest-income families with a special payment through the goods and services tax credit. The average additional benefit was close to \$400 for single individuals and close to \$600 for couples, which helped a number of families in the initial stages to deal with the extra costs they had because of this pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis has left many homeowners in Canada without a job or with reduced hours wondering how they are going to pay their mortgage. Homeowners facing financial stress have been eligible for a mortgage payment deferral of up to six months to relieve their financial burden. In addition, with the bill, we are proposing to support an estimated 1.7 million Canadians with disabilities, through a one-time, tax-free payment of \$600 to assist with the additional expenses that they are facing in this pandemic. I want to thank all members for working so hard to make sure this will happen.

The government continues to assess the impact of COVID-19. As we have said since the start of this crisis, we stand ready to take additional actions if necessary.

[*Translation*]

This week, this House has taken measures to ensure that Canadians receive timely help, thereby ensuring that our economy opens up again in a safe and effective manner.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Together we will get through this. Together, by working with provinces, municipalities and across all parties, we will be able to help Canadians get through the crisis. As the crisis eventually and gradually dissipates, we will be in a better position to rebound and build a stronger country.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Chair, there are a couple of areas here that my constituents have talked to me about, in large numbers, and that the member has not commented on today.

One, they are very thankful for the help provided to Canadians because the economy was shut down. It has been crucial, there is no question about that, but they are incredibly aware that it will need to be paid back. Although they are receiving the help now, that help means that, at some future date, they are going to be on the ground

paying the taxes, paying the expenses to return us to a healthier environment. That is the first thing I would mention.

Second, the other question I get asked a great deal is this: Why did the government not respond sooner? We know today, again, that it has been revealed that our Canadian Forces Intelligence Command informed the government on January 17 that we were facing a crisis. The government group did not even meet until 10 days later to begin to respond. What would have happened, I am asked, if our borders had been closed immediately and international travel had been shut down? Would we be facing the circumstances we are facing today?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for both of those questions.

On the issue of paying back, we have taken on these programs as a government so that individual families do not face the crushing kind of debt they would have faced if they did not have these programs. Those families that are getting the CERB, that are getting the wage subsidy, would have had to dig into their credit cards and borrow significant amounts just to be able to make ends meet. This is something that is incredibly important. We all know, as a country, that these are unprecedented times, but we went into this crisis with a very strong economy. Our primary goal right now is making sure that the connection between the worker and the employer is there, that those jobs are going to be there as the health crisis improves, so that our economy can improve significantly as well.

To respond to the member's other question, the Canadian Armed Forces receives regular intelligence briefings about any threat that could affect either the Canadian Forces or Canadians. These are shared as they need to be. Obviously, we cannot comment on specific individual intelligence briefings, but these are all shared, and these are things that we act on. I am very proud that we have incredibly good intelligence and we have very good information, which is shared with the whole of government, and this is one of the things we are able to do to keep Canadians safe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, my colleague spoke a lot about the wage subsidy. I would like her thoughts on other suggestions that the Bloc made to help businesses.

I am thinking about the SMEs back home that do not necessarily have a large payroll. Sometimes there is a single owner, no other employee. Sometimes these same people also own their work space. They do not have access to rent support.

What does my colleague think of the Bloc's suggestion of creating a business support program for fixed costs?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her very important question.

In my riding, business owners are constantly calling to ask about this. It may not be about the wage subsidy, but there are other programs.

[English]

There are the loans we are providing to businesses: the \$40,000 loans, of which \$10,000 can be given back to the business. We have made liquidity very available in our economy. We have worked with the provinces on the commercial rent subsidy, which has not necessarily worked as well as we wanted it to, but we are still working with provinces to make sure that it is working. I think the most important thing is that we have been listening and have been working very closely with parliamentary colleagues on all sides of the House. As we have seen, these programs have adapted and changed over time, and of course we remain open to all ideas from all members of this House.

• (1545)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for her comments and the tireless work that she does for her constituents in Ottawa.

I have a quick question for her. As much as we have seen the CERB help so many Canadians across the country, of course I would have preferred a more universal system. When will we know what the government's plan is, going forward, with regard to the CERB program? It is set to expire in August, and I just want to know if we expect our constituents to wait until the very last minute to find out what that looks like, or whether we will be able to hear sooner what the plans are to continue the CERB to help those people who have not been able to recover yet from COVID-19.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair, we know this pandemic is unpredictable. When we left this place in March, many of us thought we would be back in three weeks or four weeks. We have to ensure that our programs are adapting and that we are listening to Canadians. I can assure Canadians that we are not going to leave people in the lurch. We are not going to leave people who have no possibility of finding employment and cannot even buy groceries. I can reassure Canadians of that.

We also know that things could improve more quickly or less quickly than we anticipate. As the health crisis starts to hopefully improve, we have to be cognizant of a potential second wave. People want to go back to work. I know many families that want this. I truly believe that if businesses are able to open up, people want to be contributing. We need to ensure that is a possibility as well.

We have seen throughout this crisis that as people are suffering, and there is a tremendous amount of suffering, the government has been here every step of the way, listening to all members, responding and ensuring Canadians have the supports they need. I assure the member that we will all be fighting hard for our constituents to ensure they continue to have the support they need as we rebuild our economy.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Chair, our chamber of commerce in Fredericton held a webinar with the Minister of Economic Development. She mentioned the process of dealing with COVID-19 as stopping the bleeding, sewing up the wound and then healing. I feel like we have done a pretty good job of stopping the bleeding. We have incredible programs in place

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now. We have made some tweaks and improvements, which is what I would call sewing up those wounds.

What does the member believe would be the best way to support this next stage of healing for which Canadians are looking?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair, my hon. colleague's incredibly important question is one that almost all Canadians are now starting to ask themselves. That is precisely why we have the wage subsidy. The changes we made with Bill C-20 are specifically to ensure that as businesses are starting to reopen, maybe not fully, the connection between the worker and the employer is kept and those businesses can gradually—

Mr. John Brassard: It's only a matter of time.

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order, please. Would the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil please respect the member who is speaking.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is important to remember that three million people are benefiting from the wage subsidy. As we go forward, businesses need that flexibility to keep people on the payroll and open, if possible, while considering public health. We do not know how this pandemic will evolve. This gives businesses the flexibility to keep people on the payroll and help us start our economy strongly once the health crisis is immediately removed.

• (1550)

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for detailing what our government has been doing and will continue to do regarding COVID-19. One of the very important things we all have to keep in mind is that this is a work in progress. As things continue to evolve and change regarding COVID-19, we must adapt as well as a government. There are no automatic solutions.

How will yesterday's Bill C-20 further help Canadians and what we will do in the future?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair, this is exactly why we have flexibility built into Bill C-20. The 30% drop in revenue requirement has been removed so businesses can have that kind of flexibility to rebuild.

In my riding specifically, companies are already opening because of that. They will have the flexibility to continue to get supports gradually as—

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I believe the right hon. Prime Minister is rising on a point of order.

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Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, earlier today the leader of the official opposition asked me about an unsolicited proposal regarding social entrepreneurship sent by the WE organization to officials on April 9. As I said, to the best of my knowledge the proposal was not sent to my office by WE.

To ensure absolute clarity, let me add that through regular policy processes, the proposal was passed on to my office a couple of weeks later. As you know, Madam Speaker, that proposal was ultimately rejected.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Chair, I want to take the opportunity to speak to the importance of something that has been lacking in the government's response to COVID, and that is transparency and accountability, which we just saw in the House of Commons a few seconds ago.

I will also be addressing how critical it is that Parliament be sitting to oversee the response to this pandemic. We have seen this week that we can, on all sides of the chamber, agree to sit for the first time in years, maybe even in history, in the summer and that we can have a great discussion on the disability bill, Bill C-20, that we talked about in this place on Monday and Tuesday.

Parliament granted special spending powers to the government so that it could provide emergency support to Canadian workers and many businesses in a fashion that was quick and responsive. I remember the day in the chamber, Friday, March 13, when we rose. We did not know when we would be back and then all of a sudden, three days later, the Prime Minister told everyone to go home. That was Monday, March 16.

Opposition parties have worked with the government to come to an agreement that is crucially important, particularly considering how difficult it was at the time to hold regular, proper sittings in the House of Commons. What Parliament did not consent to was a process to avoid transparency and accountability at every turn. The government has done everything it can to avoid some of the questions from opposition members.

Jobs were lost in the millions in this country. Businesses were shutting down, the economy was shrinking at an unprecedented rate, which we had never seen since the Second World War, and the projected deficit has ballooned to nearly \$350 billion.

Why did it take the government until this month, July, nearly four months, to give us any information at all on the state of the economy and its budget? If we follow the pattern of behaviour of the government, it is easy to know that it was avoiding Parliament and its functions as an institution of accountability. I remember the day the finance minister stood and told everyone we had a deficit of \$343 billion. It was unheard of. People were phoning my office in Saskatoon—Grasswood. They were stunned. That number was jolting. We now have a debt of over \$1 trillion in this country. That is unaffordable for the 37 million Canadians who live in it.

I am not saying the significant levels of spending were not necessary. I do not think anyone in this chamber would say that. However, there is no good reason that the government could not be providing significantly more detail to Parliament about where the money is being allocated and what the money is for. In fact, I would argue that is the bare minimum expected of the Liberal government.

What is greatly concerning to me is that we have seen what happens when the Prime Minister thinks he has free rein to spend money wherever and however he wants, and he gives it to his friends. We have seen that with the WE scandal. We just talked about it in the House. It is exactly the reason that the government needs to be making itself available in the House of Commons proper.

When the Prime Minister thought he could allocate funding wherever he wished, he awarded a sole-sourced contract worth over \$900 million to an organization with no real experience at all in managing that kind of massive program. Why was that? We do not know. The Prime Minister has been dodging or ignoring some of the questions from the opposition for over a week now.

Let us review what we do know about this. First, the Prime Minister's wife is actively involved in WE. Second, the Prime Minister's mother and brother have received a combined total of close to \$300,000 in speaking fees from the organization. I have asked twice in the House, Monday and Tuesday, about the Prime Minister's mother receiving fees on July 2, 2017, for an event that was funded by the Government of Canada through the heritage department, \$1.18 million to the WE organization.

Third, the finance minister has two immediate family members involved in WE.

● (1555)

We learned in the past hour that the finance minister wrote a cheque for \$41,000 for illegal travel benefits from the WE organization following two family trips he took in 2017. He repaid the money today, just as he was set to testify at the finance committee. He took the trip in 2017, and today, months later in July 2020, he finally fessed up and wrote that cheque for \$41,000. I think Canadians want a new finance minister. That is what Canadians are talking about today, when \$41,000 later, he confessed to the WE Charity.

Fourth, neither the Prime Minister nor the finance minister recused themselves from the cabinet discussion about granting WE the \$912-million contract. Fifth and last, it is a sole-sourced contract without any competitive process whatsoever.

It is said that if it looks like and quacks like a duck, then it is a duck, and we saw that today from the finance minister at the finance committee here in the House of Commons. On top of that, the Prime Minister and the cabinet have had a long history of this kind of behaviour. Since the current government came to power in October 2015, it has been scandal after scandal after scandal. This is not the first time the Prime Minister, the finance minister or other members of the cabinet have been under investigation for violations of the Conflict of Interest Act.

The 2017 investigation found that the Prime Minister took a vacation to a millionaire's island with a registered lobbyist and found that he violated four provisions of the Conflict of Interest Act. That finding made him the first Prime Minister in the history of this country, in over 150 years, to have been found to violate the Conflict of Interest Act. He was the first ever in 150-plus years.

There was also the scandal in 2017 surrounding the finance minister's private company that owns a villa in France, which he somehow forgot about. Two years later he did not report that to the Ethics Commissioner. Of course, there was also the clam scam scandal involving the President of the Privy Council, and there are many, many more.

Then of course, who could forget about SNC Lavalin? That was the big scandal in the House of Commons when the Prime Minister improperly pressured the former attorney general into advancing the interests of a private company rather than the public interests. That scandal led to numerous resignations across the government. Some very good cabinet people left the Liberal government and were forced to sit on this side with opposition members.

By my count, there are five different cases where the Prime Minister or a member of his cabinet was found guilty of breaking at least one clause in our ethics law. We found out today we have another one with the finance minister admitting that the WE Charity did take \$41,000 in benefits, writing that cheque out today.

The former ethics commissioner Mary Dawson told CBC last week that she thinks it would be difficult for her successor not to find that the Prime Minister contravened section 21. She said that the Prime Minister has a blind spot when it comes to ethics. I would add that the finance minister does as well.

How can Parliament, let alone Canadians from coast to coast, continue to trust that the Prime Minister will be acting in the country's best interests and handling the unprecedented powers given to him? What does the government do when this issue is raised at committee? We saw that the Prime Minister ignores calls to appear and Liberal MPs filibuster at committee so they can cover up their leader's tracks.

These are some of the questions that Parliament needs answers for. Unfortunately, we only had two days here on Monday and Tuesday to open Parliament. We had a lot of questions. Some of the answers came this afternoon at the finance committee with that stunning revelation by the finance minister of Canada.

● (1600)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Chair, in the scandal we are examining today, with all the testimony and the latest \$41,000 the Minister of Finance accepted in 2017 from this organization, does the member think that those in the capacity of the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister of Canada would look to see what would happen if they had family ties to, and were getting paid money from, an organization that is benefiting from the government and taxpayers, from public funds, basically? Does he think there would be simple due diligence? Would someone who is professional like some of the ministers and the Prime Minister not think, at least for a moment, to watch the public funds and make sure that proper due diligence is done so that we do not

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get into this problem we see today? I would like the hon. colleague to comment on this.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, this is an embarrassing moment for the government. A member of the Privy Council has come forward in committee months after the fact, doing so today because the finance committee got him today. He revealed that in 2017 he took two trips to Ecuador and that he has family ties to WE Charity. If he had not been invited to the finance committee today, would he have paid the \$41,000? I would say no. It is embarrassing for the government. I would say the finance minister should resign.

I remember a time when the Liberals went after Bev Oda over a \$17 orange juice that she purchased. This is \$41,000, and it was not recovered until this afternoon at the finance committee, when the finance minister finally got the chequebook out and noticed that he was wrong, that it is an ethics violation and that he had better cough up the \$41,000.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Chair, I will go one step further than my hon. colleague.

The finance minister is a minister of the Crown. He is not allowed to accept sponsored travel. He accepted this trip from WE, this \$41,000 trip, which he just happened to pay the day he was showing up to the finance committee. That alone should be worthy of a resignation from a minister of the Crown. It is mind-boggling to all of us that not only did he not know that, but his staff did not know that. It is sponsored travel. No minister is allowed to do that.

I suggest that this is perhaps, in some form, influence peddling at a minimum, considering not only his trip, but also the fact that his daughter worked at WE and the organization got \$912 million as a result of this complex web. This gross connection that we are now finding out about is unbelievable. I am just wondering whether the member agrees with me on that.

● (1605)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, it is interesting that the finance minister was caught a few years ago for not showing the French villa in his declaration. That is one strike, but this \$41,000 is a major strike. This was the breaking ball that came across the plate, as months later he admits \$41,000 was never accounted for from the WE Charity when he took that trip to Ecuador, money given for accommodation, food and other things to do with WE Charity. Then we find out that not only the finance minister but the Prime Minister, his wife, his mother and his brother have ties to the WE Charity, which are just as close as the finance minister's ties. Yes, this one certainly reeks.

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I think the finance minister should step down today and give Canadians a clean bill of health. This was a \$912-million boondoggle that nearly happened. It was caught, and more will come out next week when the WE Charity owners come to committee. Hopefully they tell the truth.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Chair, I know my colleague once worked in television. I am sure he is aware there is a show called CBC Kids News, where there has been talk about the dynamics of the Prime Minister's mistakes. We now have the finance minister making mistakes, and they have both expressed they are sorry. Children are given an opportunity to respond, and I find it interesting that my children would not be given this option. They are saying he is sorry, so we need to give him some slack because he said he was sorry and that this was a mistake.

I would like the member to comment on whether or not that level of forgiveness should be given in these circumstances where we are dealing with the Prime Minister of our country and a significant minister, second to him really, on his right hand, supposedly next to our new Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, yes, as a former journalist for years, this is front-page news. Other than in the Toronto Star, it has been front-page news. I would like to thank Brian Lilley here in the House of Commons for doing an excellent job. He has been the best journalist on this. He has looked at the 300 block of Queen Street, which WE has bought every six months. Building after building, and \$43 million later, it now has an empire on Queen Street.

This is why democracy in the House of Commons is so important, because this story now has legs in the news media. It did when we came here on Monday, but following the \$41,000 cheque from the second top person in the Liberal government, this should be the front-page story on CBC, CTV and Global for many hours and days to come.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Chair, I want to ask my colleague about the current situation in Parliament and the fact that some media and reporters have done a great job of shedding light on this. I would like to also add Vivian Krause to that mix, and some of the statements she made with respect to WE. I just saw on social media that WE had somehow been involved in getting party lists and information for the Liberal Party before the last election. Those kinds of things do not come to light unless we have people investigating them.

Bringing it back to where we are in the House of Commons, the fact is we have only had so many sitting days. Even this version, for those out there watching, is not a real Parliament; rather, it is called a committee of the whole. This is a committee meeting. It is not a real Parliament. We do not have the normal number of people in the House to really bring these issues to light.

One more thing, before I ask the question, is this. I was the former chair of the ethics committee, and we wanted to have the Ethics Commissioner come and read his Trudeau II Report. We had it all lined up and ready to go, but the Liberals on the committee actually shut it down. This week the member for Winnipeg North

said it had already been addressed in a previous Parliament, but it was not addressed because the Liberals buried it there as well.

My question for the hon. member is this. Does he think this kind of setting is conducive to really holding the government to account? That is our job. We are paid very well to do that and we are not really being allowed to do that. I saw one of the members in his RV. Good for him, as he is on holidays, but that is not the way it should be. Parliament has sat through world wars in the past. We have seen many democracies around the world function regardless of the crisis. Does he think the current situation is the way it should be?

• (1610)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies for all his efforts on the ethics committee in the last Parliament.

Ethics is the most important focus for a member of Parliament who sits in the House. If we do not have an ethics base, we do not deserve to be members of Parliament in this country. Other than the committee of the whole that we have here today, the only other two committees of the whole will be on August 12 and 26. We have the biggest Liberal government scandal in years, and we are not going to come back here for three more weeks. As we saw today, there are problems with this virtual setting. Certain ministers cannot hear, and people who are speaking are not heard properly, so we need to get back here each and every day to hammer this out.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Chair, I have been reminded again and again of the kindness and creativity of people across this country these past four months, especially in our own civil service.

That historic weekend in mid-March when the pandemic took hold in Canada began a domino effect of businesses closing to the public, employees losing work and people flocking to government relief programs, fearing whether or not they would be able to pay their rent.

[*Translation*]

The huge number of applications submitted that have been processed by Service Canada and Canada Revenue Agency staff is incredible. More than six million applications were submitted by mid-April, just two weeks after Canadians started submitting their applications again.

[English]

More unsung heroes of this pandemic are the people employed at Global Affairs Canada and the CBSA, who began an incredible effort of repatriating Canadians from across the globe. During the first weeks of the pandemic, these civil servants moved mountains to schedule flights, to confirm travel eligibility, to work with consulates and foreign governments to get Canadian citizens and permanent residents back on Canadian soil. Their efforts were incredible. The minister responsible played a significant leadership role in guiding these efforts, and I wish to thank him as well.

Who can overlook the incredible work of the people involved in Canada's public health infrastructure? Dr. Tam and all of the other provincial health officers' daily updates and leadership and the support of the entire Public Health Agency and the public health departments across each province and territory, which pooled data, tracked cases and implemented protocols, have saved countless lives.

All of these efforts are to be commended, but the staff that dedicated their time to these emergency measures had to step away from their regular workloads, and ongoing cases at IRCC, Service Canada, CRA, Veterans Affairs, etc., have been stuck and languishing for months. What do people do when their federal systems are shutting down? They come to their MPs.

My team and I have been handling an incredible number of these case files and the people whose lives are on hold while their files stagnate in a backlog. Even as our government slowly works to address these files that are piling up on desks across departments, the traditional supporting documentation that people need to track down is not always available, and they cannot possibly complete the requests being made of them. We need these systems to empower workers to find alternative pathways for Canadians. This system collapse is having second- and third-order impacts on individuals and families across the country.

Let me tell members about a few of my constituents.

There is a gentleman in my riding who has been working in Canada for several years now and is applying for his permanent residency. He has submitted all of his documentation, but has been asked to submit one last piece of information: an FBI security check. It is not possible for him to get this document right now, as the FBI is not conducting these checks at this time. Relying on other countries to provide documentation is highly complex, given how hard it is to get documentation within our government. Will he need to leave Canada because we insisted on a document he could not get? How long will we leave this man and his loved ones in limbo? We need flexibility in the immigration system, and case workers who are empowered to identify alternative paths to residency and citizenship, or we risk losing our neighbours who have come to call Canada their home.

In another case, there is a couple in my riding who rely on their GIS cheques each month like so many other Canadians. They both submitted paper versions of their taxes at the same time in February. One of them had their taxes reviewed. One of them had their tax file lost. As a result, they have been denied their GIS payment until they can resubmit their taxes. They are being told that it must

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be done via e-file, but they have not been able to make that happen. We need flexibility within the CRA and employees in that department to be empowered to work with people and, in this case, to either track down the paper file or to work with this couple to facilitate the re-filing of their taxes so they can receive their GIS payments.

In yet another case, there is a mother in my riding who lost her child tax benefit just before the pandemic shut down offices in March, because the father of her children claimed that he had custody when he did not. The CRA has placed the burden of proof on her shoulders to regain the benefit, which she needs to raise these children. One of the supporting documents required was a letter from a health care provider substantiating her claims. For months, doctors, dentists and other health professionals have not been providing these services. Getting these supporting documents has been incredibly difficult.

● (1615)

[Translation]

We need to implement flexible systems that enable federal employees to work more closely with people in these uncertain times.

[English]

I know that many of my colleagues in the House worked day and night in the first months of the pandemic to get support to constituents in crisis, and continue to do so. That workload has now shifted to support constituents in their backlogged cases. While my constituent assistants and I are continuing to advocate on behalf of the individual cases that come through my door, we need to fix this at a macro level.

I want to raise this today to articulate a question to my colleagues in government. What comes next? Can we initiate a major hiring push, just as Veterans Affairs Canada announced last month to handle its backlog?

So many Canadians remain underemployed and unemployed. This seems the perfect opportunity to get more hands on deck to start working across government departments.

Can we empower case workers with more flexibility and tools at their disposal to massage case files through the system, recognizing that the standard burden of documentation is not realistic now, and may not be for months to come?

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I am but one opposition member of the House, and a rookie member, at that. I do not pretend to have all of the solutions, but I know that the solutions are out there, and I believe they lie in our civil service. The brilliant and compassionate minds that have worked tirelessly through March and April to get support into the hands of Canadians need to be equipped and empowered to put their brilliance to work to address these issues.

[*Translation*]

Communities across the country are changing. The government must adapt its services and embrace new technology.

[*English*]

There is so much about this virus that we cannot control, but we can control how we respond to it.

I wish to end on a positive note, a “thank you” to our civil service and a pledge to do all I can with my colleagues in the House to ensure that they have the tools and the respect they need to help Canadians in this time and in the future ahead.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague, who always speaks with empathy, sympathy and much humbleness. I always enjoy listening to her speeches; they are very heartfelt. I thank her for her words regarding our civil servants: the CBSA, and Service Canada and Global Affairs for repatriating so many Canadians, which they continue to work hard on doing. The number of calls they have received in these last months has been overwhelming. I thank them as well.

What are my colleague's thoughts on the programs that we have put forward, such as the CERB and the CEWS? Does she agree that without them Canadians would have been in very dire circumstances, that these programs are evolving and that they are a work in progress? Does she agree that without these Canadians would have been lost?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Chair, I am very supportive of the government's response to COVID-19. I mentioned yesterday just how proud I am to be a member of Parliament and to be a Canadian, at that, because we have fared quite well on the global stage, as far as COVID-19 goes.

The programs are not perfect, but we worked together to make them as applicable as we could to most Canadians. I do feel, however, that I must voice my support for a guaranteed livable income. That was something that, at the onset, would have supported so many more Canadians without the existing strict eligibility criteria. They would have had the support they needed to get through these months and the months ahead.

We are talking a bit about the healing and the recovery and what comes next, and I really hope the government is very open-minded with regard to the concept of a universal basic income or a guaranteed livable income, because I really feel that is the next step that we need to continue supporting Canadians with, as we have done throughout this COVID-19 crisis.

• (1620)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Chair, to build on that conversation further, I know, certainly from our side of the House and I think that we share this with the hon.

member for Fredericton, that this cannot just be the end. The government continues to go on and on about how great all of these programs are, and I agree that they have provided help in a critical, unprecedented time, but for the most part they have also shown all the holes in our existing system.

Now is the time that we get to build something better. My colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona had talked about that, and certainly the hon. member across the way has talked about the creation of bigger and better social programs. I, myself, have worked a lot in the House recently on the idea of a universal system of child care, but maybe she can expand on other programs that we could continue to work on, such as an expansion of our EI system or things like that.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for her work in the House. We certainly align on just about everything, so I am glad to be here with her in the 43rd Parliament.

I am very supportive, as well, of a universal child care system. I have two children of my own; many of my friends, families and Canadians know how important child care is to these next steps in our recovery in building back better for Canada, so we certainly need to put a lot of emphasis on that. We know how women have been disproportionately impacted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Certainly, I have felt some of those pressures as a woman, especially as a newly elected MP and what that brings into play, but I also recognize my privilege, so I cannot imagine those in a less privileged position having to deal with these last few months and then what is to come with all of the uncertainty.

There certainly need to be some changes. You mentioned some changes to the EI system; I really believe, again, that putting that patchwork of supports into a guaranteed basic income for all Canadians would really be the best step forward. It would alleviate a lot of the administrative costs and the stresses that we have experienced as parliamentarians in the rollout of these programs. That would be the direction that I would put my energy and my vote behind.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for Fredericton for her advocacy for her constituents in New Brunswick and for Canadians across the country. She has spoken about the economic and administrative benefits of the guaranteed basic income and a more direct universal payment.

Could the member speak to the difference that this kind of approach would make for her constituents?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Victoria for joining us virtually. That is a testament to how we have been doing our work here in Parliament.

In my speech, I gave a couple of examples of people struggling during this time. I think specifically about those who are waiting for their GIS cheques to come in. I think about those living on a limited income. I think about mothers who are struggling to find work or who want the option to stay with their children before they go on to their school-age classrooms.

For me, it would help countless individuals such as entrepreneurs, people wanting to take risks in their lives, artists and anyone in the gig economy. Specifically, I am thinking of many people in Atlantic Canada. I think about those with disabilities and those struggling with mental health issues. I feel this is the net we need to cast out into Canada, because it eliminates those holes we have been seeing glaringly throughout this COVID-19 crisis.

• (1625)

The Assistant Deputy Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I see there are no more questions or comments. I would like to take a few moments to thank our interpreters.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

They are doing a great job.

[*English*]

The interpreters coordinate the hybrid and floor models. I thank them very much.

It being 4:24 p.m., pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 26, it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired and the motion is deemed withdrawn.

(Motion withdrawn)

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 26, the House stands adjourned until Wednesday, August 12, at noon.

(The House adjourned at 4:24 p.m.)

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