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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 26, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*English*]

VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION IN HYBRID SITTINGS

The Deputy Speaker: In light of the special order that was agreed to by the House yesterday, I would like to take the opportunity to share some of the best practices for participating in the proceedings remotely.

Members are responsible for ensuring that their Internet connection and audio quality are strong to allow them to participate. A wired connection is more reliable than Wi-Fi, and using a computer provided by the House is a better option than using a tablet or cellphone. Using a headset with an integrated microphone will ensure the best sound quality, which is essential for allowing our interpreters to do their work safely. If you have not been provided a headset, please let our IT team know.

[*Translation*]

If there is a problem with a member's audio or video feed during their intervention, the Chair will interrupt the proceedings momentarily while the technical issue is being addressed. If the member is unable to start or resume the intervention fairly quickly, debate will continue by proceeding to the next member on the rotation list unless there is agreement to accommodate the member having the technical trouble.

To avoid such situations and allow the House administration to provide the necessary assistance, I remind members participating by videoconference to connect well in advance of their scheduled intervention.

[*English*]

The Chair wishes to remind members that virtual sittings are an extension of the proceedings of the House and that their conduct must respect our rules and practices, even if they are participating remotely. As soon as a member connects to a virtual sitting and opens their camera, they are considered to be, for all intents and purposes, in the House.

The dress code remains the same as for members participating in person. The prohibition against using props also applies, and members should ensure that they use a neutral background. Members are

not to take screenshots of the proceedings, just as members in the House cannot take photos.

[*Translation*]

Members should keep their microphone turned off unless they have been recognized by the Chair. Turning on their microphone to interrupt a member who has been properly recognized is not appropriate, as this interrupts both the audio and video feed. I thank members for their co-operation and remind them that the IT support team is available to assist with any technical issues they may have.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FURTHER SUPPORT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, is it ever good to be back here.

It is my pleasure to rise in the House to discuss Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19. However, before I get into the substance of Bill C-2, I would like to say a few words of thanks to the residents of Edmonton Centre for once again giving me the great honour of representing them in this chamber. I also want to offer my love and deep thanks to my partner David, to my family and friends and to the countless volunteers who made today possible. Serving Edmontonians, serving the city I love, is the single greatest honour of my life. My remarkable community, on the banks of North Saskatchewan River, is back at the table here in Ottawa.

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I would like to take the chamber back in time to a moment in 2020 and the beginning of the global pandemic. Canadians were asked to take unprecedented actions to keep each other safe, forgoing celebrating life's milestones, forgoing time together with family, forgoing so many of the things that bring joy to each of our lives. We saw frontline workers answer the call of duty, doing double and triple shifts to support our society and keep people safe. We faced an emergency that required widespread lockdowns, threatened millions of Canadians' ability to work and put at risk hundreds of thousands of businesses.

To respond to this unprecedented moment, our government took unprecedented action. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and thanks to the collective efforts of so many, we worked tirelessly to put in place a comprehensive suite of measures to support Canadian workers and businesses. Our income, wage and rent support programs kept households afloat, kept millions of Canadians in their jobs and allowed hundreds of thousands of businesses to keep going through the darkest days of the pandemic.

These are not just empty numbers. These are real people who were able to put food on their tables and real businesses that kept their doors open. It is the woman I met door knocking back in Edmonton during the election campaign who told me to look at the three houses to the left of hers, the three houses to the right and her own home. She said that if it were not for the government supports, the whole block might have lost their homes. It is the Credo Coffee shop on 124 Street, with two other locations, run by Geoff, Andrew and the team. They have been able to continue to provide incredible service and "caffeinations" to Edmontonians, including their member of Parliament.

Thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of Canadians and our health care workers, we are now seeing better days. Vaccination rates are high, approaching 80% of eligible Canadians; children are beginning to get their doses; grandparents are getting boosters; and our health care system is finding more and more ways to treat the virus. Schools are back in session and businesses across the country are reopening. Canada has now recovered 101% of the jobs lost in the depths of the COVID-19 recession, compared with just 81% in the United States. I want to applaud the work of my friend and colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, whose stewardship of our economy has put hope back on the horizon for so many Canadians. In short, our government took action, and it worked.

However, we also understand that there are some sectors of the economy that continue to need support. With the public health situation still unpredictable, we need to make sure there are targeted supports that enable Canadians to continue to take the necessary precautions to save lives, including necessary public health restrictions that limit some economic activity. The time has come to adapt federal support measures to these new and improved circumstances. These were temporary emergency measures and were always meant to be just that: for emergencies.

● (1010)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-2 will therefore make it possible for the government to implement targeted measures to support those who still need help.

[*English*]

As parliamentarians, we have a duty once again to take action and deliver important targeted support measures that will ensure Canadian workers and businesses that have not yet been fully able to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 have the support they need. Bill C-2 would do just that.

[*Translation*]

Like the measures for businesses, the assistance programs for Canadians will be targeted to meet the needs of those who still need help. We see that the fourth wave of the pandemic is hitting some regions of the country extra hard. It is still possible that public health officials will impose new temporary lockdowns in some regions in the coming weeks or months.

We are therefore proposing to immediately implement a program on which Canadians can depend should the need arise.

[*English*]

This new proposed program is the Canada worker lockdown benefit. As the Canada recovery benefit has done, this new targeted program would provide \$300 a week in income support to eligible workers. It would snap into action to support employees unable to work because of a local lockdown any time until May 2022, and eligible workers would be able to access it retroactively to October 24. The program would be available to workers who do not qualify for employment insurance and also to those who do qualify, provided they are not receiving EI benefits for that same period.

That is one way we are helping, but we know that Canadians may also need continued support from the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit, because we all need to protect ourselves and our family, friends and co-workers by staying home when we are sick. Furthermore, many children still cannot be vaccinated and are therefore particularly vulnerable, which means parents need to be able to stay home to take care of them.

[*Translation*]

That is why we want to extend the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit until May 7, 2022. Bill C-2 will also increase the maximum duration of these benefits by two weeks.

• (1015)

[*English*]

We know that what Canadians want most are good jobs, so we need to make sure Canadian businesses, especially small businesses, have the support they need.

This bill would extend the Canada recovery hiring program until May 7, 2022, at an increased 50% subsidy rate. This would encourage businesses to continue to rehire workers, increase their hours and create the additional jobs Canada needs for a full recovery from the COVID-19 recession.

[*Translation*]

That said, the government is aware that some businesses are unable to resume all their activities and create those jobs because of the public health measures that, as I said, are necessary to protect Canadians.

We are therefore proposing two new support programs targeting specific types of businesses in order to promote economic recovery. In both cases, the businesses must show that they experienced significant revenue declines during the first 12 months of the pandemic as well as the current month.

I will start with the tourism and hospitality recovery program, which will help hotels, restaurants and travel agencies still grappling with public health restrictions and the fact that people are travelling less because of the measures in place.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy and Canada emergency rent subsidy rate for these businesses will be 40% for those with a current-month revenue loss of 40%. The rate can go as high as 75% depending on revenue loss.

[*English*]

On that subject, allow me to pause for a few moments on what this means for our tourism sector. Since taking on the role of Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, I have been moved by the passion and pride of those in the tourism sector for the work they do. As a former business owner, I too have felt that passion and pride and know the anxiety and heartache that comes when a person's life's work is placed in jeopardy by forces beyond their control.

These tourism businesses, these tour operators, are the people who tell our story to the world. They make possible the memorable experiences people carry with them for the rest of their lives.

However, this incredible industry was dealt a body blow by the global pandemic. In 2020, revenues declined almost 50%, from \$104.4 billion to \$53.4 billion, and jobs directly attributable to tourism decreased 41%, from 692,000 to 409,000, in the same period. Revenue projections for summer 2021 are expected to be about half of summer 2019 revenues.

However, even with these challenges, Canada's tourism sector is moving forward and our whole government recognizes the vital role that tourism plays in providing employment and opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses, and further fuelling economic growth. In short, the Canadian economy will not fully recover until the tourism sector recovers.

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With government support, businesses in this sector are starting to get ready to welcome Canadians back to experience the great places and activities this country has to offer. This support includes the measures introduced in budget 2021 to support the tourism sector, totalling \$1 billion over three years.

This included \$500 million over two years flowing through the regional development agencies to help our hard-hit tourism businesses adapt their products and services and invest in future growth. It also included \$200 million through the regional development agencies to support them and help ensure Canada continues to draw millions of visitors from all over the world to our large arts and cultural festivals and major events. This has ensured that they can continue to celebrate Canada's artistic excellence and unique character. To draw visitors to our smaller local festivals and events, as part of this package Canadian Heritage also received \$200 million.

While the country is opening up, the organizations that host artistic, heritage and sport events and exhibits have been among the hardest hit during the pandemic and many Canadian artists and cultural workers have struggled to find work. With reduced revenues, many heritage, arts and sports organizations run the risk of not surviving through to the other side of the pandemic without additional support. We promised our tourism sector we would get it through to the end of this pandemic. With this suite of measures and the new supports contained in Bill C-2, we have delivered.

The other program we are proposing is the hardest-hit business recovery program. It would be available to employers in all sectors who have faced deep and enduring losses. The wage and rent subsidy rate in this case would start at 10% for applicants experiencing a 50% current period revenue loss. It would increase to a maximum of 50% for those with a current period revenue decline of 75% or higher.

In addition, we are proposing a new local lockdown program that would provide rent and wage support of up to 75% for organizations that face temporary local lockdowns and experience current month revenue losses above 40%. Support through these programs would be available from October 24, 2021, to May 7 of next year.

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Fighting COVID-19, and the lockdowns it required to save lives, demanded historic government spending in Canada and around the world. It was a historic crisis, and Canadians supported that extraordinary spending because they understood that it was not only the compassionate thing to do, but the economically smart thing to do.

Our government delivered the economic support that has prevented the sort of economic scarring that followed the 2008 recession, and that would have done permanent damage to our economy and to our communities. Most importantly, these investments in our country saved lives. Today, more targeted support is required. We must adapt to provide help where it is needed, while also prudently and carefully managing government spending.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

The measures in this bill will support Canadians and businesses still feeling the effects of the pandemic.

[*English*]

Together we have led much of our economy through the worst of this pandemic. Our actions have made it possible for our businesses to survive this once-in-a-century crisis. We have come so far and now we need to get the job done. This difficult journey is approaching its final mile. I call on all members to support this vital legislation and get our tourism and hardest-hit sectors home safe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your appointment. I also want to congratulate the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance on his re-election. It is a pleasure to see him in the House, for he is always cheerful and makes himself available to opposition members.

We in the Bloc Québécois believe that targeted and predictable measures are needed, as the minister said, and that is what we find in Bill C-2. However, support measures for self-employed workers, particularly in the cultural sector, are conspicuously absent from this bill.

What measures does the government plan to introduce for self-employed workers in the cultural sector?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and for his unwavering support for the cultural sector. My door is always open, and I would be very happy to discuss this issue with him.

I would remind the House that I had the immense honour of serving as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage in 2015 and 2016. I really appreciated the hard work of the cultural sector and the fact that it accounts for 3.5% of our GDP and employs over 600,000 people.

This government is here for self-employed workers in the cultural sector. We must be there for the workers and for the businesses. We are committed to supporting these employees and we will continue to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your position. As well, I would like to offer my congratulations to the hon. minister not only on his appointment, but also for his election. I am looking forward to working with him for the first time in this upcoming Parliament.

I appreciate a lot of what the minister had to say about tourism, considering that northern Ontario is home to many tourist operators and tourism is a big part of our economy. I do not have a question for the member, but some comments I am curious to get his thoughts on. When I talked to the tourist outfitters and small businesses in my riding, more than anything they told me that they do not necessarily need government money, but for the government to give them the opportunity to thrive, to look at opportunities to make travel easier not only for Canadians but also for those coming in internationally, and to do what it can to ensure that, come the summer season, businesses will be able to operate and make the money they did prior to COVID.

• (1025)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I too look forward to working with my hon. colleague across the way to determine how we can boost tourism in northern Ontario and across the country. Several factors are facing us right now as a country: welcoming people to our shores in a way that is safe for Canadians and the travelling public, making sure Canadians feel safe and are safe travelling within our own country, making sure that we can use the supports in Bill C-2 to help the people the hon. member spoke of bridge this winter season, which we hope is the last mile of getting tourism-based businesses through the global pandemic, and welcoming more Canadians to these businesses as well as more people from around the world to Canada.

We are one of the safest jurisdictions in the world to travel to, and that is a pathway we will continue to pursue.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when he was talking about the Canada worker lockdown benefit, the minister made the point that it is retroactive to October 23. One of the concerns the New Democrats have about that benefit is that the definition of a lockdown order seems far too restrictive. Our concern is that it may not in fact apply in many cases.

My question for the minister is this. In what regions will workers be eligible to apply retroactively for the Canada worker lockdown benefit for the period between October 23 and the present day?

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Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I respect the finance critic for his long service in the House. I can say that we will work closely with the regions of health across the country to make sure that if a lockdown is imposed these benefits would be triggered. We in the federal government are not going to dictate to public health sector units how they impose lockdown criteria. That is a *champ de compétence* for provincial jurisdictions. We need to make sure that when a lockdown is put into place the benefit would be retroactive to that time. Not seeing any such lockdowns in place right now, that benefit would not trigger, so this is a future-forward program. Once the House passes it, should a lockdown take place, those benefits would flow.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations. I also want to congratulate my hon. colleague on a hard-fought election and most importantly on his new posting.

I represent one particular travel agency in Toronto: Islington Travel Agencies. It is a small agency. It had six people working there. The sole owner has kept it open for the last two years. She is the one who is operating it, trying to keep her head above water and move forward.

How is this piece of legislation going to help small travel agencies like that?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, if I may say, having watched the hon. member's performance in the House over many distinguished years, it is an honour to serve in the House with her again.

This is a suite of services that is designed to focus on the hardest hit sectors. In this case, it is the tourism sector. For small incorporated businesses that are doing their level best to make it through to the end of the pandemic, this suite of services will address their issues should they have seen a 40% or greater reduction from the beginning of the pandemic and a 10% reduction in revenue from the previous month. We are looking at other parts of the ecosystem to see if we can respond, as well.

We have heard from the travel agents in the hon. member's riding, and we will continue to make sure that supports are there for them.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you in the chair. As well, congratulations to the minister.

I would love to see the lockdown benefits go where they need to go: directly to the people who truly need them. My concern is that, with the CERB, the CRA and EI shut down the software protections that made sure we were tracking funding to make sure it was not going where it should not. That ended up leading to significant theft of Canadian taxpayers' money.

Could the minister assure us that the government is putting those systems back in place, so that this funding would be handled ethically?

• (1030)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question and for putting her finger on this important issue.

When the pandemic hit, it was incumbent on the government to get money to the people who needed it the most, as quickly as possible. The government made heroic efforts to do exactly that. The introduction of the CERB helped more than eight million Canadians put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads.

We know that this continues to be a difficult time for many. We will continue to be there for Canadians. As it pertains to those Canadians who were entitled to the CERB, that is a matter that is being worked through with colleagues. We look forward to informing the House of our work on that matter in due course.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate you on your election.

As I rise in the House for the first time in the 44th Parliament, I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my constituents in Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques from the bottom of my heart for putting their trust in me a second time.

In the last Parliament I was the tourism critic for the Bloc Québécois. One word that has stayed with me from my interactions with people in the tourism industry is the word predictability.

This bill takes us to the month of July. As hon. members know, July is the next big tourist season for this industry.

I would ask my colleague whether it is possible to make the support for the tourism industry more predictable and to keep it in place until all health measures have been lifted.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on his second term.

As far as predictability is concerned, as a former business owner, I know the value of predictability. It is important to note in Bill C-2 that we want to support businesses until the spring and even into July. We are sure that with the vaccination rate and the economic recovery, we will be able to support businesses until they no longer need it.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everybody is asking the same question. Whether it is 28-year-old couples living in their parents' basements because they cannot afford the \$300,000 increase in the average house price that occurred since the government took office; or the single mother walking down the grocery aisle noticing that she cannot afford nutritious food for her kids; or the senior who is watching his savings disappear as inflation gallops through his bank account and vaporizes what he spent a lifetime storing away for his golden years, all are asking the same question. Why are prices rising so fast?

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Even the finance minister has had the epiphany that there is an inflation crisis. In fact, just last fall, she said that the greater risk was deflation, not inflation. She ignored my warnings to the contrary. She was not alone in that false prophecy. The current and the former governors of the Bank of Canada, a Liberal journalist and Liberal academics all laughed when I started warning about inflation back in May of 2020.

Before we can answer why prices are rising today, I have to answer the other question that I often get, which is, how did I get it so right when so many others got it so wrong? The answer is that the Liberal academics, journalists and the finance minister relied on ideology; I relied on empirical economic science.

The man who wrote the book on inflation, the empirical economy scientist who won the Nobel Prize for it, Dr. Milton Friedman, published famous graphs in which he demonstrated a nearly perfect correlation between the rise in inflation and the increase in money supply per unit of economic output. He showed in all five of those graphs, the U.S., the U.K., Germany, Japan and Brazil, that the correlation was nearly perfect. When there is more money chasing fewer goods, we always get higher prices.

When I saw the government beginning to print money to pay for exorbitant spending, I knew that inflation was just down the road. The Liberals said that those old rules did not apply, that history was over, that it no longer repeated itself and that they could ignore the thousands of years of economic history, which had demonstrated this correlation again and again, because they had reinvented the laws of economics. I was expecting the Liberals to introduce a bill repealing the law of gravity, given their penchant for thinking they could do away with the laws of economics.

Of course, history has not been repealed. Nor has economic law. The massive influx of cash as a result of a half a trillion dollars of deficits has, indeed, driven up prices. This is the funny part. The same people who said that COVID would give us deflation now blame it for inflation. The same doctors who misdiagnosed the disease now can tell us that the disease's cause has nothing to do with them.

What is the cost? Some people say it is supply chain kinks resulting from COVID. They point to the fact that other nations are also getting high levels of inflation, therefore it cannot be the government's fault here at home. The truth is other countries are getting inflation. Those countries that are doing the same stupid things our government is doing are getting a lot of inflation, and the correlation holds up even today.

• (1035)

For example, yesterday the minister pointed out that other G20 countries had high levels of inflation, and she is right about that. Argentina has 52% inflation. Why? It has increased its money supply by 80% in a year and a half. Turkey has 20% inflation. Why? It has increased its money supply by 43%. The Americans south of the border, the money-printing mammoths in Washington, have 6.2% inflation. Why? They have increased their money supply by 35%. In Canada, we have a two-decade-high record of inflation of 4.7%, after we increased money supply by 23%.

In fact, if we put the G20 countries on a graph, we see a near-perfect correlation between money supply growth and inflation. Those countries that have flooded their economies with deficit spending have high inflation and those countries that are also supply chain dependent but have kept their money supply in control have low inflation.

Let me give some examples. Japan's inflation is 0.2%. Why? Its money supply growth has been half of ours in relative terms. Saudi Arabia's inflation is 0.8%. Its money supply growth has been a third of ours. Switzerland has 1.2% inflation. Its money supply growth has been a mere quarter of ours, only 6.5%. In other words, those countries that are not printing money to pay their bills have maintained a low cost of living and an affordable life for their citizens. Those countries that are flooding their economies with cheap cash are driving up the cost of living for their people.

The Liberals will say they had no choice, that COVID made them do it. This will be their excuse for everything. Let us remember that the Prime Minister tried to give half a billion dollars to a group that had paid his family half a million dollars, and the Prime Minister said, "COVID made me do it."

COVID required that we spend money, but we did not need to have the biggest deficit in the G20. All the other G20 countries had COVID too. COVID did not force the Prime Minister to give CERB cheques to wealthy families that did not need it; to people who could have been working, with over a half a million vacant jobs; to prisoners; to organized criminals; and even to people whom the public servants suspected of making fraudulent applications. He did not have to give wage subsidies to large corporations that had so much money they were simultaneously paying out dividends and bonuses to their executives.

COVID did not force any of that on the government. Those were decisions. The government knew it could not pay for those decisions by simply borrowing from the marketplace. There was not enough money in the whole world to lend the government enough to spend and fulfill its appetites. That is why it directed the Bank of Canada to create the cash out of thin air, which, unfortunately, the bank was all too happy to do, and now we see the consequences.

Now that I have demonstrated the correlation between money supply growth and inflation in the G20 countries, let me show another piece of incontrovertible evidence that our inflation problem is not just the result of supply chain quirks.

This evidence is that the biggest inflation in our economy has been in an area where there is no supply chain: land. Land is not waiting at a port. Land is not stuck on a ship. Land is not held hostage by a COVID outbreak in some faraway place.

Land was supplied to us by geological forces millions of years before we even arrived, it is right under our feet, and yet land prices are up 20%. How does the government explain that? Is it that the acreage of land caught COVID and all of a sudden became more expensive? Of course, not. Land prices started rising after the government started printing money.

● (1040)

Let us get very specific here. In the first two months of COVID, real estate prices actually started to drop, which we would expect. We would expect that when people's incomes fall, when a hundred billion dollars disappears from the GDP, when people are afraid about their ability to earn a future living and when we shut off immigration altogether thereby decreasing the demand for real estate, prices would go down. In fact, CMHC, our housing authority, predicted there would be a 14% reduction in housing prices. It made sense to predict that at the time. However, then, all of a sudden, in May 2020, real estate prices started to rise. In the middle of a lockdown, when people cannot even go and see the properties they are buying, why would prices suddenly and supernaturally go up?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Supply and demand.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: “Supply and demand”, screams out an economic genius on the Liberal side of the House. From whence came that demand? Where did the money come from? When the economy had just lost \$100 billion and everyone was locked in their basement, where did the demand come from? It came from the printers in the government money-making machine. The money-making machine started printing cash in the spring of 2020 and within weeks, real estate prices started to skyrocket.

I reiterate that all the land that was transacted in those real estate purchases has been here for thousands of years. That cannot be the result of a COVID supply chain quirk. The housing was already here before COVID came. About 96% of the houses in Canada today were built before COVID, and therefore it is chronologically impossible to blame the cost of their construction on the COVID phenomenon. In other words, it is not supply and demand, as my friend suggests, it is simply demand, demand driven by the massive creation of money, \$400 billion of it, the biggest money supply increase since the first Trudeau caused runaway double-digit inflation in the seventies and eighties.

We now have incontrovertible evidence that it is decisions of the government, which, I grant, are being replicated by other irresponsible big-spending governments around the world, that are causing the inflation we see today.

What are the consequences of that inflation? We see them. First, there is a massive growing gap between rich and poor. People who are rich love inflation. Why do we think big banks have been so thrilled with the money-printing policies of the government?

Bob Fife went on CTV the other day and said that Bay Street was not happy with the member of Parliament for Carleton being

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appointed to finance critic. Of course Bay Street is not happy, because I am the one who has been speaking out against all the free money the government has been pumping into the financial system, inflating their assets and letting them arbitrage a profit between the price of a bond the government sells them and the higher price for which the Bank of Canada buys it back. Of course Bay Street does not like the fact that I am speaking out against that. The good news is that I do not care what Bay Street likes. I work for main street here in the House of Commons.

Yes, the financial elites are thrilled with quantitative easing. They have loved it in the United States of America. Both Washington and Wall Street love quantitative easing. It is the one thing that gets bipartisan support in Washington. Republicans love ballooning Wall Street and Democrats love ballooning Washington. Therefore, together, they both love seeing their central bank flood their economy with cash and balloon the assets of the super-rich in the urban centres, while eating away at the wages of working-class people.

The Prime Minister looks across the border at the growing gap between rich and poor, at the higher cost of living, and at the poor and the young who can never live where the jobs are because real estate prices are too high, and he says, “Let us have some of that up here,” and replicates the same disastrous policies that have led to so much social and economic division south of the border.

Here on this side of the House of Commons, we do not believe in central bank money printing to pay our bills. During the great global recession, we rejected that approach. Governments around the world decided to do it.

● (1045)

Here in Canada, we did run modest deficits, the smallest in the G7, but we did it borrowing real money and returning quickly to a balanced budget. This meant we had low inflation, low unemployment and the fastest recovery from the great global recession.

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It turns out that sound money does not just keep inflation low, but allows growth and job creation. We know inflation does not just eat away at paycheques; it kills jobs. For example, we now have among the highest unemployment in the G7 combined with one million vacant jobs. Can members imagine that: high unemployment and record-high job vacancies? Well, it is no wonder. When the government prints money to pay people not to work, what do we get? We get jobs without people and people without jobs. Of course, all the money that is going into the economy to pay people not to work means more spending with less making, which means higher prices. We need to do exactly the opposite.

We need to restore sound money. We need to stop printing cash, get the Bank of Canada focused on its real mandate, which is low inflation, bring government spending under control, cancel the hundred-billion-dollar slush fund the government has created for the post-COVID period, and return the cost of government to pre-COVID levels. Simply put, a more affordable government will mean a more affordable cost of living for Canadians, and that is what Conservatives support.

Instead of creating more cash, why do we not create more of the stuff cash buys? Why do we not unleash our energy sector to supply more affordable energy for consumers and more paycheques to our workers, approve pipelines to create jobs for western energy workers and eastern refinery workers, get the carbon tax and other red tape off the back of our farmers so they can produce more nutritious and affordable food, incentivize our municipalities to speed up building permits so we can build more houses rather than just pushing out more mortgage lending, and sell off 15% of the underutilized 37,000 federal buildings so there is more space for housing our young and our working class? Here in our nation's capital, we have massively underutilized real estate that could be used for private-sector affordable housing built in the free market to supply our youth with opportunity to live in an affordable place.

In other words, we need to move from a debt economy to a paycheque economy. We need to make more and cost less. We need to unleash the free enterprise system to supply our workers with paycheques and our consumers with affordable products and services.

• (1050)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always find it somewhat fascinating when the member tries to lecture us all about basic economics.

I would convey to the member that Canadians were in a time of need, and this government stepped up and provided programs, whether it was direct support through CERB, or through business and wage loss programs or rent subsidy programs, which, yes, I concede, cost billions of dollars. Some within the Conservative/Reform Party would have liked us not to have supported Canadians and businesses. I wonder if the member would provide his true thoughts in regard to whether or not he believes that we should have supported families in Canada in all regions.

Just the other day, we had members of his caucus saying that there are hundreds of millions that we need to spend, and more, in the province of British Columbia, and we will do that to support B.C. What does the member think of that?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, of course, when the government deprives people of their income, it has to replace that income. We supported that at the very outset in the spring of 2020. However, what we did not support was having the biggest deficit in all of the G20. All of those other countries had COVID lockdowns as well. Many of them had lower unemployment and lower COVID mortality rates with a significantly lower deficit. Taiwan, for example, which responded in a way that Conservatives originally suggested, had among the lowest COVID mortality rates in the world and a deficit of 4% of GDP rather than 16% like this government.

Yes, COVID may have forced the government to spend, but it did not force it to give money to prisoners and organized criminals. It did not force the government to give wage subsidies to corporations that were already wealthy enough to pay out dividends and bonuses. Those were irresponsible decisions that no one, not even COVID, imposed on the government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not everyone may agree with my colleague from Carleton, but I think that we can agree that he is always entertaining to listen to.

He spoke a lot about how the \$400 billion spent was far too much, and that it is the cause of the inflation we are experiencing. I would hope that he would not have let the economy collapse by spending nothing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What does he think would have been the ideal amount of money to spend?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, on average, G20 countries have deficits representing about 9% of their GDP. Canada's deficit was 16% of GDP, or almost double. Other countries were able to protect their citizens while limiting their deficits to about half of ours.

Second, the government did not need to have a \$100-billion deficit before COVID-19. Those are choices that have nothing to do with the pandemic. They are the ideological choices of an extreme left-wing government.

We could have spent less had we simply helped people in need who were prevented from working and by returning to a pre-pandemic level of spending as soon as possible.

Statements by Members

• (1055)

[English]

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on the appointment to your role. We are all doing our duty this week.

I appreciate the fact that my colleague from Carleton not only criticizes what is going on but offers very productive solutions.

On the topic of inflation, how is it the member for Carleton got it right when so many people got it wrong? As well, would he possibly like to comment on some of the warnings he gave in the middle of 2020 and how some of what he warned against has now come to fruition?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I was a voice in the wilderness, there is no doubt about it, as I showed up at the finance committee. I started warning people on my very first morning, in May of 2020; I started telling them that inflation would be our future if we did not stop printing money.

Those warnings continued throughout the last year and a half, up until yesterday, when the finance minister completed her flip-flop. After having warned of deflation, she now admits we have an “inflation crisis”.

In fairness to the minister, she was not the only one who was wrong. Central bankers, Liberal academics and the media all said that inflation was something we need not worry about.

Fellow parliamentarians, let us study the facts of history in order to see the future, rather than being blinded by ideology.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats were disappointed when the government suddenly and with just two days' notice announced the end of the Canada recovery benefit, and that is why we are here today, to debate what the government is proposing ought to replace it.

I could not help but notice, in the 20 minutes the member for Carleton had, that he never once mentioned the bill or any of its content, so I am left wondering whether the member for Carleton has recommended to the Conservative caucus that they support the bill or that they not support the bill.

I am wondering if he could enlighten us on that point and perhaps provide some of the reasons he either supports it or does not support it. We do not yet know.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, certainly this party is going to carefully study the legislation before simply giving a check mark for the government to push another \$7 billion out the door.

We all know that when the Liberals get to spend without scrutiny, money ends up in the hands of organized criminals, of prisoners and of people whom the public servants suspect of fraud. It ends up in the hands of corporate CEOs and shareholders, who take money that was supposed to go to subsidized wages.

That is what happens when the government does not face proper scrutiny, so unlike the NDP, which is just thrilled to shovel the money out the door and ask for more and more and more, we on this side of the House of Commons will defend taxpayers and consumers against irresponsible Liberal incompetence.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, COVID has had a devastating impact on residents and businesses. The programs this government rolled out really were lifelines for so many in my community. Not everyone could afford to self-isolate in a million-dollar recording studio, as some members did during the election.

I wanted to ask the hon. member which programs specifically he would recommend that we cut.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. Not everyone had a multi-million dollar private country mansion built for them with taxpayers' money right in the middle of COVID either, unlike his leader.

Very clearly, we would not have paid corporations a subsidy for their dividends and their CEO bonuses. We would not keep paying people not to work now that there are a million vacant jobs in Canada. We would not have given half a billion dollars to the WE Charity. The list of waste and corruption goes on and on, and we would have none of it.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[English]

MEMBER FOR MISSISSAUGA—MALTON

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this House as the newly elected member of Parliament for Mississauga—Malton.

I rise today with deep appreciation because my presence in this chamber is not very likely. My father was born in a mud house in a village in Punjab, India. He grew up taking odd jobs around the village to make ends meet, including collecting dry grass from swamps nearby to burn during the winters to keep his family warm. He did not wear shoes to school because he could not afford them. When the sun had baked the ground in the morning, he would walk along in the shade provided by treetops and house alleys.

As he grew older, and as circumstances became more unbearable, he charted a path to this great country because he had larger dreams for his children. He became a plumber and eventually started a business. One of his dreams was that his children would be educated because he never had that chance. It is with pride that my father tells his friends that one of his sons went to Harvard Law School. That same son stands here before everyone today.

Statements by Members

I hope my father has proven right the adage that, if one gives an immigrant an ounce, he will give back a pound.

* * *

MEMBER FOR CALGARY SIGNAL HILL

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers who helped me get elected for a third time in Calgary Signal Hill. After serving two terms in the provincial legislature and five elections, that is a tremendous accomplishment. I appreciate my constituents' support.

Whether it was Joanne, who organized my campaign, Nancy, who led our phoning efforts, or Geoffrey and Kal, who showed up every day to go door knocking with me in this unnecessary election, I am incredibly thankful.

The one thing this unnecessary election did give me was the opportunity to talk to thousands of my constituents, and this confirmed how unhappy my constituents are with a government that cannot get anything done. We are here, as Conservatives, to hold the government to account.

* * *

ROSALIE TROMBLEY

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to a Canadian music radio legend, Rosalie Trombley, who passed away this week at the age of 82. As music director at CKLW in Windsor, Rosalie was the girl with the golden ear, who helped launch countless careers, including Bob Seger, Gordon Lightfoot, Aerosmith and the Guess Who. She played Canadian records before Canadian content.

As a single mom, Rosalie worked the switchboard before rising to become the most important music director in America and commanding a signal that reached three million listeners in the U.S. and Canada. In a business dominated by men, she was a trailblazer. In 2016, Rosalie's lifetime contribution to Canadian music was recognized with a Juno Award, and each year a Canadian female broadcaster is presented with the Rosalie Award. In 1973, Bob Seger wrote a song and tribute called *Rosalie*, which goes, "She's got the power, she's got the tower, Rosalie...".

Rosalie Trombley was a pioneer who moved millions of people, broke barriers and changed music forever.

* * *

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, November 25 marked the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

During these 16 days, I think of my friend Lisa Marie Young, who tragically went missing in 2002. A member of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, she was only 21 when she disappeared. Lisa Marie will always be remembered for the joy she brought to everyone around her. I am truly sorry her mother, Marlene Jo-Anne Young, did not get the answers she deserved before her passing in 2017. I want to acknowledge the continued perseverance of Lisa Marie's

family and friends, her aunt Carol Frank and her friend Cindy, to find answers.

I ask the government to immediately implement the calls to justice of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and for 2SLGBTQIA+ people, to work to build communities where everyone is safe from gender-based violence.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COLONEL-GAËTAN-CÔTÉ ARMOURY

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in May 2020, we committed to doing the necessary repairs to ensure that our reservists could continue to train in Sherbrooke, and we have kept our word.

Any of my constituents who have walked down Belvédère Street will have seen workers at the Colonel-Gaëtan-Côté Armoury. Work on the urgent repairs started as planned on October 18. The second phase of work to get the Belvédère armoury reopened will start in 2022.

I commend our fusiliers for their resilience and ability to adapt when they were temporarily relocated to a building on Woodward Street. My colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and I had the opportunity to visit the building on October 20. I must say that I am very proud of what we have achieved to secure the future of our armouries in Sherbrooke.

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● (1105)

[*English*]

JONATHAN HENNESSY

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today with the arduous task of giving words sufficient to honour the life of a friend, a son and a brother to many: Jonathan Hennessy.

Jonathan not only stood out; he stood alone. In a world increasingly devoid of character, he provided a stark contrast in a manner not beyond comparison to the Irish wit of James Joyce or Oscar Wilde. In that vein, he was beloved by all who knew him. Had he chosen to harness his personality for a living, there is no doubt he would have won an Oscar or an Emmy, or ended up on the New York Times Best Sellers list.

The unfortunate cause of a personality as big as Jonathan's is that the silence he leaves behind is deafening. I encourage my fellow members and my constituents at home to always remember to take an extra moment to enjoy their families and friends.

In closing, I would like to express my deepest condolences to his mother Winnie, and we thank her for sharing the gift of her son Jonathan with us. May he rest in peace.

[Translation]

LAVAL—LES ÎLES

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my family, my team, all of the volunteers and the people of Laval—Les Îles, who entrusted me to represent them in the House of Commons for a third time. I thank them for putting their faith in me.

I also want to congratulate my colleagues who were re-elected and those who were elected for the first time.

I am very happy to be here in person to work with my peers on moving Canada forward, conquering and putting an end to COVID-19, kick-starting the economy and combatting climate change.

[English]

I would like to express my tremendous gratitude to the residents of Laval—Les Îles for contributing effectively in the fight against COVID-19 by getting vaccinated at impressive levels.

[Translation]

We will all have to do our part to secure a better and safer future for our children and for future generations.

* * *

[English]

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATO INDUSTRY

Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to express my ongoing support for the Prince Edward Island potato industry. Potatoes are a primary crop on Prince Edward Island, which continues to be the largest potato-producing province in Canada. The potato industry is worth over \$1 billion annually to our island economy.

The recent announcement that fresh and seed potatoes cannot be exported to the U.S. is a very serious concern. However, as Canadians, we are no strangers to challenges. In the past, we overcame the PVYN virus and mad cow disease, and more recently, we have seen the heroic pan-Canadian response to the wildfires and floods in B.C. This is not only a P.E.I. issue. An imbalanced supply of potatoes in Canada will create domestic market volatility that will affect farms across this country, reducing farm income and price. It is a Canadian issue.

I have had daily discussions with Agriculture minister Bibeau, I thank her for her efforts, as well as those of my colleagues, the premier of P.E.I., former MP Wayne Easter, the Prince Edward Island Potato Board and several potato farmers. We must continue to work diligently on this file to ensure restrictions are lifted as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: I know the member is new, but we cannot refer to the name of a member in the House. The member used the name of the minister, and we cannot do that.

The hon. member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

Statements by Members

HENRY WOOLF

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon arts and drama community has lost a treasurer in the passing of Henry Woolf. Woolf was an actor, a director, a writer and a teacher. His work could be seen on the stage, television and the big screen.

Woolf moved to Canada in 1978 to teach drama and work in theatre. He was a mentor to a new generation of artists. He was beloved by his students. In fact, one student named Jeff Rogstad said that his fingerprint is all over the theatre community in Saskatoon. Woolf served as the artistic director of the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan festival for a decade. A portrait of Woolf in the role of Shylock hangs outside the theatre bearing his name at the University of Saskatchewan drama department.

Woolf's legacy is the culture he nurtured, inspired and cultivated throughout his remarkable life. As one student said, it is hard to be sad today because we had so much fun.

* * *

• (1110)

44TH PARLIAMENT

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I rise in the House for the first time in the 44th Parliament, I find myself filled with excitement to be back in Ottawa and gratitude for the people of Whitby, who have once again given me the honour of representing them here in this House.

There is no doubt the nation's business has never been more important as we face numerous challenges, including making life more affordable, finishing the fight against COVID-19, ensuring a robust economic recovery and combatting climate change with ever-increasing urgency.

While the pandemic has brought serious hardships to and had far-reaching impacts on our way of life, it has also presented us with the opportunity to build back in a way that addresses long-standing inequities, develops greater resiliency and transitions us to a more sustainable economy.

It is my sincere belief that Canadians gave all of the members of this House, regardless of political stripe, a strong mandate to make real progress on the priorities that matter to Canadians. I look forward to working with all parliamentarians to make it happen.

* * *

GURPURAB

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Sikhs across the world celebrated Gurburab or the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who taught the lessons of remembering God, earning an honest living and sharing with others.

Statements by Members

To celebrate Gurburab, RED FM and the Dashmesh Culture Centre under the leadership of President Amanpreet Gill and the entire executive committee raised over \$700,000 in one day from Sangat for the Mata Sahib Kaur Ji Women's and Children's Transitional Housing. Congratulations to everyone on this amazing initiative.

It was an extra special Gurburab as we saw the announcement of the repeal of three farm bills in India. Our farmers, brothers, sisters and respected elders in India have been peacefully protesting over the last year in the cold streets and even faced attacks, but they persevered through their dedication.

We thank each and every one of them for their incredible sacrifices, and pray for their good health, success and prosperity.

Kisaan majdoor ekta.

* * *

[Translation]

RAYMOND SETLAKWE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to share with the House my grief at the recent death of a wonderful person. I would like us all to take a moment to remember the Hon. Raymond Setlakwe, a former senator, husband to Yvette and a descendant of Aziz, the first immigrant to flee the Armenian genocide and move to Canada to raise his family and help them prosper.

Mr. Raymond, as many people liked to call him, was unfailingly generous. A prosperous businessman, he was the founder of A. Setlakwe Limited. He collected political meetings like some people collect hockey cards.

He was more than a mentor to me. He gave me my first real chance to work in politics by supporting me when I ran for office for the first time in 1998. I have to say that, at the time, I was running for the Quebec Liberal Party. Raymond never would have supported any other party. I thought I almost lost him for the first time in 2015 when I told him that I would be running for the Conservative Party of Canada.

I want to share with my colleagues what he said to me shortly before his death: In politics, we have adversaries, not enemies.

To the only friend I have left, I want to say thank you for helping me make my dream come true. I hope that in heaven he will have the chance to meet all of the great politicians in history that he never had a chance to meet here on earth.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my riding is home to some of the most awe-inspiring ancient old-growth forests on southern Vancouver Island.

The majestic trees in these forests can defy imagination and immediately command attention with their enormous presence. Many of them were already mature trees when the Magna Carta was signed in England, and some were seedlings during the reign of Charlemagne.

The beautiful and pristine Fairy Creek watershed is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Pacheedaht First Nation, in my riding. For more than 150 years, they have watched as others decided what was best for their lands, water and people.

In June the elected and hereditary chiefs of the Pacheedaht and neighbouring Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations came together to issue a declaration, signalling their intent to take back control.

“Nothing about us without us” is not just a slogan; it is a fundamental policy change we absolutely must respect. I urge the federal government to do everything it can to support the indigenous-led stewardship plans of these nations.

* * *

● (1115)

[Translation]

SENIORS

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, seniors are among those hardest hit by the pandemic. It bears repeating that their financial situation was precarious even before the COVID-19 crisis.

Even so, there was nothing for them in the throne speech. They were forgotten. Not a word was said about those bearing the brunt of inflation and rising prices across the board.

To add insult to injury, seniors who stopped working because of the pandemic and received CERB are now having their guaranteed income supplement clawed back. That puts a considerable dent in their budget and pushes them into poverty.

This situation needs to be fixed. More than ever before, our poorest seniors are having to make difficult choices: pay for food, pay for medicine or pay for housing. It is high time the government showed those who built Quebec and Canada a little consideration by increasing old age security by \$110 per month as of age 65.

The government needs to reverse its senseless, unfair decision to create two classes of seniors. Let us see some action.

* * *

[English]

MEMBER FOR BRANTFORD—BRANT

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to rise for the first time in this House today, having been elected by the good people of Brantford—Brant. I have so many people to thank, more than I have time to mention today.

First, I would like to extend a special thanks to my wife Angela, my twin daughters Jennie and Emma, and my parents Larry and Mary Brock for their love, encouragement and ongoing support.

I am also truly grateful for my team and all the volunteers, and for their tireless efforts during my nomination and campaign.

Finally, I offer my sincerest appreciation to the voters of Brantford and Brant County, the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for placing their trust in me to serve them in Ottawa. I promise to stand up for the issues that matter most to them and be a strong voice for our community in Parliament.

Our official opposition was elected to hold the current government to account, and I am ready to take on this responsibility. I am honoured to be part of a strong Conservative team, and together we will ensure that Canada's best days are still ahead.

* * *

JAN RUSTAD

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to the families and communities affected by the extreme flooding last week in British Columbia. This 100-year flood brought catastrophic damage, laying bare the shortcomings in our current system. As climate change worsens, this will happen not every 100 years, but every 10 years or less. We need to invest in adaptation and mitigation of climate change so we are better prepared in the future. The inclusion of a national adaptation strategy in the Speech from the Throne is a significant step forward.

It is with great sadness that I inform the House of the passing of Jan Rustad of Kaleden, British Columbia. Jan was well known and considered by many to be the global expert on rotary-wing advanced flying techniques. Jan trained many pilots from the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP and many other countries.

Known as skilled, patient and humble, Jan Rustad will be missed by his family and several generations of helicopter pilots from around the world.

I offer my thanks to Jan.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment to the Chair.

COVID-19 cases are on the rise in Quebec and Canada. Many countries have started to administer third vaccine doses to all adults.

A new variant out of Africa is generating enough concern for the WHO to hold an emergency meeting today. Israel and the United Kingdom have closed their borders to six countries.

We have gotten used to the Liberal government's delayed response to urgent warnings. What is the government's plan to keep our economy open?

Oral Questions

• (1120)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 situation around the world continues to be volatile and unpredictable.

The PCR tests required for entering Canada are able to detect this variant. The purpose of this morning's WHO emergency meeting was to determine next steps. This afternoon, the minister will inform Canada of those next steps.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that response gives Canadians cause for concern.

Our economy has been devastated. Thousands of businesses have closed. We have record unemployment. You will recall that the Liberal government was slow to warn Canadians, close borders and provide vaccines. Today, we still have to protect Canadians, who are fed up with lockdowns and closures.

What is the government's plan to prevent a fifth wave, which will have disastrous consequences for Canadians' health and our economy?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our screening requirements at the border protect the health and safety of Canadians.

We know that the fight against COVID-19 is not over. We are working with our partners around the world to protect Canadians. The situation is evolving quickly, and we are working closely with our international partners, the provinces and the territories to monitor this emerging variant.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, lessons learned from the past must guide our actions now, not tomorrow or next week.

In February, the government allocated \$53 million to the Public Health Agency of Canada to conduct research on the variants. Today, there is no recommendation of any sort about this variant on the agency's website. The Minister of Health is shockingly silent while more and more people are calling for action to prevent this wave.

The economic cost of the government's foot-dragging is in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Canadians are still paying and will continue to pay for a long time. Can the government tell us right now what its plan is to protect Canadians and our economy?

[*English*]

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our government from day one took decisive action at our borders to protect Canadians and we have put together different measures to protect Canadians. However, forgive me for not taking advice from the Conservative Party. They cannot even ask their own MPs to get vaccinated and they have been asking us to remove PCR testing from predeparture.

Oral Questions

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are learning disturbing news today concerning a new COVID variant out of southern Africa. Countries like Germany, the U.K., India and Israel have already taken decisive action to close their borders to incoming flights and implement quarantine and testing requirements for those travelling from areas of concern, yet the government has not even updated its travel advisory yet.

We are wondering what is going on. What is the plan to keep Canadians safe? We have heard nothing this morning of reassurance for Canadians. We want to know what the plan is.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 situation around the world continues to be volatile and unpredictable. We continue to monitor the situation very closely. We will not hesitate to take action to protect Canadians. The PCR tests required to enter Canada are capable of detecting this variant. There are currently no direct flights to Canada from South Africa. The WHO held an emergency meeting this morning and we will hear more from the Minister of Health this afternoon.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul): Mr. Speaker, that answer is unacceptable. Countries like Germany, the U.K. and India did not have to wait for direction from the World Health Organization to keep their citizens safe.

We have seen indecision from the government before. It was Conservative members of the opposition who called on the Liberal government to close the border back in January 2020 for the coronavirus. The government waited three whole months to do so and, by then, COVID had spread across the country. Canadians do not want to see that mistake being made again. They do not want to go back into lockdown. The mental health of the nation and the economy of the nation cannot handle that again.

Canadians expect decisive action from the Liberal government. Is there a plan? What is the plan to keep Canadians safe from the African variant?

• (1125)

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a plan. Canadians have seen our plan over the last year and a half, while we have been doing everything to protect their health and safety.

I want to reassure Canadians that there are currently no direct flights from South Africa to Canada. However, I want to ask my hon. colleague where the Conservatives stand on this. Do they want to open the border or do they want to close the border? Do they want to remove the PCR predeparture test or do they want to implement PCR tests? I am not sure what they want, but we will take advice from our doctors and experts.

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development released a report yesterday that is quite damning for the government. The commissioner noted that it is going to take more than just lofty

language to avoid climate catastrophe. While the government brags about its outstanding work, the commissioner was unequivocal.

According to the commissioner, Canada “has become the worst performer of all G7 nations”. This has happened only since the Liberals came to power. How can the government brag when, really, it is the worst in the world?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the report from the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. We commend his work, especially his latest report, which paints a truly dismal picture of the Harper years. The commissioner did not look at our 2016 plan or our 2020 plan, or the 100 or so measures we have put in place, or the nearly \$100 billion we have invested.

All of these measures will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 million tonnes by 2030. That is equal to nearly half of Quebec's emissions.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment wants to talk about the Harper government, so let us talk about it. The crux of the problem is that, like Stephen Harper's government, this government is trying to claim that if we subsidize oil companies to make them cleaner they will be able to produce even more without any issues.

The commissioner of the environment and sustainable development has said that increasing production would in turn increase emissions, which runs counter to the commitment Canada has made to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

When will the government realize that the energy transition is not about transitioning from oil to more oil, but transitioning from oil to renewable energies?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree on the matter of subsidizing fossil fuels. That is why our country committed to eliminating these subsidies by 2023, two years before our G20 partners' goal of 2025. In Glasgow, we also announced that we, along with many other countries, would stop financing international fossil fuel projects.

[English]

SENIORS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seniors in Canada who receive the guaranteed income supplement are some of the poorest in this country. Many work to subsidize their meagre income. Like every other working Canadian, they asked for help during the pandemic. Now they are being punished. Seniors like David, who is 71 years old, had \$1,000 cut off their income. He cannot afford his food. He cannot afford his medication.

How can the Minister of Seniors sleep at night knowing that these seniors are going hungry and are not getting their medication every day here?

Oral Questions

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the member for her advocacy of seniors. [English]

From the very beginning, our government has worked extremely hard to support the most vulnerable seniors, including strengthening their GIS. We know that GIS adjustments have been hard on some seniors this year. I can assure the hon. member that we are working on this issue to find the right solutions to support those affected. We will be there for them.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and ministers, in a last-ditch effort, finally went to the United States to deal with buy America's attack on Canadian auto workers. Instead of improving the situation, their results have the U.S. doubling down on softwood lumber duties that devastate our industries and steal our future jobs.

For years, the Liberals have failed to protect families and their livelihoods, and now they are letting them take it on the chin from U.S. protectionism. When will the government wake up and truly support value-added industries, not just with talk but with real plans to support our workers and their families?

• (1130)

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with the hon. member as he is my hon. critic.

In a relationship as large and significant as the one that Canada has with the United States, of course there are challenges. However, we have worked together over many years to resolve many of these challenges and we have been successful. We are going to do that again here, whether it is with electric vehicles, softwood lumber or in our relationship in fighting the things we have in common, like climate change and finishing the fight against COVID-19.

Let me be clear: We are always going to have the backs of Canadian workers and businesses. We have always done it. Today is no different. We are always going to do it.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the government is serving up a tasteless, colourless and sterile throne speech, businesses in my riding and in Quebec are at the end of their rope. Why? Because they cannot find anyone to fill their vacant positions. No one. There are 280,000 job openings in the province right now. Yesterday, the Government of Quebec announced \$3.4 billion to address the labour shortage. Here, there is absolutely no mention at all of the labour shortage in the throne speech. The Liberal government is dragging its feet on this issue.

Why is the government turning its back on businesses?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, let me say that it is nice to see a fellow Bluenoser in the chair today.

I would point out that Canada has now recovered more than 100% of the jobs lost during the peak of the pandemic, but we still suffer from the same labour shortages that are affecting competitive economies right across the world. In order to address the labour shortage, we have a number of facets to our plan, including investing in child care so that hundreds of thousands of Canadian parents can join the workforce, including boosting economic immigration levels so we can find workers to support Canadian businesses, including investing in skilled training and including supporting businesses that are hardest hit by the pandemic.

All these measures have one thing in common: The Conservatives routinely voted against them.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will help the government understand how serious the labour shortage is by giving the example of Rotobec, a business in Sainte-Justine in my riding that manufactures material handling equipment. It does business in 40 countries and is currently trying to fill 30 positions. As a result, the company's growth is limited; it has to turn down contracts, and its employees are running out of steam.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for? When will it help Cathy Roberge, the head of human resources at Rotobec? What does the Prime Minister have to say to her today?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since we are talking about jobs, it is important to point out one of our country's biggest successes. When COVID hit Canada, we lost three million jobs. Now, Canada has recovered all of the jobs that were lost during COVID. We recovered 101% of the jobs, while the United States recovered only 81%.

We will continue to work closely with Quebec on the labour shortage. We can resolve this situation with immigration. Our work on day care will help too, obviously.

[English]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, The Globe and Mail has reported that job vacancies have soared to unprecedented numbers, with more than one million unfilled positions. Vacancies jumped by 16.4% in September alone.

When will the minister admit the government's plan for the labour shortage is just not working, take responsibility and fix this problem?

Oral Questions

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives seem unwilling to recognize is that there is a global phenomenon caused by interruptions to the supply chain, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that have caused labour shortages in economies right across the world. Thankfully, as the Minister of Finance just shared in our other official language, more than 100% of the job losses from the peak of this pandemic have now been recovered.

In order to help solve the labour shortages that we are seeing in Canada, we intend to invest in immigration to bring more workers here. We intend to invest in child care to open up the workforce to more parents, and we will invest in skills training. I hope the Conservatives will finally see the light of day and start supporting these essential measures.

• (1135)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, The Globe and Mail indicated that a fifth of all vacancies were in hospitality, including restaurants and hotels. Despite a hectic tourist season in Alberta, restaurant owner Stéphane Prévost had to close his restaurants for as many as two days a week this summer because there simply were not enough workers.

Why is the government always too little too late when it comes to helping employers and Canadians?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in western Canada alone, more than \$775 million went to our region under the relief and recovery fund. That helped more than 40,000 jobs in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and supported 9,000 businesses.

Our government will always be there to support businesses in western Canada. Whether it is through supports, through investments, through child care or through immigration, we will be there for workers and for businesses.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even though the government will not acknowledge it or try to solve it, we are in a labour crisis.

Apple and cherry growers left fruit in their orchards this summer. We have restaurants that are reducing their hours. Construction companies are turning down business, and there are “help wanted” signs everywhere. This is occurring in my community of Kelowna—Lake Country and also across the entire country.

Does the government plan to stand with small businesses and small farming families and address this labour crisis, or will it continue to sit by and go forward without any kind of a plan that it can show us?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely focused on supporting Canadian small businesses and Canadian workers. It is worth reminding everyone in the House of the success of Canadian businesses and Canadian workers in recovering those three million jobs that were lost during the COVID recession. A 101% recovery is great news for Canadians.

When it comes to supporting small businesses, I would like to take this opportunity to urge all members of the House to support

Bill C-2. Small businesses in B.C., in Alberta and across the country need that support.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the important holiday shopping season beginning, our small businesses were looking for more than empty words from the throne speech when it comes to addressing the supply chain crisis. In Canada, this crisis started well before the COVID-19 pandemic and is further exacerbated now with the devastating floods and landslides in British Columbia.

The lack of a plan is especially deafening. When will the Liberals finally address the supply chain delays that are hurting Canadian small businesses on the road to recovery and growth?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was a bit of a kitchen-sink question with lots of elements thrown in, but let me try to take them in turn.

When it comes to the flooding in B.C., we are there working with the Province of British Columbia. The Prime Minister will be there today.

When it comes to supply chain issues, we are monitoring that very, very closely. Let me point out that this is a global phenomenon. All Canadians appreciate that.

Finally, on small businesses, one way we can all help them right now is to vote for Bill C-2.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, higher softwood lumber duties are bad enough for Canada, but they are even worse for Quebec. Our very own Resolute seems to be the Americans' primary target.

It is senseless. Quebec's forestry industry adheres to the highest standards in Canada. We set our stumpage fees based on an auction just like the Americans, and that is precisely in response to their concerns.

Is it possible that nobody in Washington is aware of that? How is this possible? Why is nobody in the federal government willing to stand up for Quebec against the Americans?

• (1140)

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that the forestry and softwood lumber industry is important to Quebec. We will continue to stand up for resilience and innovation within the Quebec forestry industry, which exports \$10 million worth of forestry products annually and creates jobs for more than 60,000 workers in the province.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the worst part is that the Prime Minister met with President Biden just last week. Apparently they talked about softwood lumber. Even worse than the Prime Minister's failure to convince Mr. Biden to eliminate the duty is the fact that Biden doubled it, and his first target is Quebec's forestry industry.

Not only is the duty hike a threat to Quebec jobs, but it will also increase the cost of lumber at a time when demand is still very high in North America. We saw the consequences of that last year.

What is the government going to do? What will it take for the Prime Minister to stand up for Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government will always stand up for the forestry sector, and we will always stand up for its workers. We presented challenges before CUSMA at the WTO, where it has been ruled that Canada is a fair trading partner.

We absolutely denounce these tariffs. They are unfair; they are unjustified and they hurt workers and businesses on both sides of the border. I have been speaking to Quebec industry and workers on this very matter, and I will continue to stand up for their interests.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the announcement of softwood lumber tariffs doubling, we see again how this government is failing indigenous people. NorSask Forest Products, a 100% first nations-owned company in my riding, has millions of dollars held in tariffs. The government's failure to negotiate a softwood lumber agreement is costing the nine ownership nations the ability to invest in their communities.

I have been asking this question for two years, but I will ask again: Can the minister tell the leaders of these nations when they will get their money back and when these punitive softwood lumber tariffs will finally end?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been speaking to the industry, including the industry represented and advocated by the indigenous softwood lumber members. The Conservatives can shout talking points all they like, but it is the Canadian softwood lumber industry, including the indigenous softwood lumber industry, that will give me and this government a negotiating mandate on this issue.

I will work closely with the industry, as I always have, and we will continue to pursue their interests.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister visited Washington to meet with President Biden,

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and this week the U.S. has announced plans to double tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber, threatening jobs in northern Ontario and across the country. Either the Prime Minister does not care to stand up for Canadian workers or he is incapable of delivering results.

The government has said that it has raised this issue with the U.S. administration. Why is the President not taking him seriously?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue is a priority for our government. It is why we are pursuing litigation under chapter 10 of CUSMA—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I cannot hear the answer, so could the minister restart it?

The hon. Minister of International Trade.

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Speaker, this issue is important. It is why we are pursuing it under chapter 10. However, this is only possible because this government fought hard to keep the dispute settlement mechanism in the new trade agreement so that we could stand up for Canadians.

I want to remind the House and Canadians that the Conservatives urged the government to capitulate to Donald Trump and get us a weaker deal. We did not.

Our government will always stand up for Canadian workers and the softwood lumber industry.

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 22,000 New Brunswick jobs are going to feel the impact of this government's inability to stand up for them. There are thousands of jobs in Miramichi—Grand Lake and across the country that are now at severe risk because of the weakness of the current Prime Minister.

Printing more money, news flash, will not fix this issue. What will the Liberal government do to protect these hard-working forestry jobs?

• (1145)

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my message to the forestry sector industry and the workers is that we will continue to stand up for their interests. We are interested in an outcome that is acceptable to the forestry industry and to the workers. We are going to work with the Canadian softwood lumber industry, as we have always done. It is they who will give us the mandate to take to the United States on this very issue.

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I am going to keep working closely with industry. Together, we are going to take a team Canada approach, just as we have done all the way along, challenging on this issue and continuing to work on it.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister just does not get it. My region and province have been suffering for years due to the inaction of the government on the softwood lumber dispute, yet when the Prime Minister promised hope and met with President Biden, the American leader said their relationship was easy and then jacked up the tariffs on Canadian wood.

Why did the Prime Minister not get a deal on softwood lumber when he met with the President? Failure is not an option for the workers in my area. Why is it for the Prime Minister?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians will know who is defending them and who has always defended them.

When we retaliated against the U.S. on unfair U.S. aluminum and steel tariffs, the current Leader of the Opposition urged us to stop fighting back. When we were negotiating for a better CUSMA deal, the Conservatives wanted Canada to capitulate to Donald Trump. Our government has a proven track record of negotiating outcomes for the benefit of Canadian businesses and Canadian workers, whether it is renegotiating NAFTA, getting a good deal on CPTPP or getting a good deal on CETA. We are going to continue doing this work for Canadians.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indigenous communities across Canada continue to be at the forefront of the climate crisis. The ongoing flooding in B.C. has devastated first nations communities that are waiting for help to clean up and a plan to face future climate events. This week I asked the government to listen to and work with indigenous leaders, such as Chief Roxanne Harris from Stz'uminus First Nation. Stz'uminus First Nation and others have not received the support they need.

When will the government follow through with its promises?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to everyone who has suffered so tremendously through this flooding experience, including indigenous people who are disproportionately impacted not just by this climate-related event, but by many others.

My team has been working very closely to coordinate services with the Province of B.C. and has announced funding of \$4.4 million through the emergency management assistance program to the First Nations' Emergency Services Society of British Columbia. This is built on the principle that indigenous people know how to support their communities, and we will continue to work through that indigenous-led lens.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, extreme weather is hitting both the east and west coasts. The environment commissioner just released a scathing report on Canada's climate inaction. It said, "We cannot continue to go from failure to failure; we need actions and results, not just more [targets] and plans." The Liberals have the worst record in the G7.

The Prime Minister claims to be a climate leader, so why is he continuing to give billions of dollars to big oil and gas? Why is he dragging his feet on fighting the climate crisis and supporting workers?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I challenge anyone in the House to show me a country that has done more in the last four years to fight climate change than Canada has done. There has been record-level investment in public transit. There has been record-level investment in—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Let us just hold on a second.

The minister can restart.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, there has been record-level investment of \$4 billion in electrification of transportation, in nature-based solutions and in adaptation to climate change. However, the fight is not over. We have lots more to do, and that is what we will be doing.

* * *

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 28 four years ago, people from my community and from across our country gathered here to witness our government's apology to the LGBTQ2 community, acknowledging Canada's role in systemic oppression, criminalization and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit people. There is so much more to be done.

Can the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth share with us what we are doing to support LGBTQ2 communities across Canada?

• (1150)

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth for her incredible work and advocacy, and for highlighting this important date.

The discrimination that fuels homophobia, biphobia and transphobia must be eliminated, and the work starts right here in the House. That is why our government introduced the LGBTQ2 secretariat in 2017 and invested \$7.1 million in budget 2021 to support its work and \$15 million for a new LGBTQ2 projects fund. We will continue the work for the LGBTQ2 communities to create a Canada where everyone can live their authentic and true lives.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government wasted millions of dollars in the fight against COVID-19. However, it could recover some of those millions, such as the \$100 million it overpaid to the Prime Minister's friend and former member Frank Baylis, or the \$81 million it paid to Tango Communications Marketing, another Liberal Party friend. Both contracts were awarded without tender. Worse still, Tango Communications Marketing did not even deliver the products.

Since taxpayers' money does not grow on trees, will the Prime Minister take action and recover that money?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his re-election.

He will recall that our government invested \$1 billion to rebuild Canada's biomanufacturing sector just 30 days after the World Health Organization declared a pandemic. What was the result? Medicigo moved into Quebec City, where the member lives; Novavax will be produced in Montreal, and Moderna plans to set up a facility in Canada. We will continue to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

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[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of Environment has refused to signal his support for the Canadian nuclear energy industry. He said it is not up to the government to decide what sources of energy would be used. Before he said that, he said something different, which was that it was time to close the Pickering nuclear power plant. There are 3,000 families who rely on those paycheques at that plant alone, and those good jobs across Canada.

Will the minister step forward today and announce his support for the nuclear industry and the good jobs that come with nuclear?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who grew up in Saskatoon and in the hon. member's riding, I certainly understand the importance of

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the nuclear industry in this country. Certainly, Cameco and other organizations in Saskatchewan are important drivers of economic opportunity for Saskatchewan families. Nuclear is an important part of the electricity grid in this country. This government has invested in the development of small modular reactors. We look forward to seeing those things demonstrated and ultimately commercialized. We look forward to moving forward with non-emitting technologies to ensure that we are fighting climate change, but doing so in a manner that promotes economic progress.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now that inflation has taken hold and is the second highest in the G7, and because of the current government's unbridled spending, Canadians are suffering with rising prices for basic necessities.

Does the Prime Minister still maintain, at a time when Canadians need a prime minister who actually cares, that he does not think about monetary policy?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me start by reminding all members of the House and Canadians that inflation is a global phenomenon right now. It was 4.7% in Canada in October. In the U.S., it was 6.2%. In Mexico it was also 6.2%. In New Zealand, a country very similar to our own, it was 4.9%. Let me point out that the G20 average is 4.6%. That is the OECD average as well.

• (1155)

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, The Globe and Mail is reporting that the biggest price surge in two decades is set to deliver a revenue balance worth billions of dollars to the current government's coffers. While the Prime Minister's cup runneth over, skyrocketing food prices are hurting Canadian families. Food, gas and home heating are all getting more expensive. The Prime Minister's high-tax, high-spending agenda cannot be the status quo.

Why is he dragging his heels on getting this country's finances under control right here, right now?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to something as serious as the nation's finances, it is important to separate partisan posturing from the facts. We just heard the posturing. Now for the facts.

A key fact is that this fall the world's two leading ratings agencies, Moody's and S&P, both reaffirmed Canada's AAA credit rating. That is an endorsement of our government's prudent economic stewardship and Canadians should take pride in this collective accomplishment.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Montreal met with the Prime Minister this morning. Again, she implored him to tighten the borders to deal with firearms trafficking. This is not the first time Valérie Plante has asked the Prime Minister to close the borders. Last time, it was to prevent COVID-19 from entering Quebec. In the end, she had to do the federal government's job for it and deploy City of Montreal resources to screen travellers at the airports.

I would hope that this time, the federal government will do its job and deal with firearms at the border itself.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that we are focusing on stopping the flow of firearms across our borders. To combat gun smuggling, we have made investments of more than \$350 million. Through this funding, we have added more than 90 service officers and 19 prosecutors.

On the one hand, the Bloc Québécois members want action, but on the other hand, they do not support the federal government's investments at the border. How do they explain that?

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, more needs to be done, and it must be done now. The most important thing the federal government can do is combat gun trafficking at the border. The guns used in the tragedies that occurred in Montreal were illegal. It is already against the law to possess them, much less sell them, yet they are found in our neighbourhoods. Montreal and Quebec can deploy all the resources they have, but if the federal government does not do its part, guns will continue to find their way onto our streets.

Will the government finally commit to doing everything it can at the border to stem firearms trafficking?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes, absolutely. We are always willing to work with the Bloc, all members of the House and the Quebec government. That is what we must do to stop problems caused by gun violence.

Our government has made that promise, and we will keep it.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were slow to close our borders when COVID-19 emerged. Our allies did it in January 2020, but we waited until March. The World Health Organization has called an emergency meeting today to discuss the South African new variant, but the Government of Canada's own travel advisory does not even mention it. There is no mention of additional caution, screening or any new restrictions at all.

When the world acts, Canada watches and waits. When will the government finally act to protect the health and safety of Canadians and focus on our economy?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her appointment as the transport critic and I look forward to working with her on this and other files that are of concern to Canadians.

Let me reassure Canadians, first, that we are on top of this. We have acted from day one. Canadians know that we will never stop taking measures to protect their health and safety, including testing, vaccination mandates and predeparture testing.

I ask my colleague to work with us on supporting our vaccination mandate and our pre-arrival tests, and making sure that we protect the health and safety of all Canadians.

• (1200)

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of delay, Canadian Blood Services has finally announced its commitment to end the discriminatory blood ban. It is a step in the right direction, yes, but questions remain. Health Canada still needs to approve its submission. The government was told back in June that this submission would be coming.

If the Liberals care about ending this discrimination with the urgency it deserves, on what date can gay men finally donate blood in this country?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has always known that this was a discriminatory practice and it was up to the scientists and Canadian Blood Services to take this decision. We are very grateful to them for this proposal and we look forward to giving an answer in due course.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but that was absolutely shameful as an answer. You have always known this was discrimination. You have known for six months that this submission would be coming, yet you cannot give a date. You cannot outline what that process is.

To the minister, people are watching and waiting. Leadership is about backing up your words with action. Talk and talk and talk. The solution is there. The medical community is behind it. Stop talking and deliver results.

On what date will the government say gay men can finally donate blood in this country?

The Deputy Speaker: I want to remind the members to ask their questions through the Chair and not to refer to another member as "you".

The hon. minister.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who has advocated for this for a very long time, I understand that we have to wait for science and for the people who act in an arm's-length agency. It is up to the agency to actually ask us to do this. We are looking at this proposal and we hope to be able to respond as quickly as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of Canada's active involvement at COP26 in Glasgow.

Canadian climate policies are internationally recognized as being fair and progressive.

Could the Minister of Environment and Climate Change tell us more about what Canada is specifically doing to combat climate change?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Pontiac and congratulate her on her impressive career at the OECD before joining our ranks.

Canada has done a lot of work on combatting climate change. I could talk about everything that we achieved in Glasgow, such as the \$5.3 billion for developing countries, including \$1 billion to help the poorest countries reduce their dependence on coal, and the \$1 billion for nature-based solutions.

Nevertheless, like other countries around the world, Canada still has a long way to go in the fight against climate change.

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[English]

SENIORS

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's aging population has been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in almost every conceivable metric. Instead of providing the compassion, empathy and support that the seniors who built our country deserve, the Liberal government has sadly penalized Canada's seniors who took CERB by lowering their old age security payments.

Could the minister please tell me when the government will rectify this cruel decision, allow our seniors to collect what they have earned and give them the dignity they deserve?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is aware, and I think all members of the House would agree, that our seniors have been disproportionately hit by COVID and they deserve our support. That is one reason that the government supported seniors with \$500 over the summer. It is a reason that we have increased the OAS.

When it comes to the GIS and the CERB, we are very aware of this problem and we are working very urgently to get it fixed.

Oral Questions

I also want to say that we can all help our seniors by getting vaccinated and urging them to get their boosters. My dad had his recently and it has been a real relief to me.

* * *

● (1205)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the first Acadian to assume your role, on behalf of all Nova Scotians, let me congratulate you.

Recently a Nova Scotia indigenous fishing captain was lost at sea, leaving his uncertified crew stranded. The winter lobster season opens this Monday in southwestern Nova Scotia. DFO officials have confirmed that newly licensed moderate livelihood fishers are not required to have their vessels or crew government trained and certified like all commercial fishermen have to.

Why is the government so callously placing the lives of indigenous fishers at risk?

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member opposite for his new appointment.

I have compassion and regret any time someone is challenged as a mariner with problems at sea. The Canadian Coast Guard works very closely with the communities to be there for Canadians and mariners.

With respect to the moderate livelihood fishery, everything we do at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is underpinned by the conservation of stock. This is a priority that is—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

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THE ECONOMY

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our economic crisis has created a mental health and suicide crisis. During the election, I knocked on one man's door and he showed me what he was eating for dinner, cat food. This is not an exaggeration. Food bank users are at an all-time high. Canadians need to know a timeline. When will the government take the right action to support parents, children and seniors so they are not eating cat food?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things our government is moving forward on is affordable child care across the country. This is something that is so important to address affordability for families right across the country. As a parent, I know the high costs of child care are limiting for so many people.

This is a sacred place. During the time of the pandemic, I absolutely understand that we must ensure we are safe and that the people who work here are safe, but to disrespect this place that has a long history is absolutely inappropriate. I hope to never see that happen again in the House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can truly say that I had no intentions of offending anyone or any rule. In the last hybrid session, in order to facilitate ministers who were virtual, I was afforded the opportunity to do exactly what I did earlier today. No offence was made, and I did get the opportunity to at least share what I was going to be doing with the opposition House leader, as I did not want to surprise him. I apologize for not extending the same courtesy to the NDP and the Bloc, but it is no different than what we did during the hybrid sittings last summer.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after that comment by my colleague from Winnipeg North, I would sure like to know if he was authorized to do such a thing. As far as I know, it was not discussed anywhere, not among the whips or the leaders or at the Board of Internal Economy, and there was no motion about it. I would sure like to know where that troubling information comes from.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the member for Winnipeg North has been doing this before and was doing this in the last Parliament, all the more is the shame. I was not aware that members were taking phone calls in the House of Commons. It is completely unacceptable, particularly when, if it does have to do with organizing the Liberal caucus, they can take those phone calls in the lobby, they can pass notes into the chamber, and they can take the call in the lobby and then come into the House and speak to people in the House. There are many ways that the Liberals can organize themselves. If they find it too difficult, that is on them. However, beginning a tradition of taking phone calls in the House of Commons is an absolutely unacceptable way of managing their own problems.

• (1215)

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate what my colleague from Winnipeg North said. No offence was meant to the House. This had been a practice. We will end it.

I have heard, loud and clear, from the House today that members do not feel this is appropriate. I apologize. My understanding was that this was a matter that had been decided and that we were okay to operate on that basis. However, it is essential to me that this place function well. I have heard members. It will not happen again. I appreciate their feedback.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would note that, with respect to other matters that have been brought before the Speaker during this session, there was a lot of discussion with respect to practices, items and debate from the previous session. The member for Winnipeg North said that past practices and discussions from the previous Parliament should be part of this consideration, and I am looking to see if the Chair can also advise the House on whether

Routine Proceedings

that includes the questions of privilege and points of order that were raised by the official opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: We will take this under advisement. I would urge the House leaders and the whips to get together to discuss this. If a decision needs to be made, the Speaker, of course, will come back to the House with that decision.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the annual reports on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act of the Commissioner of Lobbying for the year 2020-21.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), these reports are deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North does not have the floor and is not wearing his mask. It is important that we all follow that rule.

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind members that if they are not speaking, they have to wear their masks.

There being a message from Her Excellency the Governor General, I would ask members to rise.

* * *

[Translation]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2021-22

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2022, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the supplementary estimates (B), 2021-22.

* * *

• (1220)

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. David Lametti (for the Minister of Labour) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code.

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

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PETITIONS

BARBADOS

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of my constituents, who are calling on the Government of Canada to recognize that the country of Barbados has suffered from COVID-19 like the rest of the world, but unlike most developed countries has limited access to vaccines and has a shortfall. At the time of the signing of this petition, less than 50% of the country of Barbados had been vaccinated.

As such, the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to increase the number of COVID-19 vaccines being donated to Barbados to at least 100,000 doses.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present petition no. 10672059.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to commit to upholding the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action by immediately halting all existing and planned construction of the Coastal GasLink project on Wet'suwet'en territory and ordering the RCMP to dismantle its exclusion zone and stand down, schedule nation-to-nation talks between the Wet'suwet'en nation and federal and provincial governments, and prioritize the real implementation of UNDRIP.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind members to bring the petitions to the table, as we do not want everyone circulating throughout the chamber.

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work the pages do, bringing our petitions to the table. Now that we are under the new rules, I guess it does not work.

I am presenting a petition on behalf of Canadians who suffer from ALS. The petitioners are friends and families of these people, and they want Canada to be a leader in ALS research and treatment.

The petitioners note that ALS currently has no cure and people have a life expectancy of two to five years from diagnosis. Once ALS is diagnosed, it is not only the individual but also the friends and families who are greatly affected. The petitioners are calling on the government to pursue the successful trials of some of the drugs that are taking place across Canada. If the government could help pursue them, that would be great.

There is a new drug called AMX0035. It was submitted three to six months ago, and the petitioners are hoping that Canada will get that drug approved.

• (1225)

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from Canadians from across the country who are calling on the House of Commons to enact legislation to fully protect a child not yet born from the beginning of her

biological development as a human being, the same protection granted to every other human being.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third and final petition I am presenting today is a petition from Canadians from across Canada who are concerned about the treatment of the Hazara community in Afghanistan.

This is one of the communities we protected when we were over there. There was formerly a genocidal campaign waged against them. When we were there helping to build Afghanistan, it was great, but now with the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, the Hazara community is once again under threat.

Canadians from across Canada are calling for us to have a memorial day for the Hazara people, recognized on September 25. The petitioners are calling on the Canadian government to recognize September 25 as the Hazara memorial day.

The petitioners want to see real leadership from Canada, and they look forward to the government's response.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be now allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that I have received a request for an emergency debate. I invite the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore to rise and make a brief intervention.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

LABOUR SHORTAGE

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are facing a national crisis. It is not inflation that I want to talk about today, but rather another very important issue affecting our economy and our country, namely, the labour shortage.

This is important because this shortage exists everywhere and on two levels. First, it affects all regions. No region in Canada is spared: grocery stores in Quebec, restaurants in Banff and factories in Ontario. Second, the problem exists in all sectors, including hospitality, tourism and manufacturing. Many employers are seeking employees.

For this reason, we need to discuss Canada's future and how to deal with this problem. We need to come up with solutions and implement them immediately. We also need to figure out how to manage this problem and solve it permanently. We need to listen to business owners, workers and all Canadians who are suffering right now.

For this reason, I am requesting an emergency debate on the labour shortage. Our employers deserve it; our citizens deserve it and Canada needs it.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore for her remarks, but I do not find that the request meets the requirements of the Standing Orders.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FURTHER SUPPORT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There was a minute remaining on the clock for questions for the member for Carleton.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton West.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election as Deputy Speaker.

I want to thank my colleague for Carleton for drawing the direct correlation between the massive spending and our out-of-control inflation. The government likes to pretend that it is a global issue, but I would point out that we have the second-highest inflation rate in the G7 and we are third highest for food inflation, so I do not think it is just a global issue but a made-in-Canada one.

One of my colleagues from the Liberal Party asked where we would cut. However, in the previous Parliament, we heard that the \$80-billion wage subsidy did not go through Treasury Board scrutiny as required under legislation. We saw that money went to wealthy hedge fund managers, Air Canada bonuses and Lululemon, whose market cap at the same time was growing by \$9 billion.

I wonder if my colleague for Carleton would like to comment on this wage subsidy going out of control without any oversight from the government.

• (1230)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have proven again that trickle-down economics does not work. They said that if they printed cash, gave it to government and bought up financial assets, this money would eventually trickle down to the working people.

In fact, it all stayed on the top, and the billionaires got one-third richer in the first six months of COVID while the working class saw its real wages decline. Inflation is now rising twice as fast as

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wages. It is a massive wealth transfer from the working poor to the super wealthy. Conservatives want to reverse the trend, stop the big government, stop trickle-down economics and restore a bottom-up paycheque economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I first want to say that I agree with my colleague from Carleton that trickle-down economics does not work.

I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House to share my speaking time with my newly elected colleague from Terrebonne.

The Deputy Speaker: This being a hybrid sitting of the House, for the sake of clarity I will only ask those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement.

Accordingly, all those opposed to the hon. member's request will please say nay.

Hearing no opposition, I declare the request granted.

The hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I assure everyone in the House that they will not be disappointed by the important speech my colleague from Terrebonne will give. Also, I congratulate her on her election and on being here in the House.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I will not highlight names, but there are members in the House who do not have their mask on.

The Deputy Speaker: I know only a few members are here, but I remind everybody once again to make sure they have their mask on when they are not speaking.

The hon. member for Joliette.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, it is important to remind everyone in the House that the health measures are important.

I want to start by humbly thanking the people of my riding of Joliette for putting their faith in me once again. I also thank all the volunteers and campaigners who pitched in during this election campaign. I am truly honoured to speak on behalf of the people I represent in Joliette.

I will be talking about Bill C-2, regarding the economic impacts of the pandemic.

As members know, the pandemic caused a huge economic downturn, a recession. Some sectors had to be shut down to comply with health measures, and these closures dealt a blow to the economy.

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Over the past century, economics has shown us that the least bad solution during these periods is for the government to step in with income support measures. We had measures such as the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency rent subsidy. These measures obviously need to be specific and well targeted if they are to be effective. This is why the Bloc Québécois was generally in favour of them. The Bloc is in favour of effective spending and against waste.

We now seem to be emerging from the pandemic-induced economic crisis, and that is encouraging. The latest statistics released by the government show that for period 21, there were just over 300,000 applications for the wage subsidy, which is about 10 times fewer than there were a few periods ago. We appear to be on the right track.

However, we all know that some economic sectors, businesses and workers have been hit harder by the pandemic. Some sectors will need more time to get back to the way things were before the pandemic. We think it is important to bring in effective programs to help these sectors overcome the pandemic. We believe in that, because we want to be able to count on the women and men who work in these sectors after the pandemic, once the new normal sets in. In the meantime, however, we have to be prepared to work together for the common good.

In one of our first encounters after her appointment during the last Parliament, I pointed out to the Minister of Finance the importance of targeted measures and predictability. Unlike in previous years, when this was rarely the case, these two components are included in Bill C-2.

The two measures proposed in the bill will apply until May 2022, with the possibility of being extended until July. That provides some important predictability and, for the first time, specific sectors are targeted. This all seems great, and we applaud it.

Right now, the government is telling the House that action is urgently needed. The last period has ended, and the bill must be passed to avoid an interruption in subsidies. Therefore, we must hurry up, so much so that the government wants to invoke closure.

I would like to remind the House that the Liberal Party and its government are the ones responsible for this urgent situation. Did the public really want a general election? It seems that they did not, but the government was hoping to win a majority. Voters said no. Moreover, it took the government two months to recall the House. During that time, we could have been studying Bill C-2 and taking the time to ensure that it adequately meets people's needs and the needs of our economic sectors. We did not get that time, because the government preferred to delay opening the new Parliament and resuming the work of the House.

Now the government is saying that action is urgently needed. That is obvious. It reminds me of a student who has two weeks to study or do their assignment, but who waits until the day before the deadline or the exam and realizes they must get going. Yes, it is urgent, but the student should have started earlier.

• (1235)

The government could stand to learn that lesson. It needs to take responsibility. If Bill C-2 passes second reading, and the Bloc Québécois will soon be sharing our concerns about that possibility, we believe it will be extremely important to take the time to study the provisions properly in committee.

The bill sets out percentages for sectors such as tourism and culture. There are some more targeted and more accommodating proposals. There are measures for other sectors in general. The bill requires a business to have lost 40% or 50% of its revenue before being eligible for assistance. Are these percentages carefully targeted? For the Canada emergency wage subsidy, people will receive a specific percentage. Is that percentage appropriate?

All of this must be studied in committee. We need senior officials to explain the reasoning behind these percentages and share their figures and information. We can then decide whether the policy proposed in this bill is appropriately targeted. We need to do the work. We will have to hear from different groups and sectors in society about whether the measure is good and whether they have any amendments to suggest.

When the House passed economic aid bills under a gag order, the government had to come back to the House a month or two later to say that it was wrong, that it had made mistakes and that it had cut corners. Why? It is because those bills were all passed at the last minute, without taking a step back and without taking the time to study the bills and improve them. Sometimes, when we try to move too fast, it slows us and everyone else down.

At the beginning of the pandemic, it was important to act quickly, so there may have been flaws in the legislation. However, the government could have quickly done better by targeting the measures more carefully and by taking more time to examine the issue, rather than proroguing Parliament or, more recently, calling an election and taking two months before coming back to the House.

I would like to remind members that the wording of Bill C-2, as it now stands, gives the Minister of Finance a lot of discretion. If certain sectors need to be added during the designated assistance period, she would have the power to do so, just as she could change the percentages if needed. Our hope is that, if this bill is passed, the government will use that discretion to support industries properly and respond to needs quickly.

One group is conspicuously absent from this bill: self-employed workers. Yes, there is the rent subsidy, but there is essentially nothing else in the bill. The people I have in mind are self-employed workers in the cultural sector. Supporting them is extremely important, but there is nothing in the bill as it stands. That is an issue I have with the principle of the bill. Why were these workers left out? That is a huge problem.

The government has hinted that there will be a program a few months from now, but how are these self-employed workers supposed to make it through until then with no income? This is very troubling.

Members may recall that, a few years ago, technicians and salaried employees in Quebec's cultural sector were asked to switch to self-employment to better meet the industry's needs. That is what they did, so now we need to help and support the sector. There are lots of self-employed workers in the economy, but the government is not giving them anything in this bill. That is a problem.

This sector is made up of people, women and men who need support. We must help them overcome the effects of the pandemic, which they are still grappling with. We have not forgotten them, and this oversight forces us to question our support for the very principle of this bill.

That was an overview of our thoughts on the bill. Once I have answered members' questions, the House will hear a wonderful speech from my colleague from Terrebonne.

● (1240)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP shares the Bloc Québécois's concerns about the arts and culture sector and its self-employed workers. The problem is that there is no real equivalent to the Canada recovery benefit for that sector, and the Canada emergency wage subsidy is not available to people who are self-employed.

That is why I was a little surprised that the Bloc leader was so quick to support Bill C-2 and say he would vote in favour. It is clear that there is a gap in the bill with regard to self-employed workers in the arts, culture, travel and tourism sectors. This gap needs to be filled, and I would like to know how we can work together to achieve this before the bill is passed.

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

I would like to correct one main fact. The Bloc leader did not say that he would support Bill C-2. We are debating it.

We actually have some serious concerns, in particular with respect to self-employed workers in the cultural sector. When we read the bill, we do not see anything about that. The government is telling us that there will be something, but we do not know when. The Liberals are telling us that this is difficult.

I am sorry, but in a G7 country with considerable financial resources, the state has the means, if the government is so inclined, to quickly put in place measures to support self-employed workers in need, especially those in the cultural sector. The government has the ability to effectively target these support measures.

For that reason, if the bill is passed at second reading, it will be important to take the time to study it in committee in order to discuss the points raised by my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the legislation brings forward the extension of a great deal of benefits for Canadians and businesses in great need. I understand that Bloc members are open to supporting the legislation, and I applaud them for taking into consideration how beneficial this will be for so many people in Canada and our economy.

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I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts on the idea that in any piece of legislation, it is difficult at times to be completely encompassing and that there will be some follow-through to come. Are the essence and principle of the bill something that he could personally support?

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are not yet free from the economic consequences of the pandemic. We need to work together to help those sectors still struggling get through the crisis. We will need these women, men and businesses when the pandemic ends.

The bill includes targeted measures and provides for predictability. That is good. However, it disregards the whole issue of self-employed workers, including those in the cultural sector, which is particularly troubling for us.

Why extend the measures for some sectors and abandon self-employed workers in the cultural sector?

We are looking at this bill and wondering whether we can even support it in principle. Why abandon these women and men in the cultural sector?

This is a serious problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Joliette on his reelection.

I think it was in the National Post this morning, but we heard that there are over a million job vacancies in this country, and we are still waiting for a plan from the government on how it is going to get people back to work. The Liberals brag about the low unemployment rate, but businesses are looking for workers.

In my home province, the oil patch is getting fired up again, with a starting wage of \$55 an hour. People should come on down. Let us get these jobs filled.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, the labour shortage is a serious matter. The government has to do something about it and come up with solutions.

In the long term, there will obviously be the issue of business productivity. There needs to be a major cleanup at the department of immigration and that is something the government has to tackle.

There is also the issue of seniors. Can we put tax measures in place to give them a hand and encourage them to return to the workforce without losing all their pension income?

This is an important issue that we will come back to.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Terrebonne.

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Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my esteemed colleague from Joliette for sharing his time with me, and my other colleagues for allowing him to do so.

I would like to draw everyone's attention to the fact that this is day two of the days of action on violence against women. As we all know, women were the pandemic's first casualties. They suffered psychologically and physically. There were more cases of intimate partner violence during the pandemic. We also know they paid the heaviest economic price. In fact, 68% of those who lost their jobs between October 2019 and October 2020 were women. That is more than two-thirds of the newly unemployed, and it is a huge segment of the population.

In addition, many female entrepreneurs worried they might not be able to make it through the crisis. We know that what women need is financial independence. That is why it is the government's job to protect vulnerable populations and to protect women, and that is why it should offer programs to support that segment of the population.

As my colleague from Joliette mentioned, that is why the Bloc Québécois is in favour of measures to support workers in need and those segments of the population that need the most help. This health crisis has been going on for 20 months, and for 20 months, the government has been proposing measures that we do not feel are targeted enough. On the one hand, business owners are coming to see us and saying that the government needs to do away with benefits for all workers because they are contributing to the labour shortage, but on the other hand, some segments of the population have been left out of Bill C-2, as my esteemed colleague mentioned. I am thinking about cultural workers, mostly. Self-employed cultural workers are not included in this bill, and that is one of its shortcomings. That is why we need to discuss it and work on it. I want to point out that this situation is unacceptable. It is not right that, after 20 months of this pandemic, we are still at this stage and some sectors in need are still being left out. This includes self-employed cultural workers. Currently, they are not covered by the emergency measures. That is because the government called an election, and we are now dealing with a bill that is seeking to speed things up and fails to propose any measures for cultural workers.

We called for a better targeted bill and it took 20 months for the government to introduce one. The government has not done its due diligence for the most vulnerable members of society.

• (1250)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on her first speech in this House. I am really happy to be here on this day with her.

I know that across the country, especially in my riding of North Island—Powell River, there are a lot of seniors whose guaranteed income supplements are being cut back significantly. It is leading to them not having a home. It is very hard to talk to a 79-year-old senior about how they are going to be living on the streets within the next week or so.

Could the member speak about any concerns that she and her party may have about leaving vulnerable seniors so far behind?

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for her question.

The Bloc Québécois is very concerned about seniors. The Bloc Québécois is fighting to put an end to the two age groups being used to determine eligibility for the benefits. As members know, the pandemic hit seniors hard, in terms of both their finances and their health.

That is why we also want to study this bill in committee. We want to look into this type of issue and work on behalf of the seniors we know are suffering because of this pandemic.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada we have over a million job vacancies. Restaurants are closing at four o'clock in the afternoon because they cannot find people to work there. In my riding they are talking about bringing in temporary foreign workers to work in the oil patch. Those are \$55-an-hour jobs that they cannot find people to work for.

I see nothing in Bill C-2 that would help to alleviate the job crisis that we have in this country. What does the member have to say about that?

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, much like my colleague, the Bloc Québécois is concerned about the labour shortage. A number of businesses in Terrebonne have come to tell me that they are having a hard time finding workers.

We are in the middle of a labour shortage, but the shortage has been around since before the crisis. I should point out that this labour shortage could be exacerbated by the CRB, which is why we are calling for more intelligent, targeted measures. This is what the Bloc Québécois is calling for, but that does not mean that we should stop supporting vulnerable populations. Some populations are still vulnerable in this pandemic, in particular self-employed cultural workers. We must continue to support these groups.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Terrebonne on her speech.

I want to talk more about two segments of the population that were mentioned. My colleague raised the issue of women. As critic for status of women, I am a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which had an emergency meeting in the summer of 2020 to look at how the pandemic was disproportionately affecting women.

We cannot deny that some sectors will be further affected, and the bill addresses those sectors. Culture and tourism employ many women, and they will need to be supported to get through this crisis.

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I wonder if my colleague could expand on the issue of seniors, particularly the message that the government sent when it cut the guaranteed income supplement for seniors who were working and support for those who collected the CERB. It is important to support seniors, because there are people over 65 who want to work, who want to contribute to the economy and help with the labour shortage problem. At this point, however, they are being penalized.

I would like to hear more from my colleague on the subject of both seniors and women.

• (1255)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear colleague for her intervention.

It is true that the government often sends rather mixed messages, in particular with this bill and with other measures where we see that certain segments of the population are left to fend for themselves. I am thinking in particular of seniors and women who have lost the most in this pandemic, as I mentioned earlier.

I would like to mention one thing. The Bloc Québécois has been calling for the reform of the EI system for a long time. We find ourselves in a situation where we have to pass another bill 20 months after the start of the pandemic because we have not yet brought in the necessary EI reforms. We would not be debating all of this today if we had a system that would allow self-employed workers, among others, to access EI.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a moment to thank, once again, the constituents of Elmwood—Transcona for having placed their trust in me to represent them in this place. I want to thank my wife, Janelle, and our children, Robert and Noah, who support me in my parliamentary service, as well as all of our family, friends and the many volunteers who contributed to my being here today.

I find this bill and the topic of pandemic supports interesting. I think it speaks to the crossroads that Canada finds itself at, in the face of two great challenges. On the one hand there is the challenge of pandemic recovery, and on the other there is the challenge of the climate crisis; they both raise similar questions.

They raise questions of how to support workers who suddenly see their industry dramatically hurt by forces beyond their control. They both raise the question of how to support vulnerable people who are not able to work through times of crisis and the economic effects of those crises, like inflation, as an example.

They both raise the question of how to direct investment in infrastructure and services in a way that makes us more resilient to the challenges we face. They both raise the question of how we decide who should pay the costs of these investments and what the mechanisms are by which those payments ought to be made. These are just some of the important questions that the pandemic and the climate crisis both raise.

Getting the pandemic recovery right is important, certainly in its own right, but I want to begin with a reminder that these are not questions that are going to be over with the pandemic. These are

questions that we are going to face in the years to come as the climate crisis worsens.

The Liberals have been very clear in introducing this bill that, as far as they are concerned, we are turning the page on the pandemic. If we look around, it is quite clear that we are not past the pandemic. In fact, I heard many Liberal members yesterday in the debate about a hybrid Parliament make arguments about how we are not past the pandemic and how the effects of the pandemic and the imperatives of the pandemic still very much rule our lives.

Certainly, if we look around at different parts of the country, we can see that, in fact, we are in a fourth wave. Even when the public health crisis has passed, I think it is quite reasonable to expect that the economic consequences of the pandemic will extend past the end of the public health crisis and take longer to resolve.

Earlier this week, the Deputy Prime Minister said that Canada has recovered all the jobs lost during the pandemic, and that statistic may be true in terms of the number of available jobs out there. However, it is also true that the unemployment rate is almost 7%. It is also true that the inflation rate is over 4% and that employers are complaining about a labour shortage.

What do all those numbers mean? We often throw figures and statistics out in this place without getting to the core of what those numbers mean for people across the country. They mean that there are many Canadians looking for work, but they are not the Canadians with the skills, the education and the experience that employers are looking for right now for their business. Otherwise, they would find it a lot easier to get that job, and more employers would be satisfied that they can find workers.

It means that even as this mismatch in the labour market is frustrating employers and keeping Canadians who want a job unemployed, both people and businesses are facing rising costs after depleting all of their reserves trying to cope with the economic disruptions of the pandemic. These numbers mean that it is absolutely not the time for the federal government to turn its back on the people who need help the most, yet this is the direction that Bill C-2 takes us.

New Democrats have been very clear that we believe the Canada recovery benefit should have been maintained for the time being and restored to its original level of \$500 per week. We opposed the cut this summer to \$300 per week. We were critical of the government not only for simply ending the CERB and doing it with only two days' notice, but also by choosing not to use the option they had of extending the CERB until November 20 just by regulation.

By a wave of their hand, they could have allowed for another month of support for the almost 900,000 people who were still availing themselves of the financial help under the Canada recovery benefit. They chose not to do that. That still would have meant that the benefits only lasted until a couple of days before we assembled here to talk about next steps.

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● (1300)

We know that the cost of living never went down. In fact, it was quite the contrary, which is why it did not make sense to reduce the benefit. It was at \$2,000 a month. The costs that people were facing for housing, food, home heating and other things went up and the Liberals thought it was time to bring the benefit down, leaving people to wonder how they were supposed to pay more for the essentials with less money in their pockets.

One has to assume it was a simple attempt to starve people back to work: to make sure that they did not have enough from the benefit and maybe they would rejoin the job market. When reducing the benefit to \$300 a week did not work, the government decided to cancel it altogether. The problem is, as I mentioned before, the people who need jobs are not the people employers are looking for. If so, they would be employed. It has already been a month since there has been no CRB support. No one has received CRB support for the last month, yet we have not heard from employers that suddenly they are able to hire the people they need and want to hire in their businesses. That is because other factors are driving the labour shortage.

Consider that many people work in industries that have yet to bounce back. Jobs are not necessarily available in the sectors they had experience and training in, which can make it hard to find work. Consider that many people who were already close to retirement got to see what retirement life would be like, either by working a bit from home, or because they were laid off for a while during the pandemic. To protect their personal health, or just because they found that they could actually get by and they liked retirement life and it was their time to do that, they chose not to go back to work. They had worked hard all their lives and now it was time to take their retirement. There may be more early retirements as more workers are called back to the workplace and employers begin to end work-from-home mandates.

If the Liberals were serious about having the backs of workers until the end of the pandemic, they would be working with employers to identify the jobs they need to fill and the inventory of skills needed for those positions, and then train people off of the pandemic benefit into the jobs that are available instead of simply cutting the benefit. Instead, they chose to reduce and terminate that benefit and financial support that could have made it easier for people to pursue the education and training they needed to get those jobs.

This mean-spirited and ill-conceived approach to wrapping up pandemic benefits does not bode well for the promised reforms to the employment insurance system, because those reforms have to be about financially supporting people while they get the education and training they need to fill the positions that are available in the labour market. The Liberals had an opportunity to do that. With pandemic benefits, they failed to do that and now we have to worry that the same failure will plague the reform of the employment insurance system. I have to say, they are sure taking their sweet time on this. We have known for a long time that there are structural problems with the employment insurance system and we have not seen the Liberals act quickly in order to rectify those.

We talked about the costs of these pandemic programs. It is worth noting that what fails to be mentioned is that at the peak of

the CERB and CRB, about nine million Canadians were availing themselves of those programs. When the program was cut there were fewer than 900,000 people on those programs, which means over a 90% reduction in demand for the program. That means a 90% or more cut in the cost of the program, and that is before we consider that the Liberals cut the amount of the benefit by 40%. The ongoing cost of maintaining CRB for another six or 12 months is significantly less than what we have already paid out in CRB spending.

Even if we accept for the sake of argument that it is time to pivot, as the Deputy Prime Minister has said, the targeted approach that the Liberals are taking fails by its own lights. I take the example of the tourism and hospitality sector. The government's targeted program is based on the wage subsidy program. It is a program that is only going to work for workers who are employed by somebody else, when many people such as independent travel agents are actually self-employed. There is no small number of people in that industry. About half of the independent travel agents fall into the category of being self-employed. About 80,000 or 90,000 are represented by the Association of Canadian Independent Travel Advisors. We are talking about 40,000 to 45,000 people. Those are some of the 800-and-some thousand who were still on the CRB.

● (1305)

That is an industry that is composed of about 85% women. A government that likes to pride itself on gender analysis of its policies clearly has not done its homework here, and there is a gendered impact of the failure to extend a benefit like the CRB, because these women are going to have no income support under this.

[*Translation*]

We spoke earlier about the arts and culture sector where many self-employed workers have no financial support. These people no longer receive financial support such as the CERB because these programs no longer exist. Without an employer, they have no way to receive financial assistance.

[*English*]

Bill C-2 would also ignore the opportunity to address problems with the Canada emergency business account. We have heard from many small businesses, which clearly needed the support the most, that the one-year repayment deadline in order to enjoy the forgivable loan portion of that program is simply unrealistic, because they continue to be in serious economic trouble.

Let us talk about the Canada worker lockdown benefit. When I asked the Associate Minister of Finance earlier today, we heard that it is going to be retroactive to October 23, so it is okay that they cut the CRB with only two days' notice for the people who were still on it. However, the Associate Minister of Finance confirmed earlier today that no region in Canada meets the criteria for the Canada worker lockdown benefit so far, so the fact that it is retroactive to October 23 is completely meaningless. It will not help anyone, because there is no region that meets the criteria in the legislation to date. Maybe there will be down the road, up to May 7. That is the cut-off for the Canada worker lockdown benefit. That is interesting, because the other provisions allow the government, by order in council, to extend those provisions to the end of June or the beginning of July. There is no such provision for the Canada worker lockdown benefit. That will end in May, short of another legislative intervention.

When it came to the CRB, the government decided not to extend the benefits through October and November. They extended the other programs they could, but they chose not to do that for the CRB. When it comes to the CRB's replacement program, the government has created a program that does not cover the time between October 23 and now. The Liberals have also chosen not to give themselves the option to extend that program past May 7. We have to wonder what workers have done to the government to make it feel such a strong sense of retribution.

This is just part of why this bill would really fail to take us in the direction that we have to go, and I think it is going to fail to address some of the immediate economic problems that we have, such as the labour shortage that employers are so keen to solve. It would actually take the government showing leadership and working with employers and employees or workers who are out of jobs to figure out how to match their skills to the jobs that are available.

These are just some of the problems with the bill as written. In fact, the omissions from the bill are worse. The Liberals have failed to take the opportunity to implement a low-income CERB repayment amnesty. We know a lot of people who are already poor took the government at its word when it said that if they needed help they should go ahead and apply for help, and if they had doubts about whether they were eligible for the help that the government had created, they should apply. The government would figure it out later and they would not be punished or persecuted.

I think of the kids who aged out of foster care in Manitoba during the pandemic. They went to the provincial government, because there were no jobs available in the summer of 2020. Let us not kid ourselves. It was not like there were a bunch of jobs on the market that they could have walked into, and the provincial government said they could not apply for help from the province until they had applied for every other avenue of help. The government showed them the website for CERB and directed them to apply there. That was a no-fail application process, so of course those kids were going to succeed and they were going to receive CERB money. They did, and now the federal government is asking that they pay that back. The province sure as hell is not going to give them retroactive social assistance payments to cover the period that they missed because they applied for this federal program. Instead of showing some compassion, the federal government is chasing them down for

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money they do not have. What that will do is make it harder for them to get a proper start in life because they are already starting from behind. That is why we need to see a low-income CERB repayment amnesty in Canada now.

• (1310)

I think of George from my riding, who is on the GIS. He applied for the CERB because he lost some employment income. It turns he just did not meet the \$5,000 qualifying income threshold. He just missed it. Therefore, he has been asked to give that money back.

George filed properly. He paid his taxes on that money, and because he was paid the net amount, he never got the gross amount. The government wants the gross amount back. On top of that, the government has included that income from CERB in what it is demanding back in the eligibility calculation for his guaranteed income supplement. He has had his guaranteed income supplement cut by \$750 a month, while the government asks for the gross amount that it paid him in CERB when all he got was the net amount. His normal income has been shredded by the government's uncompassionate approach to the GIS and its failure so far to fix this problem, which is affecting up to 88,000 seniors across the country.

I want to talk about these clawbacks a bit too. People were told that if they need help to take the help. We were told: "We are here for you. We have your back. We have your back until the end of the pandemic." Seniors who were working to top up their GIS took the government at its word. What they found out this July was that they were not getting a pandemic benefit, they were getting an advance on their guaranteed income supplement for the next year, except they were not told so they did not bank the money.

We know of some people who finally got dental work done. They had problems in their mouth that had been causing them pain and plaguing them for years. They could not afford to fix it before because we do not have any kind of national dental strategy, which is an issue for another day that I am happy to talk about, and it is something that the federal government should get moving on. Therefore, they used some of that money to fix their teeth.

Sometimes people used some of that money to fix their car, which is how they get to work. They used it to pay off bills that they had not been able to pay off and on which the interest was piling up on. These people did not misuse the funds, but it turns out they were spending tomorrow's paycheque without knowing it because the government did not bother to tell them.

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There have been recent media reports that show the government knew about this problem at least as early as May of this year. The GIS reassessment happened in July. Why the government could not be bothered to at least issue a letter to let people know so that they could begin to develop a strategy, I do not know. It is shameful and the government has a real obligation to let them know.

I have to say I was a little shocked this week. I heard the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, in response to a media question on this very point at a press conference, say, "It's a more complicated issue than one would think because there's serious kind of fairness and equity issue for people who may have earned similar amounts in employment income. If a senior worked last year and made an equivalent amount, they too would have lost their GIS or had their GIS potentially reduced, and so we're working on a path forward that recognizes this."

It is interesting because the Liberals have no concept of equity and fairness when it comes to the largest corporations. Only when it comes to the poor, are they willing to nickel and dime.

Let us talk about the Canada wage subsidy program and quote from the good work of *The Globe and Mail* on this issue. This is from May 10, 2021:

Beyond a handful of hedge funds, some of the largest wealth managers in the country - household names such as Franklin Templeton, CI Financial, Gluskin Sheff & Associates - collected [the wage subsidy]. Collectively, these three companies manage close to \$110 billion of assets in Canada. The Scotiabank Hedge Fund Index, which measures the monthly performance of Canadian-domiciled hedge funds with assets under management of at least \$15 million, shows an average return of 11% in 2020, the best year for the industry in a decade.

Another wage subsidy recipient was the hedge fund JM Fund Management appears in the same article:

It's JM Catalyst Fund had such a good 2020, with outsized returns not seen by the fund since 2016, that it was ranked as the third-best performing hedge fund at the 2020 Canadian Heritage Fund Awards.

Where is the concern for equity and fairness there? Companies who had competitors who did not take the wage subsidy are not being asked to pay any of that back, and they walked off with tens of millions of dollars, but God forbid that somebody who is poor got an extra couple of thousand dollars to fix their car, fix their teeth or pay off a late bill.

That is why I think this bill gets us off on the exact wrong foot for the pandemic recovery, because that should be about making sure that the people at the top are paying for the recovery and the people at the bottom are getting the help they need, and this is not what we would be doing with this bill.

• (1315)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's speech laid out the intricacies of the Canadian economy. It also laid out the intricacies of the average Canadian's everyday life and the fact that it takes a steady hand and a diligent government to ensure that there are no unintended consequences.

Now we see a job market with a million empty jobs in this country. A million jobs are looking for a person because of the actions

of the government. We see out-of-control inflation too. I do not see anything in the bill that would help fill those one million jobs.

I am wondering if the hon. member sees anything in the bill that would help alleviate the jobs crisis we have in this country.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the CRB has been done for a month already. It is pretty clear to anyone who is paying attention that there will be no financial help for any of the people who were collecting the CRB. It will only continue for those who were receiving their help through the wage subsidy, a program that we know in some cases, like in Alberta, was actually used to fund scab labour while workers were locked out.

No, this is not going to do anything for the labour market, because contrary to the claims of the Conservatives that I have heard many times, it was not the pandemic benefits that were causing the problems in the labour market. There is a lot going on in the labour market. We had a labour shortage before the pandemic.

If the people who were receiving these benefits are going to help with the labour shortage, there is clearly a need for education and training so that their skills are suitable for what employers are looking for. That is a training mandate. It is the kind of training mandate that was cut out of employment insurance, which was then unemployment insurance, by the Liberals in the nineties and was never put back in. It is the kind of thing that has to be part of employment insurance reform going forward. The bill does not give me a lot of confidence that the government understands that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. The Bloc Québécois shares the same concern about cuts to the guaranteed income supplement for seniors.

I do not think the situation can only be fixed through legislation. As of August, we could suggest considering the CERB as employment income instead of a benefit. An administrative fix could apply here.

Considering that we have known about this situation since August and it is still possible to make corrections without amending a bill, does my colleague agree that the government has been dragging its feet?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

As soon as this government was elected, and before that even, we asked several times what it needed to correct this situation. We asked what we needed a bill for, but it refused to provide a clear answer.

In my experience, that means no, it does not need a bill to ensure that seniors can receive their own benefits.

The government could have fixed this in August, but it decided to wait. We know that because of that decision, seniors will end up homeless.

This is an urgent matter and that is why I requested an emergency debate in the House of Commons on Wednesday.

The government can fix this. It has several mechanisms at its disposal to do so. It is simply a matter of will.

We are trying to create that will here in the House of Commons, now that we are assembled here.

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Elmwood—Transcona tries to give this false impression, an impression that could not be further from the truth, that the government does not understand or does not care.

When the pandemic hit, this government came to the table. We created a program called CERB from nothing. We supported wage subsidy programs and business rent subsidies. We gave direct payments to seniors and people with disabilities.

This government understood the need and still understands the need. This legislation in principle extends the benefits for thousands of Canadians.

Will the NDP do the right thing and recognize that the principle of this bill continues the supports Canadians need today, and get behind it and vote for it?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, this bill does not extend benefits; it restricts benefits. That much is very clear. If the Liberals care a whit, and I hope they do, at the next cabinet meeting on Tuesday, they can solve the problem of the GIS for seniors and fix the problem of the Canada child benefit for all the low-income families that are also experiencing a clawback.

Companies on the wage subsidy program got a handout from the government. Some of them did not need it and have not been asked to return it, and the poorest of the poor, it turns out, just got an advance, without being told that it was an advance, on their financial support.

If the Liberals care, they should fix it. It does not matter how much they care. They can sit around and have a caring circle. It does not do anything for anyone. What we need is a fix, so they should get on it.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the excellent speech by the member for Elmwood—Transcona demonstrates why he is such a valued member of this caucus.

What we are seeing is an extreme case of compassion fatigue from the government. Have my Liberal colleagues lost the ability to care? Are they just done? Have they run out?

We live in a strange time. I have never seen so many “help wanted” signs in my riding. As the member for Elmwood—Transcona said, those jobs have not filled up in correspondence with the end of CERB benefits a month ago. There is no correlation. To the nar-

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ative that workers receiving CERB were living high on the hog, let me remind the House that \$2,000 a month equals a little over \$12 an hour. This is not a wage that families can get by on.

I am wondering if my colleague can expand on the theme that these benefits were really just holding the line and that we still have too many people in this country who are the working poor and cannot advance because of all the costs they are facing.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we know is that well over half of the people who were still on the Canada recovery benefit when it was terminated were making far less than \$20,000 a year prior to the pandemic. That means they were already in low-paying jobs or were working part time. Those are not necessarily the kinds of jobs that employers are trying to fill right now, so there is an obvious mismatch between who is available to work and the kinds of jobs that are available.

The question is, if people have no financial support, how are they supposed to pursue the education and training they need to get those jobs when their families are in crisis and they are trying to figure out where they are going to get their next meal or where to sleep if they have been evicted from their home? That is not how to train the workforce for tomorrow. It is not the law of the jungle and everybody fends for themselves.

If we actually want to respond to the needs of employers, we need a plan and it needs to be resourced. That is good for workers and it is good for employers, but it is not what the government is doing.

I call on Liberals to get with the program and figure it out. They are going to have to figure it out because it is the kind of model we are going to need for employment insurance.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the NDP and the Conservative Party have different theories on politics and economics. I am wondering if the member shares my thought that if we had not had a needless, useless election, the NDP, the Liberal Party and the Conservatives could have sat down and started to figure some of this out.

• (1325)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, there is certainly no question that we should not have had an election when we did. There was no reason for the election. There was actually an all-party recommendation on this out of the procedure and House affairs committee after it studied the question of a pandemic election. It recommended against having an election unless the government lost a confidence vote in the House, which it never did. There was also a fixed election date law on the books that said there should not have been an election unless the government lost the confidence of the House, which it did not. There is absolutely no question that we should not have had the election.

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That thought occurred to me a few times in the debate yesterday when I heard the Liberals talk about this. As it happens, the New Democrats support having a hybrid capability because we recognize we are not out of the pandemic. However, it was hard to fit the Liberals' arguments about why it was okay to have an election with why we need a hybrid Parliament. That is their contradiction, not ours.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, good afternoon to you and all of my colleagues who are here in person and here virtually. I wish a happy Friday to everyone.

It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-2, which continues to support Canadian businesses and workers from coast to coast to coast.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. He is a big supporter of the agricultural community in Canada and a great friend.

I am pleased to take part in today's debate on this very important bill, Bill C-2, which would provide and continue to provide essential supports that are needed now to continue Canada's robust economic recovery from the COVID recession.

When the crisis hit, our government rapidly rolled out a full range of effective broad-based programs to support Canadians through our country's greatest economic shock since the Great Depression. Yes, we had the backs of Canadian businesses, we had the backs of Canadian workers and, most importantly, we had the backs of Canadian families. These actions were necessary and unprecedented in our lifetime.

[*Translation*]

These programs were a lifeline for workers and businesses across the country. They protected millions of jobs and helped hundreds of thousands of Canadian businesses get through the worst of the pandemic.

However, these emergency measures were always meant to be temporary to help us to get through the crisis. Fortunately, we are now entering a new phase that looks very different from the darkest moments in our fight against COVID-19.

[*English*]

Thanks to one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the world, including almost 90% in the region of York, the region I represent in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, most businesses are safely reopening and employment is now back to prepandemic levels. However, we know there are still workers and businesses whose livelihoods are being affected as a result of the pandemic-related restrictions on activities. This is why it is important to pivot our support measures to more targeted measures that would provide the help where it is needed most and continue to create jobs and growth while prudently managing government spending.

I am happy to say, which I believe the Deputy Prime Minister also said, that Moody's and Standard & Poor's have reaffirmed and confirmed our country's AAA credit rating. We are only one of a few countries in the world to maintain an AAA credit rating from

the rating agencies, which is great to see and is thanks to the hard work of all Canadians.

Some may wonder how we can tell we have reached a turning point in Canada's economic recovery from the COVID recession. Allow me to highlight the markers of our government's successful economic response plan that have brought us to where we are today.

[*Translation*]

Last year, in the throne speech, our government promised to create one million jobs, a goal that we reached in September of this year, when Canada recovered all of the jobs that were lost at the height of the recession caused by COVID-19. That means three million jobs were recovered since the spring of 2022. In fact, according to the Statistics Canada labour force survey from October, the reported unemployment rate is now 6.7%, the lowest it has been since the beginning of the pandemic. The number of jobs continues to be above the prepandemic level.

In fact, Canada's job recovery rate is well ahead of that of the United States, which has recovered only 91% of the jobs it lost at the height of the pandemic.

● (1330)

[*English*]

It is a welcomed sight that we can all see the differences between this fall and the one prior. Shops and businesses are open in my riding and from coast to coast to coast. Canadians are doing their part to make sure we have a safe reopening by rolling up their sleeves to get their vaccines and following public health advice. Children, including two of my three children, are also back in school, enabling parents to fully participate in the workforce. The early learning and childhood agreements our government is putting in place, with a total of nine agreements signed to date with the provinces and territories, are already making a difference in the lives and wallets of families across this beautiful country.

We have accomplished all of this together while sticking to health restrictions that have saved lives and putting in place the necessary resources and supports Canadians and Canadian businesses needed to survive, the small local businesses in all our ridings that we have the privilege of representing.

However, as welcome as these economic markers and signs of recovery are, our government recognizes that it has been an uneven recovery and some of the necessary health measures that continue to save lives, while less restrictive than before, are still restricting some economic activity. What this means for our government is that we are entering what I hope and believe will be the final pivot in delivering the support needed to ensure a robust, inclusive and sustainable recovery that benefits all Canadians.

[Translation]

The service industry continues to drive economic recovery, but progress in the retail sector has been partly offset by losses in other sectors, such as the restaurant and accommodation sector. As the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance indicated in October, a number of business revenue support programs have ended now that the economy has reopened.

[English]

With this change, and through Bill C-2, which we are debating today and which I hope all opposition parties will support, we are moving from the very broad-based support, which was appropriate at the height of our lockdowns, to more targeted measures that would provide help exactly where needed. This would include extending the Canada recovery hiring program until May 2022, which would help us finish the fight against COVID-19 and continue to ensure lost jobs are recovered as quickly as possible.

For eligible employers with current revenue losses of about 10%, our government would provide a subsidy rate of 50% to enable employers to hire the staff they need to grow and thrive.

In addition, our government is proposing to deliver targeted support to businesses that are still facing significant pandemic-related challenges. Let us think about the businesses, such as the hotels in a typically busy tourist designation that has not seen a return to the usual amount of visitors as in years past, or alternatively, a curling club that is just beginning to see more patrons as public health restrictions ease and Canadians begin to engage more in the recreational activities they enjoyed prior to the crisis.

These are examples of the businesses that still need our support, this chamber's help and assistance as we push to fully recover from the COVID-19 recession.

[Translation]

That is why our government wants to provide support through three new programs for businesses still grappling with major pandemic-related challenges. The first is the tourism and hospitality recovery program, which would provide support to, for example, hotels, tour operators, travel agencies and restaurants with wage and rent subsidies of up to 75%.

Next is the hardest-hit business recovery program, which would provide support to other businesses that have faced deep losses, with wage and rent subsidies of up to 50%.

Last is the local lockdown program, which would provide businesses that face temporary new local lockdowns up to the maximum amount available through the wage and rent subsidy programs. These programs will be available until May 7, 2022, and the proposed subsidy rates will be in effect until March 13, 2022. From March 13 to May 7, 2022, the rates will be reduced by half.

• (1335)

[English]

In conclusion, the economy continues to reopen and jobs are being created. People are being vaccinated. Children from ages five to 11 are now receiving theirs, and boosters are being offered to eligible Canadians. Restrictions are carefully being eased in our com-

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munities and at our border. The time has come to adapt our income and business support measures to these better and happier circumstances.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak on Bill C-2. I hope all opposition parties will support this important legislation.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his thoughts on this bill. I would like to once again congratulate him on his re-election.

In northern Ontario, in the Kenora riding, one of the greatest economic issues we are facing right now is a severe labour shortage. I do not believe there is much, if anything, in this bill that would address that.

I would like to ask my friend across the way if he feels that Bill C-2 would address the labour shortages across the country. If not, could he fill us in on what measures the government would be taking to do so?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his re-election.

With regard to Canada's economy prior to the pandemic, we had what was the lowest unemployment rate on record, with a need for more newcomers to come to Canada and for more upskilling of Canadian workers, improving their human capital. We will continue to do that.

We have recovered very quickly from the pandemic. Why? Because the programs we put in place, such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy, CEBA, CERB and programs like the regional relief and recovery fund, funds that were directed across Canada to help businesses maintain that attachment between employers and employees. We did that.

That is why we recovered faster, that is why our job market is robust and that is why we continue to attract newcomers to this country, including, I believe, a northern pilot project with IRCC that is bringing newcomers to Kenora and other parts of northern Ontario.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

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I have a few questions for him. First of all, we have heard a lot today about self-employed workers who are not getting support, particularly in the cultural sector, but there are also other self-employed people whose businesses have not recovered. Is the government open to the possibility of helping those individuals?

In addition, under the hardest-hit business recovery program, a business must have lost more than 50% of its revenue in order to obtain 10% support. Is the government open to reviewing those percentages? Perhaps 10% is enough for large corporations, but for SMEs, 50% of revenue is huge. Some additional support might be needed there.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on those two questions.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, it is very important for our government to help all businesses across the country.

[*English*]

It is very important for us to help all enterprises in Canada, but also all sectors. If there are ideas within the House that need to be brought forward, obviously those should bring them forward. That has been our motto since the beginning of the pandemic. That is how we have gotten our legislation even better than on the first iteration.

Most important, this hardest-hit measure that we have put in place in Bill C-2 falls under the Canada emergency wage subsidy, which I remind all members in the House assisted 5.5 million workers and literally hundreds of thousands of firms to maintain that attachment between employer and employee.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hopefully the member can answer this specific question.

For a business like the Windsor casino in my municipality, hundreds, if not thousands of workers were shut out of their jobs through government intervention with regard to closures. The re-opening has not allowed them to get enough weeks to qualify for employment insurance and they appear not to be eligible for this program. Could the member let us know if that is the case? If not, those workers will have to go on welfare. Will the government deal with that situation? There are others, but it is a good example.

We have thousands of people who did not have the ability to get the weeks they needed to qualify for employment insurance. By the rules I see in the bill, Bill C-2, they are basically being pushed onto welfare. Is that the government's plan? Just to push them onto welfare?

• (1340)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, the member for Windsor West and I have worked on Canada-U.S. relations. Our government, since day one, has had the backs of Canadian workers, Canadian families and Canadian employers. We will continue to do that until the end of the pandemic.

We are pivoting to more targeted measures. We have had very broad-based measures. We know that Canadians are back to work. We know that a lot of sectors have recovered, but we will continue to assist and aid those sectors that continue to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I rise for the first time in the House to discuss a bill, I want to thank all of the constituents of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, my wife, Kathryn, and my son, who is on his second election already even though he is only two and a half. He is going to be a super-volunteer later in life.

Today we are discussing Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19. I want to thank the Public Health Agency of Canada, which has been working hard since March 2020 and probably since February 2020 when we found out about this virus.

The situation we are in now compared to the beginning of the pandemic is good news. Our health authorities are doing excellent work. Dr. Paul Roumeliotis has done excellent work in my riding and I am sure that the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry agrees with me on that.

The vaccine is now approved for children aged five to 11, which is good news. I know that clinical trials are under way. Dr. Tam, our excellent chief public health officer, said last week that clinical trials for children under the age of five were under way. This is something that affects me personally, and I hope that these clinical trials will be successful for our children. There is no question that if the trials are successful my child will be vaccinated. That is the responsible thing to do.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on workers and small businesses. The COVID-19 lockdown measures have been very difficult. I know that everyone has spoken to all kinds of business owners and self-employed workers. I have had a number of conversations with hair salon owners who lost all revenue overnight and no longer knew how they would pay the bills at home. That is why the Canada emergency response benefit, the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy were created.

Even in my riding, we helped several businesses move online given that people could not go out to shop and had to stay home. Our government implemented measures to help businesses grow their online services. The Prescott-Russell Community Development Corporation did excellent work at home to ensure that several businesses had an online presence.

When we made these announcements on July 1, it is true that the CERB was changing. However, everyone knew that it would end on October 23, 2021. Shortly after that, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, together with the Prime Minister, made an announcement about the main components of Bill C-2, which we are discussing today.

I obviously support Bill C-2 because I believe that it targets the crux of the problem. When we were locked down, there were no jobs available. All the stores were closed and everyone was asked to stay home. Today, we have heard from several parties that there is a labour shortage. It existed even before the pandemic, which has made it worse. We have a support program for certain people who have lost income, and that is the purpose of the programs announced today. If a province or a municipality ever has to lock down again, I am pleased to say that we will be there to answer the call.

• (1345)

[English]

It is called the Canada worker lockdown benefit, and it is important. Hopefully we will not go back there, but if we do, and a province decides to implement lockdown measures, then at least our constituents will have something to go back on to help them pay for groceries and whatever expenses they have related to their home.

There is another important one. We have all had discussions with the tourism sector and the restaurant sector. When the economy opened, they were not able to take advantage of a fully reopened economy because they were limited by being asked to ensure that customers were six feet apart, so they could not have as many restaurant tables in their restaurants. Obviously, that has a direct impact on their revenues, which is why the tourism and hospitality recovery program is important to help them get through this pandemic as the economy reopens.

[Translation]

Another important measure deals with the hardest-hit sectors of our economy. I had the opportunity to talk to people from 417 Bus Line, who told me that a good portion of their company's income is related to school transportation, which has resumed, but that they are still missing the income generated by the charter buses that transport tourists to various communities.

I am pleased to say that the measures we are announcing today will help that company. I want to tell the Laplante family that I heard what they had to say, as did the minister, our government and the Prime Minister.

It should be noted that it costs between \$15,000 and \$20,000 just to get a bus back on the road after it has been parked for two years. Obviously the measure that we are announcing here is not directly related to the cost of getting these buses back on the road, but it will help cover other expenses, such as the cost of rehiring workers later.

We all wish that the measures we have announced were not necessary, but we have a responsibility as a government. We have a responsibility to manage risk, and that is what these measures do. They will be available to help our businesses if necessary. These businesses will have access to programs that will help them grow or deal with costs associated with any new lockdown measures.

The opposition parties have identified some flaws in these measures, and I invite them to join the conversation. We introduced a bill, but we are definitely open to certain amendments if necessary.

Government Orders

That is part of the debate. I would also encourage parliamentarians to discuss Bill C-2 with their constituents. If there are flaws in the bill, it is our responsibility to find ways to correct them. I think the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance are open to those conversations.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Bill C-2 is important to Canadians and our businesses. It puts forward tools to help our businesses, but it will not be the only way to meet those needs. Let me point out that we have a Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario and that we are seeing positive spinoffs. The agency is also doing excellent work by making interest-free loans available to entrepreneurs and businesses so they can buy new equipment or acquire new technology to help them get through the pandemic.

The message I want to send today is that our government has always been there to meet the needs of our business owners, our workers and our fellow citizens. In closing, I would like to once again thank the voters of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

• (1350)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I want to remind members who are joining us virtually to put their hand up if they want to ask a question online.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton West.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have had the pleasure of serving together on the government operations committee for six years. I hope to see both of us again on OGGO, despite what he may wish.

My colleague probably knows that the last time around with the wage subsidy, we had a lot of criticism, as it was going to wealthy hedge fund managers, big corporations and Chinese communist state-owned companies. We asked the previous Treasury Board president if the \$80 billion of new spending went through the required Treasury Board approval process, and the minister stunned us all by saying it had not.

I am wondering if my colleague could assure us that the new spending in Bill C-2 has gone through the Treasury Board approval process, as required by the Treasury Board framework.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question and also for his confidence in me knowing every procedure of the Treasury Board. I would remind him that I am not the president of the Treasury Board, but I know her, and I know that she would make sure that it goes through a rigorous process.

Government Orders

With regard to the member's previous comments about the wage subsidy, obviously we have set rules in place, and on those who have broken the rules, I have confidence that the good folks at the Canada Revenue Agency will do the work necessary to get our dollars back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the people of the riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue for putting their trust in me once again. I am very honoured. I would also like to thank my wife, Emilie, and my children, Léon and Jules, for all the sacrifices they make so that I can represent the people of my riding. I also want to thank my team and the volunteers who helped out during the election campaign. I am grateful for their contribution.

That being said, we could all have done without this election, especially considering the results. The government's goal was obviously to get a clear mandate to better manage the pandemic. In the end, the response from Canadians showed that what we were doing was good.

One of the first measures announced by the new government was to abolish the CRB. However, the Liberals did not talk about that during their election campaign, even though the campaign should have been used to promote pandemic management measures.

In the context of Bill C-2, there are also self-employed workers in the cultural sector who have been left out.

The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell seems prepared to talk about it in order to improve the situation. What can we do to help people, the self-employed workers in the cultural sector?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his re-election and thank him for the question.

The Bloc's position on the possible reintroduction or elimination of CERB has never been clear. It is confusing. I could definitely quote several comments made by the Bloc leader indicating that he absolutely wanted to eliminate the CERB under the pretext of a worsening labour shortage throughout Quebec and Canada.

As for the member's question, I would remind him that the purpose of CERB was to make up for income lost because of the lockdown. This will also be the case for the Canada worker lockdown benefit.

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his presentation today.

The concerns in my riding are growing every day. I have food processors who cannot find employees. They bring them in as temporary foreign workers. Now changes are being made, and they are not tied to those jobs anymore. The employers pay the cost of bringing them in, and they are leaving those jobs to go elsewhere.

Our food security and food availability for Canadians is at risk because of the policy of this government and the inability of em-

ployers to find workers. What is this government going to do to make sure that we have workers available in our food growing and processing sectors so that we can continue to feed Canadians affordably? We have seen the inflation climbing and grocery prices going out of control. What is this government going to do to bring this under control?

● (1355)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-2 is not about shortages of labour, but I assure my hon. colleague that if he has solutions to the lack of labour for food processing, I would love to sit down with him and hear him out.

I know that the flexibility within the temporary foreign worker program was something that, back in April 2020, all the food processors were asking for, and I would say to them simply that they are competing against themselves, which is okay. That is good for workers.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the chamber today and join colleagues in this important discussion.

This is my first opportunity to take up more than a few minutes in the House, and I want to thank all of my constituents, all the folks in my community, for their support over the last three years. My community has had three federal elections in three years that have returned me to this place, and so while we are very practised at elections, we are very much looking forward to being able to get down to the business of the nation.

I would not have been elected any of those three times if it were not for the support first and foremost of my family: my wife Amanda and our wonderful children Luke, Ama, Michaela, James and Nathan. We are not quite adding one child between each election, but I would appreciate all members' support in giving us some time as we adjust to our growing family.

In addition to the growth in the size of my family over that time, of course we all have to learn our new roles and support each other. I have been supported tremendously by my wife Amanda. Parliamentarians, folks in this place, know how much our partners and spouses give to us in terms of their support and time. I can never thank Amanda enough. I love her. I appreciate her making it possible for me to be here.

In addition to the support from my family, the support from my team has been exceptional. To all of them, and hopefully I will have an opportunity to take advantage of Standing Order 31 to thank some of them a little later on, I thank them, particularly Joan Lahey and everyone who helped her in her efforts.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. We are looking forward to hearing what my neighbour to the east has to say. We just heard from his neighbour to the east, but in response to that, I am very excited to hear what the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry has to say.

Government Orders

Today we are talking about Bill C-2 and these pandemic measures. This pandemic started 20 months ago in the spring of 2020. The pandemic measures we introduced in March of 2020 were done unanimously by all members in this place. We took a look at what Canadians needed, what we thought they might need in the face of these unprecedented times we were facing, and it was an all-hands-on-deck approach.

That help did not happen without a hard look from the official opposition and the other opposition parties. The government, and let us be fair, was faced with a situation that had not been seen in modern times. It proposed measures, some of which appeared as though they would have been adequate and some that appeared to be wholly inadequate. The government was able to put forward measures, with the support and the help from opposition parties and all members in this place, to adequately support Canadians. I think of the emergency wage subsidy as one of those measures that was vastly improved with the help of the opposition.

One of the first things, in those chaotic first days of the pandemic, the government looked to do was introduce legislation that would have given them the ability to tax and spend without parliamentary oversight for nearly two years. That is incredibly concerning. We know response to the pandemic is very important, but it also requires proper scrutiny. It requires the voices of all members of this House to represent their constituents.

What have we been hearing? First of all, we heard from the government that we had to have an election this summer because there were things that had to be taken care of right away. It was urgent, an urgent election. Without having lost the confidence of the House, the Prime Minister triggered an election via the Governor General and off we went to the doorsteps, where we heard from constituents.

● (1400)

I will circle back to what we heard from constituents, from the folks in our communities and from communities across the country.

The election happened and those of us in the room were elected. Hats off to everyone who put their name forward in the election and ran as a candidate. It is such a critical part of our democracy to have people with different perspectives, all looking for a better Canada, putting their name on the ballot. We elected 338 members, and then we waited and we waited for Parliament to be recalled. It was two months before we returned to this place, just this past Monday. It does not seem urgent. It does not seem like the government was ready to deliver on its plan.

The Liberals' plan up to this point has overseen some pretty scary stuff, some really challenging times. We have heard that the inflation crisis gripping our country is okay. We have heard it is the same as countries around the world. I guess it depends on which data set they want to compare it to, but it certainly is not okay.

When inflation is the highest it has been in my adult life, the highest it has been in 18 years, at 4.7%, vastly outstripping wage increases that most Canadians will receive, it is a tax on everything. The price of everything has gone up. Feeding a family, putting gas in a car and heating a home is costing more and more. The percent-

ages by which they have increased vary, but certainly energy costs are through the roof.

The plan we have seen from the government has delivered excruciating price increases. We have also heard that the government is going to have a windfall on account of having taxes on higher prices. I am not reassured that the Liberals are going to spend it well. I am very concerned about that. I think about one of their jobs plans from the pandemic where they spent \$100 million to create 100 jobs. Certainly the benefit to those folks who had the jobs created or the spinoff from each of those jobs was not \$1 million, at 100 jobs costing \$100 million.

We have to allow Parliament to do its work. We have to dig into this stuff and take a look at what measures Canadians really need. Are we spending too much? For all the worthy programs that have been put forward and for all the programs that were managed well, some were not and they have been exploited by organized crime and bad actors.

Therefore, now is not the time to continue the money presses and printing cash to pay for programs that not only can we not afford, but in some cases we just do not need them anymore. We need to ensure that we support the job creators. We need to ensure that we support employers, so they can welcome workers back into their workplaces. We need to ensure that we allow people to have that dignity of work, that return to work and that return to normal for which we long. That is what we have been working for throughout the COVID pandemic, surviving lockdown after lockdown. Now it is time to get back to business. That means shutting off the printing presses and focusing on doing what only government can do. Let us match up employers and workers, and return our economy and Canada to the front of the pack.

That is what we need to see from the government. The plan we have had to this point has not delivered the prosperity Canadians should have. Let us not compare bad data with bad data or compare outrageous other countries that have bad economic performance as well. Let us return Canada to its leading position. That is where we deserve to be. That is what Canadians expect from us. That is what they elected us to do.

I look so forward to working with my colleagues to return Canada to that leading position.

● (1405)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions, and I will give my colleague the opportunity to answer either one of them. Ideally, it would be nice for him to answer both of them.

The first question is in regard to the bill itself. Will the Conservative opposition support a bill that would continue the support for small businesses and people from coast to coast to coast? It is a yes or no type of thing.

Government Orders

Second, can the member tell us how many of his colleagues have not been fully vaccinated?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am so disappointed but unsurprised by the comments from the member for Winnipeg North. Every time the Liberals have the opportunity, they look to politicize the COVID-19 pandemic.

Do members know where I am from? I am from a riding that is in the health unit with the highest vaccination rate in this country and in this province, because along with my constituents, we took the politics out of vaccines. We did not pit one neighbour against another neighbour. We supported each other, and when we were concerned about someone with respect to following public health advice, we spoke to them. We made local physicians privately available to people for off-line conversations. There was none of this nonsense about trying to pit neighbour against neighbour.

We hear a lot about team Canada from these guys. It is disingenuous at best. Canadians deserve better than that nonsense. I got vaccinated. If the member did, I am glad he did, but if Canadians have not and they need answers to their questions, let us help them get those answers. In the meantime, let us get on with business, stop the shenanigans and cut out these questions.

If we divide Canadians, we are never going to get the results we are looking for. That is absolutely not what they elected us to do. Shame on that member.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, without getting into a heated debate on vaccination, I must say that doing one's part means getting vaccinated, and that is important to point out.

I have a question for my hon. colleague. If I may summarize what he said, in his opinion, the emergency measures are a waste. Does he not believe, as we in the Bloc Québécois do, that this crisis is not over and there are still segments of the population that need this assistance?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is my first time responding to the member since her election, and I welcome her to this place to do the work that we do for our constituents.

Certainly, I will chalk it up to an interpretation challenge, but supporting Canadians is not a waste. However, we need to be careful and specific in how we do it. There are challenges that remain, but we have seen undisciplined and untargeted spending from the government, and the quantitative easing worth half a trillion dollars that they have sprayed out with their money cannons since April 2020 needs to be curtailed. We need to focus only on the areas that require support from government.

• (1410)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to talk about the waste that did happen in regard to the programs being handed out. With the software programs, all of the checks and balances were removed, and money was not only wasted but went underground to criminals and

from multiple accounts to one bank account. How in the world can we trust the government to do this right this time?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the programs put forward by any government require scrutiny. We have seen that the current government needs more scrutiny than most, and certainly some of the reports we have seen of late with respect to abuse of pandemic programs are very troubling indeed.

We are going to need to make sure that whatever the government proposes has all the checks and balances, and that requires all parliamentarians working to check the government's homework, because it has proven time and time again that, given the opportunity, it is going to make mistakes that cost Canadians money we cannot afford.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House to give my first speech in the 44th Parliament. I want to start off by thanking the wonderful people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for returning me to the chamber once again. I am very grateful each and every time I come to the nation's capital and into the chamber to represent my community at a federal level. It is an honour and a privilege and not something I take lightly in the work that I do and will be doing in the House in the coming months and years, or however long this Parliament may last.

Since it is my first time to be able to speak at length, I want to acknowledge and thank my family and numerous friends and supporters who not only have been involved during the recent election campaign but continue to support me and my work in many ways, both personally and professionally. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my staff, both in my Cornwall constituency office and here on the Hill.

[*Translation*]

At the same time, it is always an opportunity for me to speak a little French. It is a work in progress. There is a francophone community in my riding, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. One of the advantages of being in the House is that it gives me the opportunity to study a second language. I am a francophile, and I know how important the francophone community is. I study every week at the ACFO in Cornwall with my teacher, Sonia, to improve my second language.

[*English*]

We are finally back to work here. Sixty-two days after election day we have the opportunity to gather in Ottawa and get back to the work that people sent us to do. After \$610 million were spent, it did not change the seat count here much, but here we are several months later, dealing with a bill as we continue to try to get past COVID.

Government Orders

This is an economic bill on government spending and there are a few things that I want to take some time to talk about specifically. The member for Yorkton—Melville just asked a good question of the previous speaker about a few areas of concern that I am hoping to use my time today to highlight. I want to highlight what I feel the government has perhaps not learned from previous support programs that have been offered as we get through the pandemic.

A few weeks ago or earlier this month, intelligence reports came out that were shared by a wide variety of Canadian media and were very concerning. The headline of an article read “Organized crime ‘knowingly and actively’ exploited federal pandemic benefits: intelligence reports” and “FINTRAC not sure total amount of CERB/CEBA funds may have gone to organized crime”. I also want to acknowledge the great work, at both provincial and municipal levels in my riding in the city of Cornwall, of a service manager for various provincial social services programs, who outlined a number of potential and actual fraud cases in the applications for benefits.

As this pandemic unfortunately continues, and hopefully we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel, the one thing I look for when I see a new piece of legislation in the rounds of benefits is what the government has learned from previous iterations in a commitment to close those gaps. We have not seen details in the bill, and I do not believe there is a firm commitment. I have a lot of concerns about the details of that.

We have heard previous speakers from the government benches say it has the Canada Revenue Agency or various departments that will work hard to do X, Y and Z in reaction to fraud and different aspects of organized crime being involved in these programs. What members have heard Conservatives say is that as a matter of fact, we should be proactive, not reactive, when it comes to these things. There are better checks and balances as we go along, and those are going to be the things I am looking for as a member of the chamber in the coming weeks and months, as we debate the legislation.

That is a segue to talking about how we scrutinize these bills. At the beginning of the pandemic, as I and many of my colleagues have mentioned, we supported programs as Canadians needed them to get through this. It has been a challenging time economically and on the physical and mental health of Canadians. However, when we talk about doing better, we had an unnecessary election; we had an unnecessary period of 62 days to wait for Parliament to come back and, as a bit of a procedural item, it now looks like the finance committee that would normally look over and review a bill such as Bill C-2 may not even be constituted until early next year at some point, when we return in January and committees get set up, elect the chairs and so forth.

We now have the opportunity and the duty to Canadians to say that for legislation like this, we need to hear from experts such as I just referenced in the news articles and intelligence reports that were coming out.

● (1415)

What more can we do, as we are spending taxpayers' hard-earned money to reduce and eliminate, as best we can, fraud and organized crime from “knowingly and actively” exploiting these federal programs? I often say there is a lot of good talk and well wishes in the

government saying that it will take a look at it and see what it can do.

At this point in the pandemic, when we saw the WE Charity scandal, which got a lot of attention, and the intelligence reports that got a lot of attention, I believe there is a lack of confidence among Canadians, especially when they read the reports. They see these reports being publicized and documented, and there is no clue of what is going on. Again, there is a concern that with having 62 days for Parliament to come back and table this bill, there are not enough details and prevention measures in there with respect to what we can do.

I mentioned the work of our shadow finance minister, the member for Carleton, who gave a great speech this morning and took questions in the opening round of this debate. He talked about how, as we look at this bill and at the feedback we are hearing from our constituents, there are “help wanted” signs in the windows of many businesses in the united Counties of SDG, the city of Cornwall and Akwesasne. This is replicated right across the province. We are seeing a real gap between getting people back to work and supports to reopen businesses, get them back to 100% and get our economy through this.

Inflation is something we saw referenced only once by the current government in this week's priority document: the Speech from the Throne. The government finally acknowledges inflation as a crisis, reaching a staggering 4.7%. This is an 18-year high, and an economic bill such as Bill C-2 is an opportunity to give detailed plans to address this. My friend and colleague for Carleton raised this morning that, when we look at statistics from around the world, there is a correlation between governments that spent hundreds of billions of dollars in debt and deficit spending and those that now have an inflationary problem. We were told there would be deflation. We now have inflation. There is a direct correlation. There is a direct correlation with our housing values and prices as we go forward.

From the feedback I have heard in my community in eastern Ontario, constituents and businesses want us to get back to work to create jobs and get businesses going at 100%, not pay people to stay at home. They also want us to address inflation. It is a serious strain on the quality of life and the budgets of those who are on fixed incomes, whether they are seniors, young families or people finishing school with student debt and looking to get into the workforce. We are forced to ask for emergency debates to try to get these as this bill goes forward. It needs more scrutiny. We need to hear from experts on things that can improve the bill, and we could talk about addressing getting the economy back to full strength.

Government Orders

I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today in the chamber. I look forward to the questions and comments. At the end of the day, let us get back to work, get Canadians back to work and get our economy firing on all cylinders again. That is what Canadians are asking for.

• (1420)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask where the Conservative Party is going to land on this very important piece of legislation. It will enable the government to continue to provide supports in many different ways to Canadians directly and to businesses, both big and small. It is really important that it pass.

My question for the member is quite simple. Is the Conservative Party going to be supporting this? Maybe, if the member does not want to answer that question, he could answer whether he would be voting in favour of this legislation.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as I just outlined in the 10 minutes that I had here in the chamber, there are a lot of questions left to be answered about the details of this bill as we propose billions of dollars more in new spending. What measures are in there to actively address the problems that I have just outlined, with respect to organized crime and abuse of process? I do not have that answer today. I am here today to raise my concerns and pose those questions. I know the member is a very large fan of Parliament and is here often in our institution. It is my sincere hope that in the coming weeks that we get it to the finance committee and get whatever scrutiny we can get, as well as witnesses and testimony to talk about it there. At this point, I have a lot of questions left before I decide. Again, having the opportunity for the member to address it from the government side gave me no assurances whatsoever. The issue of fraud and criminals getting this money unnecessarily is not even being taken seriously or addressed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for his speech, and I would like to take this opportunity to say hello to him. I hold this colleague in high regard, and I look forward to chatting with him again in person.

I would like to hear what he thinks of the Bloc's position, which is to support the cultural sector. I heard many of his colleagues say that the support measures should be discontinued because there is currently a labour shortage, among other reasons. The whole reason we are asking for assistance for the cultural sector is that this sector has not yet recovered, and we are concerned that we will lose the expertise of this specialized labour force if people leave the sector before the recovery.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I have another opportunity to practise my French in the House a little more.

The cultural sector is important in Canada. In my riding, there are many examples of the problems in this sector resulting from COVID-19. I am thinking in particular of the Aultsville Theatre in Cornwall and the Upper Canada Playhouse in Morrisburg. Many cultural institutions are having problems because of the pandemic.

I recognize all the economic and cultural opportunities provided by this sector. However, we feel that the programs must be studied and that we need more information about corruption and criminal organizations, which are also taking advantage of these programs and siphoning off money.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was addressing the cultural sector. One of the sectors that has been hit pretty hard is tourism. For example, I have been approached by the Canadian Camping Association. It has been very hard hit, and so many of our ridings are home to beautiful overnight and day camps for kids. These help the local tourism sector. They help youth employment and they have been left out of a lot of the supports that were supposed to be provided by the government.

There are so many things that we are looking for from this bill. They are asking for the continuation of the wage subsidy and continuation of the rental subsidies. That is certainly what we have been calling for from the government. I would like to hear from the member across the way.

How does he feel those supports and the continuation of those supports would help the camping industry specifically and the tourism sector in his riding?

• (1425)

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we talk about that as well. Hospitality, tourism and travel were some of the first impacted sectors when it came to COVID, and unfortunately they are going to be some of the last to recover. I have had many meetings and attended delegations not only with local groups but ones at the national level as well. Unfortunately, here we are at the end of November dealing with these things when we could have had Parliament resuming months ago to give assurances to those organizations.

Again, I look forward to hearing from them. I believe we need to continue to support those. We will take a look at the bill as a whole and make a determination in the weeks to come.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really important for all of those participating and those who might be following this debate to really have a basic understanding of what we are actually debating.

For those individuals who understand and appreciate the impact the pandemic has had on the lives of Canadians in every region of our country, they need to be aware of the fact that there was a time for the government to come to the table and provide the supports that were necessary in order to minimize the potential damage of the coronavirus.

Programs that virtually came out of thin air were put into place. Civil servants at different levels came together and put together programs that saved lives and jobs, and put Canada in a position where we could recover, I would suggest, in a manner second to no other country.

When we look at vaccination, and the level of vaccination here in Canada, we have done exceptionally well. That is something Canadians can be very proud of. We came together and recognized that the way to defeat the coronavirus was to get vaccinated. Now I understand we have over 86% of our population fully vaccinated. Our country has one of the highest percentages, possibly even the highest percentage, of people vaccinated in the world.

This legislation that we are debating talks about how we supported people, businesses and other stakeholders over the last year and a half, two years as we battled through the coronavirus. The battle continues.

This legislation is about extending and enabling this House to continue to support Canadians, small businesses and stakeholders, and would continue to enable us to build a better, stronger, healthier Canada. That starts in the community, and with members of Parliament from all across Canada, including within the Liberal caucus, feeding information to the government. The government then has a

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sense of the things that are important to our constituents and is then successful in bringing forward legislation that is important to all of us.

I understand my time is running out and that I will be able to continue on Monday. I would hope that all members of this House would come together in an apolitical fashion, recognize the value in this legislation and vote in favour of it.

● (1430)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. When we come back to this matter, the member will have close to 17 seconds.

[*Translation*]

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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