



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

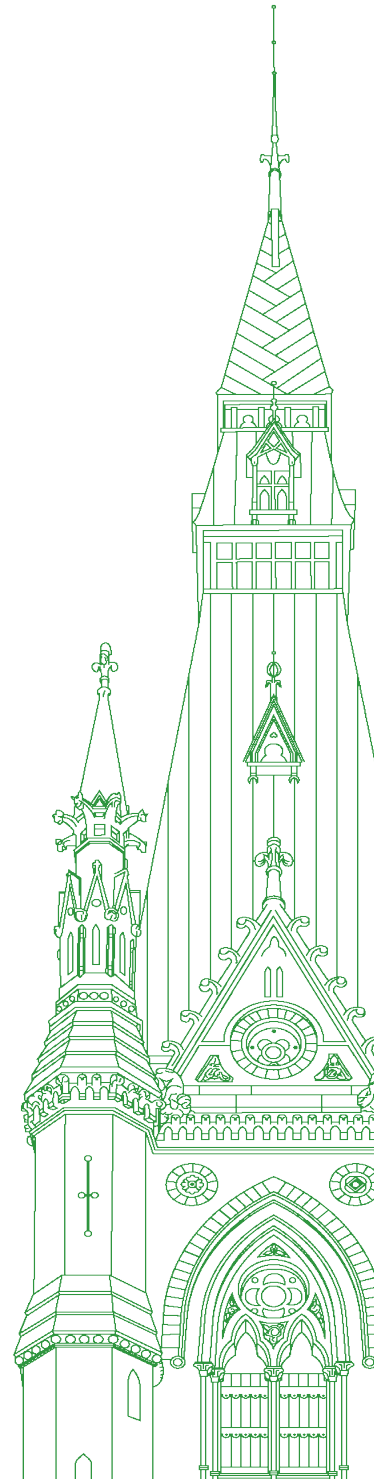
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House of Commons Debates

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Tuesday, November 3, 2020

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 3, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

BROADCASTING ACT

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition highlighting the plight of Uighur Muslims in China and calling for the imposition of Magnitsky sanctions against the officials who are responsible for what is going on.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present today electronic petition No. 2416. The petitioners note that genetically modified foods are not labelled and consumers have no way of knowing if what they are purchasing contains genetically modified organisms or not. They cite evidence from the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer that suggests there are unlabelled probable human carcinogens in our foods. As a result, the petitioners are asking the House, Parliament and the government to take action to ensure that products that contain GMOs are labelled, so consumers can exercise choice.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Lead-

er of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMIC ON CANADIAN WORKERS AND BUSINESSES

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC) moved:

That, given that the pandemic has had devastating consequences on Canadian workers and businesses, especially in the restaurant, hospitality and tourism sectors, the House call on the government to: (a) immediately pause the audits of small businesses that received the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy until at least June 2021; and (b) provide additional flexibility in the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, and other support program.

Mr. Speaker, it is a tremendous honour to lead today's debate on our opposition motion. It calls on the government to delay audits for small businesses until after next year's tax season. It also calls on the government to immediately introduce legislation to enact small business support and ensure these supports are flexible enough that they actually reach the small businesses they are supposed to help.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

I will be sharing my time with the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*English*]

As each province and municipality enacted emergency health orders, businesses were required to close their doors. The restaurant, hospitality and tourism sectors were especially hard hit. The small businesses in these and other sectors are the lifeblood of our communities. They are the backbone of the Canadian economy, and the owners, workers and customers of these small businesses are our neighbours and our friends.

Business of Supply

When governments issue orders that require businesses to close their doors and lose money, these businesses have a reasonable expectation of receiving support from their government, and that is why my Conservative colleagues have worked with the government to pass various support measures as quickly as possible. It is also why we have spent the last seven months pointing out problems with some of these support measures and offering alternative suggestions, hoping that this government would get it right and have the courage to admit when it has made mistakes, and that it would work with opposition parties, and its own backbenchers, to ensure it created the most effective and most efficient programs possible.

When we left this place in the second week of March and returned to our constituencies, we were all immediately inundated with calls for help from constituents concerned about their safety, their health, their jobs and their savings. We heard from thousands of small business owners who were concerned about the fate of their businesses.

In my riding, I met a travel agency operator. Since the pandemic hit, her revenue is down 96%, and that does not even include the fact that she has to refund most of the money she earned last year, as people are receiving refunds for trips booked previously. She is exhausting her business and personal savings, extending her credit and laying off loyal, hard-working employees. There is no end in sight.

I heard from Anna, a constituent who owns a pizza takeout kiosk in a downtown office tower. Her business was already threatened by thousands of pre-COVID energy layoffs in the very tower she is located. With the remaining nearby offices' workers mostly working from home now, she is down to a couple of dozen people a day walking past her stall. The impacts of COVID are absolutely devastating to these business operators.

I heard from a wedding officiant who is an independent contractor and does not have a business account. She could not access the CEBA program for months. She knew she was losing an entire wedding season, and she needed help in the spring.

I heard from a constituent who operates an online industry trade publication. He had recently made significant investments in his business, and even though his revenue was collapsing, he did not qualify for federal supports back in the spring.

I heard from Susan, a partner in a small oil and gas exploration company. She endured endless bureaucratic delays in trying to access the BCAP program, despite being on the threshold of receiving conventional funding on the eve of the pandemic and despite meeting all the criteria under that program.

Each of these small business owners supports a family. Most employ a whole team of dedicated employees, who are their loyal friends. The desperation and frustration in these calls, and many other calls, has been palpable. People who have worked for years to build up a business are seeing their life's work vanish before their eyes.

The coronavirus is a threat to public health and safety. That cannot be ignored. We know that, and we agree that all levels of government have a responsibility to ensure the safety of Canadians, but that responsibility also includes the need for a plan for economic

survival for the small business community. This is why my Conservative colleagues and I are asking the House to consider these three points today. Small businesses need breathing room. They also need immediate assurance that they will receive appropriate government support while public health advice is harming their businesses, and they need programs that will be flexible enough that they are actually accessible to businesses when they need them.

Tax compliance is hard enough on small businesses, and we have heard that the CRA is aggressively auditing some small businesses that are receiving the wage subsidy. They are immediately being told to produce large amounts of documentation with almost no notice. Small businesses do not have time to deal with onerous requests when they are in survival mode, which is why we are calling upon the government to delay compliance audits for the wage subsidy until after next year's tax season, until at least June 2021.

Prior to being elected, I was a small business owner, and many of my clients were also small business owners. I know what a letter from the CRA does to a small business owner. The mere fact of receiving a request for documents is enough to ruin a whole productive day for a small business owner. There is the initial anxiety of the request, followed by frantic calls to the accountant and lawyer, and the hollow-sounding assurances that these things are just routine and not a big deal.

There are then further scrambles to find what is being demanded, usually with only a few days notice. Some of the documents that are being requested in the wage subsidy audits are the same ones that small business owners would typically have to gather in the course of preparation for their 2020 return anyway, which is why next June would be a more appropriate time to commence wage subsidy audits on small businesses.

The second thing we called upon the government to do when we put this motion on notice was to immediately introduce legislation to enact promised extensions and amendments to support programs. The fact that the government has done so without waiting for a vote is welcome, but it was long overdue. The government knew that its failed rent subsidy program was coming to an end in September. It knew that its wage subsidy program was ending in the fall, and it knew that other programs, such as CEBA and BCAP, have problems that are well known.

However, instead of coming into this fall session with legislation ready to go in September, this government, mired in its own conflicts of interest and scandal, prorogued the House in August and seemingly did no advance work on necessary legislative changes. The Liberals came into September with a recycled throne speech and some vague hints about how they might address aid for small businesses. They then waited until after an opposition motion was on notice to introduce measures into the House. Desperate small business owners and workers have been waiting for details for months.

Finally, we are calling on the government to ensure that aid programs actually reach the small businesses that need them. The government's original rent subsidy program failed most small businesses, and it was panned by tenants and landlords alike. The government knows and has acknowledged that its initial approach to rent subsidy was a failed approach. Other programs, such as CEBA and BCAP, also had problems, and opposition members raised concerns about these programs months ago. While some issues were dealt with along the way, some were not.

This government now has an opportunity to get it right. It can do so by taking the time to listen to opposition MPs when we debate Bill C-9, because the Conservative caucus always stands up for small businesses. We have their backs.

We were there standing up for small businesses when this government went to war with them in 2017 with draconian tax changes. We were there standing up for small businesses when the Prime Minister said they were just a way for wealthy people to avoid paying taxes. We were there when Bill Morneau said that wealthy Canadians use complex corporate structures to avoid taxes, while he himself continued to own shares in a company that he regulated through a complex web of private companies.

We were there standing up for small businesses when this government imposed taxes that were particularly hard on restaurants, tourism and the hospitality industry, such as the escalator tax on alcohol, higher payroll taxes and, of course, the carbon tax. We have been with them since March, and we have been there ensuring that aid measures for small business passed expeditiously. We have worked with the government, and we have not held up legislation, but we have also been there making constructive recommendations to improve programs. We continue to stand with small businesses now.

• (1015)

We are calling upon the government to deal with the growing crisis of small businesses. Prior to COVID, the government failed to respect small businesses. During COVID, it has enacted programs that, in some cases, were poorly designed and difficult to access.

The government now has an opportunity to make amends, and show the small business community that it shares our Conservative support for the hard-working men and women, small business owners, and it can do so today by standing with the opposition in support of this motion.

• (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Lead-

Business of Supply

er of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is wrong in many ways. The government has been recognizing the valuable role that small businesses play for the country by being the backbone of a lot of the jobs that were created pre-pandemic. We have seen small businesses working with the government, creating over a million jobs, which is far greater than the previous administration did in nine years.

In regard to the pandemic, we have consistently been working alongside small businesses. That is why we saw the implementation of programs such as the wage subsidy program and the rent relief program. We continue to work with small businesses, consulting with them every day to make sure that we are trying to meet their needs, to the best of our abilities.

Can the member opposite inform the House what he would like to see the government do about small businesses, specifically with regard to the motion?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, the first thing the government can do is to stop treating small business owners like tax cheaters; to stop auditing them, to stop asking for onerous documentation while they are in survival mode and trying to cope with the pandemic and actually survive. It would be a welcome relief to small business owners to be shown some respect from the government that has treated them so poorly over the years.

I will leave it at that and hope that we can get more people involved in the debate than just the member for Winnipeg North.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, on the whole, we agree with the motion. There has been promises we have agreed with, but there was too much hemming and hawing, and things were taking too long. On the whole, we agree with the motion, which is asking the government to get serious.

As everyone knows, the emergency wage subsidy was meant to help people in emergency situations. It was not supposed to help parties that were rolling in dough. The Conservatives moved today's motion, and we know that both of their leadership candidates suggested reimbursing the money. They promised to reimburse it. Nobody really expects the Liberals to do so.

What have the Conservatives done to keep that promise?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I am not going to talk about political parties today. I am here to talk about workers in small businesses.

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Small business workers need to be able to keep their jobs and to be able to remain in their jobs. This was a failure of these programs in that the emergency response benefit was greatly oversubscribed at a time when the wage subsidy was under-subscribed. This shows how the programs themselves were a failure to the small business community that struggled to keep workers employed.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, as much as I appreciated the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge's speech, the one thing he did say is that Conservatives have always been there for small business people. Like him, I was a small business owner in 2008, and the Conservatives were definitely not there for small business people. They were there for big banks and big corporations.

Given that the Liberals have rolled out this flawed design program of the Canada emergency rent assistance program and given that they are going to fix it, as they admitted they were wrong, does my colleague agree that the Liberals should be rolling out legislation to backdate the fix to April 1, for those who did not get the help that they need, so that small businesses are not left out? If their landlord did not apply for a program, they should still be eligible, like everybody else. Does my colleague agree that the Liberals should fix this and backdate it right now?

• (1025)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, the member raises a good point. The former program failed small businesses. I do not know how many businesses have actually failed over the spring and summer or how many may be on the verge of failing because of the failure of that program.

He raises a valid point and I hope the government will listen to opposition MPs and create the best program it can for small business owners.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to support the motion moved by my hon. colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge, who is the small business critic.

I had the opportunity to speak with him and my other colleagues on a regular basis throughout the summer, when we were just as present, even virtually, for small and medium-sized businesses in our respective ridings.

In my riding of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, I organized round tables, together with my riding's chambers of commerce, which I want to thank, business people and municipalities affected by COVID-19. I wanted to pass along all available information to my constituents. I also wanted to support them as much as possible as they navigated the programs they were eligible for.

As a business owner, I would like to take this opportunity today to thank all the employees of our businesses, who, like us business owners, have been upended by the pandemic. I want to thank them on behalf of all business owners in Canada and Quebec.

Since I am still a business owner, I want to thank my employees and my business partner, who have managed to navigate these tur-

bulent times. Most of our employees have returned to work, but not without making some concessions, particularly in terms of working hours, to help the company weather the storm of the 2020 pandemic. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

As a business owner myself, I can attest that it is hard to make plans during a pandemic. Back in March, we hoped that all the closures would have the desired effect, namely, to flatten the curve, that we would be in lockdown for only a few weeks and that, hopefully, the pandemic would end quickly, as Canada managed to achieve during the SARS crisis in 2003.

Unfortunately, the pandemic continues. Weeks have turned into months. Although I represent a semi-rural riding, far from any big cities, the second wave is now hitting even harder than the first, during which my riding was largely spared.

Unfortunately, we learned last weekend that Montmagny RCM and L'Islet RCM had become red zones, much like the entire Chaudière-Appalaches region, I might add. Many business owners in that region have felt or will feel discouraged—and I can relate—especially those in the restaurant, bar, tourism and event industries.

Believe it or not, there was a shortage of workers in my riding before the pandemic. I realize how important it is for employers and employees to retain a relationship, so that they can be ready to go as soon as the economic recovery starts. I want to point out that there are more than 500 jobs still available in my riding as we speak. It is a bit ironic that so many people are claiming EI while many business owners are looking for employees.

Like many of my fellow Conservatives, I supported the Canada emergency wage benefit to help businesses keep their trained employees and be ready to fully resume operations as soon as the recovery begins. I was also critical of some aspects of the CERB that discouraged people from returning to work. I saw a few of these cases over the summer, and a number of business owners brought this up with me.

I remind members that, initially, people had to prove they had zero income if they wanted to qualify for CERB. That was completely ridiculous, because if someone had applied for \$2,000 but agreed to work for one day for \$100, they would lose the entire \$2,000 for the month.

The opposition parties, employers, the media, everyone was quick to say that this made no sense. The government then made a change to allow workers to earn up to \$1,000 a month. However, if they earned \$1,001 they would lose the \$2,000.

This summer, the Conservative Party was the only party to propose an alternative plan based on the principle of working while on claim. We had similar changes made to employment insurance under the Harper government. We believe that the government should never discourage work and that each dollar earned from working could progressively reduce the benefit received without eliminating it completely, as is the case under the Liberal plan. It took six months, but with the return to the employment insurance system, the unemployed were at least able to benefit from the flexibility that was lost during the summer. In the context of a minority government, we, as an opposition party, managed to get the government to make policy changes.

I also pointed out the flaws in the Canada emergency business account, whose complicated rules excluded many small businesses that did not necessarily have the revenue or major corporate bank account required by the government and Canadian financial institutions.

● (1030)

We identified these issues and it is mostly thanks to our actions that the government finally offered more flexibility. We are calling for the same thing again now.

The many changes may also be causing more confusion. The laws passed by this Parliament often contained provisions that enabled the minister or the Governor in Council to change these criteria through regulations. SMEs that do not have an accountant or tax expert on staff and that do not always have the resources necessary to seek such services took advantage of various government assistance programs by interpreting the criteria as best they could.

What is more, these criteria changed almost every day. It is important to remember that at the daily press conferences in April, May and June, the interpretation of some criteria may have differed and the way they were applied may have changed. The fact that all of these criteria and conditions were changing on a regular basis made things more complicated.

In that regard, I recognize that the government has a completely legitimate role to play in terms of oversight, to ensure that the programs are delivered properly. In some cases, however, we were the first to speak out against the government for ordering its employees to give people the CERB when there might have been fraud involved.

I wonder about that same government's choice to start by going after Canada emergency wage benefit applicants, who say they have already been contacted by the Canada Revenue Agency. These are businesses that have been bending over backward for eight months now. Many of these entrepreneurs have had to work in their employees' stead to keep the business alive. They have made considerable investments to reopen safely and comply with social distancing standards during the pandemic.

Now that we are in the second wave, these businesses are once again starting to worry about their future. What is the government doing to thank them? It is sending CRA officials to check their books. We are not out of the woods yet. I myself am a business person, and businesses clearly do not have time to deal with that right now in the middle of a pandemic. This is not the time to be asking

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businesses for accountability when they are struggling to stay afloat. There is a better time for that, and we want it postponed until at least next June. We have to let a year go by from when people began to receive or had access to various forms of government assistance.

Today, despite government measures, there are many sectors where things are very tough and where the fall and winter will be especially difficult. I am thinking of the tourism and events industries. There are many event management companies that are about to go bankrupt. They have lost 95% or 98% of their revenue and a business that has no revenue cannot make it.

The government must understand that it must give companies the space they need and far greater flexibility so they can at least survive the fall and winter.

In the past, countless businesses or professionals did not have access to the CERB or the Canada emergency business account for the simple reason that they were using a personal account rather than a business account for their banking. We worked on that the whole summer, and I remember that different committees had Zoom meetings to ensure that these people could become eligible. It took months and months for that to happen.

There are still problems today. I will ask a question about a company that was bought during or just before the pandemic and whose new owner is not eligible for assistance programs because the company is no longer associated with the former owner. That is just ridiculous.

Life continued on for businesses during the pandemic. Owners buy and sell assets and shares to survive. Business owners must be eligible for the government's programs.

I obviously support my colleague's motion calling on the government to immediately pause the audits of small businesses that received the Canada emergency wage subsidy until at least June 2021. I urge the opposition parties and my colleagues on both sides to continue to help businesses and SMEs, which are the backbone of the Canadian economy. I have been a business owner, and I am very proud of that. We must continue to support these businesses.

● (1035)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am having a lot of trouble squaring the conflicting ways the Conservatives are looking at audits during a pandemic. On one hand they are asking the civil service to provide thousands of pages of documents to review in the middle of the pandemic, then not reviewing the documents, and on the other hand they are saying that people are cheating the system with the CERB payments by staying at home, not wanting to work.

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We are in the middle of trying to deliver services to small businesses, and we are working together across party lines on this. However, the hon. members are asking us to stop midstream and interrupt the work of the CRA, which is doing small-scale audits to make sure we are on track. To audit or not to audit seems to be the question this morning.

Can the hon. member help me understand why in one case they want to do deep dive audits, and on the other hand they do not want to do audits?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is comparing apples to oranges.

We are talking about all of the businesses that make up the Canadian economy and we are asking the government to leave them alone for a few months. We know that the Liberals have called them cheaters and thieves in the past, but we do not feel that way. These businesses keep the Canadian economy going.

The member and his party gave \$1 billion to an organization that was not prepared to manage it. The documents they are asking for have nothing to do with those we are requesting. We are calling on the government to give small businesses a break. These are two completely different things. The Liberals are the ones who caused the WE Charity scandal and all of the documents they should be handing over. It is important for the House of Commons to have these documents.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, let's talk about scandal.

In his speech, my hon. colleague referred to the CERB and the many people who fell through the cracks. We agree with him. Could he answer the question posed by my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot?

The Liberals clearly said that they would not pay back the CERB they collected. What about the Conservatives?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Speaker, the political parties made decisions during the pandemic. The Liberals decided to take the wage subsidy. We, too, decided to take it, but then we later stopped. I think that those were important decisions that all organizations across the country, both political and volunteer, had to make at that time to ensure their survival and continued existence. We need to look at those decisions to make sure that things are done differently in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we agree with the Conservatives that the legislation being tabled tomorrow should have been tabled in the summer. However, the Liberals chose to prorogue Parliament.

The other day, the Liberals made an opposition day motion a motion of confidence that could have forced an election before any small business owners got the desperate support they need. We do not even know when they are going to get support in the legislation being tabled tomorrow. Does my colleague believe it was an irresponsible and shameful decision by the Liberals to have a confidence motion?

We heard from Dan Kelly, from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, on that day. He stated that it is “Absolutely critical that all political parties pull together and get the rent subsidy (CERS), CEBA loan expansion and wage subsidy (CEWS) extension across the parliamentary finish line.”

Does the member not agree that Canadians should expect parliamentarians to come together at a time like this, in a pandemic, and provide the necessary support for those who close their doors to protect public health? They are small business owners and their workers. We need to give them the support they need, immediately.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Speaker, as an entrepreneur, I cannot help but agree with someone who wants to support all entrepreneurs in Canada. Whatever the area of activity, I think it is important for the government to understand that. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB, just published a survey that shows that 75% of business were open full time two weeks ago but now that percentage has now dropped to 69%. A significant number of businesses are putting on the brakes. That will inevitably have a major impact on the Canadian economy in the coming months.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to speak to the motion.

We are living in extraordinarily difficult times. COVID-19 obviously represents the greatest public health emergency we have seen in our lifetimes. However, it also represents the greatest economic shock we have seen in generations, perhaps only rivalled by the Great Depression regarding its magnitude in the history of our nation. How we respond to this pandemic will dictate what our country looks like a year from now, two years from now or 10 years from now. We must have the courage to take actions, as difficult or as challenging as they may be, to allow households and businesses to survive this pandemic so they are still there to contribute to the economy on the back end.

Over the past eight months or so, I have had too many phone calls with business owners and workers who have been concerned about their well-being, and the well-being of their employees and families. I do not like being on the phone with parents who do not know how they will feed their kids. I do not like being on the phone with neighbours who fear they are going to lose their home. I do not like being on the phone with business owners who are worried the business they have built up over their lifetime is at risk of disappearing forever.

As much as I do not like being on the other end of those phone calls, I am so privileged to have the opportunity to do something to help those in need. I do not know that in my life I have ever done work as meaningful as I have over these recent months to help keep people fed, housed and on the payroll wherever possible.

Business of Supply

A big part of our response has been to advance benefits and supports to businesses in a manner and to a degree that Canadians have never seen. Some of those business supports are the subject of the opposition motion on the floor today.

Over the course of my remarks, I am going to discuss the nature of the economic crisis facing Canadians and explain why now is the time to make these kinds of investments. I plan to outline some of the responses we have put forward to help support businesses to date and demonstrate that they are showing signs they are starting to work, keeping people afloat during their time of need. Finally, I will deal with my objections to the motion, which largely deal with the fact that it is calling on the government to do something it has already done.

I kicked off my remarks by drawing attention to the severity of the public health and economic challenge before us. Let me say, before I get into a discussion of business supports, that the most important economic policy we can adopt is to protect the health and well-being of Canadians and our communities. We will not see an economic recovery if we do not address the public health threat before us.

The recession we are facing is not like other economic crises we have seen in the past. In 2008, for example, there was a fundamental problem with the financial system globally, primarily in the United States. That, of course, had a serious spillover effect into Canada. Now we are dealing with an exogenous shock to our economic system. It is temporary, but it is severe. The threat we are facing is caused by a threat to our public health in the form of a virus that we need to stomp out if we are going to see an economic recovery.

Effectively, we have a supply-and-demand side shock going on. Businesses have been shut down because of public health measures. Sometimes it has been mandatory and sometimes businesses have done it in a voluntary way to protect the health of their employees and customers.

Of course, on the other side of the equation we have customers who are not going out to businesses because they are afraid. They are afraid to travel. They are afraid to dine in enclosed spaces. They are afraid to go to entertainment venues. The consequences of the supply-and-demand side shocks that we are seeing are that businesses are producing fewer goods and services and customers are purchasing fewer goods and services. The Canadian economy is suffering as a result.

We made a decision that we were going to step in to ensure that the consequences of this economic slowdown would be mitigated and that the long-term prospects of the Canadian economy would remain positive. We can afford to make the kinds of investments necessary to float businesses and households through this emergency. In fact, I do not know that we can afford not to. If we do not choose to advance substantive supports for businesses and households at this point in our history, the costs will be borne out in the lives of our loved ones. We will see businesses shut their doors. We will see jobs leave and maybe never come back.

• (1045)

If we make the investments to keep households and businesses as close to whole as possible throughout this entire ordeal, we can limit long-term economic scarring. We can protect the long-term interests of the Canadian economy and, more importantly, the Canadians who take part in it.

The reason that now is the time to invest is, first, there is a need, which I think I have established by now. Second, we really can afford to do this at this point in our history.

We are dealing with a historic situation. We entered this pandemic with the strongest fiscal capacity of any developed economy in the G7, and we have used that fiscal capacity to deliver for households and businesses. We do not just have the fiscal capacity to respond. We are dealing with historically low interest rates globally and here in Canada as well. The fact is that we can finance the recovery effort at a rate that most would not have thought possible just a short time ago. We can lock in long-term low interest rates that will help ensure households and businesses can survive during this time of unprecedented uncertainty. In fact, the cost of servicing the much larger debt that we have today is lower by several billion dollars than it was about eight months ago, because our interest rate is at the effective lower bound.

Making these investments is not just something we can do; it is the smart thing to do. I direct members to the comments of the chief economist of the IMF, who is on leave from Harvard University's Department of Economics. She stated, "For the many countries that find themselves at the effective lower bound of interest rates", which Canada is at, "fiscal stimulus is not just economically sound policy, but also the fiscally responsible thing to do."

I would like to take some time to outline how some of our fiscal stimulus has been designed in a way to respond to specific needs that Canadian businesses are facing.

When we first realized the impact that this pandemic could have on the Canadian economy, we made a decision that households and small businesses were too big to fail. We wanted to protect their interests because they serve Canada's interests. The programs we have put forward are not based on some rigid economic ideology. They are designed to solve very specific problems that my constituents were calling me about. I know the constituents of every MP in the House were calling their offices as well.

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I had the opportunity to speak with my parliamentary colleagues from different partisan backgrounds, from every region in Canada. The feedback I heard largely mirrored the feedback I was hearing at home. The same thing is true of the stakeholder engagements that the government undertook, including many of the calls that I personally took part in, with chambers of commerce, business associations and local small business owners.

At the outset we realized that a lot of people were at risk of losing their income who did not necessarily qualify for EI, including self-employed Canadians. We advanced the Canada emergency response benefit to make sure that people could afford the basics, even when their job was causing them to lose income or their business was shutting down temporarily or perhaps even permanently.

We launched the Canada emergency wage subsidy because businesses were telling us that if they did not have support to keep workers on the payroll, they would have to lay them off. The panic I heard in the voices of local business owners when they realized the impact of this pandemic was going to be felt by their employees is something that will stick with me forever.

We launched the Canada emergency business account to respond to the concerns about paying monthly bills, such as electricity, heat, Internet and phone bills at businesses. This helped them literally keep the lights on.

When we realized there was a crunch coming for rent for commercial properties, we initially launched the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. Now, in response to feedback, we have moved forward with the Canada emergency rent subsidy, which will provide direct support to tenants who were suffering from an inability to cover their rent during this pandemic.

There is a series of other measures. We realized that we needed to get cash into the economy to ensure that businesses could meet their needs, whether it was dealing with equipment and materials they had on order or covering larger monthly expenses. We did this by advancing the business credit availability program. We did this by working with banks, including the Bank of Canada, to discuss lowering the domestic stability buffer. We did this by delaying remittances. We thought of every existing mechanism we had to keep cash in the hands of businesses rather than insisting they give cash to the government. This was a strategy that was important to adopt at the time.

• (1050)

I think back to the testimony that was given by Kevin Milligan: a professor of economics at the University of British Columbia who has since been brought in to advise the government. When he attended at the finance committee, he made the point that the pandemic has created significant costs. It was not a decision by the government of whether we should bear those costs, it was a decision by the government of who should bear those costs.

If the government decided not to advance the kinds of programs I have just described, those costs would have been passed on to households and businesses. They would have been demonstrated by households defaulting on their mortgages. They would have been demonstrated by parents not being able to buy groceries for their kids. They would have been demonstrated by businesses laying off

workers, perhaps permanently. They would have been demonstrated by businesses potentially being shuttered forever.

We made the decision that the federal government should take advantage of its ability to borrow at historically low interest rates and use the fiscal firepower that it had, because it had been responsible in managing the nation's economic affairs to make sure that the government stepped in and supported Canadians during their time of need. The results of these investments are starting to show themselves, and they are positive.

If I look at the road to recovery, though we may have a long way to go and though we are certainly still living in the midst of a public health and economic emergency, there is no question in my mind that the businesses that have received these supports are better off and potentially still here today because of those supports.

If I compare us to the United States with a geographic proximity that is significant given the way the virus has spread, I can see that our response has been largely successful. To date, 76% of the jobs that went missing during this pandemic have come back. We still have a way to go to reach our 2019 levels of employment, but we are going to get there because we are going to continue to be there for Canadian households and businesses.

The 76% recovery in Canada compares with a 52% return of lost jobs in the United States. I direct everyone's attention to a recent report from TD Bank, which stated, "No matter how you slice the data, the Canadian labour market has been on a steadier road to recovery relative to the U.S." The report concluded by suggesting that the old adage, "When the U.S. sneezes, Canada catches a cold," ought to be changed to, "When the U.S. sneezes, Canada builds antibodies."

The reality is that this approach is not based on ideology. It is in response to specific needs we are hearing directly from stakeholders, and it mirrors the advice we have received from leading economic experts: the IMF, the Bank of Canada, the World Bank, leading Canadian banks, business associations right here in Canada and, in fact, community members in my backyard who run businesses. Their advice has been that we need to be there in the short term to allow businesses to stay here in the long term.

Turning my attention to the motion before the House of Commons today, my objections to it exist on a number of bases. First and foremost, the motion calls on the government largely to do something that it accomplished yesterday: introduce flexibility in the wage subsidy and Canada emergency rent subsidy programs.

I note, in particular, the wage subsidy has now been extended through to next June. It is going to continue to allow employers to maintain a connection with their employees not only so they continue to have a source of income, but also so that the connection is there on the back end of this pandemic. It is going to benefit employees, who will maintain jobs, and it is going to benefit employers who will not have to look for new labour, will not have to deal with retraining and will have ready access to workers when it is safe to return to work and when orders have returned to full volume.

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Some of the changes that have been made to this wage subsidy show the flexibility that we have been willing to implement, whether it was the initial shift from 10% to 75%, the expansion of certain eligibility criteria so more organizations would qualify, or the introduction of a sliding scale so all businesses that had suffered a revenue loss had something to gain from this program rather than experiencing a cliff that would have maintained an incentive for businesses not to recover to the fullest of their ability.

As well, the new Canada emergency rent subsidy is a significant program that responds directly to the feedback we have heard from Canadian businesses. This is going to provide a new, simple, easy-to-access support. It is going to allow tenants to apply directly to the program to get the support they need literally to keep the doors open. It is going to provide support of up to 65% of their monthly rent expenses. For businesses that have been mandated to shut down as a result of a public health order, it is going to provide further lockdown support of up to 25% of their rent to ensure that they can weather the storm of this pandemic.

● (1055)

The motion suffers from an additional defect in that it asks for the suspension of audits altogether. The reality is these are perhaps the most significant economic supports that have been directly provided by a federal government in a very long time: generations, in fact. The idea that the CRA, which operates at arm's length from the government, should be told not to conduct the audits that it determines are necessary to ensure the integrity of the program is not in accordance with best practices and does not protect the public interest in making sure that the benefits accrue to those who are eligible rather than extending them to those who do not qualify, which could in fact put business owners in quite a bind if they are given benefits and not told very shortly thereafter that they were not eligible in the first place.

The other problem I have with the motion is that there is a tacit implication that the government has not been flexible in its approach to date, when it comes to specific emergency programs or perhaps emergency programs more broadly. From my conversations at home, as much as people appreciated CERB in the early days of the pandemic, or businesses appreciated the wage subsidy, the emergency business account or the slew of other government programs we put forward to help Canadians during their time of need, perhaps the most cited positive feedback was the government's willingness to listen and to adapt its programs to the needs of those who did not fit in, in the first instance.

I mentioned initially the fact that the wage subsidy shifted from 10% to 75%, and that we expanded the eligibility criteria to different classes of organizations and different kinds of businesses because of the transactions they had in the year before so we could properly adjust their supports to mirror the financial situations they found themselves in.

When I look across all the other programs, I look at the Canada emergency business account and remember that we shifted the payroll threshold. I remember we expanded it to businesses that used credit unions as opposed to traditional banks. I remember we made changes around payroll processing by third parties. I remember that we made changes to allow access for businesses that used personal

accounts. Now we are expanding the program to make a greater loan with an additional forgivable portion, and we even created a new fund through the regional relief and recovery fund in Atlantic Canada, administered by ACOA, to ensure that businesses that did not qualify for those existing supports would have another path to choose should they need additional financial support to get through this emergency. The reality is we have been as flexible as possible because we continue to have conversations with those who have been impacted most by this pandemic.

I know that I am going to continue to have those kinds of phone calls that are difficult to make throughout this pandemic. I know that I am going to be dealing with businesses whose customers have not come back. The motion cites the restaurant industry, the hospitality sector and tourism operators. I have talked to campground operators. I have talked to travel agencies. I have talked to restaurants. I have talked to airlines. They have a presence in my community and they keep people working. They are telling me that they continue to need support whether with their rent, keeping their staff on the payroll or keeping the doors open, but most importantly they say we need to continue to fight this pandemic so we can put an end to the public health emergency that is causing their customers to be afraid.

We are going to continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that we protect the health and well-being of Canadians, that we eradicate COVID-19 from our communities to the best of our ability and that we continue to extend the kind of emergency supports that will help keep Canadian households and businesses afloat throughout this pandemic until it is finally over.

I would be pleased to take whatever questions my colleagues may have.

● (1100)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary spent a lot of his speech talking about the need for support programs. No one is disputing that need. That is understood by everyone in the House. The motion deals with how the government has approached these programs and the needs of small businesses. I want to zero in on a point that the parliamentary secretary made in taking credit for the success of the government's programs in comparison to the United States. I would like him to comment on this.

The government has spent more money than any peer G7 country. Canada has spent the most, yet has the highest unemployment in the G7. How does he square that with the credit he is taking for the success of the government's programs?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, before I address the question, regarding the member's preamble that everyone in the House supports these kinds of business supports, I would direct him to comments of his own party's finance critic at the outset of this pandemic, who explained that the kinds of measures we were putting in place would not gain the support of the Conservative Party. He described them as "big, fat government programs" that did not seemingly serve his ideology, so I would dispute his preamble.

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In any event, with respect to the question, the hon. member ought to know that, despite the fact that Canada may have a lower employment rate than some of our G7 comparators, it entered this pandemic with literally the lowest in the history of our nation since we started keeping track of those statistics in 1976.

The member is criticizing, seemingly, the fact that we have had the most ambitious support program when he talks about our spending. What he is really saying is that he does not support the fact that Canada has had the most aggressive COVID-19 economic response of any developed economy in the world.

If he is curious about the unemployment rates today, I think Canada is at 9.0% compared with about 8.6% in the United States. If he would like to make up that 0.4% by paying for it in the lives that have been lost in the United States, rather than the rates we have experienced in Canada, I invite him to show me which public health measures he would erode in Canada to put Canadians' health at risk in order for that 0.4% rate of unemployment to match Canada and the United—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, we just talked about the issues facing those who have been overlooked. We all agree that we participated in local tourism during this pandemic.

However, there are cries for help. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about a very specific industry that has an impact on tourism, and that is the aerospace industry.

What does the government intend to do and when?

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, my region of Atlantic Canada has been hit hard in terms of the tourism sector and the aviation industry. My riding is home to the Halifax international airport, which serves as a major hub for our region. We have seen major airlines announce cancellations potentially indefinitely for regional air routes.

Many of the benefit programs we have put forward have been a lifesaver for the aviation sector and for air travel more broadly, whether it is financing for large employers, the wage subsidy or the other commercial programs. I know the government has been working with the aviation sector to continue to figure out specifically how we can support the long-term survival of air travel in Canada, because the full picture of this pandemic will not reveal itself until long after the public health emergency has ended.

We plan to be there to ensure the air sector has the support it needs. When it is safe to resume travel in the manner we did pre-pandemic, Canadian tourism operators are going to be among the primary beneficiaries globally.

• (1105)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with my colleague about the scale of the devastation in small businesses. This is the worst eco-

nomie impact we have seen since the Great Depression. I think the saddest moments for MPs across the country have been in many cases small business people, who put their lives into their business, closing the door for the very last time because they are simply unable to continue.

The commercial rent relief program put in place by the government was handed to a commercial mortgage company. As the member knows, initially it only applied to landlords with commercial mortgages. This was completely unacceptable. Over a billion dollars that should have gone to small businesses was not able to get there because of the complexity of the program given to a company led in part by the spouse of the chief of staff to the Prime Minister. The government has said it will fix that massive error by putting in place a new program, but it is not retroactive.

Why is the government not putting in place retroactive measures for the hundreds of thousands of small businesses that were unable to access the first botched program for commercial rent relief so that those businesses could actually weather this storm and come out of the pandemic and the second wave intact and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, before I address the question, I would like to point out that I find it wholly inappropriate to deal with the drive-by smears of the family members of the Prime Minister's staff. He and others have raised complaints along this nature, which are personal attacks. They took it so seriously that they raised it with the Ethics Commissioner, who dismissed entirely the complaint they had made. It is inappropriate to continue the personal attacks on the families of both the Prime Minister and his staff.

With respect to the question, we launched a series of benefits to meet very specific needs: the wage subsidy to help people keep workers on the payroll; CEBA to help businesses keep the lights on; and initially the commercial rent assistance program to help them keep the doors open. We realize, through many conversations with our colleagues of different partisan stripes and, most important, the businesses themselves, that they wanted something that could help them better avoid the provincial responsibility for landlord-tenant relationships. We designed an innovative program that would allow them to apply directly for support.

From his statement, I anticipate that the hon. member will be vigorously supporting the legislation when it comes time for a debate and a vote on the floor of the House of Commons.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a simple question for the member.

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During this pandemic, clear communication has been important from all levels of government. In particular, though, one of the most disappointing things has been the announcements that have come out of the federal government and their lack of execution or implementation.

Specifically, when it comes to the CEBA, back in August the government made the announcement that it would support those businesses with personal chequing accounts. As of last Monday, the Liberals made this announcement on their website “Canada Emergency Business Account now open to businesses using personal banking accounts.” However, as we know this is not a fact. What has now happened is those businesses can open a business account and then qualify to apply for the CEBA.

Would the member agree that the message and this title on the government website could be a lot clearer so small businesses clearly understand the programs and how they are available to them?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, I would disagree with the member that this has been successful communication without successful implementation. The strength of our programs is the number of Canadians they directly support.

Before I address the personal account issue, CERB has benefited more than nine million Canadians. CEBA, about which he has complaints, has now helped over 750,000 businesses. The wage subsidy is helping to keep more than three million Canadians on the payroll. Yes, there are nuances that could have been improved, both in terms of communication and delivery over time, but this is precisely why we are making the kinds of changes we have for the personal account issue.

With respect to businesses that operate out of a personal bank account, this was a challenge because to prevent fraud, financial institutions, of which over 200 are involved in the delivery of this important program, needed to quickly verify the information being presented to them as accurate. It is easy for them to do this with a business account, but it is nearly impossible for them to do that with a personal account.

The solution that we have achieved is to allow businesses to go to the bank they normally deal with through a personal account, simply open a business account and they will then immediately have access to the Canada emergency business account, like the 700-some thousand that are already benefiting from this program, continuing to keep Canadians working as a result.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean.

Starting a business is one of the hardest things a person can do. I speak from experience. Entrepreneurs work hard, often more than 40 hours a week. They often take no salary. At first, they do not get paid. They are constantly looking for financing. They are often forced to refinance their home. We are asking these people, the cornerstones of tomorrow's economy, to make a tremendous effort.

Close to 80% of businesses do not celebrate their five-year anniversary. It is extremely hard for these individuals.

Then the pandemic hit. This was the fault of neither the government nor the businesses. The pandemic came as a crippling blow. Some businesses were on the verge of becoming profitable. At last, they could see the light at the end of the tunnel. The pandemic put paid to years of hard work. It is incredibly sad.

Some sectors will feel the strain more than others. We do not know how they will be able to cope in the short or medium term. I am talking about tourism, hospitality, aviation and travel agencies. Unfortunately, the workers in these sectors are not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. We are therefore asking the government to make an effort to try to help them as much as it can.

Under these exceptional circumstances, exceptional measures were needed. Parliamentarians also needed to leave partisanship in the lobby. If we ask the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, he will say that he had a major ally at the beginning of the pandemic. The Bloc Québécois was in co-operation mode. I know this because I am the House leader of the Bloc Québécois, and I worked with the leader of the government. He said that the government was building the plane in flight, and unfortunately that was true. That is why we worked together. Unfortunately, the co-operation has eroded, giving way to partisanship.

On April 11, the emergency wage subsidy was created. Among other things, the Bloc asked that 75% of the payroll be subsidized. It was a good move on the part of the government, and naturally, we welcomed it. We wanted to include assistance for fixed costs in the subsidy. The wage subsidy was admittedly good for employees and employment relationships. Unfortunately, it may not have been enough to help businesses overcome the pandemic.

We asked the government to introduce assistance for fixed costs, and it agreed. However, the government did little or nothing to follow up on this request. The rent relief did not do the job. Less than half of the money earmarked for rent relief was spent. Perhaps the major issue was that the money was given to the property owners.

When I spoke with the government leader, I told him it was hard for us to say what help with fixed costs would look like. I told him that we were trusting them, because fixed costs are difficult to identify. They include electricity, insurance, rent and other things. We left the door open. We asked them to propose something, saying we were available to help if they needed input. We were there for the government, for the public and for the SMEs, our leaders of tomorrow. Unfortunately, the proposed help, as small as it was, did not serve its purpose. The government broke its promise, that is for sure.

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The government broke another promise. We negotiated to adjust the CERB so that after the first wave, businesses could hire people who would benefit from returning to work. Business owners were telling us that they were unable to hire people, that it was too hard. That is when we got the idea to adjust the CERB. We needed to move faster to prepare for what was coming after the first wave.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose in the House and promised to respect the Bloc Québécois' idea of adjusting the CERB. That was another victory for the Bloc Québécois. Did the Deputy Prime Minister keep her promise? Unfortunately, she did not.

That is the recent history of the assistance offered by the government. Agreements came out of good-faith discussions between the Bloc Québécois and the current government. We had hope, but that hope is gone.

● (1115)

The help with fixed costs that was offered to businesses was too prescriptive and restricted to get the job done. We are now in the second wave of the pandemic, which in many ways is worse than the first, and, once again, we have nothing for businesses. That is the reality.

On October 1, in response to the second wave, the Quebec government added a fixed costs component to its concerted temporary action program for businesses and asked the federal government to follow suit. As I said earlier, it is hard to identify all fixed costs. That is why the Quebec government gave us the flexibility to determine which fixed costs the assistance should go to. All the federal government had to do was follow its lead, which it could have done quickly.

However, October 1 came and went, and nothing was announced. One month into the second wave of the pandemic, still nothing. At last, on November 2, the government came out with something to finally address the trauma faced by business people, who deserve our utmost respect.

We agree that the Conservative motion is interesting. It talks about helping businesses, and we cannot object to that. It talks about being flexible and giving businesses a break from the CRA until June 2021. Any time the CRA comes knocking, it is stressful for businesses. Giving businesses a break until 2021 is a welcome measure. Targeting sectors that have suffered more than others from the pandemic is important. I talked about that earlier. The Conservative motion opens the door to a possibility that we raised quite some time ago.

With respect to seasonal workers, the government has admittedly taken steps in the right direction, but it has not gone far enough. We are talking about tourism, hospitality and restaurants. How are restaurant owners supposed to survive? Many people in my riding are calling out in despair. We are trying to help them using the tools provided by the government. However, everyone here agrees that the help is woefully inadequate.

What about the aerospace industry and its 40,000 quality jobs? It is Quebec's main export. Montreal is one of only three places in the world that can build an airplane from nose to tail. However, the

government has offered no assistance, a big fat zero. What a disappointment.

I know that I always seem to be in a good mood, but not right now. Why? Because the well-meaning Conservatives just told us today that despite raising \$13 million in funding in the first three quarters of 2020, they will not be paying back the Canada emergency wage subsidy. This is shameful. They raised \$13 million.

The Liberal Party is no better, since it claimed \$800,000 in public money, Quebec and Canadian taxpayers' money, despite raising \$8.6 million in political contributions in the three quarters. The Liberal Party said it would stop collecting federal assistance because it had taken enough. This is shameful.

The two richest and wealthiest political parties in Canada are a disgrace to Quebec and to Canada.

Some are looking at me as I speak, and I have no qualms about saying that the new leader of the Conservative Party, who stated during his campaign that he would pay back the amounts that the party received under the Canada emergency wage subsidy, is not going to pay back anything at all. As for the Liberal Party, it is led by a Prime Minister who keeps lecturing everyone and who prefers to give to his party, to give \$237 million to former Liberal MP Frank Baylis and to give \$900 million to WE Charity. Shame on him.

We in the Bloc Québécois are here for the right reasons. We are here to stand up for ordinary folks, and we will continue to do so.

● (1120)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier we heard the hon. member for Guelph say that an audit in the public service was the same as an audit in the private sector. Can the hon. member for La Prairie clarify the difference between the work of a federal public servant and that of an entrepreneur who takes risks to create wealth?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I must commend my colleague for making the effort and speaking French so well.

He is absolutely right to be upset about this flawed comparison. When an individual is audited, they are the one who has to pay for it. They often need an expert to provide the documents. In addition to that is the threat hanging over their head, even if they have done nothing wrong. Just go talk to business owners. They will say that it does not feel good. Is that same pressure felt in the public service? I think the answer is in the question. My colleague is absolutely right, and I agree with him.

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[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, doing a limited-scale audit of an operation during a pandemic is actually a way of managing risk on that operation. As a small business owner, audits would give me some corrections that I would be able to make before problems got out of hand.

As a businessman, I did not like auditors coming in either, but I did find them helpful in terms of managing the risk of my operation. A limited-scale audit such as this would be able to help a business owner do that. Could the hon. member please comment on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I commend and thank my colleague for the question.

It seems that some people find clarity when they are under threat. In my colleague's case, a CRA audit helps him to manage his business.

Seriously, if his business is important to him, I am sure that he is constantly doing these checks. It is a work in progress, an ongoing task.

I think he is on the wrong track. A business owner is constantly aware of what is going on in their business.

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

He touched on a number of important points. We are both concerned about the restaurant, cultural and tourism industries. I would like to focus on air transportation and the lack of a national aerospace strategy.

I would like to ask him why the government cannot come up with a clear plan and a recovery plan for the airline industry and the aerospace sector as a whole, a sector that is vital to Quebec.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I would say that I agree with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Quebec needs a robust and sensible aerospace policy that has clear and informed objectives. The federal government has done absolutely nothing on this. It does little, and any actions taken are done piecemeal. As a result, our aerospace sector, which did not get much from the government in the beginning, is in an extremely precarious situation because of the pandemic. What has the government done? It has done nothing, even though this is the most important sector of Quebec's economy.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, at the beginning of his speech, my colleague pointed out that, from the very beginning of the pandemic on, the Bloc Québécois had suggested constructive ways to support small businesses.

In my riding, I would like to thank the CLD du Haut-Saint-Laurent, the Haut-Saint-Laurent RCM, the CLD de Beauharnois-Salaberry, the Suroît-Sud CFDC and DEV Vaudreuil-Soulanges, who were also key economic partners in supporting small businesses through the wide range of programs created in both Quebec City and Ottawa.

Could my colleague explain what these organizations go through from the moment a program is announced to its actual implementation? Is this lag time in fact prejudicial to these organizations?

● (1125)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Obviously, in a situation involving a promise, from the time it is made public to when it is fulfilled, a lot of people come knocking. The wait is even worse. These individuals working for all of us are in a situation where they have nothing to give despite the tremendous demand. It is a very unfortunate situation.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always hard to rise to speak after my colleague from La Prairie because he is very eloquent. I will try to use fewer English words in my speech and I should be fine.

Without a doubt, Quebec businesses, Canadian businesses, and especially SMEs, were devastated by the pandemic. To be honest, I must say that I am very pleased that this motion is being debated in the House today. All of last week, the Liberals celebrated Small Business Week, almost as if it would magically solve the problems facing entrepreneurs who simply can no longer make ends meet.

The Liberals obviously love to hear themselves talk about the economy and entrepreneurship, congratulating themselves along the way. Their most recent display of boastful arrogance was on September 23, 2020, when the government announced that it intended to offer a wide variety of new measures to support businesses in need.

The government announced additional direct financial assistance to businesses that had to shut down due to a public health order; the extension of the Canada emergency wage subsidy until summer 2021; an enhancement to the business credit availability program; and support for industries hardest hit by the pandemic, such as travel, tourism and culture. Over one month has gone by since the government promised to support businesses, but they are still waiting.

The economies of Quebec and Canada are being devastated by the second wave of COVID-19. It is as urgent now to deliver this needed support as it was during the first wave. However, it took the government until yesterday to wake up and finally introduce a bill to extend the Canada emergency wage subsidy and create a new commercial rent subsidy program. That is the minimum.

The Liberals got the Governor General to deliver a throne speech chock full of lip service and empty promises, they got a certain opposition party that cares more about its survival than its values to do their bidding, and they threatened the country with a snap election, blaming parliamentarians who wanted to shed light on WE Charity for it. Now the Liberals are finally paying attention to businesses.

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The people who elected us do not want lip service; they want action. Quebeckers and Canadians should know that their businesses and their employers are way down the list of priorities for this government and the opposition party that props it up. People can be sure that if my colleagues from other parties have to choose between working on getting elected and working to help businesses survive, they will focus on the former.

Today, we are debating a Conservative motion that will spur the government to action. I certainly agree with that.

Before voting on any motion or bill, I always ask myself the following: Who do I work for? My answer is always the same: I work for my constituents, for the business owners in Lac-Saint-Jean and for the workers they employ. I do not work to advance my own interests. When you look at it that way, it is pretty easy to make the right decisions. If you ask me, voting to support this motion is a no-brainer.

I would now like to make a few comments on the context of the motion.

First of all, I still do not understand why it took the Liberals over a month to come up with an alternative after the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program ended. On top of that, I also do not understand why, six months after it came into effect and after countless testimonials of its failure, the government still has yet to respond to the criticism of the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, or CECRA. Do not get me wrong, I am glad the government has come to its senses on this.

However, since the start of the pandemic, SMEs have been constrained not just by the virus, but also by their landlords. Landlords wield a great deal of power over commercial tenants, because they have to absorb a certain loss. Like many from the business sector, the Bloc Québécois has always condemned this situation and repeatedly said that it would be easier to deal with the tenant involved rather than a third party. The program was also far too complex and would not exactly win any awards for ease of access. Ironically, less than half of the \$3 billion initially allocated by the government was disbursed. I have been an MP for only one year, but I am told that it is rare for a government to spend less than expected. It is a first.

We see quite rightly that the government made its own bed. The bill is clearly an admission of failure accompanied by a “better late than never”. The government will have to convince us and do it quickly. The only thing worse than further delays would be to ram through a botched program under the pretext of urgency.

• (1130)

Let me be clear. The government can no longer claim that the situation is urgent. The government no longer has the right to cut corners. From now on, it must take responsibility for how quickly it takes action and, most of all, for the integrity and seriousness of the parliamentary process through which these measures are introduced and then approved.

In principle, I am in favour of extending the Canada emergency wage subsidy until 2021, which is what Bill C-9 proposes to do. That is something we have called for a number of times. It is also

consistent with today's debate, which seeks to light a fire under this government.

I want to come back to what I was asking earlier. Who are we working for?

We work for people who clearly expressed their desire to continue to receive the subsidy. They want the government to keep the subsidy rate the same, maintain the basic subsidy rate until December, adapt the top-up subsidy as conditions change, be more flexible when determining basic income for employees who are returning from leave and include rent in the eligible expenses. They also want those businesses and individuals who are taking advantage of the pandemic to grease their own palms to pay back the subsidy, whether they are CERB fraudsters or political parties.

I know that I am repeating myself, but I find this important: Will the Liberals pay back the wage subsidy, since we know they made \$850,000 out of it?

I believe they said that they would not pay it back. Also, we realized this morning that the Conservatives still have not paid it back either, despite their leader's campaign promise to do so. Who are we working for?

The government is quick to recognize its privileges, while finally admitting that being in power is a privilege and brings with it a higher standard of probity. The government and its cronies have had their hands in the cookie jar for over six months, but Halloween is over. It is time for the Liberals to take off their masks.

Quebeckers and Canadians are ready to see their hard-earned money used for the righteous cause of saving the economy. However, let us be humble enough to recognize that it is their money, and let us do things the right way. Doing things right also means acknowledging that to deal with businesses is to deal with human beings.

A few seconds ago I was saying that our constituents want those entities and individuals that are taking advantage of the pandemic to pay back their benefits. That is why the Canada Revenue Agency is auditing the accounts of small business that received the wage subsidy. However, I think the situation calls for more flexibility from the CRA.

In the beginning, the situation was urgent for everyone, for politicians and business leaders alike. I am sure mistakes were made when the subsidies were awarded, but I think they were honest mistakes. It is for this reason, more than any other, that I agree with the motion.

It seems clear to me that in the middle of a partial closure of the economy, starting audits now is a bad idea. We all know, personally or through our role as MPs, that businesses are struggling to make it and survive. That is their priority right now, especially since the measures to help workers, although largely beneficial, intensified the pressure to retain staff. This is an undisputed fact.

Make no mistake, in spite of everything we have done, the pandemic has severely hurt our economy, and in particular the tourism and restaurant industries, which are closely linked. Tourist season in Quebec did not benefit everyone equally. The second wave is dealing a fresh blow to a sector that has already been pummelled.

For example, back home, we usually get a huge number of international visitors during the fall. This year, a decade-long campaign to extend the tourist season came to nought. Spending by international tourists is down by 95% in Montreal. Although businesses across Quebec and Canada are trying to be positive, they continue to operate at reduced capacity. I and many others fear that many establishments, including hotels and restaurants, will shut down for good. I will wrap up with this: Once we have secured more generous programs for businesses, we are going to have to quickly develop an assistance program specifically for the tourism industry.

The Prime Minister has twice said that he is looking at a tailored solution for the tourism industry. I hope that is true. I hope that he will also fulfill his constitutional responsibilities by giving the money to Quebec and the provinces. I also hope that the Conservatives and New Democrats agree with me on this.

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, tourism is important. I enjoy visiting my colleague's part of Canada. It is a beautiful place in our country, which has an industry that has been hurt.

However, there are two parts to this: We need to protect lives and we need to protect livelihoods. If we do not protect people's livelihoods, their lives will be challenging.

Over the last eight or nine months there have been many suggestions made to the Liberal Party of things to be changed. With regard to the legislation that is being proposed, I have lost small businesses in my riding because this is too late now.

Have businesses been lost in my colleague's riding because these changes that have been suggested for nine months have not been made?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question.

I know people who have closed their businesses because the government took too long to change the emergency assistance programs it had put in place. For six months, the Bloc Québécois has been saying that the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program is not working. The proof is that not even half of the \$3 billion for businesses has been spent.

I know some of these entrepreneurs personally. They have worked hard all their lives to build up these businesses. The government reacted too late, despite all the advice from the opposition. It should have listened. As a result, fathers and mothers were forced to close their businesses. It is sad and it is hard.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been a suite of programs to support small businesses in all regions of our country. There is not a day that goes by in which there is not direct input going to individual members of Parliament, Liberal members in particular, I suspect, and government, related to businesses. The parliamentary secretary to the minister of finance has been very clear on our openness to make the changes that are necessary to support small businesses.

I would ask the member if my understanding is correct that the Bloc will be supporting the opposition day motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, of course we will support this motion.

The openness of the former minister of finance was just mentioned. The fact is that, for six months now, my colleague, the member for Joliette, has been telling the Standing Committee on Finance that the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program is not working.

This is serious. We hear about working collaboratively across party lines and making changes together, but what happens at the end of the day? Committees and the House are shut down, no one can talk about WE Charity, and the opposition parties are not being heard when they have good ideas.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, most of Quebec is in the red zone right now.

Unlike the first wave, restaurants are among the businesses that are closed. My riding is extremely agricultural and is currently in the red zone. In fact, my colleague knows it well, because he used to live there, in the charming community of Saint-Liboire.

When we talk about the food supply chain, we are also talking about its role in the restaurant business. I would like to know how the rent assistance my colleague talked about could have a beneficial effect on these places we like to frequent.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, my colleague's riding is indeed absolutely splendid. I spent seven beautiful years there.

Indeed, when the restaurants and hotels close, it means that they buy fewer local products. This hurts our farmers, which is why we have been saying from the beginning that when the Bloc Québécois proposes something, it works. We saw it with aluminum; we have good ideas. We are working for our constituents, whether from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot or Lac-Saint-Jean.

Business of Supply

My riding is also very agricultural, and it has hurt a lot of farmers to see orders drop because of restaurant and hotel closures. If the other side of the House will roll up their sleeves and listen to what we have to say, we may be able to save a lot more businesses.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today and talk about small businesses: the economic generators in our small communities, job creators and cultural innovators.

I am happy to be sharing my time with my colleague, our finance critic, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Today, we are talking about those small business owners that I outlined and the sacrifices that they have made. Many have closed their doors to protect public health, and they have made the ultimate sacrifice. Many have created products to help people in our communities, including distilleries for our hygiene coordination and whatnot. It has been a tremendous effort, and we saw small businesses rise up, which they always do. In our communities, we know that they are the first ones to donate to our charitable organizations or volunteer to support those communities. Many owners are the coaches of our sports teams or teachers in the classes we take in our community. We owe them a ton of gratitude.

When I think back on when I was a small business owner and a chamber of commerce executive director, I think back to 2008 when the last recession hit us. The Conservatives were in power, and I watched the government of the day bail out its friends: the big corporations and big banks. With horror, I saw the sales in my own business drop 75% overnight, and there was no relief or help.

I was delighted when the leader of the NDP called to ask me what needed to be the priority for small business, and I identified that we could never let history repeat itself. We could never let another 2008 happen where small business owners and their workers took the brunt of the economic crisis. Instead, we needed to make sure that we helped everybody we could, especially small business owners, to get through difficult times.

I am glad to see this motion come forward today, especially the part about auditing small businesses, because there is nothing worse than being in a financial crisis and CRA is knocking on the door asking a small business owner to report to it with documents, which is not always an easy task when one is scrambling or pivoting to adjust to stay afloat, especially in times like this. It could wipe somebody out with the enormous time and energy that could be required.

I want to talk about the importance of parliamentarians working together and, for the most part, we have been doing that in this crisis. I think about the unprecedented actions, including the leader of the federal NDP and myself signing a letter with Dan Kelly, the head of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and organized labour asking the government to increase its original roll-out of the Canada emergency wage subsidy from 10% to 75%. The government has continued to roll out programs to support workers, but has always come out well below the bar of what is necessary. It

has designed programs that are flawed, that do not get people the help they need right away.

This unprecedented effort of working together, organized labour, small business owners and New Democrats working with their colleagues across the floor kicking and screaming to get the government to fix these programs, has made an enormous difference to help many Canadians, such as getting sick days, which has helped support small business. The New Democrats have been there every step of the way, supporting indigenous-led businesses in the tourism sector or eligibility around the wage subsidy and bringing forward the Canada food procurement program idea.

One program that I worked very hard on with my colleague for New Westminster—Burnaby in early April was the idea of a Canada emergency rent assistance program. Of course, we expected that the program would be directed at the small business owners who needed help. What baffled me, and everybody across our country, especially those in need the most, was that this program was designed specifically for landlords who had mortgages, which no one can really explain to this day, and many small businesses were left out. In fact, at the end of the program, even in its extended version, only 128,000 businesses were able to access the program. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business cited that there were 400,000 businesses that wanted to apply, but only one-third of them were eligible.

• (1145)

By not fixing the program, the government left \$1 billion unspent. That brings us to today. Many of those small business owners, including many in my riding, are steeped in debt or are facing bankruptcy and are under enormous pressure, because they could not access a program like the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, the same program that their neighbours or their competition got.

In all fairness, the government has admitted its failure with that program by tabling the legislation it is going to table tomorrow, the details of which are public knowledge. We are glad to see those changes happening. However, we are really disappointed that the government is not going to go back to April 1 and allow the small business owners who were left out to have access to those funds. Those are taxpayer funds that they should have equal access to.

We are seeing a massive deficit that could be \$400 billion to support small businesses and workers, gig workers and people across this country in this pandemic. At the end of the day, it is going to be those people or their children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren who will end up paying the debt on that, when it actually should be the big corporations and those who profited, as we have heard about from the New Democrats.

Business of Supply

At the end of the day, that money is going to be paid back by everybody. It is absolutely unfair to those folks who have not been able to access those program. The government has a duty and an obligation to go back and fix that program, and to ensure that those people get access to it.

I am urgently urging the minister and the Liberal government to fix this program, and urging my colleagues to get on board. I did not hear the Conservatives answer my question today, whether or not they agree the government should backdate that program so that people get access to it.

We heard that businesses in Port Alberni, for example, that rent from a local government agency could not access the program. They were disqualified, just for renting from a local government that, under its own legislation, could not provide relief to them.

The government continued to watch small businesses either fail or rack up debt, and many of them could not access the loans because of the qualifying measures of the loan programs the government was rolling out, especially for the BCAP. These programs have been very restrictive. The small businesses need help; they do not need more debt. They are in fear right now. I know what it is like to be in fear of losing a business that they built over many years.

We urge the government to support this motion today, to back off on audits but also to come back and fix this program. I see my time is running short. We are glad to see these things roll out, things that have been asked for, including the extension of the emergency wage subsidy.

One thing we have not talked a lot about is that we do not see any strings attached to protect workers. For example, in the tourism and hospitality industry, laid-off workers have no guarantees from their former employer that they would be recalled to work, so that when the jobs are restored they get put back on the seniority list or taken care of.

Indigenous-led businesses and organizations, many of which were disqualified until we went to bat for them on the wage subsidy, or the indigenous tourism organizations have not had full participation to have an indigenous lens on the important programs that the government is rolling out.

We need the government to roll out the programs. A lot of these supports come a little too late. We need the government to come back with a recovery plan to support small business, but also to invest in social infrastructure. As we are seeing, child care is absolutely essential to support small business. Pharmacare, dental care and reformed EI are needed, so that those workers who are now on the new CERB can get the training they need to meet the labour market needs. Many of them do not qualify, because initially they did not contribute to EI.

We need the government to take more action and to have a more robust rollout. Instead of threatening Canadians about going to the polls over opposition day motions, the government needs to get this program across the finish line so that small businesses are not worried that they are going to have to wait months for the support they need.

• (1150)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member touched on many different areas with which I agree. I would like him to comment more on the timeliness of supports.

The government spent the summer mired in conflict of interest scandals and then prorogued the House. When it came back in September, it did not have any legislation ready to go. It just had a recycled Speech from the Throne, and here we are on November 3.

Could the member comment on the importance of timeliness of supports and how it affects real businesses in his riding?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, my colleague's question is a great one. It has been an incredible journey for small businesses. They have been waiting for news on the extension of the wage subsidy program, or changes to the rent program.

The government prorogued Parliament. It delayed getting help to small businesses. In the meantime, every day we are seeing more and more small businesses close their doors permanently. We need the government to fix these programs, but we need the Conservatives to get on board and pressure the government to backdate the commercial rent assistance program.

Therefore, I urge that member and the Conservative Party to get behind the NDP call for the government to not just roll out the new legislation moving forward, but to help those who are steeped in debt and are looking at losing their businesses or even facing bankruptcy.

I appreciate him highlighting that the delays have cost thousands of workers and small business owners what really has been their life's work, and it is absolutely disappointing and shameful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The Bloc Québécois supports this motion.

In May, I was in the House and I questioned the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry on the problems associated with commercial rent. We already knew at that point that the program was not working very well, since only 10% of businesses were eligible for it, according to a survey undertaken very early on by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. June, July, August, September and October have gone by and now it is November. It is only now, on November 2, that the government is tabling an amendment to this program. What happened?

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That is unacceptable. Meanwhile, we have been receiving calls every day from entrepreneurs, businesses and organizations. They are exhausted. They are trying to find solutions. We had the solution, which was to change the program to make it more inclusive, to make it so that it is an option not just for building owners but for tenants as well.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy is also inconsistent. It supports businesses over a longer period of time but provides them with less support. I am thinking of the tourism industry in particular. I have spoken to representatives of the Alliance de l'industrie touristique du Québec in recent months. Every week, we review the situation. The organization is speaking out about the current situation because tourism operators are getting less income and support from the government. This is a very difficult time for them. We are currently dismantling the tourism industry, which took decades to build, because it is not receiving support from the government in a timely manner. That is a big problem.

On April 11, the Bloc Québécois proposed an amendment to the motion that sought to add fixed costs to the various government programs. We even had the approval of the Deputy Prime Minister. However, since then, nothing has happened. It is now November and the government is proposing a program like the regional relief and recovery fund, a standardized program that includes—

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

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, when it comes to the commercial rent assistance program, on April 9, my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby brought forward to the government the idea and concept for a commercial rent assistance program. We were baffled when it came back with a program that was landlord-driven and tied to mortgages. We want to learn more and get answers on that through the ethics and various different committees as to why the program was created that way. We hear of ties to the Prime Minister's Office and his chief of staff, which raises a lot of questions that need to be answered. We wanted to see this as a tenant-driven program. We wanted to see it tied to the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to give a shout-out to my colleague, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni. He has been the strongest advocate for small business in this Parliament. He does extraordinary work and I would like to underscore his amazing defence of small businesses.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce, of which I am a long-time member, and the Burnaby Board of Trade of which I am also a member. Coming out of the small and medium-sized business sector, which I will talk more about in a moment, it is fair to say that we are at a crucial period in this pandemic when we need to pay attention to small businesses.

I will flag the issues around small businesses and the government's slow response. However, with respect to the pandemic response, the NDP has been very proud to force the government to do a whole range of things that it was not willing to do initially. Two areas where the government has failed the most is certainly people with disabilities, who have had to wait seven months and are only now getting a one-time emergency payment that does not, by any means, reach all people with disabilities, and also the small business sector.

The small business sector, as my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni pointed out, saw a program put into place that was simply inadequate. I will come back to that in a moment. It is important to note that the government was very quick to respond when the big banks asked for a handout. Within a span of a few days, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, \$750 billion, three-quarters of \$1 trillion, was available through various federal government institutions in liquidity support.

That contrasts vividly with how slow the government has been in responding to the challenges faced by small businesses. Nothing is sadder than to see people in the small business sector, who have given their lives to their small businesses, which build communities and create jobs in their communities, turn the key in the door for the very last time and slip it through the mail slot because they simply cannot continue the hemorrhaging of their personal financial resources for their businesses.

The government's initial response was, to say the least, inadequate. We will recall that the government initially put forward a 10% wage subsidy. The member for Burnaby South, the national leader of the NDP, said that was absolutely insufficient, given the size and scope of the pandemic. Those in the NDP caucus worked together and forced the government to put in place a 75% wage subsidy. That has managed to save a whole range of small businesses.

As the member for Courtenay—Alberni outlined so eloquently, we also said that, like many other countries that have put in place commercial rent assistance, we needed to have a robust response from Canada. Instead of a robust response on commercial rent relief, we saw a program that was set up for commercial lenders. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, member for Central Nova, who is normally a very measured person, reacted very badly when we asked the questions that were on the minds of so many owners of small business across the country.

The facts are the following.

Fact one is that the commercial rent assistance program that was initially put in place was a failure. There is no doubt that two-thirds of the businesses that desperately needed that support were not able to access it because it went through landlords.

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Fact two is that this was an untendered contract that was basically handed over to a company that employed as its vice-president the spouse of the chief of staff to the Prime Minister. There are very obvious questions, when a program is a failure, as to why that happened. The government still has not answered those questions in any sort of fulsome way.

Fact three is that program was set up by a commercial lender to benefit landlords that had commercial mortgages. There is a clear contradiction in that. Not only did the program not work but a commercial lender was also able to set something up that, in a very real sense, was perplexing. A commercial lender was saying that those who had commercial mortgages could access this program.

These are legitimate questions. That is why we have been saying from the beginning that the program the government is announcing to replace it needs to be retroactive for all small businesses that were unable to access any sort of commercial rent relief from April right through until the end of September.

• (1200)

The NDP will continue to be determined on this fact and the member for Burnaby South, the member for Courtenay—Alberni and the entire NDP caucus believe strongly that those supports, which were denied to so many small businesses over the course of the last few months, have to be available retroactively for those businesses that need it the most.

[*Translation*]

I mentioned earlier that I was going to talk a little about my situation and my experience as the head of an SME. It was a social enterprise with about 50 employees. I am proud to say that it won two Consumer Choice Awards, in 2003 and 2004.

I understand why people might be concerned. Founders and owners of SMEs want their employees to be able to keep their jobs and their businesses to continue to operate.

Having said that, the current situation, which was created by the Conservatives and continues under the leadership of the Liberals, puts SMEs at a huge disadvantage. Web giants do not have to pay taxes in Canada and do not have the same obligations as SME owners. This needs to be corrected to make it fair for everyone.

In addition, the largest Canadian companies that use tax havens often take their money offshore and are not subject to tax laws. This needs to change. The NDP is pushing for these changes to be made during the pandemic, but also after the pandemic.

[*English*]

I want to briefly outline why the NDP feels so strongly, unlike the previous Conservative regimes and the current Liberal government, that we need to put in place a level playing field for small and medium-sized businesses in the country.

That starts with a fair tax system. We can no longer afford the \$25 billion that go to overseas tax havens. We support the motion today because the audits the CRA does so frequently on small businesses are not applied to corporations that are named in the Panama papers, Bahamas papers or Paradise papers. CRA has admitted that it simply has not been able to do any of the audits, fol-

low-ups or bringing to account any of these big businesses involved with overseas tax havens. We also believe web giants need to pay their income tax and we need to have a level playing field.

The NDP is proposing other things to be put in place for small businesses. We want to put in place a fair tax system. We also believe that the small business tax rate should go down by 1%. This helps to stimulate jobs in the local economy.

We believe in a significant investment in housing. The newly re-elected John Horgan in British Columbia, the B.C. NDP government, has invested more in housing in the past three years than the federal government and all other provincial governments put together. It has physically built more housing units than all other governments. The Liberals promise, throw out vast figures and eventually they will fund it, but they are far behind the B.C. NDP government in having turnkey housing units that people can access.

We also believe in putting in place pharmacare and ensuring our health care system is enhanced. The medicare system is a \$3,000 per employee, cost competitive advantage for Canadian businesses. Pharmacare would be a \$600 advantage on top of that. Not only does it mean that employees are treated fairly, but it takes the burden off small businesses and allows employees to have a full range of social benefits.

These are the kinds of things we propose for small businesses to help them get through this pandemic and in the period afterward, to prosper and contribute to Canada's prosperity and jobs across the country.

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that a year ago none of the programs we are referencing existed. It is through the fine work of hard-working civil servants, the cabinet and other elected officials, who worked with governments and small businesses from all regions of country, that we came up with programs to get us through this COVID pandemic. The government has been very clear that we will continue to be there to support small businesses, as we have been from the get-go.

It is my understanding, from listening to the member, that the NDP will be supporting the Conservative motion. Could the member clarify this?

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Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think it is pretty clear that we need to provide the supports for small businesses. We honestly believe the CRA is targeting small businesses rather than targeting the massive amount of money going to overseas tax havens. It is \$25 billion a year, as evaluated by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The CRA has done absolutely nothing to curb the massive tax evasion that takes place through the use of overseas tax havens.

Given the pandemic and the sheer size and scope of what we are seeing with overseas tax havens, we believe the audit function needs to be there.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the CEBA loans, there are about 30 or 40 businesses in my riding right now that cannot get through the process. They have applied through their banks and now they cannot get a hold of anybody in the government to have them approved. This is a big problem, and I am sure there are cases all across the country.

Could the member talk about the stress business owners are under when they are able to meet requirements but not able to get a loan? It is almost as though the government has put this program out there but made it impossible for businesses to receive the money. I am talking about the recent CEBA loans.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that when we look at where the government has been putting complications in place, often people who need to get the response as quickly as possible are affected. People with disabilities have had to go through incredible hoops over six months for a \$600 payment. Small businesses are having to jump through all kinds of hoops to access programs, and the commercial rent relief program was not even available to two-thirds of the small businesses that desperately needed the support.

Contrast that with the big banks and the massive liquidity supports: \$750 billion, with no conditions. The banks were not required to lower their interest rates to zero like many credit unions did. They were not required to eliminate interests or penalties. Their profit so far in the pandemic, and we will hear new figures shortly, is \$15 billion, with no conditions at all. That contrast is evident to everybody.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

At the start of this pandemic, we heard about collaboration. I believe that there has been collaboration in the House because we absolutely had to implement emergency programs quickly. There is a reason they are called emergency programs.

Nevertheless, the Bloc Québécois was the first to identify shortcomings in the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. This government waited six months to change this program.

In my hon. colleague's opinion, why did it take the government so long to change this emergency assistance, when it took only two weeks for it to take advantage of the Canada emergency wage subsidy and serve the interests of its own party?

• (1210)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question.

People with disabilities waited for six months. SMEs have a bogus program that does not work and that has created a great deal of controversy. In fact, one of the executives of the company that was chosen without a call for tenders is the spouse of the Prime Minister's chief of staff. When we ask these questions, the government refuses to answer and often reacts very emotionally.

However, the government granted \$750 billion in aid to the banking sector in a matter of days with no strings attached. I think it is obvious that this government's priority is not people or SMEs, but the banking sector.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be coming to you today from Lévis and to say hello to everyone watching, my parliamentary colleagues and the Canadian people.

First let me say that I will be sharing my time with an entrepreneur, the member for Cloverdale—Langley City, who is a remarkable business woman. She is also a mother and a grandmother several times over, not that anyone could tell by looking at her. She built a business with over 200 employees. I am very proud to serve alongside her.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, who just expressed himself in impeccable French. I congratulate him on speaking and answering in French, one of our two national languages.

Today is a great day for the House of Commons and for our country because our leader, the leader of the Conservative Party, has decided to focus Parliament's attention on what drives our economic activity, keeps our regions alive and sustains Lévis' economy: our businesses, specifically our small businesses. These include restaurants and businesses in the transportation sector. There are many businesses in the manufacturing sector here, as well as in the tourism sector.

We know these businesses have been struggling for over six months. Of course, health regulations are putting enormous pressure on them, but our role as parliamentarians is to ensure that government measures do not become an added burden. These businesses have enough to deal with, given the impact of the pandemic and health requirements. They do not need measures that cause them even greater harm.

Sadly, based on what we have seen over the past few weeks and months, we know that when we as parliamentarians ask the Liberals questions, we get no answers. I sent several letters to the former finance minister, Mr. Morneau, asking him to take immediate action to support our businesses and to rectify inconsistencies over time. I received no response to those letters.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately, we have seen that the Liberals are always very quick to help their friends. I am thinking of WE Charity and the purchase of medical equipment from a former Liberal MP at twice the going rate. That is not what our businesses want to hear. People have experienced immense hardship here in my riding. Our businesses have had trouble recruiting workers over the past six months because labour is scarce due to the disincentives put in place by the federal government.

What our leader is proposing today will provide businesses with more flexibility. For those just joining us, the motion moved by the Conservatives is meant to make the commercial rent assistance program more flexible.

The measure brought in by the Liberals was basically ineffective. Ninety per cent of businesses either had to close or saw a drop in traffic, but they still had to pay their rent in full or make arrangements with their landlords, who may or may not be willing to accommodate them.

Many businesses have been penalized by commercial rent, which is why we are asking for some flexibility regarding audits, so that we can provide support in the area of taxation, for example. As we are in the midst of the second wave, we must not add any further burden that will affect the financial health or morale of our struggling businesses.

One example of this is the wage subsidy, which the Liberals unfortunately brought in after implementing the CERB. Our businesses are the backbone of our economy. They are what I call the real economy. They are what will get us through the crisis now, and they are what will remain when the crisis is over.

The Liberals are plunging our country further and further into debt. There are no fiscal anchors. We eventually need to be able to pay back all the money spent during the crisis. Of course we want to support our businesses, our families and our workers, but we must do it wisely with targeted measures. Unfortunately, the measures brought in by the Liberals have hurt our businesses.

• (1215)

I will give two concrete examples.

The first is a pharmacist in my riding who called to tell me that he was having a hard time finding employees. Young people did not want to work because they were receiving the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency student benefit and the infamous Canada student service grant. This pharmacist, who was playing a vital role in fighting the pandemic, was facing an additional challenge because of the government. As I said, fighting the pandemic is already hard enough without the government making it harder. That is the first problem.

The second example, and second problem, concerns the overlapping measures that have not delivered the intended results. This is what happened to a restaurant owner whose employees told him that they were better off claiming government benefits than working part time. He was already in a tough spot, with food delivery for example, and now he was having a hard time retaining staff.

What we are telling the minister and the government is to ensure that the measures are effective and to make adjustments. That is the

role of Parliament. The letters I have sent have been ignored. The government prorogued the session and we have learned that the Liberals were prepared to give money to their party cronies who had given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Prime Minister's family members. They were also prepared to award contracts for twice the price to firms that provide equipment that they can obtain elsewhere for half the price.

Our vision is different, and that is why, as Conservatives, we stand up for our businesses. That is also why I hope the Liberals will support the motion we are putting forward, which calls for flexibility, for red tape reduction for bureaucrats and businesses and, at the same time, for ensuring that commercial rent is in fact paid directly to businesses rather than through a third party whose interest is not at stake.

That is what today's motion is really about. Earlier, I heard some speeches. What matters for our businesses is how to maintain the employee-employer relationships. Yesterday I spoke to a tourism company that has buses. The hardest part for this company is that the wage subsidy is not helping much. It is going through a difficult period because its revenue has been dropping for more than six months. Given the second wave, this remains a very difficult period.

It is therefore important that our measures be well targeted. Unfortunately, the government does not have fiscal anchors, which creates a burden. We want to support our businesses, but, sooner or later, we will have to be able to reimburse those sums, which have been poorly invested and have also harmed our wealth creators.

We must not kill the goose that lays the golden egg. The Liberals do not seem to be concerned about that right now, but, as our leader says, supporting people and businesses, especially those in the tourism and restaurant industries, is our primary concern. The purpose of today's motion is to give them a bit of breathing room so that they can get through this period and so that when this pandemic is over, when we have the vaccine and we have overcome these difficulties, we will still have these businesses, which will have managed to survive and create the wealth we need. It is not the government that creates wealth, it is our businesses.

In closing, I want to recognize businesses in Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis such as Bubble T, Rotobec, Exceldor and even the likes of Desjardins, which we rely on during this time. We need to be there for them. Let us adopt this motion. I urge the Liberals to support today's motion so that we can get through the pandemic with our businesses intact, once this crisis is nothing more than a bad memory.

• (1220)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a very specific question for my colleague.

Business of Supply

He just talked about the importance of giving businesses room to breathe because we are in an unprecedented crisis. Considering the need for breathing room and money, I would like to know whatever became of the taxpayer money that his party got from the Canada emergency wage subsidy. There was talk of paying that money back, and I would like to know when that will happen in order to help our businesses.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

We are right in the middle of a pandemic, which is why we Conservatives will vote for measures that support families, seniors and businesses. Members may recall that we did so in 2008 during the economic crisis. We agreed to open the fiscal purse strings, but it was always with two objectives in mind: a fiscal anchor and targeted measures.

The current Liberal government is like a ship adrift, without direction, without objectives. It does not have a fiscal anchor, which creates uncertainty in the markets, to the point where credit rating agencies have downgraded Canada's rating. For our part, we want to maintain the social safety net, and that is why we want a responsible plan, which today includes support for business.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that small businesses were the largest employers in the world.

In Winnipeg Centre, as the second wave comes in, we are now under code red restrictions. Businesses, including deer + almond, owned by Mandel Hitzer, one of the top Canadian chefs in the country, who has been featured on the Food Network, worry about 50% of the businesses closing down as a result of the federal Liberal government's failure to support small businesses, but also as a result of its provincial counterparts under the Pallister government, who have failed to support small businesses almost completely.

When my hon. colleague mentioned getting rid of programs, I became very concerned. When he is talking about getting rid of programs, which programs is he referring to? We cannot afford any more cutbacks to our support of small businesses.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I can share with my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre that we are unfortunately in a red zone too. I wish her community well as we struggle to flatten the curve.

What I can tell colleagues is that we want programs that are efficient and targeted, especially toward our small and medium-sized enterprises, and programs that do not have a negative impact, such as some of the measures implemented by the Liberal government did.

I want to reassure my colleague that we want those measures. We want to support efficient measures for small and medium-sized enterprises. That is the goal of the motion today and why I seek support from other members. I can understand why my colleague from the other party will support it. I think it is a step in the right direction. We need to be there to help and support our small and medium-sized businesses without being a barrier for them, as they go through the pandemic.

• (1225)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague pointed out, 82% of our economy depends on small businesses in Canada. The government has related to them as a less than efficient means of raising the economy. I think the words “tax cheats” came up years ago from the Prime Minister in regard to small businesses.

As well, my colleague mentioned bus lines. I have small businesses in my area that are still not eligible for some of those opportunities that will help them, such as CEBA loans, particularly. With the bus lines in my area there are no school tours or travel anymore. Can he expand on his comments about the bus lines, as well as any others that may fall through the cracks?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I wish my colleague from Manitoba well.

Yesterday, I spoke to an owner of a business, Autocar, who shared with me that we need to improve the federal programs in order to support businesses through this difficult crisis. That is why I am proud that my colleague and I are supportive of the motion, which seeks to support our businesses in their time of need so that, when we get through this, they are still with us, safe and contributing to our wealth.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during this pandemic a great divide has been perpetrated on the nation by the Liberal government, a schism of enormous proportions. Over the last seven months, we have seen certain kinds of good, hard-working Canadians be dealt blow after blow, while other kinds of Canadians were handed cheques and assistance at every turn. No injustice was too much for one bunch and no perk was too generous for the other.

As the government began to impose lockdowns and restrictions across the country, it treated Canadians like two different classes of people: the good and the bad, the honest and the cheat, the employee and the employer.

This distinction is no new thing for the government. For years the Prime Minister has been going after small businesses calling them tax cheats, suggesting they are all hiding their ill-gotten gains by taking advantage of loopholes in the system, buying equipment as a tax writeoff or hoarding money and calling it a rainy day fund. I will tax that, said Mr. Morneau. If people have a family business and want to sell the farm to their son, the government plans to make them pay over 80% of the sale price in taxes if they want to pass it on to the next generation, because everyone knows that, for the current Liberal government, passing a farm from father to son is clearly a tax dodge if ever there was one.

What happens in a pandemic when a government sees small business as the enemy of the proletariat and itself as the saviour? We see financial support programs that discourage going back to work while punishing the big bad barber, brew pub or banquet hall around the corner. Let us take the restaurant and hospitality industry as an example.

Business of Supply

In my riding there are hundreds of unique and exciting establishments gathered in every neighbourhood. Shiraz Grill on a one-way street in Langley serves up Persian and Italian food. It is delicious. Right across the street is Viva Mexico where one can have a truly authentic Mexican experience. A little closer to the Willowbrook mall, people can experience the taste of Thailand at the Naka Bistro. Further down the Fraser Highway is the ever-popular Dublin Crossing, where people can eat their fill of bangers and mash while tapping their toes to a live band of Irish rovers.

Every one of those restaurants I just mentioned is owned and operated by a hard-working entrepreneur, the majority of whom are new Canadians who have brought the colour of their culture to our communities, along with jobs and economic prosperity for us all. They took on great risks and responsibilities in their quest to create a new and better life for themselves in Canada. Little did they know that their new country now has a government that punishes risk-takers and job creators like themselves.

When their doors were closed in early March, they just buckled down and pivoted to takeout. Owners and their families worked long hours to get food to our homes in a safe way. While their wait and kitchen staff stayed home on CERB, they called their nieces and nephews, their aunts and uncles to please help with the cooking and cleaning or owners would lose their dream.

Seven months in, the entire sector teeters on the brink of extinction. After the restaurant industry invested \$750 million of its own money to train staff, enforce social distancing, implement health checks and adapt for contactless delivery and curbside pickup, they continue to live under the constant threat of lockdowns and further restrictions. The government has offered them almost no help besides a wage subsidy that disproportionately helps some businesses while being useless to others, or rent subsidies that were impossible to access until our current motion forced the government to improve it.

Now the Liberals have instructed CRA to start aggressively auditing any business that applied for the wage subsidy. If people made a mistake in their calculations, they will be charged a penalty of 275% of the amount they claimed. If the Prime Minister had been charged a 275% penalty for his illegal quarter-million dollar trip to the Aga Khan's island, he would owe almost three-quarters of a million dollars. What did he actually pay in fines and penalties? He paid a measly \$500.

The Liberal government has declared war on our small businesses, the backbone of our economy. Mom and Pop shops across this country are the target of sustained attacks that do not appear to be ending any time soon. The government has exhausted all credible excuses to explain away its continued failure to answer the call of Canada's small business owners. For months my opposition colleagues and business leaders across Canada have identified serious problems with the COVID-19 relief programs, which have allowed too many small businesses to fall through the cracks.

● (1230)

The government keeps claiming that it creates jobs in this country. The government does not create jobs. Canadian entrepreneurs do. If this Liberal government does not begin to understand that concept, our economy is going to be decimated. One can only rob

Peter to pay Paul for so long. For every small business forced into receivership, we lose the jobs and revenues those businesses create.

Canadians were told that a prorogued Parliament would give time for a quality restart plan to be corrected, and they believed that. However, what did the Liberals come back with after six weeks of a shuttered Parliament? Nothing, nada, bubkes. The government promised to come back to this session with a plan. Where is the plan? How do I tell the businesses in my riding that the support they need is going to lapse without new legislation? Where is the plan to improve the programs that have not worked for so many businesses? Where is the sector-specific support for airlines, travel and tourism, agriculture, energy, any of it?

We constantly hear how hard this government has been working for Canadians, but from where I am sitting, Canadian businessmen are getting a lump of coal in their stockings for Christmas.

Honestly, we need to get to actual work here. The finance committee should be conducting pre-budget consultations right now. We should be hearing from Canada's business leaders about what they need during this economic crisis. Instead, the Prime Minister sends his MPs to filibuster the committee, talking out the clock to avoid releasing WE scandal documents. Machiavelli, Aristotle, Plato, all the philosophers are dragged by their hair into our meeting to justify the Liberal cover-up.

There is a very serious crisis happening in our country. Many small business owners are not sleeping at night. They are absolutely desperate, and no one is listening. They are begging and pleading for this government to make a plan, an actual plan, not just a band-aid solution. I have met with them face to face. I have seen the anxiety and agony in the eyes of men and women who have poured their whole heart and soul into a dance studio, coffee shop, travel agency, hair salon, chiropractic clinic, pharmacy, restaurant or clothing boutique. The list is endless. They are under extreme stress, and it comes out in the form of migraine headaches, rashes all over their bodies and even heart attacks. Their stress comes from a government that does not have a plan, so they cannot make a plan either. Entrepreneurs will find solutions. They just need to know where they stand. Give them clarity and they will figure out the rest.

Business of Supply

The scorecard shows that our country has spent the most of all G7 countries, yet has the worst economic performance. There is no one else to blame for this disaster except the Liberals. They keep throwing money at programs that are nothing more than band-aid solutions. We need to get our economy moving again, but since the government seems incapable of stopping the bleeding, let us at least make sure that whatever band-aid solutions we apply actually work. The government is working hard to turn Canada into a benefit-based economy with no end in sight, while making it more and more impossible for businesses to find workers.

We need to show leadership here and give businesses clarity and equitable treatment. Right now, every level of government is knocking on the federal government's door demanding compliance to rules that have not even been written. With workers' compensation, Health Canada, bylaw officers and police, there is a never-ending stream of busybody bureaucrats that are making things up as they go. Health officials are even encouraging Canadians to report on their neighbours for perceived infractions.

Have we lost our minds? Do we really want a police state? I recognize that these bureaucracies are not the federal jurisdiction, but it is this government's lack of leadership and transparency that is causing so much confusion.

At first, we were told masks do not work. Now we are told something completely different: Wear one. In the beginning, the virus did not spread from person to person, and now we cannot even have our own children over for coffee. The message has been god-awful. Half of Canadians are scared to death and do not believe a word the government is saying. Why are rapid at-home tests not in the hands of Canadians? Why is this government not doing that and making it a top priority?

Let us strategically target our efforts on protecting the vulnerable while allowing the healthy to safely get back to business. Why, after seven months, is our tracking and tracing failing so miserably? We need to focus on getting things back up and running, and not on scaring our country to death.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, talk about utilizing Conservative backroom talking points. That is what came to my mind as I listened to what the member had to say in regard to the resolution.

There was very little in that speech that I would concur with, other than the fact that business owners, just like all Canadians, are having a very difficult time. The government is doing its very best to provide the supports necessary. Heaven forbid if it were Stephen Harper who was in government. At least with a Liberal government we have a government that truly cares and believes it needs to provide programs to support Canadians and businesses.

Does the member not recognize that the CERB program was in fact a good program, contrary to what her speech might have implied? Does the member not recognize that by helping Canadians through the CERB program, the government is helping businesses?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the hon. member did not find anything of value in my speech shows how little of a connection Liberals actually have with business people.

What I said comes from the heart because I live it, and many people in my riding are living it. I am meeting them. I am visiting with them. We needed CERB because of what the government has been doing.

Now I am begging the government to find a plan. We need the Liberal government to find us a plan to get us out of here, not just band-aid solutions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Cloverdale—Langley City for her speech.

Indeed, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of that. In our view, these famous amendments should have come long before now, because they are essential for the economic well-being of the people in our communities.

I would like to hear her views on start-ups. Here, in my riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, several businesses have informed me that they were not eligible for the various programs. For instance, they could not get the Canada emergency wage subsidy because their operations started in 2019 and therefore they could not provide figures for previous years, which was one of the program's eligibility criteria.

What does my colleague think the federal government should do to help start-ups so they can keep their heads above water during this historic crisis?

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with my hon. colleague more. There are still many start-ups and small businesses that are falling through the cracks. That is why the motion is asking for more flexibility.

We need to make sure that, when we get on the other side of this pandemic, we still have small businesses that are actually functioning.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for highlighting the importance of small businesses in our communities.

I am from Edmonton Strathcona. It is the heart of the restaurant scene in Edmonton. We know that Alberta has been deeply hit by COVID-19. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said that there is a higher risk of small businesses closing in Alberta than anywhere else in the country. Between March and May, 8,500 businesses closed in Edmonton. I will be supporting this motion.

As New Democrats, we have been proposing ideas throughout this pandemic. We have been able to move the government to increase the wage subsidy from 10% to 75%. We have been able to improve business supports, the CERB process, and supports for seniors, students and people with disabilities.

What has the Conservative Party proposed? What are its original thoughts on how it would move forward in the pandemic?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my hon. colleague could first of all take a look at the motion we have here today. All of the things the member mentioned, which supposedly came from the NDP, have been our suggestions.

Conservatives work hard to make sure that everybody is taken care of in the small business world because without our small businesses, we are nowhere.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, small and medium-sized enterprises are the engine of the economy in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith. The hospitality, tourism and entertainment industries have been hit really hard.

I would like to ask the member about the contradiction in the Conservative position around wanting to audit people for the CERB. There was a well-known news story about a senior who had two disabled children. They all applied for CERB. These people were not eligible, and the Conservatives wanted to see audits of people who were getting the CERB when they did not deserve it. Now they want to remove audits for small businesses, which is something I actually agree with.

Could the member comment on that?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, in a pandemic, people should not be getting a phone call from the CRA saying that they have 10 days to cough up the paperwork. We need to protect small businesses right now. We need to help them stay in business. The last thing they need is a call from the CRA.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to be here today and great to see so many of my colleagues virtually while I am in the wonderful riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge. I will be splitting my time this morning with the member for Sherbrooke.

Before I get to the heart of the matter, I wish to say that where I am located is surrounded by small businesses. There is a local bakery shop, a convenience store, a cleaner and a restaurant. We know businesses across Canada, just like the ones here in Vaughan—Woodbridge, need our assistance. We have been providing that assistance, whether through the Canada emergency business account, the new rental program or the existing rental program, which will be finishing up. However, we also knew we needed to work with the provinces when we introduced the first rental program.

I wish to acknowledge that these small businesses did not do anything. Rather, this was an exogenous shock to the economy, as we say in economics. These small businesses were working hard. They were investing in their businesses. They were growing. They were hiring Canadians and creating great middle-class jobs from coast to coast to coast. Unfortunately, with COVID-19, we have seen, not just in Canada but throughout the world, that small businesses need our assistance, and our government has responded.

Business of Supply

We have listened to the CFIB, business councils and small business owners. What we see in the legislation, in Bill C-9, is a flexibility that we are providing to businesses so we can continue to reinforce that bridge. We need to get to the other side. We know winter and spring are coming, and we need to ensure businesses have the confidence and certainty that the government has their backs, and that is what we are doing.

I am thankful for this opportunity to speak on today's motion. In my remarks, I would like to focus on the aspects of the motion that relate to the important Canada emergency wage subsidy and provide some insight on what the government has done to ensure this important measure is available to all those vital businesses across Canada that qualify for it. This government recognizes that, although the economy is slowly reopening, many people are still impacted by COVID-19 in devastating ways, and they continue to face very challenging economic circumstances as a result.

The government introduced the Canada emergency wage subsidy, or CEWS, in April to provide financial support to employers of all sizes that had been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Since its launch, more than 1.4 million CEWS applications have been approved.

I need to give a shout-out to the phenomenal team of civil servants and bureaucrats at the Canada Revenue Agency. They have worked tirelessly night and day to deliver programs to millions of Canadians who have been, and continue to be, impacted by COVID-19. Whether it is in respect to the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, or even the new rental benefit, the folks at the CRA have just been top-notch. We need to applaud them for their efforts in helping all Canadians, whether they are business owners or workers.

Additionally, millions of Canadian employees have had their jobs supported through the CEWS program, and that number continues to grow. The CEWS program, which is administered by the Canada Revenue Agency, has provided more than \$45 billion dollars in support for Canadian businesses as of October 25, 2020. The CEWS program is an essential part of the government's COVID-19 economic response plan, which strives to support Canadian businesses by helping them avoid layoffs and rehire employees.

Business of Supply

Throughout the past few months the government has made changes to expand the reach of the CEWS in order to meet the needs of Canadian businesses. The program, originally launched for a 12-week period, has been extended multiple times, and just yesterday the government introduced legislation that would extend the program until June 2021. This would continue to protect jobs by helping employers keep employees on the payroll and rehire their workers.

Keeping the attachment of the employer-employee relationship is so important. We have seen the rebound in the Canadian labour market, and how it is outperforming many of our global peers. We are seeing employees returning to their work, but while we continue to experience the impacts of COVID-19, it is important we maintain the attachment between the employer and employee.

The wage subsidy would remain at the current rate of up to 65% of eligible wages until December 19, 2020. The eligibility requirements for CEWS have also been expanded to include a greater number of employers by including those who experienced a revenue decline of less than 30%.

• (1245)

Additionally, other enhancements to the CEWS program are being proposed to ensure that CEWS continues to not only support employers, but also to respond and really enhance the flexibility of the CEWS program to the evolving Canadian health and economic situation. These adjustments to the program help ensure that CEWS addresses Canadians' needs, while also positioning them for success as we move through the economic recovery.

The government has striven to make the application process simple in order to get the money out the door quickly and into the hands of those who need it. In most cases, eligible employers receive their CEWS monies via direct deposit within 10 days of their application. In fact, eligible employers can apply for the CEWS through the CRA's My Business Account portal, and authorized representatives can apply on behalf of their clients through the CRA's Represent a Client portal. Additionally, both groups can apply through the CEWS web forms.

In order to make the process simpler, the government also developed an online CEWS calculator, which allows employers to estimate the amount of the subsidy they will receive for each claim period. The CRA's approach to CEWS compliance starts with providing early certainty through outreach and engagement with businesses and stakeholder groups, FAQs addressing common questions and auditors helping staff the CEWS inquiries line. This is all done to help businesses get it right from the start.

When more detailed review is needed with a CEWS claim, the CRA's focus remains on doing so as quickly as is practical. In fact, significant focus was placed on tools and information to help taxpayers get it right from the start. From calculators to outreach sessions, to updated questions on the website, helping businesses and their representatives has been our focus.

Along with the support of client focus, the approach to post-payment verifications of wage subsidy claims was designed by officials to reflect the current reality. Significant tax dollars are in scope. More than \$45 billion in wage subsidies have been paid, and

the program will continue to provide billions more to Canadian businesses and, obviously, their employees.

Within a few short weeks from launch to implementation, and less than five months since inception, it would be normal to see many more mistakes and grey areas than we find with more mature programs. We have to remember that the Government of Canada has rolled out a number of programs to help Canadian business and employees in a few short weeks, which would normally take years to do. We have been there for Canadian businesses and workers and we will continue to do so.

Many businesses are struggling financially and, with the pandemic, the CRA should match the scope of its compliance efforts to the size and scope of the issue. The CRA should apply targeted, minimally intrusive and commensurate interventions that reflect the nature and degree of any issue. Given this, the CRA has designed a multi-step approach to lead off with an initial phase of less than 600 verifications of claimants of all sizes who had some risk indicators.

Strategically, the overall analysis of these internal initial audits will provide the information needed to understand the nature and prevalence of issues, allow the CRA to consult with the Department of Finance on questions of interpretation and inform the options for addressing those issues needing further attention. CRA auditors were directed to be flexible on the timeliness for this work and to focus slowly on the calculations for the wage subsidy.

The government acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult time for all Canadians and that attempting to navigate the subsidy may be challenging, especially for those with questions about their eligibility or their own application. Up-to-date information on the CEWS and other recovery benefits is available at canada.ca/coronavirus.

Business of Supply

If honest Canadians discover that they have made a mistake in their CEWS applications, they can easily make adjustments to their applications through the CRA's My Business Account. However, the government takes fraud very seriously, and the CRA is able to impose penalties against employers who have submitted fraudulent claims. The CEWS program is meant to prevent further job losses, encourage employers to rehire employees they had laid off due to COVID-19 and help Canadian businesses of all sizes, as well as other eligible employers, position themselves to better resume their normal activities after the crisis.

As part of the COVID-19 economic response plan, the government identifies its key areas of focus as support for individuals, support for businesses, support for sectors, support for organizations helping Canadians, and support for provinces and territories. The CEWS certainly provides support for businesses, but by helping keep millions of Canadians in their jobs, it also helps support individual Canadians and helps ensure the economic viability of hard-hit sectors.

• (1250)

As the Canadian economy continues to safely reopen, a robust workforce is essential. The CEWS has supported Canadian organizations, both large and small, in such diverse industries as agriculture, manufacturing, food services, health care, social services, arts and entertainment, and hospitality.

I will finish there. I look forward to questions and comments.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge for the clarification he provided regarding a conversation he had with the CRA about an application that has been submitted for one of the small business support programs.

I would like him to comment on the remarks made by the member for Guelph earlier today. When he compared public service audits and private sector audits, he said they were not too different. In subsequent debate, he said that small business owners, like him, welcome federal audits and that auditing is a positive process.

Do small business owners in the parliamentary secretary's riding welcome federal CRA audits?

• (1255)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, there are over 12,000 small businesses in the city of Vaughan, and there are about 4,000 in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge. Their owners get up every morning and work hard to serve their clients and produce the wonderful products we enjoy. They have commented about how much they appreciate the help and support that our government has provided to them through the Canada emergency business account, the wage subsidy and the rental program.

We will continue to be there for those businesses, and I look forward to continuing my conversations with all businesses in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge and with businesses across the country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a very specific question for my colleague.

We have talked about various sectors that are in danger. The snow has started to fall and one sector in particular must be helped because, for the next months, in fact for the next season, there will be no day camps for our families and for the vitality of our communities. How can we trust the government when, just a few days ago, the riding of Laurentides—Labelle received the ninth batch of Canada summer jobs grants for our day camps last summer?

What does he have to say to that?

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned trust and the Canada summer jobs program. I thank her for commenting on this.

As for trust, members can look at the government's track record in assisting Canadian businesses and workers from coast to coast and at the number of programs we have delivered. Our response to the pandemic has been top-notch. We are also working well with all provinces on the safe restart agreement.

As for the Canada summer jobs program, we have expanded it since we came into government in 2015. In my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, the amount of local funding has doubled to just under a million dollars now. It is supporting youth and getting them employment. I am happy and proud to be supporting the Canada summer jobs program year in and year out in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, as in many places in Quebec, SMEs are central to our economic development and our community life. Besides the SMEs that are currently struggling, we have all those live arts, performing arts, shows, cinemas, theatres and dance groups that currently have absolutely nothing. The federal government has done nothing to help them.

In my colleague's view, how can we help our cultural industry to survive during this pandemic?

Why has his government not done more?

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, that could not be further from the truth. We have been there for the arts sector from day one. We have put in place a number of measures, and I will email the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie about the number of measures we have put in place to help folks in the arts sector.

Canada is blessed to have talented artists and performers in a very vibrant cultural industry. Our Minister of Canadian Heritage and our Minister of Economic Development are ensuring that programs are put in place to support people in that sector. We need a vibrant cultural sector from coast to coast to coast.

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you and I both know, since the spring, we have been facing an unprecedented challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic remains very difficult to deal with, and we do not know what the fall and winter will bring. One thing is certain: Our government will be there for Canadians to provide them with the support they need to get through this difficult time. Since the beginning of this pandemic, our government has supported Canadian businesses hurt by COVID-19 and its economic fallout. We took immediate action to support those businesses, particularly by helping them keep employees on the job, increasing cash flow and providing rent assistance.

As the pandemic continues to evolve, so too does our approach. In September's Speech from the Throne, our government committed to take further steps to help vulnerable businesses pull through. Consistent with that commitment, a few weeks ago, we announced our intention to implement new, targeted support measures to help hard-hit businesses and other organizations experiencing a drop in revenue. We committed to help those businesses safely get through the second wave of the virus and help them cover their costs so that they can continue to serve their communities and be positioned for a strong, dynamic recovery.

A number of programs were announced with the goal of fulfilling that commitment. For example, if passed, the new Canada emergency rent subsidy will provide qualifying organizations affected by COVID-19 with support of up to 65% of eligible expenses for rents and mortgages until December 2020. We also announced our intention to provide additional targeted support for organizations that have to shut down once again because of new restrictions imposed by public health authorities. They may claim a top-up of 25% of eligible expenses in the event of a temporary closing, in addition to the 65%, for a total of up to 90%. This rent subsidy will be available until June 2021.

We have also improved the Canada emergency wage subsidy. Since it was introduced, the subsidy has become a key part of Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan. Through the Canada emergency wage subsidy, we have supported more than 3.8 million jobs and spent more than \$45 billion to help businesses keep their workers. The Canada emergency wage subsidy has mainly helped the country's retail businesses, as well as construction, restaurants

and hotels. It has helped them to keep their employees on the payroll and encouraged them to rehire their workers.

Let me provide some statistics to illustrate the effects of this measure. In Newfoundland and Labrador, more than \$400 million has been spent since March. In Prince Edward Island, more than \$140 million has been spent since the subsidy was launched. In Nova Scotia, the figure is \$800 million and in New Brunswick, \$650 million. In Quebec, the assistance comes to more than \$10 billion. Ontario has received \$18.5 billion. In Manitoba, the total amount spent is more than \$1.4 billion and, in Saskatchewan, it is more than \$730 million. In Alberta, \$6.8 million has been spent. British Columbia has received more than \$5.3 billion. The Yukon has received \$500 million, the Northwest Territories have received \$32 million, and Nunavut has received around \$10 million.

These sums that have been invested through the emergency wage subsidy have protected millions of the country's jobs. The Canada Revenue Agency, which, we must recall, is independent, is conducting checks to ensure conformity and to make sure that the funds are being properly used, meaning to help our workers.

● (1300)

In my riding, Sherbrooke, these programs have had a noticeable impact, as I have gathered from tours, calls and the economic recovery forum I launched. Local businesses have told us that our action plan means they will not have to close their doors and will be able to keep playing an active role in Sherbrooke society.

One of these is American Biltrite, the pride of Sherbrooke, which had to shut down its operations completely in April. With government support, the company innovated and retooled part of its facility to make equipment for hospitals, including face shields. American Biltrite was able to rehire employees and reopen the business. The company says that the Canada emergency wage subsidy must be extended because revenues are still low and that the government must do more to promote local purchasing in its tendering.

This kind of feedback and information from businesses led us to announce that we are extending the Canada emergency wage benefit until June 2021, so that it can keep helping businesses protect jobs by keeping their workers on the payroll and rehiring those who were laid off. We are also freezing the maximum subsidy at 65% until December 2020.

We are adapting and we are here for businesses because they are the backbone of our economy. Canadians also have a role to play to support businesses in Canada. Obviously, we all want every local café, shop and restaurant to stay open, even if the pandemic is eating away at their profit margins.

Therefore, while all of us are doing what we can to slow the spread of the virus, why not encourage our local small businesses by ordering a meal or buying a gift card from our favourite places? Personally, I buy my bread and pastries from Les Vraies Richesses, a local downtown bakery; my fresh pasta from Pizzicato, a restaurant; and my teas from Les Zerbes Folles, a shop on Alexandre Street. These are examples of small actions we can take to help our SMEs overcome the crisis and expand by giving back to the community.

It is important to remember that this pandemic is the most serious public health crisis Canada has ever faced. Canadians of all ages all across the country have been hit hard. COVID-19 has killed over 10,000 Canadians. Millions of Canadians are either unemployed, working fewer hours or making less money as a result. These job losses are perhaps the most obvious consequence of the global economic shock we have all had to face.

However, as the Prime Minister said, we can and will do everything in our power to limit job losses and business closings, and minimize the decline in economic activity. Our government is ready, and we will get through this crisis together. When it comes to an end, we will be better positioned to recover together and continue building a safer and fairer future for all.

• (1305)

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for her speech.

She spoke about the need for the Canada emergency wage subsidy, which we will obviously not challenge because it is needed, and she described the situation of businesses in difficulty. In many cases, these businesses are struggling and having a hard time, as we can see from the job losses and business closures.

Could she tell me whether the Liberal Party, which will not reimburse the wage subsidy, is a struggling business?

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

From the beginning, the government has put measures in place to help all Canadian businesses and workers because our top priority was and still is the health and safety of Canadians. As a result, the programs are open to anyone who needs them.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have to weigh in on the debate today. I am pleased with the motion and I thank the Conservatives for raising it.

I am very concerned for the tourism sector. We look at having help for rents, but for the tourism operators in my part of the country, we also need to look at assistance for moorage charges. A lot of

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tourism operators are facing fixed costs for taking tourists out on vessels.

Would the government consider some flexibility in that regard?

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

During the pandemic, we quickly implemented the regional relief and recovery fund, the RRRF. This program has helped a number of regional businesses. We, on this side of the House, also believe that these companies are the backbone of our economy.

Through the Community Futures Canada network, the CFDC, which is very robust, very active and has a very close relationship with its clients, we were able to deliver this assistance extremely easily. We have really helped many businesses. I have heard positive comments from several businesses that received help from us. They said that this program gave them the boost they needed.

We have been there since the beginning of the crisis and we will continue to be there for all Canadians.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the parliamentary secretary's speech. I congratulate her on it.

There is a question we have been asking all day, but the government is not answering it. The Bloc Québécois demonstrated six months ago that the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance had significant problems. The proof is that more than half of the money allocated to this aid has not been used.

If someone can explain it to me once and for all today, I would like to know why, now that this aid is being changed and that it makes sense, it took six months to act and why we waited for companies to go out of business.

Why did it take the government six months to figure this out, when we said it six months ago?

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his comment.

Once again, since the beginning of the crisis, we have been working to put in place the best possible programs. We all agree that COVID-19 did not come with an instruction manual. Everybody is working hard, whether it is ministers, members of Parliament or public servants. They are there to step up and to put in place various programs designed to help as many people and businesses as possible.

Indeed, there was some trouble with the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. It is because we are on the ground, listening and close to our people that we have adapted and have proposed, in the last few weeks, a change to this program which, I hope, will come into effect quickly.

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Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to split my time with my wonderful, and I will add punctual, colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

It is also an absolute privilege to rise today in this House and talk about some of the hardest-working people in one of the hardest-working countries: small business owners.

This motion is a great step forward for small business owners. The Conservatives seek to do two things with this motion, and I hope all members will join me in supporting small business owners. The first thing we seek to do is put a pause on troublesome and burdensome audits of the CEWS program that are causing business owners challenges. The second thing is to make programs more flexible to make sure no Canadians are being left behind, which is something that is absolutely critical.

I would like to talk a bit about small businesses and why they are so important to our communities. They are the lifeblood of our communities. They are the ones that are sponsoring our soccer and hockey teams. They are in the communities providing the services we need. They are the ones making sure front-line workers are fed and that we take care of the entire community. There are over one million small business owners in Canada, who employ over 70% of private sector workers in Canada and they also contribute one-third to our GDP.

After listening to the interventions today, I want to congratulate members of all parties. It is not every day we see the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands celebrating a Conservative motion. It is terrific and a great way to show that everyone can be constructive in helping small business owners go forward.

To provide context on where we are with small business owners, it has been a challenging time for them. Even pre-pandemic, they were going through difficult times. Going into the pandemic, Canadians were struggling, with 50% of Canadians within \$200 of insolvency. Canadians were facing a GDP that was reduced to nearly 0% by the end of 2019.

The struggles continued for small business owners as they, from 2015 to 2020, dramatically reduced their investments in infrastructure, a sign that they perhaps saw challenges on the horizon. At the heart of some of these issues is the productivity gap going on in Canada. Productivity is a big fancy 10-cent word, but in reality all it means is how Canadians are able to manufacture products and deliver services. The harsh reality is that Canadians were struggling.

In the U.S., the average worker contributes \$60 per hour to GDP. In Switzerland, that number is more like \$84. Unfortunately, here in Canada that number is \$50. That is important because it affects people. It affects real wages. Going into the pandemic, the average wage in Canada was \$19, compared with \$23 for the United States and \$33 for Switzerland. We had challenges going into the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the economy has become much worse. Many of the constituents I spoke with told me about horrible, diffi-

cult situations. They have told me about losing their jobs, their homes, and in some cases, they have lost all hope. This is all despite record spending. The government has actually spent more than any other country in the G20. We have the highest deficit, yet we have the worst unemployment numbers in the G7.

Many small business owners are heading out of business. The CFIB told us that, as of September 30, a full third of businesses will either close down or partially close. These are difficult times, but the numbers never tell the full story. I want to tell the House the story of John and Lent Travel.

John owns the Lent Travel agency in the beautiful town of Port Hope. By the way, if members have not been to Port Hope, please go once the lockdown is over. It is beautiful. He owns one of three travel agencies in town; one has shut down and one is operating at one-third its capacity. John told me that from the beginning of the pandemic to March 2021 he expects no revenue.

● (1315)

Just to go through the numbers, he was down 151% in April, then down 97%, 95%, 95%, 100%, 100% of revenue, equating to zero revenue over a year. He is in a challenging situation. He would have loved to have access to some of the programs, such as the rent subsidies, but unfortunately he owns instead of rents so he is out of luck there. John is like millions of Canadians who are feeling left behind in these difficult times.

The pandemic was a challenge to all of us. It required us all to sacrifice. There is no doubt about that. Government support programs were a necessary bridge, hopefully. Unfortunately, too many of those programs got confused, were delayed and held Canadians back. Instead of being that bridge to a brighter day, they became a trap. They were too complex and too confusing, and they even penalized work. No Canadian should ever be financially behind for adding an extra day's work. That should never happen. That is how John felt.

As we move forward into the safe reopening of the country, we are all looking forward. I know we all want that day when we can give hugs and shake hands again, when we can do all those wonderful things that we miss because of the pandemic. We need to move forward and give our businesses, not a shot of morphine but a shot of adrenaline, so we can carry forward. We need to have a safe recovery plan that includes rapid testing, so students could go back to school, so workers could go back to their factories and offices, and so that we could all once again start contributing fully to the economy, as I know every Canadian wants to.

We need policies that encourage work and promote opportunities. The government has had the opportunity to invest, however, it has too often squandered those opportunities of investing in the private sector. For example, while veterans are waiting, while new mothers are waiting, while people with disabilities are waiting, while that was all going on, the CRA proudly announced on social media that it was open for business, that it could audit and charge penalties and interest. Even for the Liberal government, that is peak hypocrisy.

If the government is saying it does not have resources to get money out to people with disabilities, new mothers and veterans, it cannot, at the same time, be saying that it has plenty of resources to audit and make life more difficult for hard-working, honest Canadian taxpayers.

The substance of this motion is with respect to the CEWS audit. Almost immediately upon the announcement of this, almost to the day, we started receiving complaints in our office about the burdensome, pages and pages, requirements by the CRA on an audit, a fishing expedition. These are not just simple documents, these are documents that have to be prepared by tax lawyers, by accountants, costing thousands of dollars. In fact, some folks have actually paid more in fees than they received in benefits. Imagine that. This is shameful, and all in the midst of a pandemic.

This is not the time in Ontario, Quebec and across the country in different regions. We are facing a second wave of the pandemic. Small business owners need to be helped. They need a hand up to get themselves back on track. They do not need a burdensome audit that puts them behind the eight ball and costs them thousands of dollars.

We are approaching the one-year anniversary of the pandemic. That is a terrible landmark to meet. The truth is, it is a year. These are not early days of the pandemic. The excuses are growing long, that there were not resources, we have shown that is not the case, or that we do not have time, we do have time. We need to work collaboratively so John does not feel left behind in Port Hope, and to help entrepreneurs who started a new business, some who started a new business in March of 2020 and do not have year-over-year numbers, who do not qualify, who are not eligible for these programs.

There are sectors of the economy that are being hit harder than others. This pandemic has not hit us all equally. Sectors like tourism, travel, aviation and energy have been hit harder than others. We need tailor-made solutions, not the one-size-fits-all that does not cut it.

• (1320)

Ultimately, we need solutions that do not come from government programs, but from the private sector. We have the most creative innovators, the hardest-working small business owners and the best workers in the entire world, and we have the opportunity to give them the ability to bring us out of this terrible economic crisis through their hard work. We just need to get out of their way.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr.

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Speaker, I agree with the member's comments regarding how innovative and fantastic our small businesses are. There is absolutely no doubt that they have gone through a great deal because of the pandemic. At the same time, the government has been working very closely with small businesses in all regions of our country. Recognizing that it is important for the government to continue to play a very important role in supporting our small businesses, I am a little surprised by the motion that is brought forward. I would ask the member if there are add-ons in terms of specific programs he would like to see that are not there to support small businesses.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to receive a question from my learned colleague.

I would start with the motion and stop audits. We would not even stop them, just pause them for about six months for small business owners. The CRA would get its pound of flesh, but let us defer that until after the worst of the pandemic, hopefully, is over. I think that is a reasonable thing.

I really do mean with all sincerity that I would love for all members to vote in favour of this motion. There is nothing unreasonable in here. There is no language that is exploitative or over the top. We are putting our hands forward to this government as a constructive opposition and hope that it will walk forward with us.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech.

I have a question for him. We have heard a lot of talk about the issues facing the tourism and aviation industries. I wonder if he is aware that, in many ridings, including my own, Laurentides—Labelle, and a number of others in Quebec, there are two industries, tourism and aviation, that are being hit hard. People are crying out for help right now.

Did we make sure we had not forgotten anyone when drawing up the requests? Between my colleague and I, these two industries go hand in hand, and neither could not survive without the other.

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question, and also for killing time while I got my translation. I appreciate that, and I am working on my French.

Regarding aviation, there is an airport in my riding, so I am very familiar with the struggles that are going on. One of the things that I think will be key in getting us all back in motion is finding a safe way to travel and finding a safe way to get our economy back in motion. Of course, safety will always come first, but there are ways to do it. There is rapid testing, and technologies are out there that can get the economy back in motion. Also, it is not one-size-fits-all. We need to have tailor-made solutions for individual sectors, because they have been hit in different ways.

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Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am dealing with a number of companies that are really struggling with the Canada emergency business account, or CEBA. Their bottom lines are being hammered right now.

I know of one small business that has been turned down three times. It is trying to work through this. The owners have been told that their stock does not count in their costs and that their Visa bills cannot be used, even though most small businesses in my region are paying with Visa to get supplies. They have tried three times. When we tried to get answers for them, we found out that this work was outsourced to the Canada Development Investment Corporation.

The CDIC is arm's length, but it does not have a clue what it is like to be a small business owner in northern Ontario. This is a \$40,000 loan. It should be straightforward. We should be able to phone and find out what the problem is. Instead, we are seeing businesses about to go under if the government does not start to fix the problems.

I would ask my hon. colleague what he thinks we need to do to make sure the money that should get out the door to small businesses actually gets to them.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, in my early days I started a business on my credit card. I know exactly what the member is talking about. That is the type of flexibility we are talking about with respect to this motion. In this fluid environment, we need bureaucrats to think outside the box and we need the government to empower them to do so. I would say 99.9% of Canadians are not fraudsters. They just want to go out there, work hard and provide for their families. If we have to change the rules and make things more fluid and flexible to help them, let us do it.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate. It was an excellent motion put forward by my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge. It certainly shows that he understands the huge challenges our businesses are going through right now. There are two components included in this: One is pausing audits until 2021 and the other is flexibility within the rent subsidy and wage subsidy programs.

The government has stood up already and proudly proclaimed how much it has done. However, I want to note that with the six-week prorogation, and the fact we have been back here going on seven weeks, for three months we have had no answer to some programs that had some significant challenges. How many businesses were lost during those three months? We had the six weeks of prorogation and some additional time before we saw some action.

Interestingly, back in January or February, businesses told me they heard that COVID-19 was low risk and they were not really worried. They were not doing any anticipatory planning, but then all of a sudden it was like a volcano. They had not had proper warning this was coming. The government was very concerned. All of a sudden the minister was saying people should stock up, and there was a run on toilet paper and other products.

For businesses, the reality did not hit until they saw some of our national sports organizations closing down. I believe that when some of those organizations said they were closing down for the

season, then all of a sudden it was serious for business owners. Something was going to happen and something was going on. Across the country, many businesses had to immediately shut their doors.

Throughout this, some people have managed to do pretty well. I have talked to businesses throughout my riding. The folks who sell bicycles and boats, and the businesses that do landscaping, have been so busy they cannot keep up with demand. For those few that have this robust volume, there are so many others suffering, mostly in the hospitality, tourism and personal care industries. There are some people who have kept their heads above water, and thank goodness we have those businesses doing okay.

Let us imagine someone closing their business down in March. The Blue Grotto had to close down. The owner knew he was going to be allowed to reopen his nightclub, so he spent thousands of dollars to prepare for the reopening in terms of safety and barriers between places where people sat. He was open for one night, and then received an order to close down. This particular business owner has been very vocal in public, so I do not mind sharing his story here. He has shared his story of how difficult it was to spend so much money to prepare to reopen and then all of a sudden get closed down.

Adding insult to injury was the issue of his rent. His landlord was not in a position, or was unwilling, to look at the rent subsidy. This owner put his heart and soul into his business, like so many others. He was not even receiving the advantage of some of the existing programs. He had no money coming in from the rent subsidy or the wage subsidy, and is still closed down. He is trying to keep his head above water.

What if he happens to get a notice from the Canada Revenue Agency? For small business owners, receiving a notice that they are going to have an audit is very stressful at the best of times.

● (1330)

Imagine, in the worst of times, not just trying to survive but getting a notice from the Canada Revenue Agency asking for piles of documents that it wants within 10 days. I think everyone in the House believes that there should be some good process to make sure that the programs we have developed have been used appropriately, and there should be some audit process, but the least we can do is delay that process, as the motion states, until June. I think that is a very reasonable motion because we cannot afford to put that stress on our small business owners right now.

Like most members in the House, one of the challenges we had when the pandemic first started was helping businesses to navigate the programs and services available. I would like to share some anecdotes provided by the Kamloops Chamber, and also by other chambers in the riding. One person said they were tapped, stretched and scared of losing everything they worked decades for. This was a commercial landlord who did not apply for the benefit because they did not like the way the program was being delivered. It was a personal service company. Another said, "I never thought I would be managing an inherently dangerous organization to society." That was a local arts organization. Imagine someone thinking they were providing a good service for the community that was then deemed to be dangerous. "Every decision we make feels like we are screwing ourselves over," said someone in the restaurant business. "I desperately wanted to be able to keep my employees on, but I can't afford it in this uncertainty." That was someone who had been business since 1995.

I went into a shop downtown and a person there told me that people would come in and say they were so glad that she had survived. She said she tells them she has not survived, she has just reopened. She does not know if she is going to survive.

There are stories from the hotels in 100 Mile House to north Thompson, where someone who just bought a business did not qualify for assistance. Again, they put their life savings into a business. I hear that story over and over. People do not realize, if they are lucky enough to have a job that pays well, gives a pension and health care benefits, that many of our entrepreneurs are taking huge risks. Their life savings, and their hearts and souls, have gone into these businesses. They do not have pension plans and they do not have benefit programs, but they have something that they care about and believe in.

That person in north Thompson who just bought a small resort found out that they did not qualify for programs because they were a new owner, and as a new owner could not show their revenue losses. In the riding I represent, a larger business, the Rocky Mountaineer, lost its entire season. The Rocky Mountaineer is not just the company itself, but the spillover to the hotels, restaurants and so many others.

It was heartbreaking. I remember having many painful conversations about what they had tried. It would mean something to small businesses if everyone in the House would say we were going to delay the Canada Revenue Agency audits and do the best we can to change programs and make sure they meet people's needs in a flexible, fluid and responsive way. This is an incredibly important motion and I hope that all sides of the House can agree.

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, small businesses can take encouragement from the House in that all members of Parliament, from all political parties, understand and appreciate that there is a great deal of value attached to the work and efforts of small businesses throughout the country. In listening to a lot of the debate thus far, one of the aspects of small businesses that we often overlook, but should not, is the importance of social enterprises and non-profit organizations. These also have

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commitments that they have to maintain, and they contribute immensely to Canada's economy and our lifestyle.

Could the member provide her thoughts in regard to that aspect of small businesses?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, that is another great point. We know many small businesses are struggling. The Liberals talk about flexibility with respect to small business owners who use their Visas and right now the expenses do not count toward the rental program. I understand some improvements will be made. Hopefully, it will be much more flexible and beneficial to the landlord-tenant relationship. That will help the people involved in social enterprises. Absolutely, it is another area that speaks to that need. Business is so diverse that to create a program to meet those very diverse needs can sometimes be a challenge, but the government needs to be responsive and adapt as we go.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by my colleague from the Conservative Party.

We agree on one thing, which is that we want to work to help as many Quebeckers and Canadians as possible who are facing the pandemic right now, especially businesses.

However, we need to pay attention what is being done with that money. At the moment, neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives will answer us. The wage subsidy used by the wealthiest parties in Canada has not been paid back, even though the Conservative Party leader said during his leadership campaign that he would pay back the money that the Conservative Party had received through the wage subsidy and put in its coffers.

Does my hon. colleague believe the Conservative Party intends to pay that money back?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I know the wage subsidy program was critically important for so many in Kamloops. We heard that it was one of the most protective programs out there. I know there were many commitments from the different political parties regarding what they were going to do about that wage subsidy. It is certainly appropriate for every party to reflect on what it will do next.

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Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last time we were in an economic crisis was in 2008. The Conservative government at the time bailed out big banks and big corporations. As a small business owner who was struggling through that period of time, I remember calling my Conservative MP and getting no response. The only response I got from the Government of Canada was auditors wanting to audit my company. Therefore, I am really glad to see the Conservatives have had a watershed moment and are enlightened about small business.

The member talked about bike shops and some of the businesses in her riding that have had success through the pandemic. Some other businesses that have had success through the pandemic are big banks, Amazon and Netflix, which have done well. The pressure and incentive of the Liberals is not working to get them to pay their fair share. Does she not agree they need to ante up and the government needs to force them to do their part and pay their fair share to help out with the pandemic?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I recall issues differently with respect to the global crisis. It was a very different kind of crisis than what we face right now, where businesses have been absolutely shuttered. I remember many measures regarding tax rates for small business, red tape reduction and the creation of My Account with the Canada Revenue Agency, where the agency stood by the decisions it gave online.

Certainly, as Conservatives, we need to respect all our engines. We do not pick and choose. Small businesses, large businesses, oil companies, all engines will have to be firing to get us out of the very difficult situation we are in because of this pandemic.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic, I am very proud to host the Calgary Midnapore economic recovery task force. I was very proud to have 25 small business members from my riding contribute to that as well as the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek, Richard Gotfried. Out of this study came some very discouraging news. Forty-seven per cent of small business owners were concerned about financially sustaining themselves beyond one year. Thirty-eight per cent of businesses had to lay off staff during the pandemic. Forty-two per cent of small businesses within my riding were concerned about paying operating expenses.

I wonder if the hon. member can share if she has heard such disturbing numbers relating to small businesses laying off staff and struggling to meet their operating expenses during this difficult time.

• (1345)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe there is anywhere in the country where people have been immune, and, quite frankly, anywhere in the world, from the serious and significant impacts of this. We need support for our small businesses. Even in Ottawa, many of us have restaurants we go to sometimes. When we talk to the owners, the rent they pay is astronomical. Their ability to survive without necessary supports will be a real challenge for their future.

This motion is calling for that support.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Winnipeg North.

I am happy to participate in the debate on the Conservative motion from the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge. I am heartened to hear the calls for collaborative effort and working together. That is absolutely key.

I am going to talk a little about what our different regional development agencies will be doing to support small and medium-sized enterprises from coast to coast to coast, which is just one of the layers of support out there for small businesses.

In six different specific regions of the country, agencies work closely with businesses and innovators to fuel economic growth that creates those well-paying, middle-class jobs for Canadians. They apply a place-based, location-based lens to the overall direction of the government, as outlined in the innovation and skills plan, to advance and diversify regional economies and help communities thrive.

Let me talk a bit about each RDA, or each regional development agency, and why their mandates are specific to the needs of the regions they serve and why this is so important when it comes to confronting the challenges brought about this pandemic.

ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, will help businesses become more competitive, innovative and productive.

[*Translation*]

In Quebec we have Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, or CED. It guides Quebec businesses and the province's regions toward the economy of tomorrow.

[*English*]

In the north, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, or CanNor, helps to develop a diversified, sustainable and dynamic economy across Canada's three territories.

Ontario is covered by two separate RDAs. The Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, or FedDev, provides programs and services to support innovation and economic growth in southern Ontario, while the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, or FedNor, supports businesses and community partners to build a stronger northern Ontario.

Then there is the regional development agency that serves the west. Western Economic Diversification Canada promotes the development and diversification of western Canada's economy and advances the interests of the west in national economic policy, programs and projects.

We do understand that the path to economic prosperity varies from region to region. Strong regional economies are essential for Canada's success and its sustainability.

[*Translation*]

Strong regional economies are essential for Canada's success and its sustainability.

[English]

That is why our regional development agencies are there to help businesses and innovators grow, succeed and create good jobs for Canadians.

RDA programs provide funds to companies, not-for-profits and communities. The idea is to foster the right environment to enable businesses to grow and entrepreneurs and innovators to start businesses and then have them succeed. This creates an ideal condition for the development of strong, dynamic and inclusive regional economies throughout the country. That is exactly what we need.

We support regional innovation ecosystems and help businesses scale-up. Even during these times, some businesses are scaling up. Some businesses were in a position to take advantage of the challenges out there and have overcome it. We want to help them.

The rest of the world is looking at the kinds of solutions that we in Canada can actually create, and we are helping those companies do just that. We provide financial assistance. We bring together key players. We have talked about collaborative efforts and how we connect all the people who need to be on the same page to help people move forward together.

• (1350)

We are going to have the kind of growth strategies that eliminate the regional gaps. We want everyone in Canada to be able to thrive, to make it through these challenging, unprecedented times and be in a position that will allow us to come back gangbusters once the worst of this is over.

A good example of the approach we are taking by helping SMEs is what we are doing through this economic epidemic. We are taking a regionally based approach and delivering what is called the regional relief and recovery fund program. We believe we need a layered approach and those at the local and regional levels are going to be the ones who understand where the support is most desperately needed.

We have invested over \$1.5 billion nationally in this one program for regional economic development and it has seen an incredible take-up. Demand has been especially high in western Canada. This result has been a lifeline to more than 12,000 businesses, which have protected 95,000 jobs, 20,000 jobs in western Canada alone.

Looking at just Alberta, Western Economic Diversification Canada has provided \$96 million in relief to over 1,700 small and medium-sized enterprises in that province and has helped protect more than 6,900 jobs. On all accounts, this is by far the highest volume of activity for the regional relief and recovery fund of any province in western Canada and, indeed, one of the highest across the country on a per capital basis. The numbers do tell an important story. The immediate impact is that this funding is ensuring Alberta keeps firms operating and helps them retain their workers, and the government takes immense pride in that.

Another important part of the regional relief and recovery fund is the response in rural communities, delivered through our partners at Community Futures organizations. Another Alberta example is that over 800 loan applications have been approved through Community Futures, translating to more than 3,600 jobs protected in rural Al-

Business of Supply

berta. I am really pleased to say that nearly 60% of that support has been directed to under-represented communities, including women-owned, youth-owned and indigenous-owned businesses.

We have helped dozens of small businesses, even in the member's hometown. This is through direct and indirect support.

Here is a case in point. The University of Calgary is using a \$250,000 regional relief and recovery fund contribution from Western Diversification. It is using it to enable Creative Destruction Lab-Rockies to help businesses mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and access capital to adapt their business models and develop innovative COVID-19 solutions.

We have the talent, the skills and what it takes to help businesses. The world is looking for solutions, and it is looking at us. For every one of the 95,000 jobs that has been preserved across Canada through this one program, we have saved many more, and who knows where those people would be tomorrow.

The RDAs are delivering other creative programs to support business people who are under-represented. Our message to companies and communities in regions across Canada is clear. We are here for them now and we will get through this together.

• (1355)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said quite a number of things that were, only by extension maybe, connected to the motion, which did have three specific points to it.

I would ask the member if she thinks that now, while small businesses are in an absolute fight for survival and are hanging on by a thread, is the appropriate time for onerous audits on the wage subsidy and if she sees how small businesses could take this as an implication that the government considers them to be tax cheats.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, it is a very challenging situation; there is no doubt about it in my mind. CRA is an arm's length kind of agency. We want it to do its work independently, and we think it is important that sometimes CRA can be supportive and helpful.

We could probably say to the CRA to try to be supportive and helpful instead of onerous, as the member suggested, but there are businesses out there that could use that kind of expertise to make sure they are on the path they really want to be on. I understand the feeling behind the motion. There is a way of making sure the work the CRA does is indeed helpful.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague praised the innovation of small businesses and how Canada is leading the way, yet the Liberal government continues not to provide small businesses with the funding they need to survive the pandemic.

Statements by Members

I refer back to my earlier comments about Mandel Hitzer, who actually hosted the Prime Minister at his restaurant deer + almond. He is an award-winning chef and his business is in jeopardy. People are struggling. The government is not doing its part for small businesses, certainly not in Winnipeg Centre.

Beyond mere rhetoric, what is the hon. member's government going to do immediately to save small businesses now?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, this is one of those times when we have to say that we need to get control of the virus. We need to conquer the pandemic and give people the confidence to go out and frequent restaurants. This is absolutely key. People need to go to restaurants and feel safe, and travel and feel safe. That has to be our first priority. If we can get control of the pandemic and protect people's lives, then we can protect their livelihoods. We tried to take a layered approach to help as many people as we possibly could.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, the Green Party will be supporting the motion. We have been asking for more flexibility for small businesses for quite a while. In my riding, I have been working with a lot of small businesses that have been dealing with issues with the emergency response benefit, the small business account and the banks, and constantly dealing with technicalities for their applications. We need more flexibility in the system.

Our small businesses need to survive this pandemic. Otherwise, they are going to be taken over by these large corporations like Amazon that are able to supplant them. What does the hon. member think about taxing some of these large multinational corporations like Amazon that are taking advantage of this pandemic?

• (1400)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member wholeheartedly. We want to see our small and medium-sized businesses survive through this. I heard someone express it as “we're all in the same storm but we're not all in the same boat”. I thought that was really effective, because this storm is going to affect some people more than others. As a government, we recognize that and we will make the effort to make it survivable for as many as possible.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

IGNAT KANEFF

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is said, “To whom much is given, much is expected”. Today, I rise to honour someone to whom nothing was given and yet gave so much.

This past summer, Canada lost Ignat Kaneff.

Born in Bulgaria, Mr. Kaneff arrived in Canada in 1951 with not a dollar to his name, but he was exceptionally hard-working. He started supporting himself by washing cars, floors and dishes. Eventually he saved enough money to build a house, and eventually he went on to develop subdivisions, apartments and public buildings that have shaped Toronto, Mississauga and Brampton.

Iggy and his wife Didi have donated generously to a range of causes across Canada, and for this community and philanthropic work, Mr. Kaneff has received many awards, including the Order of Canada. I came to know Mr. Kaneff as I went to school with his daughters, Anna-Maria and Kristina. This past year, Kristina got married. During his speech at the wedding, Mr. Kaneff said something very telling. He said, “Canada is the greatest country in the world...but you have to earn it.”

Mr. Kaneff not only earned it, but gave back generously to those around him and to Canada. In so doing, he made the greatest country in the world even better.

* * *

VETERANS IN CANADA

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, next week, Canadians will be observing both Remembrance Day and Indigenous Veterans Day. Many members of the armed forces have left the comforts of home behind to serve our country here and abroad by participating in disaster relief, rescue missions, armed conflicts and more. Their courage is an example to all of us, and we strive to remember the sacrifices and honour the legacies of the brave women and men who have fought for freedom, democracy and human rights.

On behalf of residents in the Kenora riding, I thank them for their service.

However, right now they need our help. This year will be difficult for Legions across the country, which are struggling financially due to the pandemic. We can support and honour our veterans by ensuring Legions get through this trying time and can continue operating. I would like to take this opportunity to ask each Canadian to please do what they can to support our Legions and the amazing work they do to improve the lives of veterans.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to give thanks to our veterans and those currently serving. In my riding, Quinte West is home to CFB Trenton, the largest air force base in Canada. We also have one of the largest veteran populations across the country. My riding is also home to the storied Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, famed for winning more battle honours than any other Canadian regiment in World War II.

As the son of a veteran of the Second World War, and having hired a veteran to help the men and women who have served, I recognize the importance of supporting our veterans. This year our Remembrance Day ceremonies across the Bay of Quinte and Canada will be a little different. Because of the changes brought on by the pandemic, communities are having to adapt their traditional ceremonies, for example, by going virtual. However, COVID-19 does not stop us from recognizing the sacrifices our veterans have made.

This November 11, we should not forget to stop and take a moment to give thanks for all they have given. Lest we forget.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MICHEL AUGER

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec lost a journalism giant over the weekend. Michel Auger died at the age of 76. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I offer my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of this legendary crime reporter.

Mr. Auger spent four decades in journalism and won the Judith Jasmin award and the medal of the National Assembly of Quebec, but he was best known for his reporting on organized crime for the *Journal de Montréal*. Michel Auger's outstanding coverage of the rivalries between criminal motorcycle gangs is a part of Quebec's history.

No one can forget when he was shot in the back six times in the Journal's parking lot on September 13, 2000, in an attempt to silence him. Just three months later, he courageously returned to work with his head held high and continued to cover organized crime.

We have lost a proud champion of free speech at a time when that very freedom is under debate.

Thank you, Michel Auger.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ford of Canada, headquartered in my community, has a long history in Oakville and operates at the leading edge of innovation and excellence.

Last month, I joined the Prime Minister, Ford president and CEO Dean Stoneley, Unifor president Jerry Dias, the premier and MPs and MPPs to announce \$600 million in joint federal and provincial funding to help Ford's Oakville facility upgrade its assembly plant to mass-produce zero-emission electric vehicles and the batteries that power them.

The partnership between both governments and Ford will save more than 3,000 jobs at Ford and create new, high-paying jobs at the plant and across Canada. This marks the first large-scale production of battery-electric vehicles made in Canada by an auto maker for Canadians and the export market.

We thank Ford of Canada for its leadership.

* * *

MARGARET BIRCH

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Ontario lost a great Canadian: Margaret Birch.

Statements by Members

A proud Ontarian, Margaret was born in Leamington and spent much of her life in service to her community. She volunteered at the Scarborough General Hospital and eventually went on to become the chair of the Scarborough board of health. Her community activism earned her Scarborough's citizen of the year, awarded in 1970, and she achieved political success, winning a seat on Ontario's legislature in 1971.

In 1973, Margaret made history by becoming Ontario's first female cabinet minister, launching an incredible political career that lasted until her retirement in 1985. During her time in politics, she became the first woman member of the Albany Club in Toronto and passionately advocated for mental health care for vulnerable populations.

Margaret's inspirational career has impacted countless Ontarians, and she has left a legacy worth remembering.

May Margaret rest in peace.

* * *

ANITA STEWART

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I inform the House of the passing of Anita Stewart, the University of Guelph's food laureate.

Anita was the soul behind Canada's local food movement and received the Order of Canada for her contributions to our understanding of what food means to us as Canadians. She spoke just as passionately about indigenous diet as about the food prepared by chefs in our cities, but her legacy is Food Day Canada where each year she encouraged Canadians to share what Canadian fare was on the barbeque on the August long weekend.

There is a missing place at the table now, but Anita's memory and passion will live on.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BOURASSA YOUTH

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to speak about the youth in my riding of Bourassa. We know that our youth are the present and future of our country. Our role as adults is to support their development and growth as citizens.

Today, I want to congratulate present and former students of École Henri-Bourassa, the school I attended in my youth. They had the courage to file a formal complaint with their school about the racist and unacceptable behaviour of a teacher in a position of authority.

Statements by Members

Like all youth of Quebec and Canada, the youth of Montreal North are the builders of our future society. Thanks to their courage, actions and determination, they are assuming their civic responsibilities and paving the way for a stronger and more inclusive Canada. Well done. I am proud of them.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the government suspended arms exports to Turkey because it was not upholding its international obligations. However, in April of this year, seven drone systems were approved for export from Canada to Turkey after the Prime Minister spoke with Turkish President Erdogan.

My colleague, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, tried to get answers about whether the Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs overrode the recommendations of their own Global Affairs officials. He asked four times if ministerial interference was used to approve the export of these Canadian-made drone targeting systems to Turkey. Four questions were asked and still no one on the other side of the House could give him a straight answer.

It is time for the government to stop dodging questions, provide actual answers and tell Canadians whether its weak leadership on the international stage is putting civilian lives at risk.

* * *

● (1410)

HALLOWEEN IN KITCHENER—CONESTOGA

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that we showed our Halloween spirit in some creative ways in Kitchener—Conestoga. It was certainly different this year, but the delight of Halloween proved that communities could still come together and find safe ways to celebrate.

In Wilmot Township, I enjoyed every minute of the drive-through event in New Hamburg. There were decorations and surprises, while children safely held their bags out of car windows and volunteers filled them with sweet treats.

I thank the Wilmot Family Resource Centre and all the volunteers for their hard work, and thank Fall Harvest Farm and Shantz Family Farm for donating the pumpkins, which at the end of the event were further donated to a pig farm.

I was then off to Woolwich Township, where Max's Sports World put on a free event in support of Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region. I thank Kacee Vasudeva and all the volunteers and donors.

Because of the generosity of so many people, kids had a safe Halloween they will long remember. Seeing the smiles on their faces was all the treat I needed.

The Speaker: I remind all members joining us virtually to please turn off their mikes. It is not really fair to the member speaking when a voice comes barreling in and interrupts their speech. We want to make sure there are no interruptions in the House. It is just courtesy, and I know everyone in this room is very courteous.

WOMEN

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in praise of Canadian women. Their strength, ingenuity, bravery and intelligence are evident every day in Canadian society.

As a member of Parliament, lawyer and mother of four, I marvel at the professionalism, enthusiasm, dedication and caring hearts that my three grown daughters bring to their careers, studies and relationships.

Women make up a huge share of our front-line workers and are often sandwiched between their children and elderly parents. Many are entrepreneurs and small business owners. They are bearing the brunt of this pandemic on every front imaginable. They should be recognized and respected for their immense contributions.

I have always believed in the value of mentoring and encouraging young women. I was the founding chair of the CBA Women Lawyers Forum both nationally and in B.C. We championed formal mentorship, resilience and leadership education, and intergenerational collegiality. It has been proven that increased numbers of women on corporate boards leads to business excellence and success.

All women should consider mentorship and should encourage their peers during these trying times. I thank them for everything they do.

* * *

JAMES CHOI

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the life of Corporal James Choi, a member of the Royal Westminster Regiment and a patriot who devoted his life to his country, family and community. Tragically, Corporal Choi passed away at age 29 after succumbing to wounds obtained during a live-fire training exercise in Wainwright, Alberta.

James was born in Mission, B.C., and grew up in Coquitlam as the eldest of three children to Korean immigrant parents. He was a football and lacrosse player, and studied criminology before joining the Canadian Armed Forces in 2016. He was described by his family as having been exceptionally responsible. Everything he did was about serving others and ensuring that his loved ones were safe and well.

Corporal James Choi will forever be in the hearts of those who were touched by his humility and love. I express my deepest condolences to his family, and I am here to support them during this season of grief.

[Member spoke in Korean]

[English]

May James rest in peace.

* * *

• (1415)

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Winnipeg has now been declared code red because of COVID, and while the government keeps talking about how we are all in this together, people are being left behind. From the threat that 50% of small businesses will be closing in Winnipeg Centre, to the loss of loved ones at Parkview Place because of the government's failure to end for-profit care and legislate national standards for care, to the cases now being reported in local shelters, like Siloam Mission, this is a tragedy and the situation is becoming more dire by the moment.

The Liberals must match their talk with action and immediately take substantial measures to help our community. People's lives and jobs are on the line, and this is happening under the watch of the Liberal government. If we are really all in this together, it is time for the government to demonstrate it through real action.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL CAREGIVER WEEK

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during national caregiver week, let us all acknowledge caregivers' commitment to the well-being of their family members. Since this year's theme emphasizes the importance of self-care for caregivers, let us commend the invisible work of the people, mostly women, who make sacrifices over and over out of love, but who all too often forget to take care of themselves. They do invisible work with people who are sick, disabled or losing their autonomy, in addition to having a lifelong role as a spouse, parent and worker. It is invisible work, but it is quite common. Almost one-quarter of Quebecers are caregivers in one way or another, providing physical care, helping loved ones do their shopping and household chores, and more. Caregivers are among those most affected by the pandemic. Many of them gave up their income or job to protect someone who is weak or currently fragile.

In closing, I also want to thank the organizations that provide assistance and support to caregivers. We are with them, and we thank them.

* * *

CANADIAN JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the institution of the Canadian justice system is the envy of the world. We have a reputation for being a country that respects human rights, and we are all very proud of that. However, there is a fly in the ointment. The judicial appointment process has been tarnished by a Liberal corruption scandal. In order to be credible, this process has to be shielded from any political influence. We support an independent, impartial panel of experts to choose the best highly qualified candidates for judicial appointments in Canada.

Oral Questions

I condemn the Liberals for choosing another path, for interfering in the selection of highly qualified candidates and replacing them with Liberal Party cronies. This situation is unacceptable and calls for the House to investigate the Liberal government's shady actions. This is about our reputation as a Canadian society here and abroad. We all have a duty as MPs to protect our Canadian justice system that is so dear to us. For that reason, we want to know the whole truth.

* * *

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Montreal East has an exceptional potential for development. In the coming years, we will have major opportunities to develop former industrial sites while preserving the environment.

In Hochelaga, hundreds of residents have come together to save the Boisé Steinberg, thereby demonstrating the importance they attach to natural, green spaces. I completely support the residents' initiative in planting trees. I applaud the support from other elected officials in preserving this wetland in the east.

I believe that it is essential for the future health of our cities to promote a vision for development that blends both the economy and the environment. That is why our government is making investments such as \$950 million in the green municipal fund, \$31 million for the Canada healthy communities initiative, and has allocated \$2.2 billion to municipalities by accelerating this year's payments from the gas tax fund in order to support sustainable development projects. In Montreal East, we have an opportunity to provide a renewed boost to innovative, sustainable economic development.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

TERRORISM

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "certain political rights are inseparable from the very essence of democracy: freedom of thought, speech, expression..., assembly and association." Can the Prime Minister tell us whose quote that is?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will always defend political rights, Canadians' rights, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, freedom of expression, freedom of religion. All the rights Canadians expect governments to defend, we will always defend.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Today, Mr. Speaker, but not on Friday.

Oral Questions

That quote was by the Prime Minister's father, in a book published while he was prime minister. In one generation, the Liberal Party has gone from freedom of speech being the very essence of democracy to the Prime Minister musing about what speech he might limit.

In the last week, world leaders have been standing with President Macron and defending free speech. Why has the Prime Minister not?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, like this week, we condemn unequivocally the terrorist attacks in France and elsewhere. We stand with the French people. We will always stand against terrorism, against violence and in defence of free speech and other rights we hold dear around the world.

● (1420)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, four days ago, Canadians were concerned when the Prime Minister seemed to suggest that he would limit the freedom of expression. He wanted to have sensitive debates about "possible exceptions" while wearing a poppy, a symbol of our freedoms and liberties granted by the sacrifice of thousands who came before us.

The question is very simple. Does the Prime Minister believe that freedom of speech is essential to a democracy, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I said that last week, I say that again this week. Nothing justifies the horrific violence we saw last week and over the past weeks. Nothing justifies violence, nothing justifies terrorism. We will unequivocally defend freedom of speech, as I said last week, as I continue to say this week and as I will say again next week, if the hon. member asks.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, President Macron called Premier Legault. He thanked him for always being at France's side in protecting freedom of expression.

If the Prime Minister stands in so much solidarity, why did President Macron not call him?

Can the Prime Minister acknowledge his mistake and agree to always protect freedom of expression as guaranteed in the charter?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said last week, we unequivocally condemn the acts of terrorism that we have seen in France and elsewhere. We will always stand in solidarity with our friends in France. We will always defend freedom of expression. We will always work with France to promote the values we share all around the world.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is flip-flopping on a matter of basic rights, and that is disturbing.

We know the Prime Minister is refusing to stand up for true freedom of expression. Perhaps he has forgotten that the Charter of Rights signed by Pierre Elliott Trudeau guarantees that right. One is either for it or against it. There is no grey area.

Why is the Prime Minister unable to defend freedom of expression?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said it last week and I have said it four times already today. I will say it again and I will continue to say it: We unequivocally defend freedom of expression. We unequivocally condemn these terrorist acts. Such violence is never justified.

We will always stand strong with our French friends and all who defend these fundamental rights around the world as we fight terrorism together.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have another chance to try to get an answer. It is hard to keep up with the Prime Minister.

On Friday, he came perilously close to rationalizing the terrorist attacks in France and the sickening murder of Samuel Paty by stating that the caricatures of Mohammed were a provocation and that free speech is not without limits. This morning, he is trying to make us believe the opposite. That is quite the acrobatic feat.

Does he condemn the Mohammed caricatures? No, but creators should self-censor. This is kind of like therapy: It will do him good to answer our question.

Where exactly is the limit on freedom of expression?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said last week and as I have said many times today, we will always defend freedom of expression. It is a fundamental principle of our democracy and our freedoms as citizens. We will always stand up in defence of freedom of expression.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, please. He keeps contradicting himself, except just now, when he finally said the same thing twice in a row.

To our great relief, the Quebec National Assembly and the Premier of Quebec have spoken on behalf of the Quebec nation. The French president actually called Premier Legault this morning.

Quebec refuses to sacrifice its values, its language, secularism, freedom of speech and communal harmony to multiculturalist communitarianism. Quebec condemns the attacks and their radical Islamist religious motives against France. This Prime Minister is undermining our relationship and friendship with France.

Will he at least admit that he does not speak for Quebec on such matters?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we have been working very closely with President Macron for several years now to combat terrorism, defend our fundamental rights, defend freedom of speech and defend the values we care about as Canadian and French citizens.

We have been there to fight for the environment. We have been there, side by side, to fight for women's rights. We will continue to work closely to support and defend the freedoms of everyone on the planet.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are worried about flu vaccine shortages.

Doctors have had to cancel appointments. Pharmacies do not have any more vaccines. Not only are we living in a global pandemic, but we are now fearing a flu epidemic.

Why did the Liberal government not prepare for this?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, we saw it coming and ordered more flu vaccines than usual. We are there to make sure that Canadians can get the flu vaccine. It is a very good thing that a record number of Canadians are seeking to get a flu vaccine. We will make sure that we have vaccines for everybody, because we know that fighting the seasonal flu is a very good way to prevent outbreaks of COVID-19.

We will always be there for Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maybe the Prime Minister is not aware there are pharmacies that have run out of the vaccine. There are doctors that are cancelling appointments. People cannot get access to the vaccine for the flu in the middle of a global pandemic. We should have been prepared for this. Why was the Prime Minister's Liberal government not prepared for the reality of a flu season to have sufficient access to the flu vaccine?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we pre-ordered more flu vaccines than normal because we knew Canadians would do the important and right thing and get their flu vaccines. We have seen record numbers of people coming out for their flu vaccines. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories in order to be able to meet this surge in demand, because it is a good thing that Canadians are getting their flu vaccines. I will continue encouraging people to get their flu vaccines. Orders of government will work together to ensure that people will be able to get vaccinated soon.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small businesses have suffered across Canada. Industry experts say that 60% of restaurants may fail by the end of the year. The Liberals knew that their failed rent subsidy and flawed wage subsidy programs were coming to an end this fall, yet they chose to prorogue the House in August and failed to prepare the necessary legislation when Parliament reopened. It is November 3. Why have small businesses had to wait months to find out details of support programs?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, mak-

Oral Questions

ing sure that our small businesses are supported through this very difficult time is our top priority.

I want to assure the hon. member that absolutely nothing is more important than for us to get the supports out to businesses, especially the important support like rent support and fixed costs during this very tough period. The legislation that was introduced will do exactly that; ensure that our businesses get that support to bridge through this difficult time, including lockdown support of an additional 25%. I hope that the member will indeed support us so that we can get this important legislation passed and get the support to businesses.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is coming weeks too late for some businesses. Last Sunday, rent was due for thousands of Canadian small businesses struggling with higher costs and fewer customers. The government has known for months that its rent assistance program was a disaster and that it was ending in September. A new program was promised weeks ago. Announcements do not pay the rent.

On what date will businesses be able to apply for rent assistance?

● (1430)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that at the outset of this pandemic we made the decision that we would be there for Canadian households and businesses, no matter what it took.

To help with the cost of staff, we advanced the wage subsidy; to help with the cost of fixed expenses, we launched the emergency business account; and to help with rent, we initially started with the commercial rent assistance program. We are now moving forward with the Canada emergency rent subsidy. This new program will allow applicants to apply retroactively back to the period beginning September 27. If the hon. member would like a technical briefing from department officials, I would be pleased to set one up for him.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small businesses are struggling through this pandemic. They have enough troubles without having the burden of additional untimely audits. Some small business owners are reporting that audit responses are costing more than the benefits they are receiving.

Will the minister commit today to pausing the CEWS audits and helping our small businesses, instead of labelling them as tax cheats?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government acted quickly and decisively to help Canadian workers and the organizations that employ them. The Canada Revenue Agency launched a small-scale initiative to audit Canada emergency wage subsidy payments. While the agency is carrying out prepayment audits for the CEWS, the post-payment compliance process will rely on this important work.

[English]

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, we know small business owners are not a priority for the government, as is seen from this response and by the fact that it took it months to get announcements out the door.

Will the minister finally commit to pausing CEWS audits for Canadian small business owners?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the wage subsidy, we want to make sure this benefit reaches as many businesses as possible. It is essential, since we asked CRA to administer a very complex program, which is going to meet the unique needs of different businesses and will involve subsidies ranging from a few hundred dollars to tens of millions of dollars potentially, that we have integrity measures in place.

We are going to trust CRA to do its work at arm's length from the government, as all parties should do, if they one day form government. This is the correct path forward. We are going to continue to advance supports that will land on the front doors of businesses, so they can remain open when this pandemic is over.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE ECONOMY**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even with the highest deficit in the OECD, we in Canada have a higher unemployment rate than the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan. Despite this, the government shut down Parliament almost all summer instead of working to restart our economy safely.

Where is the plan to build back after the catastrophic damage caused to our small businesses, our workers and our economy?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member's assertion, I would remind him that Canada's recovery regarding job loss is going much faster than many of the comparative countries he has outlined. I point to the United States, in particular. While Canada has recouped 76% of the jobs that were lost during this pandemic, the United States sits at only 52%. The hon. member will know that he is cherry-picking data because, if he actually looked back at our record entering this pandemic, he would see that Canada was on a record run of job growth and had

achieved its lowest unemployment rate since we started keeping track of those statistics over 40 years ago.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is more proof that if the government tortures the data badly enough it will confess to anything.

Here are the facts from the OECD. The United States has an unemployment rate of 7.9%. Canada has an unemployment rate of 9.0%. In fact, Japan, Germany, France and the U.K., along with the U.S., all have lower unemployment than Canada, despite having by far the largest deficit in the OECD.

This is the worst record around. What will the government do to reverse the disastrous damage it has done to our businesses and workers?

● (1435)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect, if anyone is torturing themselves to use data to make a false point, it is the hon. member opposite. Members will notice his speaking point just a few days ago talked about unemployment in the G7, but because Canada's jobs are actually recovering more quickly than our G7 comparators, he has dropped Italy from that list.

If we pay attention to what is going on, we will see that our unemployment rate is a factor of not just the status of our economy, but of the public health measures that have been put in place to keep Canadians safe. Our unemployment rate in Canada is about 9.0%. The last data point I saw for the United States was about 8.4%. If the hon. member is so enthralled with the American response to the coronavirus pandemic, I would ask him to show us which public health measures we should erode for the sake of that extra 0.6 points.

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*[Translation]***JUSTICE**

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office is pushing to have friends of the Liberal Party appointed judges.

Yesterday, the minister said, "I can only speak based on my experience as justice minister.... I have never been pressured by the Prime Minister's Office."

However, Radio-Canada has revealed that on February 18, 2019, while that same minister was in office, a Liberal aide wrote the following to his chief of staff: "Need to talk about what PMO requires us to do prior to a judicial appointment. It raises some concerns."

Who is telling the truth?

Oral Questions

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to restore confidence in the appointment system after 10 years under the Conservatives, we put in place a clear and transparent system in 2016 to identify exceptional candidates who also reflect Canada's diversity. All appointments are based on candidates' professional experience. Nominations are assessed by the judicial advisory committees, which give us recommendations, either highly recommended or recommended candidates, and we go from there.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal aide in question also told the justice minister's office, "What we are doing is similar to what led to the Commission d'enquête sur le processus de nomination des juges, back in 2010 in Quebec". That was the Bastarache commission.

That is not all. Joël-Denis Bellavance of La Presse revealed that a member of the Prime Minister's Office contacted the Minister of Justice four times to find out more about certain candidates. This is documented in at least two media sources.

Who is telling the truth? The Minister of Justice or the newspapers?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the one who makes recommendations to cabinet, and I have never been pressured by anyone. My recommendations have never been blocked.

We consult with the legal community on each case. The legal community is very happy to have a role to play in the evaluation of candidates. This is how we ensure the integrity, credibility and reputation of candidates. It works very well, and I am extremely proud of the outcome.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after more than seven months, the Transbois company in my riding is still unable to access the emergency wage subsidy because it had the misfortune of changing owners on the wrong date. I say it has been seven months, but we are almost at eight months.

The Prime Minister said that he would not let anyone down. Transbois has 40 employees and needs help to ensure its survival and continued existence.

Is the government going to make sure that it helps all businesses, regardless of size?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course I will be pleased to help my hon. colleague and Transbois access funding.

As my colleague knows full well, he can come to us at Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions to find a solution that will help the owners of Transbois and their employees in particular. I would be pleased to start a conversation with him. I look forward to hearing from him.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the restaurant and hotel industries are on the brink of bankruptcy. Thousands of businesses in this important sector of the

Canadian economy can hold on no longer. We must act now. Fixed costs need to be paid every month.

Customers are unable to visit these establishments because of the pandemic. We are starting in on the 10th month. Bill C-9 has not been adapted for these businesses.

When will the government introduce a plan tailored to the restaurant and hotel industries?

• (1440)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that, generally speaking, the hospitality and tourism sectors are facing massive challenges.

I have had a number of conversations with the Association hôtellerie Québec, most recently yesterday, with the Conférence économique de l'industrie touristique québécoise, led by Raymond Bachand, and with several other stakeholders across the country.

We have been there from the beginning of the pandemic with programs such as the wage subsidy, assistance for small businesses, and rent relief. We realize that we still need to do more, and we will do so.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small businesses, such as That Breakfast Place in Port Stanley, Evolution Yoga in London, and the St. Thomas Health Club, have faced an uphill battle getting relief from the government, especially when it comes to rent relief.

These businesses have real people, often hard-working parents and caretakers, who are just trying to make ends meet. Some of them are fearful their businesses will close for good. Will the government back off and give these businesses room to breathe as they chart a path forward?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with many business owners across Canada, including in my own community, who have been raising issues like this with me for several months.

The good news is we have stepped up in a way that no government ever has in the history of our nation to provide direct support to businesses that have been affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic. In order to help with the costs for their employees, we advanced a wage subsidy, which is keeping three million workers on the payroll. In order to help with the fixed costs for small and medium-sized businesses, we advanced the emergency business account, which is helping over 700,000 Canadian businesses.

Now, to address commercial rent, we are putting forward the Canada emergency rent subsidy, which is going to help them stay in their premises as long as is possible, so they can still keep—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this truly is not a reality for all. It is no secret that women who own businesses are facing the challenges of this pandemic. I receive pleas from many women who are working as travel agents, curators at museums or who run small boutiques and have gone months with little or no business at all. Many of them have worked hundreds of additional hours to fill the gaps to keep their businesses afloat. Now is not the time to have big brother knocking at the door.

Will the government take the reasonable step of backing off small businesses as they regroup to survive this pandemic?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her advocacy of women. Truly, this pandemic has hit women the hardest. I will say at the same time, with a lot of humility, that no country in the world has done a better job at applying an intersectional gendered analysis to its COVID response than Canada has. We have much to do. The path to recovery depends on women doing well and this is the right government at the right time to get it done.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week we learned that a high-ranking Facebook executive has been using his connections within the government to offer lucrative positions to civil servants. It might be why we heard today that instead of making web giants pay their fair share, the Liberals are passing the buck to regulators. It seems that Facebook lobbying is working.

Will the minister please explain why his ministry is helping Facebook instead of looking out for the interests of Canadians?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, who would want to work for Facebook when they can work for the wonderful ministry of Canadian Heritage?

Second, we are doing today what no government has done before. We are forcing web giants to do their fair share when it comes to Canadian stories, Canadian artists and Canadian musicians, which only a handful of countries in the world have done. This will lead to close to \$1 billion of more investment in our Canadian stories and in our Canadian artists.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals introduce a bill, we can expect to be disappointed, but damn it, there must be a limit.

The Broadcasting Act was supposed to be modernized, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage had the opportunity to have all stakeholders contribute to the production of Quebec and Canadian cultural content. The minister blew it. Not only are Internet service providers not included, but the advertising revenue of Facebook and Google is also protected.

How can the Liberals give them a present like that? Would it have anything to do with the 104 meetings that these web giants have had with the Liberal government?

• (1445)

The Speaker: Before I recognize the minister, I would like to remind members to use a little judgment in choosing their words. I would like them to use words that are considered parliamentary.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française applauded the introduction of Bill C-10 to modernize broadcasting. ADISQ called it a historic day. We will be forcing web giants to invest almost \$1 billion in Canadian culture, in our artists and in our stories. Special attention is being paid to the francophonie all across Canada, to first nations, to indigenous productions and to racialized groups wherever they may be in the country.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has put measures in place to support our business owners during the pandemic. One of these measures, the Canada emergency business account, has helped nearly 775,000 businesses benefit from an interest-free loan of up to \$40,000. Last week, the minister announced new changes that will support many more businesses that need this important assistance.

Can the minister tell business owners in Laval and across Canada how the new changes will support them in these difficult times?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan for his question, which is important for Laval business owners.

I am pleased to announce that the program is now open to businesses that operate with a personal bank account. This will help more businesses in Laval and across Canada with their fixed costs. Our government will always be there for SMEs in Quebec and across the country.

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[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was recently reported that a former staff member to the Minister of Justice wrote to his chief of staff stating, "Need to talk about what PMO requires us to do prior to a judicial appointment. It raises some concerns."

Why is the Prime Minister's Office maintaining such partisan-controlled involvement of judicial appointments and why will the minister not raise the same alarm bells on this as his former staff member did?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of Conservative appointments, we put into place a system that would rebuild confidence in the judicial appointment process. It is clear and it is transparent. It is based on the quality of the candidates and promotes diversity.

Judicial appointment committees across the country do their work choosing candidates, recommending them highly or simply recommending them. We take those recommended candidates and we consult widely and deeply across the legal community in order to get the very best candidates and the most diverse bench which represents Canada. I am proud of the results.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the minister may simply be trying to do his job and may in fact be frustrated by the constant partisan meddling of the Prime Minister's Office in the judicial appointments process, but this meddling is having serious impacts on the backlog in the courts across the country, something raised just recently in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Rather than the focus being on trying to help Liberal insiders, will the minister tell the PMO to back off so the backlog in Canada's courts can be addressed?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have worked diligently to make appointments at a regular pace in order to reduce any backlog, and we are succeeding.

The judicial appointments committee in Newfoundland and Labrador has been reconstituted after its normal time period after it expired. It is now evaluating files and will be moving to those appointments in the very near future.

I am proud of the process we have put into place. It is transparent, clear and focuses on quality, all the while maintaining diversity in our judiciary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for Canada, Radio-Canada and La Presse are reporting that during the judicial nomination process, Liberal supporters, Liberal MPs, members of the Prime Minister's staff and even the justice minister's chief of staff had partisan influence on the list of nominees.

The Minister of Justice is an honourable man, a distinguished academic and a man who has steered clear of partisan shenanigans throughout his career.

Can he tell us, although he might not be aware of it, if his staff meddled in the judicial appointment process, yes or no?

● (1450)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his compliments.

I can assure my colleague and Canadians that I am the one who recommends judges to cabinet. I have not been pressured by anyone, and my appointments have never been blocked by anyone.

I have appointed people of all political stripes, and from time to time, even members of the Conservative Party approach me to promote certain judicial candidates and ask questions about this.

Oral Questions

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Minister of Justice did not respond directly to my question. However, there is a subject that unites all Canadians, and that is the way we should defend and honour our veterans.

Soon we will commemorate Remembrance Day. Soon, hundreds of events will take place across the country to honour the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The Department of Veterans Affairs posted a tweet about receiving a reminder on November 11 to take a moment to remember those who served and sacrificed for our freedom. The French version of the tweet contained many spelling and grammar errors.

Why use such mediocre French for such an important event?

[*English*]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague bringing this to me. I will evaluate the situation and make sure that responses are handled properly in the right language.

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[*Translation*]

TERRORISM

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a week ago, the House unanimously adopted a Bloc Québécois motion condemning the terrorist attack on teacher Samuel Paty and freedom of expression.

This motion called on the federal government “to fly Canada's flag at half-mast”. Even the Prime Minister agreed to adopt this motion, even though he claims today that he did not realize it. A week later, this still has not been done. There is no trace of the memory of Samuel Paty in the flag of Canada half-masting notices.

Who refused to comply and why?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

As I said yesterday, I think we should avoid politicizing this issue. We were all absolutely horrified by the terrorist acts that were committed in France. We stand in solidarity with the French people. The Prime Minister said that and so did I.

Oral Questions

The day after the attacks, I expressed our solidarity with the French people on behalf of the Government of Canada.

We will always be there to fight against terror and intolerance.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard his response yesterday, and it is the same today.

It is not the answer to the right question. I will repeat my question. The House voted unanimously to lower the flags to half-mast in memory of Samuel Paty. The Liberal government chose not to do so. The Prime Minister took 11 days to condemn the beheading of this French professor, killed in reaction to a lecture on freedom of expression.

Three days later, the Prime Minister put this tragedy into perspective. Why this disrespect for the memory of Samuel Paty? Why have the flags not yet been lowered to half-mast, as the House unanimously ordered a week ago?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

As he knows, all parliamentarians have expressed their horror at this tragedy. We take note of his question.

I want to assure the House and all Canadians that we have expressed our solidarity with the French people and that Canada will always be there to defend freedom of expression around the world.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, consumers continue to struggle with rising food costs, while farmers and processors are receiving less. Five retailers now control over 80% of the grocery trade in Canada. This diminished competition leads to abuses in the industry while sticking consumers with the bill. Independent grocers are the lifeline of many towns across Canada where big retail will not go.

Since the Prime Minister has the Westons' back, can or will the minister stand up for independent grocers and consumers, and update the Competition Act to reflect today's concentrated reality?

• (1455)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure my colleague, and the producers and grocers across Canada, that we are following the situation closely. We are looking at the different opportunities we may have, but we have to work with the provinces in this regard. I can assure members it will be a topic discussed at our federal-provincial-territorial meeting this month.

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TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the environment committee, I asked officials from four different government departments on our progress to reduce carbon from Canada's heavy trucking sector. Specifically, I asked if the govern-

ment has been consulting industry players such as the Canadian Trucking Alliance. The answer was, "Not that I'm aware of."

Why does the minister continue to ignore Canada's trucking industry?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of what we have been doing with the trucking industry, particularly during this pandemic. We have reached out to the trucking industry on a number of fronts to ensure their job, which is a difficult one in these circumstances, can be as easy as possible with respect to such items as truck stops so they can eat food and have the opportunity to use the washroom. We are working with the trucking industry because we realize the sacrifice they are making for Canadians, particularly those who travel on a frequent basis to the United States.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Communist China, as part of its systematic campaign to dismantle democracy in Hong Kong, arrested eight pro-democracy politicians. Meanwhile, Communist China continues to escalate threats against democratic Taiwan by sending sorties into Taiwanese aerospace on 25 of the past 31 days of October. Enough is enough.

When will the government impose sanctions on Chinese Communist officials?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been standing up at every step of the way. If we look at the case of Hong Kong, Canada was the very first country in the world to suspend the extradition treaty between Canada and Hong Kong. We then suspended the export of equipment and we adopted our travel advisory. At every step of the way, we have been standing up for values and principles with our allies around the world. We will continue to stand up for the values and principles and we will always continue to fight for democracy around the world.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November 5-11 marks Veterans' Week, 2020. In Cape Breton—Canso we have 16 legions and countless veterans who depend on their support. Like businesses, legions have struggled to make ends meet during this pandemic. For the Minister of Veterans Affairs, what support can our government provide to legion branches and other organizations that support veterans across Canada to ensure that they can keep up their important work?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Cape Breton—Canso for all his hard work with the legions and veterans in his riding. Legion branches across the country are dealing with the COVID-19 issue and we would encourage Canadians to support the Royal Canadian Legion's annual poppy campaign this year. Our government is supporting our legions and veterans organizations with \$20 million in funding to help them get through this pandemic.

We can be extremely proud of the work we have done for our legions and other organizations to support our veterans and we will always be there for them.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many federally regulated employers are barely hanging on due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are 100% focused on survival, but instead of helping them the Liberals are insisting that now is the time to hold costly consultations on the right of employees to “disengage from work”. We are in the middle of the worst economic crisis in our lifetime. Workers will be permanently disengaged from work if they lose their jobs. Why is the labour minister putting this extra burden on employers, instead of focusing on helping these workers save their jobs?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that we have been working very collaboratively with both labour and industry. During this pandemic, I want to thank the collaborative nature of my P/T partners, labour and industry, as we work together to protect both workers and industry. We implemented a number of measures like the Canada emergency response benefit as well as a wage subsidy, which in fact keeps the relationship between employee and employer strong so that as we recover through this pandemic we will come back even stronger.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development has revealed that Transport Canada still has major shortcomings in the transportation of dangerous goods: outdated lists, thousands of unregulated facilities, no standards and a lack of preparedness for emergency situations.

The mayor of Lac-Mégantic clearly stated, “it is not right that reports should cause so much concern seven years later”.

The Minister of Transport says over and over again that rail safety is his first priority.

When is he going to stop talking and really start doing something to make the safety of Canadians a priority?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He forgot to mention that the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development also stated that progress is being made.

However, I support the fact that it is always possible to do better. We will continue to do better with our inspections and our oversight of the measures that the railways have undertaken.

We are always working to improve rail safety. It is part of my first priority.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is finally going to give the \$600 one-time, tax-free payment to Canadians living with disabilities. It is meant to defray some of the extra costs arising from the pandemic. The payment only started last Friday, seven months after the announcement.

Will tax credit promoters who sign people up for the disability tax credit get to take their usual 30% cut first, before the money gets to the intended recipients?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been working tirelessly to make sure we put a disability-inclusive lens on our complete pandemic response, including from the very beginning consulting our newly formed COVID-19 disability advisory group. Yes, it took a long time, way too long, to get the payment out to individuals with disabilities. We are committed through the Speech from the Throne to make sure that never happens again.

Last Friday, 1.6 million Canadians started getting payments, and I am very proud of our government's work behind the scenes to make this happen.

Points of Order

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the workers on our farms are essential to the agriculture sector; they have demonstrated this during the pandemic. As a precautionary measure, temporary foreign workers must be placed in mandatory 14-day isolation upon arrival. Our government quickly provided \$50 million in assistance to employers to support their costs. In Brome—Missisquoi, producers have told me time and again how important this measure is, as did the Caron orchard, which was able to benefit from this assistance for some fifty workers.

Can the Minister of Agriculture tell us whether the program is going to be extended?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that the mandatory isolation support for temporary foreign workers program has been extended, along with the Quarantine Act, until November 30, 2020. Under the program, employers will receive \$1,500 per foreign worker to cover part of the costs associated with the 14-day isolation period during which the worker cannot work.

The health of farm workers is a priority for our government, and we will continue to support food producers and processors so that they can put in place the measures needed to protect essential workers.

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[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill Morneau was forced to resign in the midst of the biggest financial crisis of the century. That was after he tried to move a billion dollars to his besties, the Kielburgers, and the Liberals are promoting him as the head of the OECD. Seriously, let us ask the Sears workers what they think of that. They had their pension funds robbed by hedge fund operators and Bill Morneau did nothing to help them. Meanwhile, his family business was winding up its savings.

This guy is the king of the one per cent. Why are the Liberals promoting his interests instead of the interests of Canadian workers who are facing so much economic insecurity at this time?

• (1505)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I and every member of the House think it is important to have Canadians leading international organizations. We are proud to put forward a Canadian with an outstanding background and the expertise to bring the organization forward. We know the OECD is playing an important role during this pandemic. We are proud to have a Canadian as a candidate, and we will support him so that he can lead the organization into the future.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, we know this pandemic has had a devastating impact on Canada's small businesses. Many small businesses in my riding have raised concerns about the requirement that landlords apply to the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program.

Can the minister please explain in what ways the new rent subsidy program will be helpful and easier for businesses to use?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to address the member's question. As Canadians take action to limit the spread of a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that many businesses are struggling to meet their monthly expenses, including rent specifically.

The new Canada emergency rent subsidy is going to be better targeted, easier to access and will provide direct support to affected businesses. For the hardest-hit Canadian businesses that suffer a lockdown at the hands of a public health order, we will be there for them, as we said we would be in the throne speech, by providing a rent subsidy that could be as generous as 90% of their monthly expenses. We will be there for businesses through this pandemic to make sure they are still here on the back end.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-214—WAYS AND MEANS MOTION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, October 30, you made a statement respecting the items of Private Members' Business on the order of precedence. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, you drew members' attention to concerns respecting Bill C-214, sponsored by the member for Calgary Centre, entitled "An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (qualifying environmental trust)".

I am rising to make an intervention as to why I believe the bill would need to be preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion. A qualifying environmental trust is a special kind of trust that is recognized under the Income Tax Act for setting aside reclamation costs for mining sites, waste disposal and quarry sites, as well as pipelines.

The purpose of Bill C-214, as set out in the summary, is to amend "the Income Tax Act to include, in the definition 'qualifying environmental trust', trusts that are maintained for the sole purpose of funding the reclamation of an oil or gas well operated for the purpose of producing petroleum or natural gas."

Bill C-214 proposes to repeal paragraph (a) of the definition "excluded trust" in subsection 211.6(1) of the Income Tax Act, which currently provides that an excluded trust includes a trust that "relates at that time to the reclamation of a well;" and proposes to add paragraph (e) to the definition of "qualifying site" in the same provision. The proposed paragraph (e) would read as follows:

(e) the operation of an oil or gas well drilled for the purpose of producing petroleum or natural gas.

The consequence of these proposed amendments would be that the reference to a qualifying site in paragraph (b) of the definition of a “qualifying environmental trust” would include the operation of an oil or gas well drilled for the purpose of producing petroleum or natural gas.

Subsection 211.6(2) of the Income Tax Act is the charging provision that imposes tax on qualifying environmental trusts. Adding a new paragraph (e) to the definition of a “qualifying site” in subsection 211.6(1) of the Income Tax Act would have the effect of expanding the definition of a “qualifying environmental trust” to include trusts that are maintained for the sole purpose of funding the reclamation of an oil or gas well operated for producing petroleum or natural gas. Therefore, the effect of Bill C-214 would be to cause a tax to be payable by a new class of taxpayers, that is, qualifying environmental trusts in respect of the operation of an oil or gas well.

Page 906 of the third edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states:

The House must first adopt a ways and means motion before a bill which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer can be introduced. Charges on the people, in this context, refer to new taxes, the continuation of an expiring tax, an increase in the rate of an existing tax, or an extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayers.

The proposed amendment in Bill C-214 in respect of qualifying environmental trusts would represent an increase in the incidence of tax for these trusts. The definition of qualifying environmental trusts in Bill C-214 would now include trusts that are maintained for the sole purpose of funding the reclamation of an oil or gas well operated for the purpose of producing petroleum or natural gas.

As a result, the number of qualifying environmental trusts that would be subject to part XII.4 tax will increase. Therefore, I submit that this is a situation where the adoption of a ways and means motion would need to precede the introduction of Bill C-214, since the effect of the bill would represent an extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayers.

In terms of precedents to support the argument that the introduction of the bill should have been preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion, I would draw the attention of members to the following Speaker's ruling.

● (1510)

On November 4, 2011, the Speaker ruled that Bill C-317, an act to amend the Income Tax Act regarding labour organizations, should have been preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion, since the provision of the bill would have created a new class of taxpayer. The Speaker ruled:

If enacted, Bill C-317 would thus create a situation whereby labour organizations can be differentiated into two distinct categories, those that comply with the financial reporting mechanism and those that do not.

In the Chair's opinion, this new category of labour organization would constitute a class of taxpayer that does not currently exist. Labour organizations in the newly created class, that is those that do not meet the financial reporting requirements outlined in the bill, would see the removal of their current tax-exempt status....

As a result of this determination, I find that Bill C-317, by distinguishing between certain labour organizations, creates a new class of taxpayer and that this new class of taxpayer would then be subject to a removal of an alleviation of taxation.

Points of Order

For the reasons stated, I must, therefore, rule that Bill C-317 should have been preceded by a ways and means motion.

The principle to be derived from Bill C-317 is that any measure that would have the effect of subjecting a new group of taxpayers to a tax must be preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion. This principle also applies in the case of Bill C-214.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member and will take that under advisement.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order that relates to conduct arising during question period, which I believe to be unparliamentary in nature. A similar point of order was made in a recent question period, I believe, by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

In this instance, the member for Calgary Centre interjected by removing the mute feature from his Zoom connection and speaking in a disparaging way toward the government, in a way that made it impossible for all members who are logged in virtually to hear any of the commentary. I do not believe that the member for Calgary Centre's voice is any more important than any of the 338 members of Parliament.

I would ask that you advise him, Mr. Speaker, at the next opportunity, that it is not within our rules to be speaking while others have the floor.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for heckling with the mute button off. It was two words. I do not think the words were unparliamentary, as did my hon. colleague on the other side of the House, but I will take it under advisement and I will refrain.

The Speaker: I want to remind all hon. members that when someone is speaking, the minute they take the mute off, it brings attention to their microphones and cameras, so members might usurp the member who is speaking, which is not fair to the person speaking, regardless of what party they are in or what side of the House they sit on.

Out of respect, when members are in virtual mode, they should not unmute themselves unless they are about to speak after being acknowledged by the Speaker.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

• (1515)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMIC ON
CANADIAN WORKERS AND BUSINESSES

The House resumed consideration of the motion

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise and talk about the important issues facing our nation.

Obviously, the most significant thing taking place in our nation today is the coronavirus, and not only what Ottawa is doing but also the different jurisdictions that have responsibility. How are businesses, individuals and the many stakeholders responding to the coronavirus, and how, as a society, can we collectively minimize the damage to our people and economy? This is something that I believe Canadians want the House of Commons to focus its attention on.

Virtually since day one, the Prime Minister, cabinet and entire Liberal caucus have focused on doing what we can to contribute ongoing information, programs and support so that Canada is healthier from both a social and economic perspective. I am very proud of the work that we have done to date. Having said that, I recognize the challenges that lie ahead of us, as we are well into the second wave.

Today, with the second wave, given the number of cases that we have, my home province of Manitoba is probably more challenged than other provinces. It is something that all people are concerned about, and they want to know to what degree the government continues to be there in support.

I was encouraged, at least in part, by the official opposition bringing forward a motion that is somewhat relevant to the coronavirus and to some of the things we have been doing as a government. The focus of the motion deals with small businesses. Let there be no doubt that we recognize the value of small businesses. In fact, in terms of dollar value, the most subscribed program is probably the wage subsidy program: a direct support program that allows employers to keep their employees during this very difficult time. I would suggest that it has literally saved millions of jobs and has afforded businesses the opportunity to survive. This particular program is not alone: We have seen other programs put forward by the Government of Canada, working with many stakeholders throughout our country, to ensure that we can protect and support people wherever possible.

However, to address the statement that we needed to realize this a year ago, these programs did not exist. It was not until March and April that we were put into this position of needing to get programs established. At the earliest, it was in January that people were starting to think of how we were going to support our communities in order to get through an anticipated pandemic. In a relatively short period of time, with the support of so many, we created a litany of

programs to protect the people of Canada and to support and protect our businesses.

Every day, we are in contact with small businesses, individual Canadians and a wide spectrum of stakeholders to ensure that our programs continue to evolve. The wage loss subsidy program and the CERB both received modifications.

• (1520)

When a program is established, virtually from nothing, we can anticipate there will be a need for changes. We will not necessarily have a perfect program from day one. I am very happy to say that, through this time, we have seen amendments to programs that affect individuals and businesses, and we continue to see some modifications.

In the bigger picture, we also see how the federal government has very successfully worked with provincial governments. One needs only to look at the restart program, which gave \$19 billion to support provinces. The government worked with them to ensure the economy would be in a better position as it reopened. We recognize the important roles other jurisdictions, provinces, territories, indigenous leaders and so many others have in protecting our communities, whether individuals or businesses.

Earlier today I referred to small businesses being more than what most people might think. For example, I think social enterprises are great employers and contribute immensely to our communities.

Two weeks ago I mentioned Folklorama in the city of Winnipeg, and how the Minister of Heritage had a meeting with some of its representatives. Yesterday I had the opportunity, with the Prime Minister, to meet with representatives from Folklorama. Folklorama is an organization in Winnipeg that has been around for over 50 years. It has provided so much economic activity to the city of Winnipeg over the years and has been absolutely incredible. It also provides social benefits for not only our city but our country in terms of diversification.

Through meetings, whether with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Heritage, Folklorama, other organizations, small companies or large companies, we understand and recognize the important role the government has to play in this pandemic. We have understood that from day one, and this government has been there for Canadians in a very real and tangible way.

I listened to the speeches across the way, and one wonders where the members have been. With many of their comments, I would suggest, they are trying to give false impressions, as if the Government of Canada has not been there. I would challenge members to look at any other jurisdiction within Canada and the number of resources, whether financial resources or the development of programs, and find an area where a government has been as thorough in delivering for Canadians in all aspects of society.

We needed to do that. As a government, it was important for us to step up and protect the interests of Canadians in all regions of our country. What would have happened had we not done that? The consequences would have been horrendous to our economy and people in many different ways.

Unfortunately, I have run out of time. Hopefully I will get a bit more time to expand in answers to questions and comments.

• (1525)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments, because we have been working together. I think everybody in the House agrees this is a time to put partisanship aside, which is what the motion is about today.

I was wondering if I could get the parliamentary secretary's opinion on the motion, because what it is asking is to call the CRA off, for a little while, for small businesses that are really struggling right now, and to be a bit more flexible. We have offered some suggestions in the past. Thankfully the government has listened to us, and I appreciate that very much, but I would like him to comment on exactly what the motion is.

In Oshawa, the Tartan Tavern closed down this past weekend. That is where I had my first legal beer 38 years ago, and it was a landmark in Oshawa. Businesses are really struggling and need that flexibility, and I ask the government to support the motion today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as I indicated virtually from day one, this government, even pre-pandemic, has been very supportive of Canada's small businesses. During the pandemic it has come up with a suite of programs. We have demonstrated our willingness not only to listen, but to make the program modifications necessary to protect both the short-term and long-term interests of small businesses.

The member and this motion deal with one aspect. It is interesting that they would bring this motion, because not that long ago members of the Conservative Party were standing up and asking why we were handing out as much as we were without ensuring more accountability, on the issue of CERB payments. I will leave it with the individuals within the bureaucracy in the cabinet to come up with ideas of how we can continue to offer support, and try to provide my feedback directly to those people.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to zero in on the second half of this motion, which is asking the House to provide additional flexibility, especially in the rental assistance program. I appreciate that these programs were delivered in an unprecedented time, and they did need some tinkering. I guess the problem I have is that we have been calling for improvements on this program for quite some time now, and for some small businesses it is already too late.

We have had numerous members of the opposition identify problems with this program for many months. Why are we only now starting to talk about adding flexibility to the program, when it is the month of November?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member should be aware that when we brought in the suite of programs to support Canadians and businesses, small and large alike, they were put together relatively quickly because of the pandemic. Even though we have seen those programs implemented, modifications to the programs have taken place relatively quickly.

What the member is referring to is that there might be specific asks in certain areas, and some might be more challenging than oth-

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ers. Any sort of modification usually ends up with a fairly significant consequence. As time goes on, there have been changes, and I suspect there will continue to be changes going forward.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, my question is similar to my colleague's.

From the outset, the hon. member for Joliette has repeatedly called within the Standing Committee on Finance for changes to the commercial rent assistance program to make it more flexible. It is now expected that there will be a change and that the transfer between the Canada Revenue Agency and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation will take place.

When and how will this be done? We need to avoid rough patches and make sure that companies do not end up paying more.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I assure the member that the government is, in fact, acting quickly to bring forward the information that is necessary and is doing what it can to modify programs so that we can best serve the small and large businesses in all regions of our country.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

I want to thank the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge for the excellent motion he presented today. It is very important. I am very pleased with it, and I will be supporting it strongly.

I want to break down the motion a bit.

Part one says, “the pandemic has had devastating consequences on Canadian workers and businesses, especially in the restaurant...and tourism sectors”. It has been 12 months since the coronavirus showed up in China, 11 months since the Prime Minister and the health minister were warned about it, 10 months before Canadians started getting sick on cruises, nine months since the first cases in Canada and eight months since small businesses were hit with declining or disappearing revenue.

One of the first messages I received was from a small manufacturing business in my riding. The constituent wrote, “The government's support for small business in this COVID-19 situation is entirely inadequate. Avoiding layoffs is the critical issue right now. Our production line is idle and we need action now. The government has provided 10% salary support...and it's not enough.”

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It turns out that this business owner was far more perceptive than the government. The government's big idea was a 10% wage subsidy. Business owners knew intuitively this was not enough. Other countries had already implemented higher subsidies. The U.K. had a subsidy of 80%. Business owners understood that if businesses were not supported, individuals would need help one by one.

I received another letter in March. It states:

I just wanted to let you know that Bateman Jewellers was celebrating 75 years in business this year. But due to COVID-19 we are going to have to shut down for a while until this pandemic passes. The 10% special wage subsidy is not even close for us to continue to run our business. As a result, we are adding to the already 500,000 going to EI for support. We will add five more this week. I ask you to try and get the government to do more for small business. Small business has carried this country for years and it is time for the government to support us.

It is clear that the average business owner in Canada could clearly see where things were going, yet the government was slow to act. Yes, the government eventually increased the wage subsidy to 75%, but it was because the opposition continued to bring forward the business point of view in the House. Unfortunately, for most businesses it was too late. People had already been laid off and were applying for CERB. In the months since then, small businesses have continued to suffer, creating an economic crisis in our country.

The second part of the motion asks us to “immediately pause the audits of small businesses that received the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy until at least June 2021.” We have had eight months of economic hardship and uncertainty, and now the Prime Minister wants to audit the same small businesses he promised to help.

I spent 20 years as an accountant and 12 years as a small business owner. This morning I was quite amused that the member for Guelph had the audacity to suggest that business owners appreciated audits and that audits could be helpful and a learning opportunity. Let me help this member and the rest of my colleagues opposite better understand the anatomy of an audit call.

After answering the phone, a business owner will hear, “Hello, Mr. Smith. The CRA has selected your file for audit.” Let me paint a picture of what happens at that moment. His knees will get wobbly and he will have to sit down. His entire business life will flash before his eyes. The vast majority of business owners are honest, but the system is complex. Mistakes can be made, so the next thought is “I am going to be in trouble”.

At this point, he has to take a deep breath and calm down. Once settled down a bit, he has to start to figure out what to do next. Usually the first call is to the accountant. However, for many small businesses, the business owners are the accountants. They are calling themselves. They have to dig out a bunch of records and spend a bunch of time with the auditor. Remember, the small business owner has likely laid off much of his support staff, if he had any to begin with. He may be cooking in the kitchen. He may be delivering orders. He still has to run his business. He is struggling to pay his bills and the last thing he needs is to deal with an auditor.

The bottom line is that we assume small business owners are honest, hard-working Canadians. They are not tax cheats like the Liberals would like us to think. Small business owners are our best asset to deploy in this pandemic. They will get Canada working

again and will generate revenue for employees and for the government. They need to be focused and they need time to do their jobs. I believe it is very reasonable to provide CRA with info in 2021 once these small businesses have filed their paperwork for 2020.

● (1535)

The third part of the motion asks us to “immediately introduce legislation to enact promised extensions and amendments to support programs”. I want to remind the House that the government shut down Parliament in the spring. It replaced Parliament over the spring and summer with a sham committee system that kept the government unaccountable and then, of course, prorogued Parliament. The Liberals had seven months to introduce legislation for this, but instead they acted late and their actions were inadequate, although they still managed to find ways to launder money to their friends, like the Kielburgers.

The fourth part of this motion asks us to “provide additional flexibility in the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, and other support programs.” This is what my party has wanted for nine months. Businesses with mortgages were treated differently from businesses with leased space.

I have another letter from a constituent. It says:

I own a small business called The Backyard...we took out a mortgage with BDC to complete this expansion and currently the only relief offered...is to defer principal payments, but they still require payments of interest. As we have been ordered to be closed now for nearly a month, we obviously have no income and no ability to pay the...interest they are requiring. I fail to see how it makes sense that a bank who is federally mandated to serve entrepreneurs, and had a net income of \$886M in 2019, should continue to collect interest from small businesses and entrepreneurs such as ourselves who have been ordered to be closed.

Clearly, many of the criteria were too rigid.

I have another letter. It states:

I wanted to...give my feedback regarding the 75% rent relief announcement made by the Prime Minister... My company has been ordered to close by the Provincial government.... Despite my doors being closed I have done my best to operate in some way to generate some sense of revenue online. Had I not taken these steps I would likely never re-open my doors.... Essentially, over the 2 and a half months of closure.... This accounts for [about] 50% of our pre-covid [income]...or more importantly an entire month and a half's worth of revenue. I'm sure you can understand how devastating that is to a small business. To say that our business has been kneecapped due to the governmental responses to covid-19 is an understatement.

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The biggest problem with the rent relief program was the requirement that the landlord had to initiate the application. One of my constituents, Sherry, had a restaurant that was on the verge of going bankrupt. She asked many times for the landlord to make an application for her for the rent relief program. She asked me to see if I could help, so I phoned the commercial leasing agent. I was told that they were not going to apply to the program, even though they have many commercial tenants, because the application process was too onerous. Then Sherry got behind in her rent for July and August and the landlord would not renew her lease.

We can see that the design and implementation of these programs were entirely inadequate. They only helped a narrow swath of businesses. The results of these programs speak for themselves. The wage subsidy program has been very under subscribed. The rent relief program was seriously under subscribed. Originally, businesses had to lose 70% of their revenue to qualify, and the results show that this did nothing for 90% of businesses in Canada.

The Conservatives immediately called on the government to address this flaw, and the redesigned program was announced October 9. For five months, the Conservatives called for a new program with the introduction of a sliding scale instead of requiring a hard 70% reduction in revenue. The Liberals have finally made these changes, but they were announced a full week after the program expired. Why was this not done in August? It was because of the pro-rogation. The legislation was only introduced in the House of Commons yesterday.

What is missing in all of these programs? Why are we debating this motion and not Bill C-9? It is all about flexibility. Once again, the Liberal government has unilaterally made programming changes without proper consultation.

The Conservatives have supported COVID programming in the past, warts and all. Why? It is because Canadians need help. We would rather get some help to them, flawed or not, than leave them with no help. The Liberals are in the all-or-nothing club. We must vote for the Prime Minister or he will make something a confidence vote, triggering an election. The Conservatives do not operate like that. We do not play brinkmanship with taxpayer dollars, we do not play brinkmanship with people's jobs and we do not play with people's health. That is why I am supporting this motion.

• (1540)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was a city councillor in 2008 when the real estate industry triggered a collapse of not just the North American economy but in fact the global economy, which created a recession. I was also a city councillor when I watched the federal government propose a budget that did absolutely nothing to protect thousands of jobs and the production of new housing in the country. It was only when the opposition parties threatened to bring down the government that the former Harper government decided to act.

Would the member care to contrast the substantial delay, the pro-roguing of Parliament and the inadequate response from the Harper government to that recession, that economic crisis, which at the time was the deepest and darkest recession the country had faced since the Great Depression?

The Harper government refused to act, was bent into action by the opposition and then acted with measures almost too small to make a difference to save the jobs and the construction industry. We lost thousands of houses and thousands of jobs in that 2008 slow response.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, I was not around in those days, but in listening to the member, it sounds like he was describing what we just experienced in the last six months.

All I know is that there was a slow response from the current government to this pandemic. There was an inadequate response, especially for small businesses. Small businesses needed help and it was not there, which forced them to lay off people. Now the government is finally coming back and making some of those corrections to the programs that should have been made months ago and for which we as opposition have been asking. That is what I have seen. The government should have acted faster.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois welcomes the motion. In Quebec, the tourism industry and the restaurant industry have been going through difficult times, as elsewhere in the country. In the Gaspé Peninsula and the Lower St. Lawrence, we have been fortunate. This summer, a few people came to see us. There is, however, the Riôtel group in Matane, Percé and Bonaventure, who is going through especially difficult times. The winter is going to be tough.

Does my colleague think that the government could support them more by extending the various programs that are already in place?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, the hospitality sector is definitely in deep trouble. One of the important things that needs to be done to encourage people to travel and have the confidence to visit hospitality places like hotels and restaurants is rapid COVID testing. We need to have better testing. We need to have rapid testing. People need to know they are safe and need to feel safe.

I think once we can help Canadians feel safer with the situation, and testing is one of the big keys in that, it will help us get our economy rolling again, especially in the restaurant, hospitality and travel sectors.

• (1545)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, like the member, many small businesses in my riding of Vancouver East are in desperate straits and in need of the commercial rent subsidy. Would the Conservatives support calling for the Liberal government to apply the commercial rent subsidy retroactively so businesses that did not qualify in the earlier program would be able to access the resources and support they desperately need?

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Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, it is an interesting suggestion and is something that should be looked at. What I find most interesting is that the calendar is not difficult to interpret. The government knew that the current program was expiring at the end of September, yet it waited until now to introduce something new. Obviously, part of the reason was because it prorogued Parliament and could not introduce anything in Parliament.

The calendar is very simple to understand and I am surprised the government had not introduced a replacement program sooner so we did not have to talk about it being retroactive.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, this pandemic has affected Canadians from all walks of life in many different ways, whether it be front-line workers who have put themselves in harm's way to keep us all safe; or workers in the service industry, like retail employees and servers, whose jobs have vanished; or retirees who have seen their savings decimated by the financial markets tanking; or small business owners who have had to adapt to this new reality, resulting in many suffering massive losses and some even being forced to close their doors for good.

So many in my community have phoned or written my office in the last eight months. They are struggling to get by. They are facing a once-in-a-lifetime challenge. While this government has made some announcements which seemed promising, when it came time to deliver many of these programs, they just could not get it right.

I believe it was my colleague, the member for Edmonton Centre, who previously described it best: The government gets an A for announcement and an F for delivery.

Our motion today discusses the devastating consequences on Canadian workers and businesses, especially in the restaurant, hospitality and tourism sectors. I want to bring to light three real-life examples of small businesses in my community that have struggled during the pandemic in a few different ways.

Two weeks ago, I met with Tony Siwicki from the Silver Heights Restaurant. They have been known by all in sunny St. James since 1957 for having the best ribs in town. I confess that I have sampled those ribs several times, and I agree. I can confidently say those ribs definitely live up to the hype. I might add Tony is also chair of the Manitoba Restaurant and Foodservices Association.

Tony is a third-generation restaurateur and certainly over the past 63 years the businesses built by his family have seen many ups and downs, but this pandemic has hit them harder than ever before.

Tony went to apply for the commercial rent assistance program in the hopes he could get much-needed support to weather the storm. After months of fighting to access the program, he was finally able to get some help, but it took a strong will and jumping through many hoops.

The process was challenging, and he is not the only one facing it. With only 8% of restaurants owning their building, the vast majority have had issues with the landlord portion of the commercial rent assistance program. By mandating landlords' involvement the program, a fatal error to this program, and setting a hard cap on revenue losses, this program turned out to be a total and utter disaster.

With Manitoba now facing more serious restrictions as it has entered code red, this is adding on to the challenges Tony has been facing. When we spoke last, he had only one table for the entire lunch hour on what is usually one of his busiest days. Fixed costs are not going away and the added costs they have incurred for new cleaning and safety measures have not helped them stay afloat. Restaurateurs, just like Tony, need help and they need it right now.

Then there is Tim Hudek who owns One Great City Brewing. I think we can all agree that nothing is more Canadian than an ice-cold beer. In fact, I wish we had one now, given the stress that everyone is undergoing with these programs. Tim opened the brewery in 2017 and is one of many outstanding small craft breweries in Winnipeg. His brewery has a fantastic restaurant that serves food to accompany their delicious craft beers made on-site.

At the start of the pandemic, Tim reached out to my office for assistance and I was happy to help him, just as my team and I have been doing since the beginning. We had issues with the Canada emergency wage subsidy program due to the structure of his business. The government did not recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach to business supports was not feasible for a business like Tim's.

Tim is concerned. He is concerned about the climate of uncertainty facing small businesses when it comes to what supports are available and which restrictions will be put in place. He is fighting to do everything he can, not only for business but for the countless individuals he employs. Small businesses are the job creators and backbone of our economy and we must ensure we are doing our part as they face challenges like never before.

My friend Will Gault has also faced challenges during the pandemic. Will owns Willy Dogs, the best hot dog cart in Winnipeg. Will tried qualifying for the much needed \$40,000 CEBA loan through the Canada emergency business account. He was turned down because he did not meet the specific requirements for the program.

With winter now upon us, Will has shifted his business indoors at our local Deer Lodge Curling Club. However, with the recent restrictions, he will not get any foot traffic from curlers as sports have been suspended. He is now limited to takeout and curbside pickup only and he cannot sustain his business under these conditions. He does not think the club will be able to stay open much longer, leaving him with no place to set up his operation.

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• (1550)

Will said he is a month away from his livelihood being killed. He may be forced to put his house up for sale. Will provides for his wife and two young children, and as parliamentarians, we must do everything in our power to help Canadians who are struggling just like him. Emergency programs need to work for Canadians in emergency situations, just like my friend Will.

We are here to work together for Canadians across the country. They hired us to work for them by electing us to this place. In the middle of this pandemic, though, the Prime Minister locked out MPs and shut down Parliament to block investigations into the government's ethical scandals. At a time when Canadians needed us the most, the Liberals put politics before people. Instead of allowing members from all parties to come to work and do our jobs, introduce and debate ideas, help improve their legislation, and help people and local businesses stay afloat, they shut down everything because of their own ethical scandals.

Throughout the pandemic, we proposed constructive solutions. We proposed increasing the wage subsidy from 10% to 75%. The government finally took our advice and implemented this change. We called for changes to the commercial rent assistance program from this side of the house, such as making the program more flexible and allowing landlords to negotiate with their tenants directly instead of the mandated reduction. Many small businesses contacted my office saying the required participation of their landlords in the rent assistance program was their biggest hurdle. It took many months, but it seems like the government may finally be listening after our calls for changing this requirement.

Conservatives have been calling on the government to end the restriction for small businesses operating out of personal chequing accounts to be eligible for the \$40,000 CEBA loan. After many months of dragging its feet, it seems there may finally be some action taken on this front.

My colleague, the member for Carleton, and I proposed back in April to allow Canadians a one-time tax-free withdrawal from their RRSPs and to give them until the end of 2023 to repay it without penalty. This would have given Canadians who are struggling access to their own funds instead of having to rely on government benefits. We received absolutely zero response to this suggestion. The member for Carleton and I also proposed waiving all mandatory RRIF withdrawals for the 2020 calendar year to allow seniors to keep their investments protected and not be forced to liquidate them during a time of losses. It was another suggestion and, yet again, there was nothing but crickets to be heard from the government.

Throughout this pandemic, our Conservative team has taken a team Canada approach and did everything we could with the Liberal government. We were hearing feedback every day from our constituents, just like members in this House from all parties. We proposed constructive solutions to help Canadians when they needed support the most.

Canadian small business owners and workers need a plan that keeps Canadians safe, protects jobs and gets our country back on track. They need a plan that recognizes the key points of this motion. The government needs to take action to address promised extensions and amendments to emergency support programs while

providing added flexibility, which small business owners desperately need.

This is why I urge that all members in this House support our motion today and get Canadian small business owners and workers the certainty, clarity and support they need. I will add that Tony, Tim and Will are counting on all of us.

• (1555)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):

Madam Speaker, first of all, the member should know that Tony, Tim and Will are in our hearts and minds as we pull through this pandemic together as Canadians. I hope they see good days ahead as we work together to make sure those good days arrive. I thank the member for telling their stories.

I will put aside the party opposite's concerns that we are spending too much money. The member for Carleton often says we should stop spending money. I am not sure how to do that and help small business simultaneously. However, I will ask a very particular question.

I have a run a restaurant and had to meet a paycheque running a restaurant. I understand entirely the complexities of the leases that restaurant owners have and the debt structure that many restaurant owners have in terms of putting their private assets up against the business in order to get the financing they need to open. Leases are an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. The laws that govern commercial leases are entirely within provincial jurisdiction. The time it took to get provinces onside to help small business was substantial, including the province that the member opposite comes from.

If we were to intervene unilaterally in a private contract between two individuals under provincial jurisdiction, does the member opposite think the courts would for a minute defend our actions against landlords who decided they did not want to participate? Does he think we could have overridden the courts, overridden provincial jurisdiction and intervened in private contracts unilaterally, with no consequence?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Speaker, I think, with the greatest respect, that the member is missing the point. The approach was just simply incorrect, and they have essentially admitted to that through the introduction of their latest legislation, which simply aims to provide a direct subsidy to tenants. If they had just done that from the beginning, many businesses would have survived through this pandemic. It has been eight months.

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I remember being at a finance committee meeting where Mr. Siddall from CMHC was defending the rent assist program by saying that of course landlords would accept it because it makes sense for them to accept it, and it was designed to be in their interests. He could not have been more wrong, and that was months and months ago. We were pleading with the government to wake up and examine this program and make it right. Instead the Liberals created a fake Parliament, a COVID committee. They then prorogued, and now we are here in November having this debate all over again.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his speech.

I have a question for him. I will have an opportunity to speak soon, but I will say right now that we will support the opposition motion.

The member gave several examples of how difficult things are in his riding, and we could do the same for ours. I would like his thoughts on sectors like tourism, which is closely connected to the hospitality and restaurant sectors. We knew from the beginning that the road would be long. This sector was shut down in March, it picked up a bit in the summer and then it was shut down again. This will have long-term consequences.

What type of measures does the member envision in the long term?

[*English*]

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Speaker, aside from the subject matter of this motion, we have been asking the government for months now for rapid testing. Every country in the world seems to have rapid testing.

Rapid testing would go a long way in easing the concerns of people who would be customers in the restaurant, hospitality and tourism sectors. That is an area of policy we need to pursue in order to alleviate many of the concerns. Hopefully that will get people coming back out and being customers again.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the motion moved by our colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge. I also want to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with our esteemed colleague from Richmond Hill.

Today's motion deals with an important matter. I want to give a little context to the motion by giving an overview of what Canada's six regional development agencies are doing to support small businesses get through the COVID-19 pandemic and tackle the challenges the pandemic is leaving in its wake.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on Canadians from coast to coast to coast. With the lockdown, much of our economy is on forced pause. Everyone's life has been disrupted. This is especially true for entrepreneurs and workers in small and medium-sized businesses. These businesses are a source of good local jobs,

but also of local pride. They are the backbone of our economy and our communities.

The Government of Canada very quickly understood the importance of helping them weather the crisis and acted very quickly. We launched the largest economic assistance program in our history. That included the Canada emergency wage benefit to help businesses keep their employees and rehire the ones they had to lay off, deferral of GST and HST remittances and customs duty amounts for businesses, and the Canada emergency business account offering interest-free loans to businesses and not-for-profits. We have been responsive to needs and have continuously adjusted and improved our assistance.

However, one of the things I heard when I met with entrepreneurs in my region, the vast and magnificent Madawaska—Restigouche, is that, despite the extensive social and economic safety net we set up, the smallest businesses are still having a hard time.

We asked ourselves two questions. How can we help those who are slipping through the cracks? What tool can we use to assist them, knowing that these entrepreneurs would rather turn to institutions that are part of their community, institutions they trust?

To respond to both of these concerns, we created a special assistance program implemented by our six regional economic development agencies. These agencies are on the ground. They are the ones who are best positioned to help workers and SMEs at the very heart of our communities.

That is why we established the regional relief and recovery Fund, or RRRF. The RRRF has a total budget of \$962 million and is implemented either directly or indirectly by our regional development agencies in co-operation with key partners such as Community Futures development corporations, or CFDCs, in Quebec, or the CBD-Cs, in the Atlantic provinces, for example, and lastly with the PME MTL network.

The purpose of the RRRF is to support businesses at the heart of their local economies that cannot use existing federal programs or whose needs cannot be met by those programs. It provides SMEs and organizations that lack liquidity with emergency financial support to enable them to pay their employees and cover fixed costs so that they can stay in business.

Through the RRRF, we have been able to provide financial and technical assistance to thousands of businesses and organizations across the country, from coast to coast to coast. For example, by supporting Québec International, we have helped build the resilience of many SMEs in the Quebec City region affected by COVID-19, such as the Quartier Petit Champlain co-op, which has since shifted to e-commerce, and Défi-Évasion, which now has an online gaming platform.

Through the RRRF, we have provided direct assistance to many SMEs, including Proposify, a Halifax-based tech company that develops winning marketing strategies for its clients, particularly in exports. I would also like to mention Vexxit, a budding, innovative and majority woman-owned company in Winnipeg that has developed a unique intellectual property protection algorithm and uses it to match professional services businesses with clients.

The RRRF has proven essential to help businesses stay open and retain their highly qualified employees. I have seen it myself in my own riding of Madawaska—Restigouche.

● (1605)

Since the launch of the regional relief and recovery fund, the RRRF, in May, more than 12,000 businesses across the country have received help through this fund. However, it should be noted that the economic repercussions of the pandemic are not felt the same way in every region of the country, and that is especially true for Canada's northern territories. The Government of Canada understands and acknowledges that. That is why, in addition to the RRRF, \$15 million was allocated to the creation of the northern business relief fund, which targets other immediate assistance needs for SMEs and seeks to ensure stability for businesses in sectors that are essential to economic recovery in the North.

Our response to the challenges that SMEs are facing in this crisis would have been incomplete if we had not recognized that certain sectors have been more directly hurt and require special attention. One of those industries is the fish and seafood processing chain. That is a vital sector of our economy, especially in Atlantic Canada, Quebec and in western Canada.

Overnight, the health crisis paralyzed these businesses' supply chain and cut off their access to markets. Action was needed. That is why the government created the Canadian seafood stabilization fund. With \$62.5 million in support, this important sector of our economy can get what it needs and adapt to the new realities brought about by COVID-19.

Together, these measures have helped protect many Canadian jobs, provide emergency support to families, and keep businesses afloat as they deal with the impact of the health crisis. No sector of our economy has been spared by this health crisis, and with the arrival of the second wave, there is clearly a need for additional support.

That is why the Government of Canada announced another \$600 million on October 2 to help Canadian businesses recover from the impact of COVID-19. This additional investment brings the total amount of assistance provided to businesses through the RRRF to over \$1.5 billion.

Our SMEs are still facing many challenges. As my colleagues know, businesses on our main streets are vital to our communities. They have been hit hard. Many businesses have responded to the lockdown by expanding their offer of goods and services and joining online stores to attract new customers and to reach new markets. This was an unprecedented opportunity for us to help them not only rebound, but also to become better prepared to be competitive in the economy of tomorrow.

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That is why we launched the Digital Main Street platform, which seeks to support almost 23,000 Ontario businesses by helping them survive and also prosper in the new economy. With federal funding of more than \$42 million disbursed by FedDev Ontario, this innovative program helps businesses go digital.

We also know that it is not just main streets that are facing challenges. All the economies of our major cities have been greatly impacted by the economic repercussions of COVID-19. The number of active businesses in all major Canadian cities fell sharply in February and June as follows: 18% in Toronto, 15% in Montreal, 10% in Vancouver and 9% in Calgary.

I will use the example of Montreal, which became the epicentre of the Canadian pandemic in the spring of 2020. Social distancing measures and bans on large public gatherings have deprived the city's economy of its main sources of revenue associated with commerce, industry and tourism. The increase in e-commerce and telework has also had a serious impact on customer traffic in the downtown core, and the absence of international students has compounded the situation. In short, customer traffic in downtown Montreal is estimated to have dropped from 600,000 to 50,000 people a day. As of August, 26% of commercial space in downtown Montreal was vacant. Hotel occupancy in this tourist metropolis has plummeted by 69%.

The Canadian government is well aware of these challenges and has already begun to take action. For instance, we have allocated \$30 million through the RRRF to the PME MTL network to provide targeted support to SMEs within Montreal affected by the economic impact of the pandemic.

I could go on. We have been listening to our businesses and to SMEs all across the country. We are ready to answer questions about the government's plans and the measures we have put in place.

● (1610)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things that has been affecting small businesses during the pandemic and even prior to that is the predatory practices of the credit card companies. Their outrageous behaviour prior to COVID-19 saw interest rates up to 28%, some at 19% and some even in the 15 percentile. Then we had better operators like Vancity, for example, which during COVID-19 went to 0%.

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The question I have for the member is whether or not he thinks there is room and there should be legislation or at least some type of a window provided to lower credit card interest rate fees and the service charges on small businesses. Those charges are absolutely outrageous and criminal when we look at them compared with other countries. Canada has some of the highest fees and rates, which are a drain on small businesses as they have moved to more operations. Whether it be credit cards or Interac, all those fees are going on.

I would like to hear the government's response to this. It is one of the things we have really not seen much from it on. It should have been dealt with before the pandemic, and it should be dealt with right now because they are getting more business than ever before.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for this excellent question.

I would say that Canada's entire financial services sector has been listening to businesses during the COVID-19 crisis. Based on the Parliament of Canada's suggestions, many credit unions offered to suspend or defer required payments. Canadian banks and credit unions have been very co-operative.

That is an excellent question about credit cards. This problem has been around for a long time, but during the COVID-19 crisis, businesses were able to benefit from government measures like the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, the Canada emergency business account and the regional relief and recovery fund. Businesses saw that we were there and they welcomed the assistance provided by the federal government.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He is my riding neighbour and I want to acknowledge him.

He spoke a lot about the regional relief and recovery fund, the RRRF, which was well received in my region of the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work that the four Community Futures development corporations in my region did as part of this program. They supported a number of struggling businesses.

There has been an increase in assistance, which I think is good, but it is temporary, while the pandemic could be around for quite a long time and businesses will continue to struggle for just as long. I am therefore wondering whether the federal government intends to make this program permanent.

Mr. René Arseneault: Madam Speaker, I thank my neighbour for that question.

From a geographic perspective, I would say that she is practically my riding cousin because our two ridings have the same type of population and the same type of businesses in the tourism, forestry and fishing industries.

The RRRF was extremely well received in very rural areas such as Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and Madawaska—Restigouche. The program was enhanced and it was extremely well

received. It helped an incredible variety of businesses, from florists to campgrounds to minigolf courses. It is unbelievable.

My colleague asked a good question. The program was enhanced. We have stepped up. I hope all residents of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia will be able to fully benefit from this excellent program that we put in place.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, one component of the motion we are debating today is flexibility. I was listening for that. I am recalling all of the emails I received, particularly back in May and June, and I am going to focus my comments specifically on the commercial rent program, CECRA.

Many businesses could not make use of that because of their relationship with their landlords, but I want to cite a meeting I had with Fred Naclerio, a large commercial landlord, who met with me wanting to do the right thing by his hundreds of tenants. He wanted to help them, but the hard cliff of the 70% drop and the inflexibility of the program forced his tenants to share with him financial details that made it very awkward on a go-forward basis. Even more so, for any fit-ups or any work he did as the commercial landlord on behalf of his clients, he now had to eat the utility costs and the fit-ups in his 25% contribution. He was willing to do the 25%, but there was no flexibility for all of the additional.

Can the member comment on why the landlords were pushed into a corner and had to remain within that tight restriction?

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The government has heard from businesses and from commercial landlords and tenants. That is why this new program, the Canada emergency rent subsidy, will provide much more flexibility and will even be backdated to September. This is a great opportunity for those most affected who need rent support. I hope that my colleague will be able to reassure his constituents in this regard.

[*English*]

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I stand to speak to the motion put forward by the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge. The motion put forward seeks to pause the audits of small businesses that received the Canada emergency wage subsidy and provide additional flexibility to the Canada emergency rent subsidy, the Canada emergency wage subsidy and other support programs.

When the pandemic hit, our government quickly rolled out many programs to help individuals and small businesses through the pandemic. The Canada emergency wage subsidy has helped protect more than 3.5 million Canadian jobs by supporting employers to keep their staff on the payroll.

However, an important step in understanding the viability of the program is by conducting audits on businesses that received this support. The Canada Revenue Agency recently began a small-scale post-payment verification project. This will help the government understand the level and degree of non-compliance. It will also help us refine the approach to better help our small businesses. The scale is small and the focus is on refining the program to help our small businesses better.

In the bill introduced by the Minister of Finance on October 9, we hoped to extend the wage subsidy program until June 2021. In ensuring this is administered fairly to employers, it is vital that CRA continues to probe and conduct audits. On the first part of the motion, which is talking about the audit, I strongly suggest we continue doing the audit because it is focused on bettering the program. On the second part of the motion, which is talking about the extension and modifications of various subsidy programs, we are doing that. As such, I cannot support the motion put forward by the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Let me highlight the work we have done and the work we are planning to do to better address the second part of the motion. Small businesses, as all members know, are the hearts of our communities and the backbone of the Canadian economy. They make up 95% of all businesses, employ 8.5 million Canadians and account for 40% of our economy. These small businesses continue to add charm to our towns and cities, attracting tourists from every nook of the world.

In my riding of Richmond Hill, attractions like the David Dunlap Observatory continue to fascinate both amateur and expert astronomers alike since its opening in 1935. Some of the hardest-hit sectors were in food services, cultural, recreation and entertainment industries that usually benefit from tourism spending.

Tourism has always been a driving force in the building of Canada. It draws newcomers, investors and economic activity into our communities. It generates \$102 billion in annual economic activity, 1.8 million jobs and accounts for 2% of our GDP. The sector's footprint is virtually everywhere, underpinning businesses and not-for-profits in every province, territory and city, as well as many small communities.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a dramatic impact on Canada's economy, and the challenge for the tourism sector has been amplified by closures and travel restrictions. Social distancing, capacity limitations and traveller sentiment will continue to impact the tourism industry into the future, even as travel restrictions slowly begin to ease.

In a meeting with hoteliers in my riding and the Hotel Association of Canada, I was informed that the tourism and hospitality sectors have been hardest hit during COVID-19 and continue to face significant barriers to recovery. There is no question that times are

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tough, especially with many parts of the country experiencing the second wave of the pandemic.

We made available several financial supports to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will briefly mention them, as the details have been reviewed by many of the members in the House. They are the Canada emergency business account, the business credit availability program, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance, the COVID-19 emergency support fund and the northern business relief fund.

● (1620)

There are also new supports for women and youth entrepreneurs, indigenous business owners and Black entrepreneurs. These measures are necessary because economic empowerment of all Canadians is the key to a just economic recovery.

The pandemic has hurt our small businesses the hardest, and owners have shown incredible resilience by continuing to serve their communities. I want to highlight the efforts of Aneal Swaratsingh, owner of Aneal's Taste of the Islands: a Caribbean restaurant in the heart of Richmond Hill. Aneal's restaurant has faced challenges during the pandemic. Still, he has donated meals to the local peer support centre and is consistently serving the most vulnerable in our community.

In May, we established the regional relief and recovery fund, delivered through the regional development agencies, to mitigate the financial pressure experienced by businesses and to allow them to continue their operations. The regional relief and recovery fund provides targeted assistance to businesses and business support organizations that were unable to access our existing COVID-19 relief measures. A lifeline for businesses that might otherwise not have survived, the RRRF has been vital in helping them continue their operations, keep their employees, pay bills and get access to capital.

On October 2, the Prime Minister announced \$600 million in top-up funds for the RRRF. We are providing over \$1.5 billion through the RRRF to help more businesses and organizations in sectors such as tourism that are key to the regions and to local economies.

So far, more than 2,700 Canadian businesses in the tourism sector have benefited from the fund. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the six regional development agencies: the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario and Western Economic Diversification Canada.

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The regional development agencies are taking a place-based approach to delivering the regional relief and recovery fund program. They are taking a leading role in implementing measures to help businesses and individuals within communities across the country, and they are providing as much flexibility as possible with their existing recipients. Our RDAs are there to help businesses and innovators grow, succeed and create good jobs for Canadians.

The government is proud of the measures and initiatives taken to support our small and medium-size businesses, particularly those in the tourism sector.

Some of the work we are planning to do includes expanding the Canada emergency business account to help businesses with fixed costs, improving the business credit availability program and extending the Canada emergency wage subsidy until June 2021, to help businesses keep employees on the payroll and rehire workers.

Further, following a commitment in the Speech from the Throne to provide direct financial support to businesses temporarily shut down as a result of a local public health decision, we have introduced the new Canada emergency rent subsidy to provide rent subsidies directly to tenants while also supporting property owners. Qualifying organizations would be able to access rent and mortgage support until June 2021.

COVID-19 has caused businesses across the country, both large and small, to rethink their approaches. Entrepreneurs and owners are looking at more digital options, more creative solutions and more climate-friendly investments. We will support people and businesses in the tourism sector through this crisis as long as it lasts. Whatever it takes, we are here and our government is here for small businesses and the tourism sector.

● (1625)

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, in the member's speech he mentioned audits from the government as if they were good things. This morning, the member for Guelph also mentioned audits as if a small business would appreciate an audit or enjoy an audit, and would learn something very important from an audit.

Does the member believe that audits from the CRA are something that small businesses would look forward to with joy and anticipation?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Madam Speaker, I would like to provide a different perspective on the audit.

If I may, I will ask the member to consider a small business owner who gets a call that says, "I am calling from the CRA. We are so happy you have been benefiting from our wage subsidy. We would like to have some questions answered to see how we could improve the program and make it better. Your business has some uniqueness that we may not have considered in the past."

Let me draw a parallel example. When quality assurance is done in a manufacturing facility, someone looks at how they can improve the product or service. They do not say they are going to do a quality check because they want to punish the employee who provided that product or service.

I would like to present that different perspective.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I hear my colleague loud and clear, and audits can be a way for large and small businesses to improve. My colleague mentioned manufacturing companies.

That said, the government keeps repeating that we have to work together and that it is here to help citizens. Businesses are "corporate citizens".

However, do Canada Revenue Agency's repeated refusals to postpone audits not show rather a lack of support for small entrepreneurs, when the agency is under the responsibility of the member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, a riding with many small entrepreneurs?

[English]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Madam Speaker, our government respects the CRA's arm's-length status.

I would also like to highlight that the Minister of National Revenue does not instruct the CRA to begin audits, nor does the minister intervene in audits that are under way.

However, going back to the comment I made previously, this is a continuous improvement. We got feedback in committees about how we could improve the program. Small businesses are another stakeholder in this whole process, and we needed to reach out to them in the same way that, at the beginning of COVID-19, we asked them what we could do differently, whether the measures taken had been effective and, if not, how we could improve them.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have had the privilege of working with the hon. member at committee throughout this entire pandemic. I know he is thoughtful, he cares about his constituents, and he, no doubt, probably cares about small businesses, too.

As New Democrats, we have been calling on the Liberals to fix their rent support program for months. We heard from small businesses that the rent support needed to be tenant-driven, right from the beginning of this pandemic.

Why did it take until November to fix it? Why are the Liberals not backdating this program to help businesses that could not access their failed CECRA program from the outset?

● (1630)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Madam Speaker, it is a true pleasure to work with the hon. member on the OGGO committee. I truly enjoy our exchanges, and benefit from his insight and his passion for the work that he is doing.

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I want to emphasize that we actually did make the program retroactive, from September 27 to October 24. That modification has already been done. Again, initially, when we introduced the first program, it really focused on partnership: partnership with the provinces, partnership with landlords, partnership with the federal government and partnership with tenants. We felt that was the best model.

A lot of tenants benefited from it. A lot of landlords took the initiative to support that. Some did not. To make sure that tenants did not fall through the cracks, we modified the program and we continued to support small businesses as we learned more.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the hon. member for Niagara Falls.

I am very pleased to be joining the debate. Actually, I am happy to be talking about anything right now, as we just never know when an opposition party will ask for a document from the government and it will prorogue again or perhaps call an instant election, so I am pleased to be debating this motion.

Today's motion is about supporting small and medium enterprises. There are two main parts. The first is an immediate pause to the audits of small businesses that have received the wage subsidy, at least until June of next year, and the second is to provide flexibility to the rent subsidy program, the wage subsidy program and other programs.

The first part is regarding CRA audits. It is funny that the last three interventions were all from members of OGGO. I have great respect for all of them, but the previous speaker talked about audits being a learning and helpful experience. I can tell the member and everyone listening that, having been in business, the CRA is not there to improve their business. No one looks upon a CRA audit as helpful. The CRA is there for one reason: to squeeze as much money as possible from Canadians and Canadian businesses.

I have to ask: In what world does anyone think now is the time to burden small businesses with a CRA audit? We are in a pandemic. Small businesses, restaurants and retail operations at the best of times, during boom times, have difficulty making it through. Now, during the pandemic and with closures, layoffs and supply line difficulties, the government thinks it is a great time to help Canadians out by having CRA audits. It is mind-boggling. It is beyond dumb, and it has to be stopped immediately.

The second part is regarding subsidies. It is important that the government switch from the one-size-fits-all subsidy program that we have seen and involve the stakeholders and opposition parties and listen to what needs to be done. I am glad to see Bill C-9, where the government is actually making changes to its failed rent subsidy program, but there is a lot more that needs to be done and I hope it will listen.

We have heard the leader of my party state there is no business in Canada without small business, and I agree 100%. I want to give a shout-out, though, to a government department that deserves some credit. It is OSME: the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises within PSPC, Public Services and Procurement Canada. This small

agency does nothing but provide assistance to small businesses that are learning how to bid on government contracts.

I encourage all small businesses to take a look at the website. They just need to google OSME. It provides great webinars and seminars on how to bid on government business and win government contracts. The Government of Canada, for better or for worse, is the largest buyer of goods and services in Canada by far, so now more than ever it is a great time to take a look. I have teamed up with OSME to do seminars with business and cultural groups. It does a phenomenal job, and I suggest people look it up.

I am very pleased that this motion specifically mentions the restaurant and hospitality business. Before I became what author Douglas Adams calls a lizard man, a politician, I spent 37 years in the hospitality industry, in restaurants and hotels. Like many Canadians, it was my very first job. I worked as a busboy when I was 14 at the Blarney Stone in Gastown, Vancouver.

Later, I joined the hotel business and worked my way up through the business and across Canada, from Victoria to St. John's, Newfoundland, and back again. It was a phenomenal industry. It allowed me to meet and work with a lot of people from different cultures and, funnily enough, I ended up getting to serve and meet every prime minister, from Pierre Trudeau all the way up to Prime Minister Harper.

The hotel and restaurant industry is vital to Canada. It employs approximately 1.2 million Canadians. If we take the median income supplied by Statistics Canada, that is about \$31 billion a year in wages that the industry provides, but more important than that, it very often provides the first job for a young Canadian: the first chance to learn responsibility and the first chance to get the pride of a paycheque.

● (1635)

Even more important than all of that, the hospitality industry, restaurants and hotels particularly, very often provide the very first job for new Canadians when they come here. This industry, more than any other industry, is welcoming people who have perhaps limited language and other skills, and it gives them the opportunity to provide for their families.

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More than any industry in Canada and probably the world, this industry also provides a welcoming work environment to those in the LGBTQ community. My wife and I both grew up in the restaurant and hotel industry and I can attest that no other industry has provided such a welcoming atmosphere. The hotel industry was probably the very first to break the glass ceiling for women as well, long before any other industry. It is a vital industry and we need to protect it.

The Hotel Association of Canada has asked for various types of relief, and there are a couple of things that we need to work with. We have to tailor the wage subsidy program so that we do not have a one-size-fits-all program. Perhaps one could be specifically for the hotel industry. We have seen a lot of other industries in Canada bounce back, but particularly the tourism industry, restaurants, hotels, fairs and events, are probably bearing the brunt more than any other industry. There are enough people, and I am sure we could tailor a program specifically for it.

We need to develop a specific credit availability program for the industry. It is one thing to have small business loans, but the government has to realize that a single hotel, for example, is still saddled with probably \$300,000 to \$400,000 a year in municipal property taxes, and \$30,000 to \$40,000 a month in fixed costs, such as hydro, electricity and other bills, even with the hotel shut down.

We also have to fix the CERB. I have heard repeatedly from small businesses, restaurants and hotels about the difficulty of hiring people back, because they are finding it better to be on the CERB than to return to employment. Now the CERB has been great. It has helped a lot of people, but it is ridiculous that we have a program that if a person goes back to work part time and earns one penny over \$1,000, that person would lose the full CERB. We need to have a system where people can continue to work more and have a clawback rather than an all-or-nothing approach.

As well, we have to address the financial crisis with our airports. We have to stop using the travel industry as a cash cow for the government. We did an Order Paper question for Transport Canada about security fees at airports, and we found that this government, from 2015 to 2019, has banked an additional quarter of a billion dollars in security fees from airports. When buying a ticket, we see the security fee, and 75¢ of that goes to actually providing security at the airport. The government is banking the rest. There is a lot the government can do to help out the businesses in the travel industry besides wage subsidies and other programs by doing common-sense things, like stop acting like it is a cash cow.

For heaven's sake, my Liberal colleagues across the way should get their act together on rapid testing. It should not be up to Air Canada to team up with companies to provide rapid testing for their customers in Toronto or Calgary. It should not be up to WestJet. The government should be on this and be providing rapid testing for airports and other communities to help out.

As I mentioned before, this industry is vital to Canada. It has been hit harder than any other industry we have seen. We have seen so many bounce back. We have seen other things improve, but the travel and tourism industries are still getting pummelled. A lot more can be done.

I hope the government will support our motion today to increase the flexibility for the programs, listen to stakeholders and, for heaven's sake, call off the dogs at the CRA. A colleague across the way said, "Oh, they're a hands-off organization". We have seen the minister stand repeatedly in the House and brag about how she has sent people to go after tax evaders abroad. Call off the dogs at the CRA. We do not need an audit punishing our small businesses right now.

I ask the government to accept the motion, support the motion, push back the audit for the year and work with the opposition parties to improve the programs helping our small and medium-sized enterprises.

● (1640)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work in the tourism industry.

One of the concerns that I have raised is with the credit card companies, especially when small operators are paying exorbitant fees and service charges. We have seen in COVID-19 much of the industry having to resort to Interac. Credit card fees are often the highest in the world. In fact, in Australia there is regulation for those fees. We have upwards of 28%, ordinary cards are at 19%. There are good operators, co-operatives like Vancity, that actually went down to 0%.

What does my colleague think about the fact that during the pandemic, credit card agencies have actually made record profits and windfalls off the backs of a lot of small businesses and operators? Should that not be looked at?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Windsor West has brought up a lot of great points, and I appreciate his support for the hospitality industry. Pre-pandemic, credit card fees at restaurants would often take a larger chunk of profits than the actual owner, so it is something that has to be addressed, if we are going to have a federally regulated banking system that limits competition.

I do have to say one thing. He has made a point about record profits. Mastercard, which is soon going to be, like Amazon and Apple, one of the trillion-dollar-U.S. valued companies, got a hand-out from the Liberal government for \$50 million last year. The government has to stop rewarding banks and people like the Westons and Loblaws and start looking after regular Canadians.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will save the comments in regard to the Bank of Montreal or Mastercard. A lot of assertions made by members are not necessarily substantiated with any real depth or any demonstration of appreciation of why a government would do the things that it does, even Conservative governments.

My question is more specific. When taking a look at the hospital industry, I think it is very important that we continue to monitor that industry, because, as the member tries to allude to, some industries are much more severely impacted than other industries. That is why it is so critically important that all members of Parliament have a role to play in providing their thoughts from their communities, as businesses are impacted quite differently.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I will go back to my colleague from Winnipeg North's comment about Mastercard.

It is funny; last week we were having a debate, and he was justifying his government's corruption because there is a pandemic, and now he is justifying corporate welfare. I would say there is never anything that justifies corporate welfare, and never anything that would justify government corruption.

Regarding his question about the hospitality industry, he talks about monitoring it. The industry does not need the government to monitor it; it needs action. One of my colleagues previously talked about how the government is "A for announcements, D for delivery". Here is another example. We do not need monitoring. There are 700,000 unemployed in the hotel and restaurant business, families losing their livelihoods, and small restaurants and families losing their companies. We need action from the government now.

• (1645)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I have something in common that I do not know if he realizes. I also come from a tourism background. I used to run a restaurant with my family on the Cabot Trail. I am keenly aware of how much the tourism sector has suffered in this pandemic and how much it is at risk. I certainly know that in my community in British Columbia we were told that the Western Diversification Canada office would have adequate funds to help the tourism sector. Those funds ran out in an nanosecond.

I ask my hon. colleague if he thinks the motion brought forward today by his party is adequate to meet the needs of the tourism sector.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I used to run a hotel in Victoria. My wife used to run a hotel in Victoria as well, so we know the area very well.

The hon. member has a great point about Western Diversification Canada. We saw earlier one of my Liberal colleagues get up and brag about how much the government was doing, saying they had spent \$97 million in Alberta. That is like \$25 per person, and it is one tenth of what the Liberal government was giving in corporate welfare to its friends at WE Charity.

Obviously, the government has its priorities messed up. It needs to focus on Canadians and small businesses, and not those connected to the Liberal Party.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Ethics; the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona, Post-Secondary Education; and the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore, Aviation Industry.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to support the motion, as it is one of great importance not only to my constituents but in fact all Canadians, as we look to address and combat the impacts of COVID-19.

We are now eight months into this enduring pandemic, with no immediate end in sight. That is why it is so troubling, as Canadians wait for the Liberal government to announce an economic recovery plan, one that lays a path forward without compromising health and safety.

While much focus has been on the well-being of Canadians, as it rightly should be, our Canadian economy also deserves attention. In particular, it has been Canadian workers and small businesses, especially in the restaurant, hospitality and travel and tourism sectors, who have been hardest hit.

As member of Parliament for Niagara Falls and special adviser to the leader on tourism recovery, I have held many Zoom meetings with business leaders and other travel and tourism stakeholders to hear their concerns, challenges and what it is they need to survive through this pandemic so that they can one day achieve recovery.

There are increasing concerns, frustrations and anxiety from these stakeholders who are waiting on the promised extensions and amendments to key support programs, including the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program and the Canada emergency business account.

The longer the Liberal government delays, the more concerned these stakeholders become, the greater their frustration mounts and the higher their anxieties rise. It is by no coincidence the Liberals announced Bill C-9 merely one day before we were about to begin debate on this very important motion. As with many of the key economic programs it has developed, the government has come to the table a day late.

Many of these stakeholders also point to the existing federal government policies as a source of their troubles and frustrations. Although we must talk about the needed legislation to support small businesses, we must never lose sight of the source of their desperation in the first place. It was the design flaws in these Liberal programs that added to the confusion, burden and negative consequences suffered by many in our travel and tourism industry.

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What is needed now is a way forward, a plan for recovery that does not compromise the health and safety of Canadians. In fact, research conducted by McKinsey & Company, in collaboration with Destination Canada, indicated that without government investment 61,000 tourism businesses are projected to fail and 1.66 million tourism sector employees could be laid off.

It is incumbent on our federal government to get business supports right and implemented in a timely manner. It must also present a much-needed tourism recovery plan. This plan is long overdue. Many stakeholders have emphasized how far behind Canada is compared with some other countries like the United Kingdom and countries in the European Union. This is especially true when it comes to the development and implementation of tools such as rapid testing, which could reduce the negative impacts the 14-day mandatory quarantine has on businesses in the travel and tourism sector.

The “hardest hit” campaign launched by the recently established Coalition of Hardest Hit Businesses warns that jobs are at risk if current policies and conditions remain the same. This group is asking for the wage subsidy to remain at 75% until the summer of 2021. I understand the government is proposing a maximum of 65%. Is the Liberal government even listening?

We need to listen to businesses now and deliver the programs they so desperately need to avoid many of them failing and permanently closing. The longer this pandemic drags on, the more apparent it becomes the Liberal government is in a state of policy confusion. Although the policy environment is quickly changing and extremely dynamic, the Liberal government fails to keep up, consult, adapt and change with it.

This is even more frustrating to see when we know of businesses and industries that are desperately trying to forge ahead with their own responsible solutions in the interest of their very own survival. According to Restaurants Canada, its membership has invested over \$750 million in training, sanitizer stations, PPE, air purification systems and other protective equipment, all designed to provide the highest levels of safety to their customers. Despite these investments, this sector has seen a loss of 188,000 jobs and recent closures could see that number rise by another 100,000 jobs.

We can also look at the rapid testing pilots under way in our aviation industry to see the innovative leadership taking place there as well. Great work is being done by private sector actors at the international airports in Toronto and Vancouver. Work on innovative solutions like these is very much needed and needed now. Solutions could be achieved so much quicker if these industries had a willing and enthusiastic federal government partner to work with.

• (1650)

The first wave of COVID-19 has slammed our Canadian tourism and travel industry. The sector was hit first, it was hit hardest and it will take the longest to recover. Casualties from this pandemic are not just measured by those infected by this virus and the lives sadly lost. They are also measured by the livelihoods destroyed when businesses are forced to permanently close through no fault of their own.

How many more sacrifices can Canadians be told to make by the Liberal government as it continues forward without any plans for a recovery or any sense of urgency in providing the promised supports businesses need to survive?

I come from a tourism community where 40,000 people work in this sector. There are over 16,000 hotel rooms in our riding to accommodate the over 14 million visitors who traditionally would visit each year. Most of these people have been out of work since March. Their employers are heavily leveraged, they have spent their reserves and now face increased insurance premium renewals, some running at double and triple regular rates.

These challenges are not just happening in Niagara but across our entire national travel and tourism industry. In fact, Destination Canada is even forecasting that we should not expect to see a recovery to 2019 tourism levels until 2024. In its October 2020 “State of the Industry” report, it says that this would be a catastrophic loss for our economy. This would be devastating for the almost one in 10 Canadians who work in our travel and tourism industry.

Considering the dire strait of travel and tourism across Canada, it is only appropriate that my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge has introduced this timely opposition motion. The motion is very important. What it asks of the government is urgently needed, and urgently needed now.

As Parliament, we need to do more to support measures that adapt us to live safely and responsibly in a COVID world until we have a vaccine ready. This means balancing health and economic interests without compromising the safety and well-being of Canadians.

It also means supporting our small businesses, including those in the travel and tourism economy, with the programs they need to survive and to provide these programs in a timely manner. We also need to do more to support timely investments in innovative solutions to mitigate and manage the risks of COVID-19.

We need the federal government to present a sector-specific tourism recovery plan so our travel and tourism businesses can get through this pandemic together. We need the federal government to move quicker and to be there for Canadians when it is needed.

I have one additional quote from the same Destination Canada report, which says, “We need to help provide a light at the end of the tunnel—the November to March months are some of the lowest in terms of overall visitation. Many businesses are facing decisions on whether to stay open over the next months.”

This is a call to action and so too is our motion. Canadians want to get back to work and they are looking to Parliament for timely and critical solutions. Now is the time to deliver.

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• (1655)

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am curious as to whether the member would agree with me that all the ideas being presented here today are good ideas as to how we can improve and bring in new measures to help Canadians. Does he not think this could be discussed at committee? We could really debate this and bring in witnesses instead of perhaps paralyzing the committees with work that is really not necessary. That is where it should be discussed. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Madam Speaker, we would not have come to this point if it was not for the intransigence in some instances and the lack of flexibility in the current programs that the government constructed. From the beginning, we have been providing timely advice to changes that were needed.

For example, the CEBA program is a great program, but we had to ask for the extension on the pay threshold. We had to ask for sole proprietors to be included. That date, May 19, was the date the Liberals said people who had personal chequing accounts could apply for the CEBA. Only last week they were told they would now qualify. We need to do better for our small and medium-sized businesses and we need to do better for our tourism economy.

[Translation]

Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech.

Like my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I will support the Conservative motion. I was pleased to hear the hon. member speak at length about tourism.

Of course, hotels and restaurants have been affected, but does my colleague think that small businesses that prepare things such as weddings, shows or other events should also be considered in this motion?

[English]

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Madam Speaker, the key again is the notion of flexibility in these programs. They need to encompass more and several additional small and medium-sized enterprises, so they can benefit as well.

I have heard from several stakeholder groups that have approached the government. They are all asking for sector-specific plans. They are asking primarily for a tourism recovery plan. That is what is needed.

I look forward to working with the hon. member and all members of the House to ensure we deliver a tourism recovery plan that meets the needs of all.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments on the tourism sector. My riding is on Vancouver Island and we are suffering through the exact same things. We just simply do not have visitors coming to enjoy the recreational fishing, whale watching or enjoying all the beautiful lodges and amazing scenery. We are suffering in exactly the same way.

I want to ask the member about the second part of the motion. We are asking for flexibility with rental assistance now. For months

opposition members have been bringing this problem to the attention of the government. Only now are we seeing legislation in the form of Bill C-9.

Does he not find it quite remarkable that we are only just now finding action on this file and we are already in the month of November? It is quite remarkable that we have had to wait this long.

• (1700)

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. Since the announcement of the original programs, we have been asking for changes to be made. I have had several tourism stakeholders and small businesses in my riding bring forward their concerns, not only with the CEBA program but with the CECRA program as well. CECRA has been an abject failure. It is important that we get this new program up and running so we can get that support in the hands of the tenants, those small and medium-sized businesses that need it and need it now.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, as my colleagues from the Bloc and I have said, we will support the Conservative Party motion since we are convinced that it is high time that the government take action, and above all, change course.

The Bloc Québécois has long been calling for effective and productive support by proposing a comprehensive vision that is tailored to the hardest-hit sectors where the needs are the greatest.

I was listening to my colleagues' speeches earlier. It is true that the reality was not the same for certain SMEs and every sector of the economy. Some SMEs had an easier time of it due to certain favourable conditions. However, other sectors such as tourism, housing, the restaurant industry, information or arts and culture had a harder time. These are sectors that deserve better than more emergency measures negotiated on a piecemeal basis.

I mentioned a comprehensive vision. We need to think about how long the crisis will last for these sectors. Will it take one year or two for the recovery to take hold? How will we ensure that the measures are meaningful and sustainable and that no one is left out?

I want to share some figures. According to a survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business published on September 30, 24% of hospitality businesses were considering bankruptcy. That figure was 26% in the arts and recreation sector.

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According to a report by the Institut du Québec, more than 30,000 jobs were lost in the information, arts and culture sector. In 2019, in Quebec, this industry represented more than 4% of Quebec workers. As far as the food and accommodation sector is concerned, more than 56,000 jobs were lost. In 2019, this industry represented nearly 6% of workers. These sectors are struggling because the measures in place are ineffective.

The Bloc Québécois has been shedding light on these shortcomings for months and has made several proposals that could help the businesses. I will not list them all or talk about making some of these measures permanent. I will provide an example, the Canada emergency response benefit. I did not say anything in the early days when nine million workers across the country found themselves unemployed and we needed to act quickly.

A few weeks later, however, it was already clear that some people had been left behind. We were the first to speak up about seasonal workers. As I was saying earlier, the tourism and hospitality sectors are interconnected. These sectors have been devastated in some parts of Quebec and Canada. Workers did not necessarily lose their jobs because of COVID-19, but they were unsure whether they would have a job to go back to because of COVID-19. It took weeks for CERB to be adjusted.

It is a life or death situation for some sectors of the economy. The second wave of the pandemic has shaken the Quebec tourism industry, which was already quite rattled from the first wave. On October 22, Tourisme Montréal sounded the alarm, noting that summer 2020 had been the worst summer in history and that spending by international tourists had dropped 95%. Montreal is a ghost town right now. The industry is suffering and workers are suffering just as much.

A number of tourist establishments plan to shut down permanently, and the Prime Minister has said twice that he planned to take specific action for these sectors. When will that happen?

• (1705)

What we are hearing is that they have a lot of empathy for them. Last week or the week before that, we saw the entire government stand up in celebration of Small Business Week. It truly was a sight to behold. I feel it was honest and sincere.

Aside from paying tribute to small businesses and saying they are making a difference in Quebec's economy, in addition to listening to them and meeting with them, can we not try to find solutions that will give, not false hope, but rather the hope that measures will provide structure and that companies will be able to get through the crisis, which may last for weeks, months, or even years?

We therefore ask the government to answer the question "What are you waiting for?", because the workers of an entire industry cannot make ends meet. We need a solid long-term plan to deal with the crisis. We find the government's lack of vision deplorable. It has acted in a piecemeal manner by adopting emergency measures poorly adapted to businesses that have been largely, if not totally, confined since March.

The Prime Minister talked about the holiday season. He said that winter was going to be tough, but that we were going to have a

spring and a summer. That, I admit, is not very inspiring and it does not give us much hope that things are going to change. Looking beyond the turkey or tourtière that we will be eating around the table with our families, we see many industries, entrepreneurs and thousands of workers wondering what tomorrow will look like in their sector. This is where action is needed.

The commercial rent assistance has long been a failure. The proof is that about half of the \$3 billion originally planned ended up being spent, not because businesses did not need it, but because the program is too complex and poorly designed. We have known this for a long time. Last June, Quebec's economy and innovation minister criticized the program's lack of effectiveness. The Bloc has said so repeatedly. Ever since the bill was passed, we have known that it would end on September 30. Why wait until yesterday to act?

As for the Canada emergency wage subsidy, I would say it is high time they adapted it to the current context because all businesses have the same needs. Flexibility is key. Once again, I applaud the government for listening to us and introducing more flexibility, but my question, once again, is this: Why did the government wait until yesterday to announce improvements to the program?

As an aside, if it is a cash flow problem, we would like to remind the Liberal Party that it can repay the \$1-billion loan it collected from the wage subsidy. I believe the Conservatives have already done so. I will let the other two parties speak for themselves.

As for the Canada Revenue Agency's audits, I think this motion is meant to make things easier for businesses, not create unnecessary stress. We therefore ask the government to adopt the motion and join those who are asking it to delay the audits. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business made the same request, which was denied.

In conclusion, the crisis affects everyone, but it does not affect everyone equally. Some sectors of our economy, some of our workers, are in more urgent need. They do not just need to be reminded of what has been done for them. They need to be told what the government is going to do for them starting now and what long-term measures the government will introduce.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the Bloc is supporting this motion, as are NDP and Green Party members.

In her speech, the member spoke about the timing. We know what happened. While mired in a sea of corruption investigations, the governing party chose to prorogue Parliament. I am wondering if the member has an answer to this question: Even though it shut this place down, why on earth did the government not spend that time in the summer preparing legislation to be tabled in September? It is now November 3, and we still do not have the details of the supports that small businesses are relying upon?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I think we all know the answer. At least on this side of the House, we all deplored the fact that the House was prorogued in August. In fact, apart from the measures adopted just yesterday to respond with greater flexibility and adaptability to needs, we know that three other measures were dropped.

Why did the government do that? It was to sweep the serious matter of the WE Charity scandal under the rug. No one will forget that. On the other hand, we must respond to the motion moved today by the Conservative Party.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, members of the opposition have come together in many of the statements they have made today. I want to counter their statements by providing the assurances that I think are really important.

From day one, this government has been working diligently with small businesses, entrepreneurs, Canadians in general and different levels of government to make sure we provided the types of supports that have led to the saving of tens of thousands of companies and ensured the ongoing employment of millions of Canadians. We will continue to do so. We will continue to be there.

We recognize the need for changes. In the weeks following the introduction of programs we made modifications, and we continue to improve upon programs. We want Canadians to know that whether it is the Prime Minister, the cabinet or the Liberal caucus, we will continue to be there in a very real and tangible way for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

This is an opportunity to provide comments or ask a question. I chose to make a comment.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, the problem is not what has been done, but rather what was not done and the delayed action.

Let's look at the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. It began in April, and we knew it would end in September. We have been repeating since the spring that it was inadequate. Everywhere in our ridings, people are coming to us and saying that they are being forced to shut down because the government has not been able to help them. We need to act, rather than react. The two are quite different.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I like the fact that my colleague

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brought us back to the beginning of the pandemic. Programs were launched quickly and the government forgot one especially important industry.

One of Quebec's great tourism regions is Gaspé, which is located in the riding represented by the Minister of National Revenue. She forgot to include businesses in the tourism, hotel and fishing industries on the list of businesses eligible for the wage subsidy. Workers thus slipped through the cracks. Fortunately, the opposition parties were there to identify the gaps and help change the programs.

I would like to know why we should still trust the government, which had the time to take action, but still forgot about a lot of people.

• (1715)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I concur with my dear colleague.

In reply to her question, I would say that we must stay focused. Trust is earned. We must always be vigilant. Like others, I would say that we are not confident about the measures implemented, because we have always had to stay focused to ensure that we do not let anyone slip through the cracks. We will be vigilant even today.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[English]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I invite them to rise and so indicate to the Chair.

And one or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to an order made on Wednesday, September 23, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 4, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House you would find unanimous consent to call it 5:30 p.m., so that we could begin Private Members' Business.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Do we have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***SAFE AND REGULATED SPORTS BETTING ACT**

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC) moved that Bill C-218, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is truly an honour to stand in the House today and begin the conversation we need on the safe and regulated sports betting act, which seeks to legalize single-event sports wagering in Canada.

The gaming industry in Canada is a multi-billion dollar industry. Casinos, racetracks and other gaming facilities operating across the country directly employ tens of thousands of people. The economic activity created in these communities with gaming facilities generate tens of thousands of dollars more.

The gaming industry pays \$6.7 billion in salaries per year and generates over \$9 billion in revenue for governments and much-needed charities every single year. However, none of that includes the single-event sport betting industry, which is a \$14-billion industry in this country. Unfortunately, all of that activity is taking place underground. Offshore websites like Bodog and bet365 take in billions of dollars a year, and criminal organizations operating black market betting rings across the country are taking in billions of dollars more.

As we look at this, none of that money is going back toward the public good, and much of it goes toward funding other forms of criminality. It is true that in this country some form of sports betting is taking place legally, and I mentioned that. Horse racing is one. It takes place all across this country. There is also what is known as parlay betting in this country. It is what programs like Proline and Sport Select have, requiring bettors across the country to correctly place wagers on multiple events. If a bettor does not get them all right, then the ticket is unsuccessful.

Parlay betting delivers about \$500 million in revenue nationally each year in this country, but that is a mere pittance compared to what single-event betting brings offshore and to the criminal enterprises in this country.

In my province of Saskatchewan, the provincial government uses the revenue from parlay betting products to fund sports body government industries, the youth and amateur sports, and we also use that money for the amateur arts in our province. Imagine what we could do with our share of \$14 billion.

Legalization of single-event betting is something that, for many years, governments along with indigenous groups across Canada have been calling for. The legalization of single-event betting is supported by provincial and many municipal governments across this country. I have spoken with and received support from provincial cabinet ministers coast to coast.

Travis Toews, the Minister of Finance in the province of Alberta, wrote to me in an email, "The current restrictions do not allow the provinces to compete on an even playing field, thus allowing substantial revenues to flow to unregulated, illegal operations and off-

shore Internet sites without providing any financial benefits to Canadians. Removing these barriers to allow for provincially regulated alternatives would not only provide the provinces with financial benefits for their communities and social programs, but would also provide gaming consumers with security and integrity that is inherent in provincially regulated gaming."

That is the sentiment that is echoed by other provincial governments in this land, and I think it really speaks for itself. We need regulation. The provinces want to regulate it, and they have the expertise on regulating gambling and betting. They have been doing it for the past 30-plus years.

I have also spoken several times with the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, also known as SIGA. It believes that single-event betting would be a valuable addition to its businesses and would greatly benefit indigenous communities across my province of Saskatchewan.

● (1720)

SIGA's casinos are run to the highest regulatory standards of the Indigenous Gaming Regulators and are accredited by the Responsible Gambling Council of Canada.

This is done as a non-profit company that gives 100% of profits back to indigenous nations of Saskatchewan, to community organizations in Saskatchewan and to the Province of Saskatchewan. These are the organizations that we want running our betting operations, not the criminal enterprises in unregulated offshore websites that we have now in Canada.

I am going to address the elephant in the room: problem gambling and addiction. As it currently stands, there is absolutely no consumer protection or support for those struggling with gambling addictions built into the illegal sports betting systems that we have today in this country. The Hells Angels do not have a program for problem gambling.

Minister Toews mentioned in a letter to me that legalizing single-event wagering would allow governments to put strict standards and protections in place to protect consumers and offer assistance to those who need it. It would also give governments, as we all know, much-needed new sources of revenue that they could use to fund social programs, such as mental health programs, mental health research and addiction treatment, and broader sectors, such as education and health care.

The final thing we must consider is the context that we are debating the legislation in. I have had a few people ask me what the difference is between now and when the bill was introduced in the last Parliament. First of all, the National Hockey League, the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, the Canadian Football League and Major League Soccer have all asked for Bill C-218. In a joint statement made by these five professional leagues back in June, they stressed the importance of a legal framework for sports betting that could shift consumers from unregulated black-market betting to the legal and safe marketplace that this would provide. This would allow for strong consumer protection and safeguards, and would protect the integrity of the game.

We must also consider that our current laws put Canada at a significant competitive disadvantage. Since the proposal was last considered in Canada, the Supreme Court of the United States struck down their national ban on single-event wagering. Now nearly every state south of the border, 48 to be exact, has either legalized single-event betting or has a bill before the state legislature seeking to do so.

These include the border states, such as New York and Michigan. This poses a unique threat to our communities of Niagara Falls and Windsor, whose economies rely largely on the cross-border tourism. Gaming is a big part of the tourism sector. It is a big concern for these communities that if they are not able to offer this service, they will lose a significant amount of business to their competition in the United States.

As a federal government, we need to be giving our local industries and communities the resources they need to be competitive. We must also consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has had a profound effect on many industries and communities in this country, and gaming and sports, the two industries most talked about in the context of sports betting, are no exception to that.

I am sure that many of my colleagues are familiar with the situation in the National Hockey League as it resumes its season in the tightly controlled bubbles of Toronto and Edmonton. No one was allowed in without first isolating for two weeks. Once their isolation was done, teams spent additional weeks or months in the bubble away from their homes and families.

- (1725)

This system worked. There was not a single positive test of any player inside the bubble in Toronto and Edmonton the entire time. All things considered, the National Hockey League's return to play was a great success.

However, anyone who follows sports closely knows that this model simply is not sustainable. The total loss of revenue from the lack of tickets sales of any kind will take a toll on many teams. Asking players to separate themselves from their families for months at a time just is not feasible. Even if fans can return to the stands sometime in the near future, the teams will need additional resources of revenue to begin their own financial recovery.

There is the Canadian Football League, adored, of course, in my home province of Saskatchewan. As many know, the Roughriders are the heart and soul of sports in the province of Saskatchewan.

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Every weekend, fans travel from across the province to pack Mosaic Stadium to the brim and cheer on the beloved Rough Riders.

Unfortunately, the Canadian Football League was forced to cancel its season this year, and I might add the only professional sport league in North America that has not played this past year. The prospect of having no fans in attendance meant too much of a revenue loss to sustain alongside the cost of a season.

We are still not sure what is going to happen with the smaller sports leagues. When I look at the Canadian Hockey League or the American Hockey League, the teams in those leagues are often as important to their communities as the big-league clubs are to the big cities. These leagues, similarly, had to cancel their season due to COVID-19 and the inability to generate any revenue without fans in the stands.

My mind goes to the small market community-owned hockey clubs that lost out on the revenue this past year, on which they desperately relied, teams like Prince Albert, Owen Sound, Peterborough, Baie-Comeau and many more. As we know, many other teams that represent their communities on the ice serve as a role model for countless children in their communities. That was also lost this past year.

Single-event sports betting is not a cure-all, but it can be an important part of any plan to support our gaming and sports industries. It can provide not only a significant new source of revenue for sports leagues, but it will drive increased interest in individual games and events. This is a step that the federal government can take to support Canadian sport coast to coast.

Canadians in Winnipeg and Quebec City know what it is like to lose a beloved sport franchise. Winnipeg lost the first version of the Jets in 1996, and it did not get another team until 15 years later. Quebec City lost the Nordiques in 1995. Sadly, it is still without an NHL team in that city. Not only does it hurt the fans, but it hurts the city as a whole.

I will summarize a few points of the bill.

First, single-event sports betting is already taking place in Canada to the tune of \$14 billion a year. However, instead of safely regulated, these activities are run by the black market gambling rings and offshore websites. None of this money, absolutely none of it, goes back into the public coffers and none of it goes to addressing issues like problem gambling or mental health support.

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Second, the provinces, our indigenous communities and major leagues want single-game sports betting in Canada. Fourteen billion dollars is a lot of money and it does not just mean more economic activity and new, well-paying jobs. It also means new tax revenues to invest in education, health care as well as the more specific investments like mental health treatment, consumer protection and problem gambling programs that are much needed in the country.

• (1730)

Third, this is an opportunity to assist our sports and gaming industries in their recovery from the damage done by COVID-19. As we speak, gaming institutions across this country are operating at a greatly reduced capacity or not at all.

It is a common-sense change. I hope my colleagues will support Bill C-218

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an interesting speech that, unfortunately, is not supported by any facts.

What we know about casinos and the trouble they are having right now, is that they are losing a demographic because they have effectively bankrupted it. Then they prey on the next demographic coming down the road. In this case, casinos are now looking for single-event sports betting as a way of supplementing their income because they are losing on all other fronts. This has been shown time and again.

What I take issue with is this notion that it is going to expand the economy. It is kind of like the NDP tax hike for wealthy Canadians that is going to pay for everything seven times over because it is actually using the same tax hike to pay for everything seven times over. The list of what would benefit from this, from hospitals to schools to addicted gamblers to major league sports franchises to amateur sport, is continuous.

The trouble is that casinos take four dollars out of the local economy for every dollar that goes into it. Why would you want to bankrupt small business right now with a new casino offering?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the parliamentary secretary that he is to address all questions and comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, this member of the Liberal Party has stated tonight he is comfortable with Canada losing \$14 billion to criminal activity in this country. He is comfortable with sites such as Bodog and bet365 taking \$4 billion out of this economy and paying nothing back.

The member has also confirmed tonight that he does not care about the problem gamblers, because those involved in criminal activities and these websites certainly do not care about that. There are people down in their basements betting every night on these uncontrolled sites. By regulating this through Bill C-218, it will be done by the provincial governments. The provincial governments have been regulating gambling for the last 30 years.

He is absolutely intent on leaving \$14 billion, which could be put into the Canadian economy for health, education and gambling addiction. That is despicable to me.

• (1735)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely correct. When we look at the matter in front of us today, we see that the United States and other countries have moved to a regulated market. The result is that Canada has become a bastion for organized crime activity. Canada has become the laggard in regulation.

Canada has also become the neglecting party when it comes to dealing with the money we have to spend to fight organized crime. I would like the member to talk about that. How complex and organized do we have to be, and how much must we spend in taxpayer dollars, to fight the illegal market the parliamentary secretary is so comfortable with?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Windsor West for all his efforts in the last Parliament trying to pass his bill, which was exactly the same as this with respect to regulated single-event sports betting.

The member for Windsor West is right that we are losing out. Every province and territory in this country is losing out when offshore game sites, along with criminal activity, are using an underground economy. It is \$14 billion today. If this bill does not pass the House of Commons, the \$14 billion will go to \$20 billion or \$30 billion because it will take another three to four years to have this bill come forward.

It is now time for Canada to get on board and regulate it. The provinces want this, and they have been in the business of gaming for the last 30 years. I agree with the member for Windsor West. It is time this bill comes forward, gets passed in the House of Commons and becomes law, so the provinces can regulate it.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for his excellent remarks.

We do indeed need some regulation. Our colleague mentioned in his speech that this could be a source of funding that might help bring back the Nordiques, for example. Does he not fear that things could start going down a slippery slope? What effect would that have on people's mental health?

Could he drive that home once again? It seems to me that the crux of the matter is that we must ensure people do not end up alone at home making bets.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, the member from the Bloc well knows that people in the province of Quebec have been depressed ever since the Nordiques left in 1995. We are hoping the Nordiques will some day come back to the NHL.

Part of this program I have talked about is in respect to gambling addictions and mental health issues. Hopefully, this bill will give the provinces and territories the much-needed revenue to deal with the issues we know exist out there today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I look forward to the return of the Nordiques, especially since, in my opinion, Alain Côté's goal was legal.

Having said that, such short, clear and succinct bills rarely generate that much interest and debate. Bill C-218 consists of three clauses. The first tells us its title, the safe and regulated sports betting act. The third and final clause states that this act comes into force on a date to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council. All the substance of the bill is found in the second clause, which states that paragraph 207(4)(b) of the Criminal Code is to be repealed. It is pretty straightforward. It is simple, but Bill C-218 is like a ghost haunting the halls of Parliament.

It started in 2011. At the time, so during the 40th Parliament, we had Bill C-627. The bill that had been introduced had the same objectives, but it was never debated.

There was a second attempt during the 41st Parliament, in 2013. That was Bill C-290, but it died in the Senate in October 2014.

During the 42nd Parliament, in other words, the last session of Parliament, there was Bill C-221, but it did not pass second reading on September 21, 2016.

Today, under the 43rd Parliament, we are back with Bill C-218. Hopefully, we can finally make an informed and effective decision on this bill.

Unsurprisingly, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the bill. It will do so because we have to take reality into account. The bill is in line with the legislative movement in the world. Our American neighbours already have laws allowing sports betting on a single sport. The attempt to end this practice was settled by the U.S. Supreme Court on May 14, 2018, with the *Murphy v. NCAA* decision. That court ruled that it was unconstitutional for Congress to ban sports betting. Americans can therefore do this.

It is 2020 and people in France and England can place bets online. Earlier, in the lobby, I spoke to someone who made bets on a site based in Gibraltar, so we no longer need to meet someone in our city to bet. Now, it can be done everywhere in the world, and it is even easier in the United States.

Our neighbours to the south are competing unfairly Quebec and Canada in the gaming industry. Quebec has always been somewhat concerned about the pathological aspect of gambling and the use of that money. My Conservative colleague spoke about \$14 billion. In Quebec, we are talking about \$27 million a year, which is no small amount. What is more, we have always felt that this money should not go into the pockets of organized crime but should instead be replenishing the government coffers.

Quebec therefore set up an institution called Loto-Québec, which manages gaming in Quebec. However, the gaming industry in New

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York state and the entire online gaming industry are currently competing unfairly with Loto-Québec. It is time for that to stop.

Bill C-218 seeks to regulate gaming and make it safer for the people who engage in it. My intention is not to say that betting is a virtue, but it does exist. It always has and it always will. Our job as legislators is to regulate it as best we can.

I will now go back to what I was saying at the beginning of my speech. The title of Bill C-218 is as follows: safe and regulated sports betting act. In my opinion, we must ensure that this industry is regulated so we can better protect the players. It is a major industry around the world.

We want to avoid unfair competition, regulate gaming more effectively and be part of the global movement.

• (1740)

There was a situation in Quebec less than a year ago, in December 2019, involving an 18-year-old man from Laval who racked up an online gambling debt of \$80,000. When online gambling debts are controlled by the mob, the interest rate ranges from 3% to 5% a week and the debt increases exponentially. That is a scourge that we need to tackle.

This young man obviously did not have the means to pay that kind of money and ended up committing suicide in his home. He ended his life because he was unable to manage his gambling debt and he feared the worst for the safety of his family and the people around him. The website in question was tied to the Montreal Mafia.

We do not want that. Our responsibility as legislators is to prevent situations like that from happening again. The National Assembly of Quebec decided to tackle this problem as best it could. In 2016, it passed Bill 74 to regulate gambling in Quebec. However, the Superior Court of Quebec deemed the bill to be illegal because it did not fall within Quebec's jurisdiction. According to the court, Quebec did not have the authority to prohibit gambling.

Quebec's hands are therefore tied. There is a pathological addiction to gambling among people who play. We want to control this problem, and we have some expertise through casinos and commercial lotteries. However, we need the additional tool of Bill C-218 to prevent situations as sad as the one of this 18-year-old young man.

In Quebec, we are talking about \$27 million, but my colleague was talking about \$14 billion. No matter how many millions or billions of dollars we leave to organized crime, I think it is a disgrace and that we owe it to ourselves to take back this jurisdiction and ensure that people play safely within a well-regulated framework.

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Some parliamentarians opposed to the bill have concerns about cheating. I would just like to point out that section 209 of the Criminal Code already prohibits cheating at play. This risk already exists, and will always exist, even after Bill C-218 is passed, and so I do not think this is a problem that should concern us.

We must instead ensure that people who gamble do so within a safe and regulated framework and that the profits from gambling do not end up in organized crime, but remain in government coffers to benefit the citizens of Quebec and Canada.

• (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on Bill C-218. I want to start by thanking my former colleague and friend Joe Comartin who brought the bill forward in previous Parliaments. I have had it since then and I want to thank the member for bring it forward again in partnership. As we have heard, even from the Bloc, it is due time for this strong legislation.

I like the reference the international reputation and the work going on to fight illegal gaming across the world. That is a choice we have to make here right now. It is a choice we should have made before.

Unfortunately, the heavy lobbying by the professional sports organizations over a number of different decades has stopped Canada from moving forward. What has changed over the years is something the New Democrats saw taking place, which was the fact that this was moving across the globe and even into the United States. The court system was readjusting the Nevada circuit, which was borne out of criminal organization. It was finally broken down to provide this type of organized effort to regulate the industry across the United States, hence why the sporting organizations finally came to their senses and understood that we need a better plan.

Organized crime and those who prey on people have gotten away with this for far too long, not just in Canada but across the globe, because of an unregulated product. We spend millions of dollars in local areas to fight them and billions of dollars to fight them across the globe. When we look at the bill, all it would do is adjust something that is necessary at this point in time.

I have travelled across the country and have seen the people who have been affected by the unregulated market. The thugs, those doing the offshore betting and organized crime element, are not dealing with the social repercussions in regard to betting in general. In fact, we have to spend extra money just to fight those elements.

When we look at a province like Ontario, it is legal right now to bet on three games, but not on one or two games. The change has not happened here because of paternalism of a central government that goes back to colonialism.

We are asking that the provinces have a chance to fight back. The provinces need to make their own choices on what products and services they will offer their citizens. They will be the front-line people to deal with the repercussions if there is some negative activity with regard to single-event sports gaming. It will give them

power and custodianship of a responsible product that is then put out. We are talking about the public good.

Right now, the system of three works against individual citizens. It is called a parlay bet because it is a rigged bet. It makes it very difficult for people to win and creates further problems and complications. This allows for us to come into the modern age of a regulated system.

Who are we fighting? We are fighting criminal activity from the organized elements connected to the Hells Angels and other organized crime. We are fighting those in the backrooms, basements and bars who run the numbers and make profits off the backs of people.

• (1750)

The alternatives are to bring in this regulated market. With the regulated market, we have revenue to deal with a number of different problems. We also have revenue that will bring public good.

For example, Michigan is the most recent to bring this into the United States. We saw that this was going to take place. It is putting its revenue toward helping firefighters who get cancer or other illnesses from the job. The rest of the money goes to education. Each province will get to choose what product it wants out there. It will decide how that goes out. Then it will decide where that revenue goes.

When we look at the history of this bill, it also comes from competition. Billions of dollars of legally regulated betting is now at risk. When we look at communities like Windsor or Hamilton and across the country, we have tourist destinations where people visit. Those places no longer have a product available. They have to compete with the United States and with the phone.

There is a sad story taking place here. There are the value-added jobs in the actual regulated sports industry business and all the entertainment that goes around it. Then we have all those doing the work for the web design, running the different scenarios and the work that goes on behind the analysis and activity that takes place.

• (1755)

We get no benefit from that right now. We send tens of billions of dollars underground that then goes to human smuggling, violent crime, prostitution and drugs. Then we have to use our other revenue to fight that at the cost of millions of dollars locally and hundreds of millions of dollars nationally. It is time to change that.

That is why when I introduced my bill, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Labour Congress were on board with it. Think of that. We have the business and labour communities together. The provinces and a number of organizations are looking at this through the tourism lens. A number of different groups understand the status quo does not work and that is why Canada has been left behind. That is why Canada now has to compete with illegal activity.

Here are some headlines of some recent illegal activity: “9 arrested, \$35 million of items seized in organized crime bust”, “Police bust illegal casino and spa north of Toronto, seize 20,000 sq. ft. mansion and \$1M in cash”, “Police lay 228 charges in alleged illegal gambling ring tied to Hells Angels”.

This is what is baffling about the government's current position on this. If we look at the most recent article, there are all kinds of things in it that are quite shocking that are tied to the unregulated market. Here are the words: “Dozens of suspects are facing hundreds of charges”, “illegal gaming”, “two-year-long investigation”, “18 other agencies and police services” had to come together, “further acts of violence”, “five allegedly illegal gambling websites”.

That is what is happening with Hells Angels and others. They have moved not only to thuggery on the streets but organized activity online. There were people gunned down in Toronto. A homicide is tied to this. There were 21 firearms seized, along with cash, vehicles, jewellery, vacation homes and gold and silver bars. That is what we are fighting against. There were 28 people charged with a total of 228 offences in this one bust alone. What the government is doing right now is not good enough. It is not good to put this onto another Parliament. We cannot compete out there with this activity.

Then there are the good things that can happen with a regulated market. Caesars Windsor, for example, has organized jobs with benefits. Money is going toward dealing with gaming addiction, which is super important to deal with in all of this. There is no way Hells Angels and other organized criminals are giving to the United Way. They are not giving to the charities and saying they will help them deal with the addiction problem. They are extending credit, giving people more products, giving them a raw bet, putting them further in debt and also making people dealing with this feel shame due to their admission of doing an illegal activity. The type of support that is necessary for people should be out there and people should not feel shame when dealing with it.

That is what is upsetting about the parliamentary secretary's intervention on this. We are telling all of the people who have those addiction issues that they have to keep it underground. For mental health issues, supports for families, all of those things, there needs to be money to deal with them. It is the responsibility of the provinces and the federal government, in this place, to deal with this. This is an opportunity for them to use revenues for the public good.

I mentioned what Michigan is doing, but I can say that right now, with COVID-19, we can do one of two things as the sports leagues emerge and as the betting activity stays at home, and we are all waiting. We can give them a bonus. That is what is happening. They are getting a bonus under COVID-19 and they are not going to be paying the big profit tax that maybe some other companies will. Those in organized crime are not going to saunter up to the table and say they will give money for infrastructure, health care and education. They are going to squirrel away that money either in Canada or somewhere else in the world and use it for all the other illegal activities.

From just the few stories I have noted, we are going to have to pay more money to the RCMP and to provincial and municipal po-

lice to fight this. That is what has taken place. It is time to change, time to come of age and time for us to grow up.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-218 put forward by my friend, the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood, entitled an act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting).

My interest in this topic is not related to personal habits. I lost interest in sports gambling when, as kids, we collected hockey cards and played a game in which we flipped them to the ground against an opponent. Someone would flip their card and watch it land, heads or tails, and then someone else would flip their card. If the second person matched the first, heads or tails, they would win the card. That is how I lost my 1954 Topps Gordie Howe card, which, if I still had it today, would be worth \$13,000.

My best bets over the years could have been profitable, had I backed them up with money. That would include Muhammad Ali knocking out George Foreman, the Tiger-Cats beating the Edmonton Eskimos in the 1986 Grey Cup, and the Czechs beating the Soviet Union in the 1968 world hockey championships.

If I am not a sports gambler, why am I addressing the matter of sports betting? It became obvious to me at an early age that people liked to bet on sports. Growing up in Hamilton exposed me to lots of it. Right near my grandparents' house in the east end was the racetrack known as the Hamilton Jockey Club. Although it had an illustrious racing history, Queen's Plates and all, its location near the steel mills in the days when workers were paid in cash meant that some dads came home after payday with no money.

Another feature of the east end was the floating craps game, once played on the street in storefronts, which were able to move away quickly if the police showed up. The last big one took place on July 2, 1959 at the corner of Beach Road and Albemarle, complete with drinks being served by a relative of mine who had been involved in the illicit alcohol trade. The reason the date is important is it was during a royal visit. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth was here, and that tied up almost the entire police force for the entire day.

Another relative was a well-known retired athlete and tavern owner. Fifty years ago people could place a bet on almost any sporting event in the tavern with Roy, the in-house bookie, who even had his own private telephone line.

Then of course there were the Irish Sweepstakes, well known around the world, with winners becoming known to their communities and yet it was a total secret, supposedly, as to how one actually purchased an Irish Sweepstake ticket. One local winner won enough to retire as a waiter and purchase a farm.

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My favourite story about the prevalence of gambling in our community came from the late and much beloved Sister Maria Cordis. Sister Maria was a well-known music teacher in the city who regaled us with stories. As a young novitiate, she was walking downtown and saw a man sitting in the park grass, slumped over. She took out a \$5 bill and slipped it into his hand and said, "For His grace." The next week she walked past that same man who waved her over and handed her \$100. "What is this?" she asked. The man replied, "His Grace paid 20 to 1 at Woodbine."

Sports gambling has been going on forever. The historians say the Greeks and the Romans bet on chariot races. It seems to be a natural human instinct to make a wager on almost anything, but especially sports competitions. Gambling as a whole involves staggering amounts of money.

In Hamilton, we were considering a downtown casino. We learned that the amount of money gambled by Hamiltonians at various Ontario Lottery and Gaming sites in one year was \$40 million. As much as we, as a government, have had concerns about the obvious negative impacts and consequences of gambling, we have to acknowledge the reality that it does take place.

Not so long ago, the idea of single-event sports betting was opposed by major sports leagues and notably the Canadian Football League, here in Canada of course. The attitude among the North American pro sports leagues has changed over the past few years, to the point that serious consideration should now be given to the request from the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

● (1800)

However, I will say again that sports betting is an old story and an apocryphal one. It is related to the Grey Cup and goes back to 1954. That year, the Montreal Alouettes had assembled one of the greatest teams ever, with Sam Etcheverry, Hal Patterson, Red O'Quinn, Alex Webster and so many others. They were the huge favourites to win that game. The famous Chuck Hunsinger fumble led to a last-minute touchdown and an Edmonton victory. One bettor won so much money that he flew the entire Edmonton Eskimos team that day from Toronto to Montreal to celebrate, because in 1954 Toronto was fast asleep by sundown and was no place for a victory party. That is how much money he won. That story was confirmed for me by none other than Normie Kwong.

What confronts us now is, as always, to ensure that we carefully regulate gambling in a responsible manner with appropriate supports for individuals who may suffer from addictive behaviour and for the accompanying toll on personal and family lives.

The profits made through illegal gambling by organized crime do not find their way to supportive services. The Criminal Code currently prohibits all forms of gaming and betting, unless a particular form of gambling is specifically permitted. The provinces and territories are permitted to conduct or license a broad range of lottery schemes, including betting on the outcome of more than one sporting event, such as all of the NFL games in a weekend. However, there are exclusions, such as betting on a single event such as the Grey Cup game. The proposal before us would remove that exclusion.

We also need to take into account the competitiveness of our industries, whether it is making steel, mining potash or gambling, because our neighbours in the United States have legalized single-event sports betting. This puts their operators in a better position to offer a broader range of products and enables them to siphon off some of the money that should be coming to Canadian operators. This, of course, includes indigenous peoples and communities, for whom these proceeds can be critical, as we have seen during the pandemic lockdowns this year.

Among many things to be considered is the effect on the horse racing industry. The provinces and territories could be allowed wagering on single horse races, which could affect racetrack revenues. Repealing paragraph 207(4)(b), as contemplated by this bill, would permit the establishment of pari-mutuel betting, which could further impact the racing industry.

I want to congratulate the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood for taking the initiative to allow Parliament to explore a further enhancement to the gambling industry, and all of the jobs and activities it supports, through his thoughtful recommendations regarding changes to the Criminal Code. He has ideal credentials for sitting in this place because he did play-by-play sports. To me that is an outstanding credential, since I did that as well.

Those of us who are close to the sports and games understand in a very broad way that people are going to find a way to place a wager in a sporting event. It is up to us as the regulators to see if we can create what is proposed in this bill: a safe, legal and careful way of ensuring that supports are in place for those with problems, but that there are no negative impacts on the sports involved, especially in the horse racing industry.

● (1805)

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak in support of my colleague's private member's bill, Bill C-218, an act to amend the Criminal Code to legalize single-game sports betting in Canada.

I want to thank my Conservative colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood, for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. I also want to thank my NDP colleague, the member for Windsor West, for being one of Parliament's most vocal supporters for legalizing single-game sports betting.

I am proud to add my voice to this effort through second reading debate today, and I sincerely hope that all parties in the House will provide their support for this important piece of legislation, which is long overdue. In addition to legalizing single-game sports betting, Bill C-218 would help stimulate the creation of much-needed new jobs across Canada, generate millions in annual new revenues, spur tourism recovery and, more importantly, undermine the efforts of organized crime.

I will discuss these benefits in more detail, but first I want to recognize the 40,000 hard-working tourism employees in my community of Niagara, including those in our two casinos.

Before the pandemic, Fallsview Casino and Casino Niagara employed approximately 4,000 workers. Due to COVID-19, these casinos have been closed since last March. It is my sincerest hope that we can soon reach a state in Ontario whereby our tourism recovers and our two casinos can return to a sense of normalcy and responsibly reopen so that workers can begin returning to the jobs that they so dearly miss.

Bill C-218 may be a small bill, but if it is passed by Parliament, it could and would make a big difference. Over the past 10 years, there have been several opportunities for Parliament to address and remedy the situation. Each time, however, this opportunity has been lost. The most recent example, Bill C-221, was introduced in the first session of the 42nd Parliament by my colleague for Windsor West. Despite his valiant efforts, the bill was defeated at second reading by the majority Liberal government of the day. Hopefully, this time will be different.

I am encouraged by the kind words of several Liberal members who have been supportive of this initiative. Some even campaigned on it in the last general election. With cross-party support, it is my hope that we can come together as a Parliament and pass this legislation.

There have been some significant changes to the gaming industry landscape across North America since Bill C-221 was defeated. In a 2018 ruling, the United States Supreme Court legalized single-game sports betting. In response to this ruling, many states rushed to implement this newly legal and hugely popular activity. As of December 2019, 13 U.S. states had already legalized single-game sports betting, including cross-border states like New York, Michigan and Montana. These states are Canada's direct international competitors, and compete against border communities in Canada for tourism visitation, jobs, business and revenue generation.

Another development in the aftermath of this ruling was a shift among major professional sports leagues, which have become far more favourable in their support of single-game sports betting. For example, on June 15, 2018, the NHL released a statement. It read: "The National Hockey League has long opposed legalized sports betting; however, in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling, the practical reality is that the landscape for sports betting in North America has changed dramatically. The National Hockey League is no longer opposed to Canadian federal legislation that may be contemplated to eliminate the provisions in Canada's Criminal Code that prohibit provincial governments from offering bets on single sporting events."

Other major professional sports leagues in Canada that endorse single-game sport betting after this ruling include, but are not limited to, the Canadian Football League, the National Basketball Association, Major League Soccer and Major League Baseball. I cannot overstate the significance of these changes and what it means to have the support of these leagues behind this legislation.

According to a 2017 national economic benefits report published by the Canadian gaming industry, \$17.1 billion was generated by

Private Members' Business

this industry, including \$16.1 billion in direct gaming activity and \$1 billion in non-gaming revenue, which includes items such as food and beverages, entertainment, accommodations, retail and so on. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, gaming in Canada directly supported 182,500 full-time jobs and generated \$9.2 billion annually to fund government and community programs and services. Of significance, the Canadian gaming industry has also invested \$120 million annually on problem gaming treatment and initiatives to promote research, awareness and prevention as well as responsible gaming programs. It is incredible to think that these were the contributions of the gaming industry to our economy as of 2017. One can only imagine the growth that is ahead when our Canadian Parliament finally agrees to legalize this activity.

● (1810)

A final benefit I would like to discuss is the impact legalization would have on the illegal gaming market that currently exists. In January 2020, the Canadian Gaming Association noted that Canadians are estimated to be spending \$10 billion annually through illegal sports betting operations controlled by, or orchestrated by, organized crime.

In December 2019, the Ontario Provincial Police put an end to a sophisticated illegal gaming operation through an investigation called Project Hobart. The police operation led to the arrest of 28 individuals who are now facing a combined 228 charges. From January 1, 2019, to July 2019, a period of just seven months, their illegal gaming websites are alleged to have brought in approximately \$13 million in illicit funds. Over the period of five years, the police believe they grossed more than \$131 million in illegal revenues. These revenues are a strong source of funding for organized crime.

OPP Commissioner Thomas Carrique said the illegal gaming network placed individuals, society and the economy at risk. It is for these reasons and more that it is time we legalize single-game sports betting in Canada. If the economic arguments are not convincing enough for some of my esteemed colleagues, perhaps this public safety argument is.

The truth is that Canada is very far behind on this matter. We need to catch up to our international competitors, and do so quickly. We were behind even before the pandemic struck, then Parliament was prorogued and here we are today: even further behind. Every day that goes by is an additional day lost to our international competition. These delays cause Canadians to miss opportunities that they should be afforded.

From a tourism recovery perspective as we seek to navigate a path forward from COVID-19, Bill C-218 would deliver exactly what this industry needs as we prepare and plan for our recovery. As member of Parliament for Niagara Falls, I am proud to support Bill C-218 to legalize single-game sports betting, and I encourage my parliamentary colleagues of all party stripes to do the same.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today and address the matter that has really plagued this place and its members for some months now. No, I am not talking about COVID-19; I am talking about the cover-up that has followed the scattershot, at best, response by this government in so many areas.

We have seen this most acutely at committee with filibusters, and I say “acutely at committee”, because we saw, on a very large scale, the lengths to which the Liberal government will go to hide from accountability. That, of course, was when the opposition parties proposed a motion that would have formed a special committee to look at the pandemic response, to look at the failed Canada student service grant and to look at other pandemic-related measures, and the government made it a confidence vote. It was so afraid that Canadians would find out the truth that it backed the opposition into a corner and, of course, the official opposition, Canada's Conservatives, voted for the motion. We voted to form that committee, because that is what we were sent here to do.

I talk about what happened at committee. We have heard, most recently, Liberal members refer to the blacked-out documents that we saw at the finance committee as being sacred texts. They said the documents were as sacred as the Bible, the Quran or other religious texts. Those are the lengths that they will go to, so the question is: do they want to black out other religious texts, or do they just believe that corruption is sacred?

Just minutes ago at the ethics committee, we heard Liberal members go on about everything from underwear manufacturing to reading out donors to the Conservative Party. I will go off topic very briefly just to say it would take the Liberals a long time to read the list of Conservative donors, based on the news this weekend of the records that have been set by the party with our new leader. The member for Durham has led us through a very strong quarter, because that is the response that we are getting from Canadians. The opposition has not just attempted to bring to light what the Liberals are so desperate to hide, we have also posed concrete solutions and concrete improvements to flawed legislation that they have brought forward.

It does leave Canadians, members and me wondering what they are so desperate to hide. The ethics committee has rounded over 20 hours of filibuster since Parliament has resumed following the cover-up prorogation. The government said it was to reset the agenda and that they are focused on one thing. Yes, they are focused on one

thing, and that is avoiding accountability, so we need to know what they are trying to hide. We need to see what is in the documents that they are fighting so desperately for Canadians not to see, and why their members are saying such unusual things, such as these redacted documents being sacred.

My question to the government is: what is it trying to hide?

• (1820)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the focus of the Conservative Party throughout this entire process is interesting. The Conservatives often like to talk about how they are trying to work collaboratively with the government on the coronavirus. I see this great reluctance on their part. I can see the sadness in their faces quite often. If we want to get a Conservative excited, just throw the name Liberal in anything to do with government and instantly the antennas go up and it becomes unethical or scandalous.

I genuinely do not believe we are trying to hide anything. I hope I will have a chance to go to the ethics committee to talk about the issue of scandals. I have seen scandals in the past.

When I hear the Conservatives talk about scandals, I scratch my head. We are in the midst of a pandemic. I realize they get really excited about this stuff for political purposes, but at some point in time they must realize that the number one issue in our country is the pandemic. Being the official opposition, members have more of a responsibility to the collective Conservative Party than focusing on things that, from my perspective, are just not there.

I had asked a question about committee meetings and how many had been held. I understand that since March to August, there have been over 200 House committee meetings, over 50 meetings in July and August. It is unprecedented in recent decades. It is truly amazing.

When the Conservative Party, the Bloc and the NDP say it is a scandal, they call in the Ethics Commissioner. Often the Ethics Commissioner says no, but they still call in the RCMP. It does not matter what the issue is as long as they can try to get that headline. That is really why they scream from the mountain top about corruption. Just because the Conservative Party says it is corrupt does not make it corrupt.

If I get that opportunity to go to the ethics committee, I will share with the members there some of the things that happened under the Harper regime and the Mulroney regime which were corrupt. I remember the Airbus scandal. I can go back to the Harper regime and the in and out scandal. What about the Senate? I do not know how many people from the PMO were directly involved. Going right in to the Conservative Senate, we can talk about fundraisers and the whole nine yards. We get a lot of discussion and debate about the issue of corruption.

Maybe what the ethics committee should be looking at is the importance of the Ethics Commissioner and the potential role the commissioner can play in informing Canadians. The worst thing a Canadian can do is listen to the Conservatives on the issue of corruption. If we look at what the Ethics Commissioner, an independent officer, has to say, we would get something closer to an element of truth.

• (1825)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, I too trust the Ethics Commissioner, who twice found the current Prime Minister guilty of breaking ethics laws, with “The Trudeau Report” and the “Trudeau II Report”. The Prime Minister is now under investigation for a third time.

We have a government that has been slow to respond to the pandemic. We have tried to approach this with a team Canada approach to improve the measures the government has put forward when it was slow to close borders, when it flip-flopped on mask usage and when it failed to procure rapid tests in a reasonable amount of time. We can talk about the scandal: misappropriating \$1 billion by giving it to close friends of the Prime Minister and his family.

The question is not what the Prime Minister has to hide, but what else he has to hide that we have not found out yet.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, whether there is something there or not, the Conservatives will find something to justify their behaviour. I would suggest what the Conservative Party really needs to do is look at what we have been able to accomplish, often without any direct input from the Conservative Party of Canada.

We have found a higher sense of co-operation from provincial Conservative parties than we have from the official opposition. A lot can be learned from the provincial level where there is team Canada approach on the number one concern of Canadians, which is the coronavirus and keeping Canadians healthy and our economy doing well.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, last week, I asked the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth what happened to the \$912 million the Liberal government promised to students in June. Students and recent graduates in my riding of Edmonton Strathcona are really struggling. I wanted the minister to know and share in my concern for their welfare. However, instead of showing understanding or compassion, the minister simply rattled off more platitudes and self-congratulatory rhetoric.

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The minister spoke of Canada summer jobs. She spoke of the government investing more money in the program. Let us talk about Canada summer jobs. On April 8, the Prime Minister announced changes to the Canada summer jobs program in response to COVID-19, including extended deadlines, extended programming dates and an increase to the wage subsidy rate for employers.

While these changes may have been welcomed by some, they did not actually make a difference for students in my riding of Edmonton Strathcona where only 40% of eligible Canadian summer job applicants received funding. The one thing that would have made this program better would have been more money. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister did not announce any new money for the Canada summer jobs program that day, and instead hinted at a new program for students that would be coming soon.

We now know that the new program was the WE Charity \$912-million Canada student service grant. It was announced with great fanfare on June 25 and lasted for eight days before it was cancelled. The why and how of the program is now being investigated by this House, but the overriding question I have is where is the \$912 million that was promised for students?

Not a single student benefited from this much-hyped program. To our knowledge, none of this money was spent. Instead, students have gone without and they are suffering because of it. Students rely on summer employment, not just for the summer months, but to provide the funds they need to live on when they go to school.

When the public health crisis shut down so many businesses, students were among the hardest hit. Some were able to access CERB, while others relied on the Canada emergency student benefit, something the Liberals only created when the NDP demanded it. These did help students and allowed them to survive for a few more months. However, these emergency supports have ended and they did not give students and recent graduates the means to survive this school year.

I have a few stories to share. Sandy is a student and when COVID hit, her employment disappeared. She was not eligible for CERB and has had to live on her credit card. She is now back in school, but is facing a pile of bills and looking into personal bankruptcy.

Ethan graduated last November. He was working part time in retail and was looking forward to a career in his chosen field. When the pandemic hit, he lost both his temporary job and his career placement. He could not get CERB or the emergency student benefit, and now does not know how he is going to pay his student loans or even just survive.

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Alice had a job lined up for May, but it fell through. She tried to apply for the Canada student service grant, but we know how that ended. She has taken out another loan to pay for her semester, but she is worried about debt and is planning on dropping out.

It is only November. Students are facing at least five more months of tuition and living expenses. The government must make sure that the \$912 million allocated for the student service grant program, which never happened, gets to students and gets to students now.

Will the government tell us today how it is getting these emergency funds to students who need them now?

• (1830)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have great respect for the member's work and the advocacy she is doing on behalf of her constituents and students in her riding.

I want to be very clear. The Government of Canada has been committed to supporting young people from the very beginning of this pandemic. We introduced a nearly \$9-billion comprehensive support package for students. That package included boosts to job programs, boosts to income supports and a pause on student loan repayments. I will provide more details, starting with the job aspect.

The Government of Canada recognized many students could not find work this summer, which is why we introduced the Canada emergency student benefit. Through the CESB, eligible students received \$1,250 per month between May and August. They were also able to continue working part time while receiving the benefit, as long as their income did not exceed \$1,000. This meant they could remain connected to the labour force. Students with permanent disabilities and those with dependents received an additional \$750 per month. This benefit has provided income support to over 700,000 post-secondary students and recent graduates since its launch.

The youth employment and skills strategy has helped to put focus on creating more opportunities for youth who face barriers to employment. New funding announced during COVID-19 provided nearly \$190 million in additional funding to create almost 10,000 more work and training opportunities for young Canadians. These jobs are critical in sectors such as agriculture, health and essential services to support communities impacted by this virus.

In response to disruptions caused by COVID-19, the Government of Canada also invested nearly \$62 million to boost the Canada summer jobs program. I know this because I manage the Canada summer jobs program here in my riding. Through this investment, we increased jobs under the program from 70,000 to 80,000, with just over 84,000 total jobs approved and thousands of opportunities currently still available. I encourage youth to visit www.jobbank.gc.ca. I have been sending students there in search of work, and many of them in my riding have been successful in finding some temporary work.

We also introduced temporary flexibilities to the program this year to respond to the pandemic, which included allowing employ-

ers to offer part-time and stay-at-home positions and extending the hiring period to the end of February 2021.

Another important job program is the student work placement program. It has given real-world hands-on work experience to post-secondary students across Canada. This year the government invested over \$266 million in that program to support up to 40,000 work placements for students in vital sectors such as health care, food processing and e-commerce.

As this pandemic drags on, we promise to be there for Canada's young people. They are our future and the leaders of today and they absolutely deserve our support. I want to thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona once again for her advocacy on this important issue and for students from coast to coast to coast. I truly want to make sure we do well to serve them.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I understand there was trouble connecting, but I want to remind the member he should be wearing a headset because it makes it a lot easier for the interpreters to translate.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

• (1835)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, the member spoke of programs that are either over or completely inappropriate for the COVID pandemic. The stress of being a student or a recent graduate right now is incredible. They lost their summer employment. They have no job options. They are facing tuition increases. They do not know how they are going to pay their student debt.

The University of Alberta Campus Food Bank has been inundated with new requests. This is a tragedy, and it has only just begun.

Let us start with a few concrete suggestions. Will the government forgive student loan interest, or at least extend the interest-free deferral program until after this pandemic? Will the government work with the provinces to make tuition more affordable, with the ultimate goal of tuition-free post-secondary education for all Canadians, something that is already being done in over two dozen countries? Finally, will the government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time is up.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I apologize to you, the members in the House, anybody listening and the interpretation team for the oversight with regard to my headset. One would think that after 10 months, I would be used to it.

I want to thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona for her advocacy and for the good questions. Certainly no good ideas are off the table. We do need to find ways to continue to support students throughout the remainder of this pandemic. The uncertainty that many young Canadians feel in these unprecedented times can be truly overwhelming. I talk to the students in my riding as well.

That is why the Government of Canada has also made changes to the Canada student loan program to help students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A six-month interest-free moratorium on the repayment of student loans provided relief to nearly one million borrowers. The Government of Canada will continue to ease eligibility requirements for Canada student loans and Canada student grants to allow more post-secondary students to qualify and be eligible for greater amounts.

I can be counted on to listen and to hear more good ideas. The Government of Canada will continue to be steadfast in its commitment to support youth from coast to coast to coast.

AVIATION INDUSTRY

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will never forget Friday, March 13. That was the day that I came home from Ottawa, went into my home and things changed forever, certainly until now. That was eight months ago and that is how long the aviation sector has been waiting for a plan from the government.

Let me go over a timeline. On March 18, the international borders closed. On March 21, Porter Airlines suspended operations. On March 23, Sunwing Airlines suspended operations. As well, Air Transat temporarily laid off 70% of its staff. On April 1, Air Transat concluded repatriation operations. On April 18, Air Transat suspended flights. On April 20, Air Canada concluded repatriation operations. At the end of April, there is still no plan.

On June 30, Air Canada announced it is discontinuing services to 30 regional routes and closed eight stations. There is still no plan. On July 17, WestJet concluded its repatriation operations. On July 24, WestJet laid off 3,333 employees. There is still no plan. On August 14, the Government of Canada finally introduced a flight plan, but just a plan with health and safety measures, no sector support and certainly nothing regarding rapid testing or safe corridors.

On September 1, Nav Canada increased its fees by 29.5%. On September 3, Air Canada announced a COVID-19 testing pilot project at Pearson Airport, done by the private sector and not by the government. Why? Because there was no plan.

On October 1, Air Canada ordered approved rapid tests and the Vancouver airport announced a COVID-19 rapid testing pilot project, again by the private sector and not the government. On October 14, WestJet suspended routes to Atlantic Canada. Why? Because there was no plan. On November 2, the Calgary airport quarantine and testing project began.

This has not been without devastating effects to our economy. As a result of this inaction, we are expected to lose 1.2% to 1.7% of Canada's GDP. The U.S. had a plan and what is the result of that? It has the capacity of U.S. carriers at 50%, while Canada, where there has not been a plan, is only at 25%. As well, Canadian carriers have lost 14% capacity share of transatlantic services compared to a year

ago. Finally, leakage to the U.S. market and U.S. carriers is expected to continue to grow as Canadians go to the U.S. for cheaper flights, as a result of the government not having a plan.

I receive lots of correspondence from airline sector employees. They are difficult to read and they are difficult to hear, but I am going to share one of them today.

It says, "Dear Honourable Member, I just want to give a heartfelt thank you for your words in Parliament about our aviation sector. I am a pilot who is furloughed with Air Canada. I was furloughed the day my beautiful baby daughter was born. That day turned our lives upside-down, not because of our beautiful baby girl but losing my job, trying to figure things out. This is not an easy task as new parents and trying to find a new career. This has been an utter nightmare with no help. We have been left out to dry by this current government. Once again, I can't thank you enough."

These families and this sector deserve a plan. Where is the plan?

● (1840)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the member points to the United States as the model for transportation: A country that is the global epicentre of the virus with an uncontrolled spread.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government of Canada, public health officials, health authorities and the Canadian air industry, including operators, airports and labour groups, have worked collaboratively to implement measures that reduce the spread of the virus.

In August, Transport Canada released Canada's flight plan for navigating COVID-19, demonstrating to the Canadian public the extensive measures the aviation industry and the Government of Canada had implemented in response to the pandemic. In support of the flight plan, we are working to identify additional priority measures, such as safe contactless processing of passengers and testing procedures to enable the safe restart of the aviation sector, as well as establishing a framework for COVID-19 testing of air travellers.

Transport Canada is also working closely with other federal partners to explore risk-based opportunities that will allow Canada to reopen its borders. This includes implementing a sustainable approach to reducing public health risks today, and building resilience to safeguard the system against similar risks in the future. These approaches will help rebuild public confidence in the safety of our air travel.

Adjournment Proceedings

Preventing the spread of the pandemic has been and remains the government's top priority. The various regulatory requirements that were put in place will likely remain for the foreseeable future. However, there is room for adjustment to better support the restart of the air sector. Transport Canada will be actively assessing orders that have been issued to see what can be done, and will be consulting with industry on possible amendments.

We recognize that the virus and public health measures have resulted in a dramatic reduction in passengers and a significant financial input packed on operators throughout the air sector. This means that revenues are greatly reduced and the sector cannot operate in the same manner as it did prior to the pandemic. Operators have done a lot to manage their costs, with over 50% layoffs across the industry, as well as other reduced operating and capital costs. Appreciating the situation faced by operators, we continue to engage with stakeholders to fully understand the challenges and assess their solutions.

The government has already taken some important steps. In March, we waived rent for airport authorities that have ground leases with the federal government, thus removing some costs from the system. We have provided funding to ensure air service to remote communities with the \$17.3 million in April for the territories alone, and up to an additional \$174 million in August.

The government has also launched several broad economic measures the air industry has been able to benefit from, most notably the Canadian emergency wage subsidy, which has been widely utilized by the air sector to the benefit of both employers and employees. To date, this has provided over \$1 billion in relief to the industry.

The government will continue its important engagement with stakeholders and partners as we work to address challenges faced by the air sector in Canada today and to ensure we have a strong industry into the future.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I would like the parliamentary secretary to also listen to this correspondence after that bureaucratic drivel. It states, "Honourable member, I have been following you for a while on social media and I really want to thank

you on behalf of our pilots. We are going through some incredibly difficult times and your voice is a light at the end of a very long tunnel. Please keep on doing your work. Everyone is very appreciative, and if you need support at any point, please let us know. When this whole pandemic started, I was doing my captain training while rescuing Canadians in Europe and in the south. Now, if I can fly again as a first officer I would be happy. When this pandemic started, we didn't know what we were fighting against, but all the staff was very courageous and with no information about the virus we went to fly in already-infected countries to bring Canadians home and now we feel abandoned by the government. We thought by the end of the spring there would be something to help us. Rapid testing: Is there a plan? Is there a discussion?"

The government had the opportunity to do something amazing, to save a sector. What did it do? Nothing. Where is the plan?

• (1845)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, again it is interesting the hon. member points to the United States as the best plan and best way to address this public health emergency.

I would like to point her to a tweet from the hon. member for Carleton, who is her party's finance critic. It states, "Easy rule: if a business venture needs a government handout it's a money loser." It is truly unfortunate that the Conservative Party would have that type of policy from its finance critic. We are hearing something a little different today from the transportation critic.

This government has a commitment across the Canadian economy, which includes the air sector. We have seen it through the wage subsidy, we have seen it through relief and, as we have seen in the throne speech, there is a signal that we are willing to do more. We are open to doing more and are looking forward to seeing that plan for the sector.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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