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# House of Commons Debates

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Tuesday, December 14, 2021

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1000)

[*Translation*]

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS OF CANADA

**Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today, I have the great honour to table, in both official languages, the Public Accounts of Canada. The Auditor General of Canada has provided an unqualified audit opinion on the Canadian government's financial statements.

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[*English*]

### AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

**The Speaker:** It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 8(2) of the Auditor General Act, a report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons entitled “Commentary on 2020-21 Financial Audits”.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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[*English*]

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and consistent with the current policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, five treaties this morning.

The first is entitled “amendments to Annex I of the International Convention against Doping in Sport” notified on October 1, 2021.

The second is the exchange of letters between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Republic of Colombia constituting an agreement to amend the free trade agreement between

Canada and the Republic of Colombia, done at Lima on November 21, 2008, done at Ottawa on February 16, 2021, and done at Bogotá on August 4, 2021.

The third is the “Coproduction Agreement in the areas of film, television and on-demand audiovisual media services between the Government of Canada and the Government of the French Republic” done at Paris on May 20, 2021, at Montreal on June 2, 2021, and at Paris and Montreal on July 28, 2021.

The fourth is the “Resolution (88) 15 Setting Up a European Support Fund for the Co-production and Distribution of Creative Cinematographic and Audiovisual Works (‘Eurimages’), adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on October 26, 1988, as amended.

The last is the “Arrangement between the Government of Canada and the European Space Agency Concerning the Participation by the Government of Canada in the Advanced Research in Telecommunications Systems 4.0 (ARTES 4.0) Programme”, done at Paris on April 17, 2020, and on April 20, 2020. This last treaty is tabled for information purposes only.

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● (1005)

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### FINANCE

**Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Finance regarding Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19.

I want to say a big thanks to the extraordinary and tireless clerks and staff who made this all happen: Alexandre Roger, Philippe Méla, Isabelle D'Souza and Émilie Thiverge. I thank them so much on behalf of the committee.

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### SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN ACT

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-212, An Act to develop a national school food program for children.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce my bill proposing the school food program for children act. I would like to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for seconding this bill and for her tireless advocacy and support of food security.

*Routine Proceedings*

This legislation would require the Minister of Health to develop a national school food program to ensure that all children in Canada have access to healthy food. The program would operate at little or no direct cost to children or their families; build on existing practices from other jurisdictions; and promote evidence-based, healthy food education.

In a country as prosperous as Canada, no child should have to struggle through the school day on an empty stomach. Prior to COVID-19, more than 1.5 million children lived in families who struggled to put food on the table in this country. Food insecurity has grown dramatically through the pandemic. A national school food program would not only give every student in Canada access to nutritious food, but it would make healthy eating a daily lesson for our kids.

I call on all parliamentarians to work together to support this important health and social justice initiative that so many other countries around the world are already doing.

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

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**CRIMINAL CODE**

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-213, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal interest rate).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is very important to introduce this long overdue legislation to end predatory lending in Canada.

I would like to thank my seconder, the member of Parliament for Nunavut, who has been a strong advocate for marginalized people, as well as organizations like ACORN across the country that have been pushing back against predatory lending practices.

As members are well aware, legalized interest rates of up to 600% currently exist in Canada. This bill would end the loopholes that allow financial institutions and payday loan lenders to charge 500% or 600% and would cut in half the criminal interest rate that is currently permitted in the Criminal Code. I will provide just one of many examples. My constituent, who I will call Lisa, paid \$13,000 in interest charges over a number of years. She struggled to put food on the table and keep a roof over her head for a \$700 emergency loan and was unable to pay even one dollar of principal over that period.

Other countries have put in place microcredit, lending circles and co-operative credit. Therefore, for the marginalized populations, who make up 40% of this country and who share no part of the wealth, it is vitally important to end these predatory lending practices.

I hope all members of Parliament will support this long overdue and important legislation.

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

• (1010)

**CANADIAN NAVIGABLE WATERS ACT**

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-214, An Act to amend the Canadian Navigable Waters Act (lakes and rivers in British Columbia)

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to introduce my bill. I thank my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for seconding it.

It is a bill that would restore protection to all the lakes and rivers in my riding that were protected under the Navigable Waters Protection Act, but were stripped of that by the Harper government. The Liberal government promised to fix this, but its half measures in Bill C-69 did not do that.

The bill would restore protection to the Okanagan River, home of one of the greatest success stories of salmon restoration in Canada, the Kettle and Granby rivers that flow through Boundary Country, the Slocan River, one of the most beautiful rivers on the continent, and lakes such as Osoyoos, Skaha and Slocan, as well as Vaseux Lake, one of the first federal bird sanctuaries in the country. All of these waterways and more are at the heart of South Okanagan—West Kootenay and fully deserve the protection they once had.

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

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**INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY ACT**

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.)** moved that Bill S-214, An Act to establish International Mother Language Day, be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to sponsor Bill S-214, which is an act to establish February 21 each year as international mother language day in Canada. This bill recognizes that, in addition to Canada's official languages, French and English, there are over 60 different aboriginal languages spoken in our nation. It also recognizes the important cultural and societal values of the first languages of so many Canadians who have chosen this country as their home.

Our thanks and congratulations to our champion, Aminul Islam in Surrey, and to Senator Jaffer, who sponsored this bill in the other place.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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**PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT**

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC)** moved that Bill S-202, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate), be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present Bill S-202, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate). It is seconded by the hon. member for Saskatoon—Grasswood, a long-time promoter of heritage in this country, especially if it involves sports, and a great member of the heritage committee. This bill intends to create the position of parliamentary visual artist laureate and corrects a reference to the Canada Council for the Arts in the English version of the Parliament of Canada Act.

The mandate of the parliamentary visual artist laureate would be to promote the arts in Canada through Parliament, including by fostering knowledge, enjoyment, awareness and the development of arts. This position would highlight the importance of art in our culture and in our communities. It would serve as a method for historical preservation of Canadian arts. It will hopefully be studied soon by the heritage committee.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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### CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC)** moved that Bill S-206, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (disclosure of information by jurors), be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be the sponsor of Bill S-206, which passed in the Senate unanimously last week. This bill would implement a key recommendation of the unanimous 2018 justice committee report on juror supports initiated by the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, who I am proud to have as the seconder.

More specifically, this bill would carve out a narrow exception to the jury secrecy rule so that former jurors who are suffering from mental health issues arising from their jury service could disclose all aspects of that service, including the deliberation process, with a medical professional bound by confidentiality. It would protect the integrity of the rule while seeing that former jurors could get the help that they need and deserve.

This bill is identical to Bill C-417 that I introduced, which passed this House unanimously in 2019. This is a common-sense, non-partisan bill that has enjoyed unanimous support. I urge its speedy passage.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

\* \* \*

● (1015)

### PETITIONS

#### HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to present a petition today from citizens across Canada, looking to raise the issue of international human organ trafficking to the House of Commons.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to work quickly to support Bill S-223.

#### Routine Proceedings

#### FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION COUPON PROGRAMS

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to table a petition on behalf of residents from Cumberland, Courtenay and Royston in my riding.

They have supported this petition because of their concerns around food security and tackling poverty. The petitioners highlight that farmers markets are really a key, important tool in terms of COVID-19 recovery, and in terms of supporting domestic food systems and food security, and the local economy.

The petitioners are calling on the government to support a national matching program for all provincial farmers market nutrition coupon programs across Canada that would match provinces that already contribute to their farmers market nutrition coupon programs and encourage provinces that do not have such a program to implement one by offering matching funding.

This is a very important program in British Columbia. It is an honour to table this petition calling on the federal government to match this program in British Columbia.

#### HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today on behalf of Canadians calling for the prevention of international organ harvesting. In particular, they call upon the Parliament of Canada to speedily pass Bill S-223, which would prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs removed either without consent or as a result of a financial transaction. The bill would also render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who have participated in this abhorrent trade.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition from many Canadians today on the issue of organ harvesting, especially as it relates to Canadians travelling abroad to participate in it. It is terrible, and we need to stop it.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions to present today.

The first petition is with respect to Bill S-223. This is a bill on forced organ harvesting and trafficking, which a number of colleagues have tabled petitions on already. This is the same bill that was put forward in each of the last two Parliaments, and the bill has already passed the Senate.

Petitioners are calling on the government and the House of Commons to work together to finally pass legislation to prohibit forced organ harvesting and trafficking, and to prohibit Canadians from going abroad to receive an organ taken without consent.

*Routine Proceedings*

## ETHIOPIA

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition that I am tabling highlights concerns about the situation in Ethiopia. Some of the specific information in this petition is a bit dated, but the conflict, in particular in the Tigray region, continues to be a significant concern for many Canadians and people around the world.

Petitioners note that Ethiopia is a large recipient of Canada's international development assistance, and they want to see more engagement from the government with respect to this situation, including working to end the conflict; supporting peace and mediation; and calling for full humanitarian access, independent monitoring and international investigation into the credible reports of war crimes and gross violations of human rights.

## CONVERSION THERAPY

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition is from people who are concerned about the definition used for conversion therapy in a number of conversion therapy bills. Petitioners want to see efforts made to fix the definition. They support efforts to ban conversion therapy, but they want to clarify what is being referred to in the definition of "conversion therapy".

## CARBON CAPTURE AND STORAGE

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition highlights an issue that is very important in my riding: carbon capture and storage technology. It is an important tool for fighting back against the challenges we face in terms of climate change.

Petitioners note the government's commitments with respect to emission reductions and call on the government to introduce new tax incentives to attract investment in the area of carbon capture, utilization and storage technology.

## MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition highlights the issue of Canadians struggling with mental health challenges and a bill that passed in the last Parliament allowing medically facilitated suicide for those facing mental health challenges.

Petitioners note that the Canadian Mental Health Association has said that it is a recovery-oriented organization and does not believe that mental illnesses are irremediable. Therefore, the undersigned call on the government and on Parliament to oppose any effort to classify mental illness as irremediable, or to allow state-administered or supervised killings based on mental health challenges.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition highlights the persecution of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. It outlines a number of the abuses they have faced: birth suppression, political and religious indoctrination, arbitrary detention, separation of children from families, invasive surveillance, destruction of cultural sites, forced labour and forced organ harvesting.

Petitioners want to see stronger engagement from Parliament, as well as from the government, in response to these issues. The

House of Commons has recognized that Uighurs face genocide. However, the government has not been willing to take that step. Petitioners call on the government to formally recognize that Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China have been and are being subjected to genocide, and to use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act, to sanction those responsible for heinous crimes committed against the Uighur people.

## MYANMAR

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights the human rights situation in Burma. It notes that in the coup earlier this year, there were a large number of people killed and detained. There is also the systematic killing, abducting and torturing of civilians by Myanmar security forces, and the fact that the Tatmadaw does not have a mandate to represent Myanmar and has been outlawed by the National Unity Government as terrorists responsible for gross human rights violations.

The petitioners have a number of asks of the government: to recognize the National United Government as the only legitimate governing body of Myanmar; support its efforts to establish a federal democratic and pluralistic country that respects the rights of all ethnic communities, including the Rohingya; designate the Tatmadaw as a terrorist organization and cut all diplomatic ties with it; provide humanitarian aid for refugees displaced by countrywide crackdowns and the bombing of villages and towns, such as Karen, Kachin and Chin states; and provide financial support for detainees and civil workers who have joined the civil disobedience movement against the junta.

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the next petition highlights another international challenge: the situation in the Republic of Artsakh, also known as the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Following the Armenian-Azerbaijan war a ceasefire was established, but there are continuing concerns related to the detention of prisoners of war.

● (1020)

Petitioners call on the government to condemn Azerbaijan's illegal detention of Armenian prisoners of war and call for their immediate release; to use all the diplomatic tools available to advocate for the release of those held captive; to condemn ongoing state-sponsored anti-Armenian hatred in Azerbaijan; to denounce all aggressive rhetoric from Turkey and Azerbaijan against Armenian Artsakh; to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to ensure the safety and viability of the population of Artsakh; and facilitate the exchange of the remains of fatalities.

• (1025)

HAZARAS

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the next petition highlights the situation of the Hazara people in Afghanistan. This particular petition was certified prior to the Taliban takeover, and there were significant human rights concerns about the violence against the Hazara community in Afghanistan, which goes back a very long time. The Hazara community has experienced successive waves of violence. The situation is particularly dire now for the Hazara community, as well as for Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and other minority communities in Afghanistan.

This petition, in particular, is calling on the government to formally recognize the 1891-93 ethnic cleansing perpetuated against the Hazaras as genocide and to designate September 25 as a Hazara genocide memorial day. The petition also supports Bill C-287 from the last Parliament, which aimed at ensuring development assistance was always contributing to the advancement of peace and security and focusing on the well-being of all individuals, including minority communities.

FALUN GONG

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the next petition I am tabling is with respect to the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. Petitioners note the ongoing persecution of Falun Gong practitioners, including organ harvesting as part of that persecution, and that extensive evidence points to 14 key officials and former officials of the Chinese Communist regime who demonstrate primary culpability in human rights atrocities committed against Falun Gong practitioners.

Petitioners call on the government to deploy all legal sanctions, including freezing assets and barring entry to Canada, against perpetrators involved in these abuses. They want to see the government use the Magnitsky act to target those who have been involved in the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the final petition I am tabling today highlights the situation of the energy sector and the fact that the Trans Mountain expansion project would create many jobs and new opportunities for Canadians. It also highlights the benefit of Canadian energy and calls on the government to support the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

I commend all of these important petitions to the consideration of members.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

As you know, Standing Order 36(6) gives a maximum of 15 minutes for petitions. There are 338 members of Parliament. If one member of Parliament is able to monopolize half of that time, which is what just happened, unfortunately other members of Parliament may not be able to present their petitions.

I would ask you continue what has been our normal practice, which is to allow members of Parliament to present a handful of petitions, maybe two or three, and then move on to other members of

*Routine Proceedings*

Parliament in order to avoid one member of Parliament taking half of the 15 minutes allotted to petitions.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order.

Respectfully, I believe the NDP House leader may not have noticed, but I actually went last. All of the other members who wanted to table petitions went before me. Also, the member will also know the standing order prescribes a limited amount of time per petition, and I think I exercised a greater economy of words per petition than members of his own caucus have. I cannot help that I have an active constituency and many people who want me to raise issues in the House.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** We have another point of order from the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

I have heard enough, but I will allow the hon. member to speak to this. I will then add to it.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Madam Speaker, speaking to this point of order, there was another member in the House who had risen to present petitions before the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, and the Speaker did not see him.

However, in 13 years in Parliament, I have never seen one member abuse a rule like this and dominate by taking 15 minutes to introduce 10 or 12 petitions. Other members of the House also have very active constituencies and also would like to introduce petitions. I would ask my hon. colleague to exercise some restraint and maybe show some respect for his colleagues.

• (1030)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Before I go to any other points of order, I will indicate that there is still some time remaining.

There are 15 minutes allocated for petitions. The rules regarding petitions do not indicate whether one, two or 10 petitions can be tabled. The rules do specifically indicate that, when presenting petitions, the presentations be as short and succinct as possible, and that individuals do not read the whole petition to allow for others.

There is still time for other individuals to present petitions. In my view, I would like to move on so that we can get on with the business of the day and recognize the next member who wishes to pose a petition.

I have another point of order. If it is on the same point of order, I have just ruled on it. It would be best not to continue going there. I do not think it is wise for members to indicate that one member is taking up a lot of time. We know that individuals are very passionate about their petitions and so are Canadians. That is why we have tabling of petitions in the House.

The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Madam Speaker, I really did not want to get up to speak, but after those comments from the NDP I would point out that petitions are not just from us as parliamentarians. We are representing our constituents, who are bringing their petitions to us to present to the House. It is their way to connect themselves to the House. I would just reiterate that and commend our member who brought that voice forward to the House this morning.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I appreciate the added information, which is basically what I had just indicated.

Presenting petitions, the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a petition signed by Canadians who are concerned about forced human organ harvesting. In particular, the petitioners call upon Parliament to see the speedy passage of Bill S-223, which seeks to amend the Criminal Code as well as the Immigration, Refugee Protection Act to prevent Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs that were removed without consent or as a result of a financial transaction.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from December 13 consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, though I have been on my feet a number of times in this Parliament it is my first formal speech, so I would like to take a moment to give my thanks. Representing the people of St. Catharines in this place has been the greatest honour of my life. I want to thank the voters, my supporters and everyone who helped on the campaign.

For all of us here there is one name on the ballot, but we know it takes dozens of people behind the scenes. Though we all have differences of opinion, I know that everyone comes to this place to work hard for the betterment of their constituents, and I commit that to my constituents and the people of St. Catharines.

Even though there are far too many people to thank, I want to say a special thanks to my team: Sam, Sara, Zack, Romy and Cass, who were there with me behind the scenes. They are an incredible team and I am so fortunate. The people of St. Catharines are fortunate to have them working for them. I would be remiss if I did not also thank a standout volunteer on my campaign, Alice, who did some incredible work for us and helped us get to where we are. I thank her so much.

I was in the House yesterday and listened to some of the debate. I was reminded of a dinner I was at, probably about 10 to 15 years ago. A children's mental health organization in our region was presenting its first ever hope award to a local member of the community who was outstanding in terms of delivering on mental health and addiction. I believe the recipient that year was Dr. Robin Williams, who is a long-time pediatrician. She was my pediatrician when I was young. She eventually became a medical officer of health and is a passionate advocate for mental health, especially children's mental health.

At that time, the House of Commons was debating significant changes to the Criminal Code. A “lock them up and throw away the key” approach had unfortunately made its way through, and Dr. Williams was concerned by this. I remember her looking down from the podium, after accepting the award, at the Conservative member of Parliament at the time. She said, “Please give me a fraction of what you intend to spend on building prisons and I promise I will lower the crime rate. Locking them up and throwing away the key does not work”.

The same member of Parliament Dr. Williams pleaded with was later sitting in committee. In one of our first studies at the justice committee after the 2015 election, we were discussing the overrepresentation of indigenous people in federal prisons. I believe more than 20% of the prison population is indigenous people, yet indigenous people are 5% or less of the Canadian population. I expressed some concern. That same member, when he had an opportunity to question a witness, said that the system was working: People in jail meant the system was working. It was not.

We have fought the war on drugs for a long time now. Almost for my entire life we have been fighting this war, and we have lost it. I do not know if there is a member here who can stand and say that this has been a successful public policy adventure for any level of government in any country. It heartens me a bit when I finally see Conservative members get up to talk about the opioid crisis and about a three-digit suicide phone number that people can call, but there is no connection. That is a great initiative and I truly hope to see it in the immediate future, but there is no connection to broader policy concerns. There is no connection to the systemic racism that exists. There is no connection to our criminal justice system in which people with mental health disorders and concurrent disorders, that is addiction and mental health disorders at the same time, are overrepresented.



*Government Orders*

• (1035)

Members of the Conservative Party call for more mandatory minimum penalties and say that they are effective tools of government. If we look to the United States, it is a laboratory for mandatory minimum penalties. Canada has done it and it has not worked. Let us look to the United States and pick whatever state hon. members want to. It has not worked. If mandatory minimum penalties worked as a significant tool of deterrence, the United States would be the safest country in the world. I do not know that anyone here is willing to stand and say that, in terms of drug or firearms offences. It is significant.

We even see right-wing politicians in the United States finally saying enough is enough. As significant percentages of their states' budgets and the federal prison budget are exploding and not producing public safety, questions need to be asked: Why is this not working and what is happening here? Judges in the United States often have zero discretion in terms of what they do, but I know in Canada we have a significant respect for our judiciary.

• (1040)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I don't even know what I'm saying.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** I know the hon. member wants to take off his mask to heckle. He is so upset by the discussion of this topic and—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I want to remind members that when somebody has the floor, the member deserves the respect to be allowed to give his speech so hon. members are able to draft their questions when it is time for questions and comments. I would ask that there be no heckling or yelling across the floor.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage has three minutes remaining.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** Madam Speaker, it is disappointing that the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies would remove his mask to yell and heckle. It is not his opportunity.

I do not know what the animosity is. We have failed. Liberal and Conservative governments have successively failed on this file. It is time to right the wrongs on this. It has not worked. It does not make us safer. Time after time it has been promised to Canadians that mandatory minimums will make us safer, and they have not. In the speeches I have heard from members of the Conservative Party, we have not heard the decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada that have struck down mandatory minimums along the way because they lead to a lack of judicial autonomy.

We have a great deal of respect for the judiciary in this country. Even as a lawyer in St. Catharines, I commended the Harper government at the time for the quality of the judges it appointed in Niagara. I know there is some criticism of the types of people who get appointed to the bench, but I have never seen anyone stand in this place and say the individuals appointed by the minister of justice were unqualified. We have a high-quality bench, and judicial discretion needs to be at the heart of things. Things come up. We cannot focus on every aspect of an event or every likely outcome, so why do we not leave that trust in judges?

All members of the House want their communities to be safe, and mandatory minimums seem counterintuitive. We think they

have to work: I am a law-abiding citizen and I do not want to go to jail for a set period of time. They work. Study after study shows that they do not. There is a suggestion on the other side that Liberals do not want this, but I think every member of the House believes it. It is insulting to say we do not. If people commit serious offences under the changes that are proposed to the Criminal Code, they will receive serious penalties. That is fundamental and part of judicial discretion. Aggravating and mitigating factors are important parts of our sentencing structure, even when mandatory minimums do not exist. Though it may not seem like it, mandatory minimums actually reduce sentences. If we look at the studies, judges see them as a ceiling, not a floor.

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am doing work on human trafficking, and the parliamentary secretary mentioned the mandatory minimum and states in which it seems to be working.

We had a round table in Oshawa with representatives from Texas and the FBI, and one of the things that is very concerning with these perpetrators of human trafficking is that it is modern slavery. If we do not have similar types of penalties across the border, it actually seems to be attracting more bad “business” on this side of the border. I am very concerned that these penalties are being removed and we are going to be seeing more human trafficking.

If they are going to be moving forward in this direction, what will be a deterrent against these international human traffickers, the slave traders?

• (1045)

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** Madam Speaker, once again we have a suggestion that human traffickers will get off and not receive a strong penalty. It is a serious offence, and the hon. members are suggesting our judiciary is stupid in terms of not seeing a serious offence like human trafficking and not providing a penalty that will fit the crime. This is about judicial discretion. We do not appoint stupid people to the bench. They will impose a serious penalty for a serious crime.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Madam Speaker, mandatory minimum penalties have clearly not proven to be effective over the years. As an ethicist, I worked with police officers and prisons. In both cases, I was able to observe two types of inmates: repeat offenders for whom not a lot can be done, and who are serving what is likely an appropriate sentence, and first-time offenders who are serving time because they made a mistake.

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If we vote in favour of doing away with mandatory minimum penalties, we still need to think about maintaining such penalties for firearm-related offences, including the trafficking and possession of firearms.

Does the hon. member agree with me on that?

[*English*]

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** Madam Speaker, I am not going to get into specific details and I look forward to the committee's study on this, but if we keep carving out issues, we are not addressing the serious problem.

I take the member at his word that he was involved in the criminal justice system. He knows that if people commit serious offences, they receive serious penalties. This legislation would not stop that. Unfortunately, the questions I have heard consistently from the Conservatives do not address that systemic racism problem we are looking to address here. I look forward to the committee's study on it and making the bill better, and I hope this bill passes very quickly.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I believe and hope all members of this House want to deal as effectively as we possibly can to save lives with regard to the opioid crisis we know is hitting very hard in Canada. While I appreciate that this bill would eliminate the mandatory minimum sentences for all drug offences, we have seen proof that we need a safe supply; we need decriminalization of possession of small amounts of drugs, and we need to expunge records to actually deal with the opioid drug crisis.

Will the member speak to that and to the idea that the Liberals still have work to do to make sure we are dealing with the opioid crisis properly?

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** Madam Speaker, we all have work to do at all orders of government. There is no silver bullet to solving the opioid crisis. This legislation will not solve it. Safe supply is another piece of the puzzle but will not solve it. We have to talk about things like housing and poverty reduction. We have to talk about so many things, because this is a crisis that has been decades in the making. We need significant, complex, real solutions to solve it.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I speak to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The bill proposes sentencing and other amendments that would provide greater flexibility to the criminal justice system and support appropriate and proportionate responses to crime. In doing so, the proposed changes would help to reduce the overrepresentation of indigenous people, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities in the criminal justice system, including by repealing sentencing laws that have been shown to disproportionately impact these groups.

I applaud the government for showing leadership on important issues like this. Recent events remind us that systemic racism and discrimination are real problems in the criminal justice system, and the consequences of leaving these problems unaddressed are significant. We know that many systemic factors contribute to the seriousness of this problem. These systemic factors can be addressed only through deliberate and sustained action by all those responsi-

ble for aspects of the justice system and other social systems that interact with it. That said, our criminal laws and the responses they dictate significantly impact what can and cannot be done by those in the criminal justice system. These laws affect those who engage with the criminal justice system as accused, as offenders, as witnesses or as victims.

Conservatives' sentencing reforms have resulted in the increased use of mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment, or MMPs, and additional restrictions on the availability of conditional sentence orders, or CSOs. These changes have limited judges' ability to impose proportionate sentences. They also affect judges' ability to meaningfully consider the background or systemic factors that impact indigenous people, Black Canadians and marginalized people, and they play a part in bringing them into contact with the criminal justice system.

Unsurprisingly, we have seen significant increases in incarceration rates for members of these communities in the last two decades. For example, in 1999, indigenous people represented about 2% of the Canadian adult population but accounted for about 17% of admissions to provincial, territorial and federal custody. As of 2020, indigenous adults accounted for 5% of the Canadian adult population but represented 30% of federally incarcerated individuals, with indigenous women accounting for 42% of all federally incarcerated women.

Similarly, in 2018, Black individuals represented 7.2% of the federally incarcerated population but only 3% of the Canadian population. We know that Black people are also more likely to be admitted to federal custody for an offence punishable by an MMP than are other Canadians. Data from the Correctional Service of Canada from 2007-17 reveal that 39% of Black people and 20% of indigenous people who were federally incarcerated between those years were there for offences carrying an MMP. That is why repealing those MMPs is expected to reduce the overall rates of incarceration of indigenous people and Black Canadians.

Bill C-5's proposed reforms are informed by extensive consultations with a broad range of justice system and other partners across Canada, including Crown prosecutors, defence lawyers, indigenous leaders and communities, academics, victim advocates, restorative justice proponents, representatives of frontline community support systems, and representatives from such areas as health and mental health, housing and other support programs in the social system.

The bill also responds to calls for reform from various commissions of inquiry, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario criminal justice system.

Parliamentarians have also noted the detrimental effects of MMPs. For instance, the August 2016 interim report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, entitled “Delaying Justice is Denying Justice”, found that MMPs have negatively impacted indigenous persons and members of marginalized communities, including those with mental health challenges. Similarly, the Parliamentary Black Caucus in its June 2020 statement called for the review and repeal of MMPs and the removal of limitations on CSOs.

The common theme in all of these calls for reform is the recognition that the broad and indiscriminate use of MMPs and the Criminal Code's current restrictions on the use of CSOs have had numerous negative impacts, and that those impacts have been disproportionately felt by indigenous people, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities.

• (1050)

They have also made our criminal justice system less effective and less efficient. I believe this bill would help to restore the public's confidence in the criminal justice system by providing much-needed discretion to sentencing judges, who are aware of all the facts of a case. It would allow them to impose sentences that respond to the particular circumstances of the offence and of the individual before the court.

The bill would achieve this important goal by repealing 20 MMPs, including MMPs for all drug-related offences and for some, not all, firearm-related offences. The bill would also lift many of the restrictions on the availability of CSOs in cases where offenders do not pose a risk to public safety, allowing them to serve their sentences in the community under strict conditions, such as house arrest or curfew, while still being able to benefit from employment, educational opportunities, family, community and health-related support systems.

Most Canadians would agree that conditional sentences are an appropriate sentencing tool and should be available for judges for appropriate cases. I would expect that they would be used in less serious cases, and I am confident that judges could make the appropriate assessments as to their use.

Lastly, this bill would require police and prosecutors to consider alternatives to criminal charges for the simple possession of drugs, such as issuing a warning or diversion to addiction treatment programs. These measures are consistent with the government's approach to treating substance use and the opioid epidemic in Canada as a health issue rather than a criminal justice one.

I would like to conclude by noting that I am aware that Bill C-5 has already been met with widespread support by communities and those responsible for the justice system in Canada. Some have gone so far as noting that it is among the most progressive criminal law reform bills introduced in many years. Like many others, I believe the government is on the right track with this bill, and I urge Parli-

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ment to support its swift passage. I look forward to hearing the views of other members.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, doing away with mandatory minimum penalties is a good first step, particularly when it comes to the possession of drugs. As to firearms, we still need to discuss what should be done.

It is a good first step, but it is not enough, because it will not fully put an end to the overrepresentation of first nations and Black people in prisons. Once again, we need to be proactive. Providing judges and police officers with training to prevent racial prejudice is important. We also need to invest in social and support structures for these people.

What does my colleague think about that?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Madam Speaker, I must say that I agree with the hon. member in her assessment of the situation. It was not long ago that we were debating the notion of additional training for judges to deal with gender issues that might come up. Again, that was so the judgments were appropriate not only to the criminal justice system, but also for the unique circumstances that the individual before the court is presenting.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Madam Speaker, one of the frustrations I hear from people in my riding, especially firearms owners in my riding, is that the government always seems to be making more hoops to jump through for law-abiding Canadians. It seems to be making things more difficult for hunters and sport shooters, but when it comes to fighting criminals and standing up against organized crime specifically, the government is looking at reducing mandatory minimums and making things easier for criminals.

It is difficult for us on this side of the House to understand that approach. I am wondering if the member opposite could explain further how he feels that reducing minimum sentences would do anything to help stop organized crime.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Madam Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary noted, minimum mandatory provisions somehow seemed to have become the ceiling rather than the bottom of the spectrum.

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Any suggestion that Bill C-5 would remove sentencing or make serious crimes less punishable is simply wrong. What it really does is to allow judges to exercise what their name implies. They judge things. They have the discretion to apply justice appropriately to the specific situation. In a serious situation such as the one the member was alluding to, I have no doubt they will do their job effectively.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my colleague said this bill treats using substances for personal use as a health issue, but it actually does not do that, far from it. It is not even a half measure.

We have heard from police chiefs and we have heard from medical health professionals. Our own shared province of British Columbia has been calling for decriminalization and safe supply as first steps to address the opioid crisis. This bill still criminalizes people. It may leave it in the hands of judges and police officers to decide whether they are going to move forward with charges, but it is not even close to what the Health Canada expert panel on substance use recommends, which is full decriminalization and expungement of all records.

Do my colleague and his party support decriminalization? When will they honour the request from British Columbia for an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for simple possession and allow decriminalization?

• (1100)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Madam Speaker, in practical terms, the police are not arresting people for simple possession. Certainly, in British Columbia, where Crown counsel has to approve all charges, they are not approving charges. For all practical purposes, that is not happening.

Decriminalization, in my personal view, does not go far enough. We need to ensure there is a safe supply. We cannot leave the provision of dangerous drugs, the profits and the production in the hands of criminals. I would be prepared to work with my hon. colleague to see that come about.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it brings me no great joy to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-5.

The first thing I want to point out is that this bill is an exact copy of Bill C-22, which was introduced and debated in the previous Parliament. Then there was an election, so now we have to start over. On second thought, maybe starting over is not such a bad thing, because if Bill C-22 had been adopted in its entirety a few months ago, the mandatory minimum sentences for a number of important offences would have been reduced. At least now we have a chance to change things.

The main reasons that led me to become a Conservative MP have to do with public order, national defence, public safety and sound economic management. More than anything else, it was the Conservative approach to public order that really prompted me to become a Conservative MP. I was elected for the first time in 2015, but, unfortunately for my party, the Liberals won that time around and have been in power ever since.

Since 2015, we have witnessed drastic and tragic changes to how public safety issues are addressed. Victim protection has changed, and criminals have been given more rights. That really worries me.

Personally, I blame the Liberals, of course, but also the New Democrats, who, unfortunately, systematically support the Liberal approach. The Bloc Québécois tends to do that as well. As a Quebecker, I often have a hard time understanding how my Bloc colleagues can be so far to the left on these issues, but that is another debate. As I see it, the approach in Bill C-5 is totally ideological and utterly incomprehensible.

Here are some examples of crimes for which Bill C-5 will reduce minimum sentences: robbery with a firearm; extortion with a firearm; weapons trafficking; importing or exporting an unauthorized firearm; discharging a firearm with intent; using a firearm in the commission of an offence; possession of a prohibited firearm; possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition; possession of a weapon obtained by the commission of an offence; possession for the purposes of weapons trafficking; and discharging a firearm.

If Canadians and Quebecers were listening carefully to that list of the various crimes involving firearms, most people would say that that does not make sense and that reducing the penalties for such offences is out of the question. If people had a clear understanding of what is being debated today, if people were polled, the vast majority would say that this makes no sense and that there is no reason to reduce the sentences of criminals who commit these kinds of offences. That is what the average person on the street would say.

Of course, each member has a duty to represent their constituents, about 100,000 people on average. The Liberals are going to say that this is what people want, and the NDP will support them. Unfortunately, we Conservatives are in a minority. However, I can guarantee that if we asked Canadians about this, the majority, over 50% of them, would surely say they are against this type of measure.

We also must remember that the Liberals have had a change of heart. The offences I just listed were included in the Criminal Code in 1976 under the Liberal government at the time, which was led by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the current Prime Minister's father. Back then, the left and right saw crime very differently, and we can all agree that these were important measures that did the trick.

Today, over 40 years later, we are trying to understand why Pierre Elliott Trudeau's son has a totally different perspective on this issue and is taking his government in a direction that puts public safety in jeopardy.

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• (1105)

What is more, Bill C-5 deals on one hand with firearms and on the other hand with drugs. Let us be clear: We are talking about sentences for traffickers, not addicts or drug users. This is not at all about managing people who use drugs for various reasons and all the risks that entails. This is truly about traffickers, those who sell, produce and traffic in drugs such as heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and crystal meth.

On that, I would like to read what my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton said in the House yesterday. I find it very relevant when we are talking about fentanyl. He said the following:

We have an opioid crisis in Canada today. Every day, approximately 20 Canadians lose their lives to an opioid overdose. It has increased by 88% since the onset of COVID, 7,000 Canadians a year. The Liberal government's solution is to roll back mandatory sentencing for the very people who are putting this poison on our streets, endangering lives and killing 20 Canadians a day.

That is the main issue, that ideological and philosophical approach to criminals.

As my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton so wisely pointed out yesterday, how are Canadians supposed to agree with eliminating harsh sentences for drug traffickers, the people who are responsible for the fentanyl that kills 20 Canadians a day? Where is the logic there? I cannot wrap my head around it, and neither can most of my colleagues.

I would like to hear my colleagues from other parties, like the Bloc Québécois members and even some from the Liberal Party, acknowledge that the Conservatives are right and that the government is going too far with Bill C-5.

This is not the right way to tackle the problem. As I was saying, this has nothing to do with addicts. When speaking about people who use for various reasons, a Bloc member said earlier that we should be proactive in tackling this problem. To be proactive, to help drug users, we would have to go after the traffickers who get those drugs onto the streets and whose actions lead to the death of 20 Canadians every day.

What is worse, the Prime Minister appears to think all of this is okay. He does not seem to grasp the problem, and the government does not seem to be able to find the right approach. If this were based on facts or on some logic that people could get on board with, it would be fine, but no, the government seems to think its ideology is perfect. This is unacceptable.

I remind members that Bill C-5 would reduce minimum penalties for crimes that involve the use of a firearm. There has been talk in Montreal about firearms and the trafficking of guns through the United States for several weeks now. People are bringing in weapons from all over the place and selling them on the black market. There are 14-, 15- or 16-year-old kids using these weapons on Montreal streets. Toronto has had the same problem for many years. Quebec is now grappling with this issue, as firearms are becoming increasingly prevalent in Montreal.

While police, judges and the justice system try to find a way to control this problem, here in Ottawa we are debating a bill that, ultimately, tells gun traffickers that they need not worry, and that if they are arrested, they will not be sentenced and that everything

will be fine; that it is no big deal if they sell guns; and that there is nothing to worry about if they buy and use guns. Bill C-5 sends the message that traffickers should not worry, they can do what they want, they will only get a little slap on the wrist and it will not really be that bad.

The same goes for drugs. Usually, in a society where the rule of law, law and order, is important, people who are considering selling drugs should say to themselves that they will be put in jail for some time if they are caught, so they should perhaps reconsider.

• (1110)

Instead, the government is telling them that there is no need to worry, that they can sell drugs to young people and that it is not serious if 20 people die every day. In my view, it defies logic.

The bill also refers to conditional sentences and house arrest. It is as though the Liberals want to empty jails completely by sending inmates to serve their sentences at home.

The bill contains a long list of crimes for which sentences will be decreased, including criminal harassment, sexual assault, abduction of a person under 14, trafficking in persons, motor vehicle theft, and breaking and entering, all of which are not minor crimes. Instead of being jailed, offenders who commit these crimes will be told to stay home and celebrate. That means a person who has committed a sexual assault could be under house arrest in a neighbourhood close to the victim. That is just ridiculous.

Let us get back to firearms. Last month, the media reported that the integrated RCMP Cornwall border integrity team had commenced a firearms smuggling investigation after a boat crossed the St. Lawrence River and made landfall near Cornwall, Ontario. The criminals unloaded three large bags from the boat into a vehicle and departed the area. The RCMP conducted a roadside stop of the vehicle and seized a large number of firearms, including prohibited and restricted weapons and high-capacity magazines. Inti Falero-Delgado, a 25-year-old man from Laval, Quebec, and Vladimir Souffrant, a 49-year-old Montrealer, were placed under arrest.

Under Bill C-5, the two individuals involved in this arms trafficking and smuggling incident would not receive minimum sentences. It is unlikely either of them would go to prison. They would probably get a conditional sentence or, at worst, serve their sentence at home. That is how it works in real life because, in real life, criminals always think about the possible consequences of their crimes.

Criminals are aware that the government keeps reducing the penalties. That is why there has been a 20% increase in violent crime in Canada since the change of government in 2015. Criminals who want to commit a crime or live a life of crime will benefit from the measures the government is proposing. The hardened criminals will influence the younger ones and tell them not to worry because the Prime Minister's government made sure that things would not be so bad for them.

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The other point I would like to raise has to do with systemic racism, which the government claims this bill will help to combat. It is not relevant to say that this will have an impact on Black and indigenous communities and other racialized groups. These groups may be proportionally overrepresented in prisons, but the notion of crime should not be related to race because that does not change anything. A crime is a crime, regardless of the skin colour of the person committing it, whether they are Caucasian, Black or indigenous. As soon as a crime is committed with a weapon, then race should no longer be a factor. The government is pulling the wool over people's eyes by saying that this bill will combat systemic racism. It is a false debate. There is no connection there.

We need to consider other solutions when it comes to incarceration and overrepresentation. Reducing sentences will not solve this problem. On the contrary, it will give just about any group more leeway to commit crimes, since they will be less concerned about the fear of incarceration.

I have a very concrete example of this. Three or four years ago, Bill C-71 was introduced to enhance gun controls. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security at the time, and I was the one who asked representatives from indigenous groups to come and share their thoughts on the bill. I would remind the House that it is because of Bill C-71 that gun owners are now required to apply for a number from Ottawa to sell a gun or transfer it to someone else.

● (1115)

That approach to public safety is debatable, but that is what we have, so that is fine. I asked indigenous people to appear before the committee to tell us what they thought. They were very clear that they felt it was irrelevant. The indigenous representative from Saskatchewan made it clear that there was no way a father wanting to follow tradition and pass his gun on to his son would contact Ottawa and ask for an authorization number. No one would do that.

My first reaction was this: Any time someone has two hands and picks up a gun, it is a public safety issue, regardless of whether the person is indigenous, White or Black. In my view, race has nothing to do with public safety. The fact remains that, until we hear otherwise, Bill C-71 does not apply to indigenous people. I had asked the former minister of public safety, but he did not have an answer.

They want to play with these ideas to get a message of openness across in the media. However, when I am talking about public safety, I prefer to have the facts: When someone picks up a gun and shoots, race becomes irrelevant. These are very sensitive issues, and I hate when the Liberals use them to try to score political points and make themselves out to be the best and most open of the parties. In reality, that is just not true.

I will finish by saying that Bill C-5 is a bad bill because it is trying to pull the wool over Canadians' eyes and make them believe that it will solve systemic racism. In fact, all it will do is help criminals commit more crimes, and it will do nothing to help Canadians.

**Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed the member opposite's speech.

In my riding, many people are suffering due to the opioid crisis, and a lot of people are working hard to help these victims from a health perspective. Given a situation like the opioid crisis, would my colleague agree that we need to approach a crisis like this from a health perspective, not a Criminal Code perspective? Should we not try to find more solutions from that angle?

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, that is precisely what I was saying at the beginning of my speech when I quoted my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton.

When we talk about opioids, we are talking about fentanyl. Let us not forget that there are criminal networks of dealers importing and selling these substances. Traffickers mix opioids, cocaine and every drug, and the concentration becomes too high, which is why every day, 20 Canadians die from an opioid overdose. It is a major problem.

In our view, in my view, we are not going to solve this problem by rolling back sentencing for drug traffickers. On the contrary, we have to deal with trafficking at the source and ensure that no opioids are sold to Canadians on the street.

**Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I will focus on some of the myths that my colleague stated as facts.

The member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles may not identify with some of the positions taken by the Bloc Québécois, but I can assure the House that as Quebeckers, we do not identify whatsoever with the positions taken by the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

He claims in no uncertain terms that Bill C-5 gives more rights to criminals. Firstly, I would like to know his definition of criminal. Does he make a distinction between a career criminal and an occasional criminal? Does he believe that occasional criminals can be rehabilitated?

● (1120)

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague and I congratulate him on his election. We did not win his riding.

I do believe in the concept of occasional criminals and career criminals. There is nothing to be done for some criminals, while others simply have bad luck.

However, lighter sentences will work in favour of new criminals, youth, who will say to themselves that if they commit an offence, they will get off easier because the good old Liberal government reduced these sentences. This will spread the notion that crime can pay, and that is something we must not do.

[*English*]

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech of my colleague from Charlesbourg. He talked a bit about how indigenous people did not see this as a solution. However, we know that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 32 recommends that minimum mandatory sentences be stopped.

Therefore, I would like him to comment on the fact that the TRC has called for this. How can he stand in this place and say that is not accurate?

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[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. That is part of the ideological debate, the position we should take on matters of public safety.

As I mentioned, being indigenous, Black, white or other is irrelevant. We are all human beings with two hands. When we decide to commit a crime with a gun, for example, we have to pay the price.

I know that the notion of indigenous group or race was mentioned in the report. However, I believe that we must look at what has led to the problem and find solutions to help indigenous people not commit crimes. The notion of public safety must be the same for all human beings, no matter their race.

[*English*]

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Madam Speaker, in the last election, constituents in my riding of Prince Albert wanted to see us get tougher on gang crime, criminal activity and rural crime. It appears this legislation would do the opposite and would send the wrong signal. I am curious what the member's constituents would say to him with respect to what the priority should be when dealing with criminals, illegal guns and things like that. Would the bill do that or would it send the wrong message?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Based on what I hear from my colleagues, rural areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan are experiencing serious problems with people breaking into isolated homes while the owners are present. These people show up drunk, high and armed. These offences happen often and are a huge problem. This type of breaking and entering in rural areas is a problem that we are trying to stop.

However, by introducing a bill to reduce penalties, the government is sending the message that criminals can continue to commit crimes because even if they are caught, nothing will happen. That is the problem with Bill C-5.

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I also thank him for congratulating our colleague from Trois-Rivières. Winning by just one vote is still a win. We are very happy to have him here.

As far as I know, there are no studies showing that mandatory minimum penalties have any effect whatsoever on someone's decision to commit a crime. Since my colleague is claiming that mandatory minimums do have this effect, does he have some information that we do not? If so, could he share the sources with us?

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. Obviously, I do not have the information with me. However, one thing is certain: Law and order follow a certain basic logic in our society.

Do we want a society where people know that, if they commit a crime, there are practically no consequences, or do we want a society that makes sure that people who decided to commit a crime, either once or repeatedly, will face suitable punishment?

• (1125)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the heart of this bill recognizes that our judges, who are independent and have the legal background and understanding of the circumstances surrounding a crime, are in a far greater position to deal with the circumstances for a sentence. Does the Conservative Party not have the confidence in our judicial system, that the dispositions of judges would be fair without having mandatory minimum sentences, which can cause other issues, such as systemic racism?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, every week, we hear from Canadians who do not understand why a certain judgment was handed down, why a person who committed a crime received a short sentence or a third of a sentence. We often hear questions about judgments.

The most important part of our job is creating laws. The administration of justice is the purview of judges. Of course, we need to provide the justice system and judges with the best tools possible.

However, when we start reducing sentences, when we remove criteria, judges will have to work with the tools Parliament has given them.

As legislators, we need to decide how much we want to reorient our justice system and Criminal Code so that judges can do their job based on the decisions made by the people's representatives.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, we have heard from mayors, provincial governments, including British Columbia, health care professionals, frontline service workers, police chiefs and public health officials. They are calling for the decriminalization of the personal possession of drugs.

The opioid crisis is happening. Will my colleague listen to health professionals and police chiefs and not let politics stand in the way of saving lives?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I actually did mention in my speech that I was not talking about drug users. Drug use is a problem that needs to be managed.

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In this case, we are talking about criminals like drug dealers and drug traffickers. That is where we think we need to continue to focus and step up our efforts, not the opposite.

[*English*]

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Kings—Hants.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the Chair for giving me time to talk about Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Canadians want a criminal justice system that makes them safer and reacts quickly and effectively to crime. They expect the criminal justice system to produce equitable outcomes for all.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, we know this is not the case for all Canadians. There are many reasons for this, including the way our criminal laws are drafted and how they are applied.

I am very proud to be part of a government that has demonstrated the courage to acknowledge that our criminal justice system and our laws do not always produce the most appropriate outcomes for everyone, and that has taken decisive action to correct this. In so doing, we are providing our courts and decision-makers within the criminal justice system with the flexibility they need to make better decisions for everyone.

Bill C-5 proposes needed law reform in three areas. First, it would give sentencing courts greater discretion to impose fit sentences by repealing mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for some offences in the Criminal Code and all offences in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Second, it would provide sentencing courts with greater discretion to impose fit sentences by repealing unnecessary restrictions on the granting of conditional sentences of imprisonment. Third, it would require police and prosecutors to consider diverting simple possession cases away from the criminal justice system and to a health treatment program.

Traditional criminal justice system approaches to offences in simple drug possession cases are not working. This new approach would produce better outcomes for the accused and for society more generally.

At the heart of this bill is a recognition that those responsible for administering our criminal justice system need to have discretion in responding to crime. This is completely appropriate because the ability of our criminal justice system to produce appropriate outcomes is based on the proper exercise of discretion.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

The Supreme Court of Canada has said on many occasions that the proper exercise of discretion is essential to the effective operation of our criminal justice system. I am in perfect agreement.

Bill C-5 would repeal all mandatory minimum penalties for six offences in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and for 14 of-

fences in the Criminal Code. In so doing, it would restore judicial discretion to sentencing courts.

Some people may say that this means that the sentences for these offences will now be shorter and that, by doing away with these rigid sentencing rules, we are sending the message that these offences are not serious.

[*English*]

I would respond by saying that judges would impose appropriate penalties based on facts before them. A fit sentence is just that: one that is appropriate in all circumstances. If a particular trial judge's decision is inappropriate, our system enables this to be corrected through an appeal.

I also have complete confidence that the courts will continue to view these offences with the seriousness that is warranted. Repealing MMPs for certain offences involving firearms does not mean these offences are not serious or that courts will not recognize their level of severity. On the contrary, courts across Canada consistently comment on the fact that firearms-related crimes are particularly serious and should be addressed in correspondingly serious ways. That will not cease to be the case because of this bill, and offenders who deserve to go to jail will still go to jail.

What will be different, however, is the following. There would be fewer charter challenges, prosecutions would be faster and sentencing decisions would be better tailored to the circumstances of individual offenders. When courts are sentencing indigenous people, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities, they will have the ability to meaningfully consider the circumstances of the offender before them to make a sentencing decision that properly takes circumstances into account. I urge all members to support these changes.

In our platform, our government committed to continuing to combat gender-based violence and fight gun smuggling with measures that we have previously introduced, such as lifetime background checks to prevent those with a history of abuse against their spouses or partners from obtaining firearms licences; red-flag laws that would allow immediate removal of firearms if people are threats to themselves or others, particularly to their spouses or partners; increased maximum penalties for firearms trafficking and smuggling from 10 to 14 years of imprisonment; and enhancing the capacity of the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency to combat the illegal importation of firearms.

Bill C-5 also proposes to restore judicial discretion for sentencing courts through amendments to the conditional sentence regime. Conditional sentences were created in 1996 to provide an innovative way for courts to sentence offenders by allowing them to serve their sentences in the community under strict punitive conditions, but also rehabilitative ones. These changes recognized that imprisonment at correctional facilities is not always necessary. These changes also responded to the fact that indigenous people were disproportionately being sent to prison and that this had to change.



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The conditional sentencing regime has always disallowed the use of conditions sentences for offences punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty. Sentencing courts also have always had to be satisfied that serving a sentence in the community would not pose a public safety risk, and a sentence had to be less than two years. However, over time, additional restrictions placed on this tool have diminished its effectiveness and made it unavailable in a wider range of cases. This has taken away judicial discretion by removing an important tool for addressing over-incarceration.

With the changes proposed by Bill C-5, the government is correcting course from the previous Conservative government's limiting of CSOs so that courts can better respond to the specific facts before them. They will still only be available in cases where public safety would not be impacted. These are welcomed evidence-based changes that are broadly supported and that will make an important difference in our criminal justice system.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, I would like to briefly address the changes relating to simple drug possession.

The opioid crisis affecting many Canadian communities has focused the spotlight on the harms of drug addiction. It has forced communities to find innovative solutions, but it has also helped demonstrate that a response to addiction based on health measures and social action is far more effective than other means, namely criminal justice measures that stigmatize users and create barriers to their rehabilitation.

[*English*]

The government has long recognized the importance of making greater linkages between the justice system and other social systems, including health care. The proposed measures in this bill would do just that. This bill would encourage police and prosecutors to move away from charging and prosecuting for simple drug possession in appropriate cases and, instead, direct people into other appropriate systems that are better able to respond to the root causes that contribute to their interaction with the justice system in the first place.

If we think about it, instead of being charged and prosecuted, which can result in job loss, separation from family and community and increase the possibility of reoffending, the system would facilitate the supports needed, keep the offenders working and keep them in their communities. This is smart criminal justice policy that has been proven to work, and I strongly support these changes.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

The reforms contained in the bill are long overdue and have garnered wide support. I know that many people would have preferred that the bill go even further, but I also know that the Minister of Justice said that this is only one major step in a broader effort to make our criminal justice system more equitable for all. It is essential that we take this step now.

I am asking all members to support this important legislative measure.

[*English*]

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to question my colleague on a few things, one of which is our absolute faith in judges, who are going to be wide open to give a bunch of good rules. The rules we set for our laws in Canada are very wide already, and judges have discretion, within a certain breadth, in how to deliver sentencing. The rules are not strict. However, judges do need a set of laws, rules and guidelines about how they apply sentencing. Regardless of the person in front of them at a point in time, there is a victim of crime as well, and all victims need to see there is crime and punishment and an outcome with a cost.

Would you suggest there is an objective here that you are not looking at, as far as the outcome goes, that will lead to something worse in society as opposed to something less bad in prisons?

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I am not going to suggest it, so I would ask the hon. member to put his questions to the member through the Speaker.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Madam Speaker, obviously this bill will be worked on at committee in order to really look at all the different ways it will have impacts on society. Currently, our justice system does not necessarily work. There is an overrepresentation of certain communities, and that is because judges do not necessarily have the discretion they should have. As I mentioned in my speech, people can still go through an appeal process if ever the judge's decision is deemed not to be the right one.

We do have faith in our judges, so we believe that this bill would only help improve the situation. Of course, when it comes to simple drug possession, nobody is really worse off except the person who has committed the crime, so a rehabilitation program is obviously a much better solution.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, actual research has shown that mandatory minimum penalties are not always useful. We all agree on that. We will talk about firearms later.

That being said, I want to return to the matter of prevention. There are reasons why young people turn to crime. We need to be able to respond to these young people and their families from an early age, namely by investing in health and social services and social housing structures. I am not talking about affordable housing; there is a world of difference between the two.

When will the government do something about prevention?

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**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Madam Speaker, I totally agree with the hon. member. I am a teacher, so I am well acquainted with the importance of prevention. I know how impressionable young people are and how important it is that they make the right choices.

I think this bill is taking us in the right direction by eliminating the minimum two-year sentence. That could help us get young people on the right track and send them to rehab instead of prison.

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, I thank the member for mentioning that the Liberal government acknowledges indigenous people are over-incarcerated and has trust in the judicial system. However, removing mandatory minimums instead of decriminalizing the personal possession of drugs makes sure that people with addictions will still end up in the criminal justice system rather than the health care system.

Why is the government only taking a half step toward reducing the overrepresentation of indigenous, Black and racialized Canadians in the criminal justice system?

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Madam Speaker, absolutely a lot more work needs to be done, and this is only a small step in the right direction. It is, however, an important step in this direction. We want to make sure that we take all of the right steps without moving too quickly and endangering Canadians. For sure, there is a problem of overrepresentation of indigenous and racialized communities, and this is one of the reasons the bill is being presented.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House today and debate Bill C-5. This bill proposes legislative measures that would repeal certain mandatory minimum penalties and give prosecutors the discretion to deal with simple drug possession as a health issue rather than a criminal one.

I would like to begin by telling you what I think is the most fundamental aspect of this bill that provides for the independence of the judiciary with respect to sentencing.

Before I had the privilege of serving the voters of Kings—Hants in the House, I was a lawyer, so I can say with assurance that the circumstances of each case are usually different. For these reasons, when it comes to sentencing, I think that not allowing judges to use their discretion is a problem.

[*English*]

I had the privilege of listening to this debate on the same bill before the House in the 43rd Parliament, about the aspect of judicial independence and judges' discretion. I want to make a link to what I believe to be generally a Conservative principle, namely that we allow local decision-makers to use their discretion when available. It is the idea of decentralizing decisions to local governments, provincial governments, when available and necessary. My friends from the Bloc Québécois would certainly appreciate that as well, with respect to the devolving of powers.

I also see that in this legislation. We sit here as parliamentarians. I have heard the Minister of Justice and other members of this House provide circumstances and cases that could be used to talk about how this bill could impact sentencing and judicial outcomes. The reality is no one in this House knows the particular circumstances of a case that is going to happen three or four years from now. At the end of the day, we want to allow our judges, our judiciary, to make those decisions and weigh both mitigating and aggravating factors. As I mentioned before, in my time as a lawyer, not all circumstances of a case are the same. Fundamentally, this allows our judiciary the discretion to make those decisions.

The member for St. Catharines, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, in his remarks earlier today talked about the fact that the Supreme Court of Canada has found that mandatory minimum penalties, in some cases, are unconstitutional. It is up for debate in this House, but they are not effective at actually reducing crime. I have heard conversations among colleagues in this House about how we tackle crime and how we can challenge some of those points. I agree that there needs to be work done outside of this legislation. This legislation is not a silver bullet to solve that, but this is legislation that would help provide that discretion to judges and reduce the systemic challenges that indigenous and Black Canadians face.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

I have mentioned many times in the House that I have the privilege of representing the three indigenous nations of Kings—Hants: Sipekne'katik, Glooscap and the Annapolis Valley First Nation.

While talking with the leaders of these communities, I heard about how the structure of the criminal justice system can create inequality, and how first-time offenders can become lifelong criminals after spending years in prison for simple drug possession, instead of receiving rehabilitation services or the necessary support to turn their lives around.

[*English*]

As opposed to trying to work to rehabilitate individuals and look at certain circumstances, we are putting people in jail for a minimum period of time, even if the circumstances do not warrant it. That is the reality.

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Kody Blois:** The members opposite can have their views, and I would welcome their questions when I am done, but I would like to keep the floor.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I want to remind members one more time that when somebody has the floor they deserve respect. If the hon. members who are not speaking wish to ask questions and make comments, then I would ask that they hold off until then.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Madam Speaker, I would certainly welcome the questions once I have finished.

The statistics have been borne out. Again, I really think fundamentally that this is about judicial independence and discretion. The facts are quite stark. Five per cent of the adult population in Canada are indigenous. They represent 30% of our incarcerated population, and 42% if one considers women; 7.2% of our incarcerated population is Black, despite the fact that they represent only 3% in this country. This bill means a lot to my indigenous communities and my Black residents in Kings—Hants.

What I heard in the debate, and perhaps what some of the members opposite were trying to intervene with is “a crime is a crime”. I hear that. A crime is proportionate. It does not matter what a person's background is. At the end of the day, we need to look at the circumstances behind the behaviour. I agree that serious crime represents and should represent serious punishment, but at the same time, by imposing mandatory minimums and taking that discretion away from common law principles in terms of sentencing, we are not giving that discretion for the judges to be able to look at the best-case scenario. The same applies to prosecutors in terms of their ability to look at the circumstances and provide recommendations that will keep our communities safe.

Again, I would agree with the idea that this piece of legislation alone would not solve the issue. There has to be a focus on investment in social support systems, in housing and in recreation. All of that is important to reducing crime, writ large, in communities across the country. This is important to creating challenges for individuals for whom there may perhaps be better programs and supports than just imposing a mandatory minimum penalty.

I want to also mention the point around encouraging diversion for simple drug possession. I know we have a challenge in this country. I would be naive to stand here in the House and say that drugs are not a problem in Kings—Hants. They certainly are. The opioid crisis is something that is often mentioned in the House, particularly by our colleagues from British Columbia. It is just reasonable, sensible public policy to allow and give further discretion to police officers to be able to use their discretion to treat these instances as a health issue versus a criminal issue, and to try to make sure those supports are in place.

I know the members of the NDP would be asking for a step even further. There are circumstances where the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice are able to work to allow municipalities to go further. I do not have the section at the moment, but I know those are going to be things our government will consider in the days ahead.

I do not know how much time I have, perhaps two or three minutes, but I would suggest this in terms of my conclusion.

All members of this House agree that serious crime and activity deserve a serious penalty and that we should not be light on crime in that sense. However, looking at the mandatory minimum penalties in place, in some cases they have been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada. We know they have a detrimental impact on visible minorities in this country. They take away the discretion for judges to be able to look at the circumstances of a case

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and move forward. Indeed, many members of this House have said that the mandatory minimum penalty almost provides a cap in terms of what the courts will award, as opposed to maybe looking at the circumstances, recognizing that there is an aggravating factor and saying that this individual in question actually deserves a higher sentence. Sometimes the courts will simply look at the mandatory minimum and put that in place, and that is really problematic as well.

We need to be able to move forward. I will certainly be in support of this legislation. It is reasonable, and I look forward to taking questions from members opposite in this House.

• (1150)

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I just want to share the perspective of the constituents I represent in Lakeland.

I come from a family of law-abiding firearms owners. I represent many law-abiding firearms owners: hunters and sports shooters of all nationalities and all backgrounds. They are confused about the Liberals' approach to gangs and gun crime, even while shootings increase in places like Toronto and Vancouver. Residents there deserve to have a government that will protect their safety and make their neighbourhoods and streets safe.

I wonder why the member then does not agree that there should be prison time for robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting unauthorized firearms, discharging a firearm with intent, all kinds of illegal possession of firearms and discharging firearms with recklessness. Law-abiding firearms owners—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I will ask the hon. member to answer the question. I have other members with questions.

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Madam Speaker, nowhere in my speech did I ever mention that there should not be jail time or criminality for those types of behaviours. In fact, all I said is that we should not be imposing a mandatory minimum. We should allow the judiciary to make the decision on an appropriate sentence.

With all due respect, this type of fearmongering is problematic for important debate on being able to reduce systemic barriers in our criminal justice system. I believe that serious crime deserves serious time, but I also believe that we should give that discretion to judges to make the choice; it does not belong to us as parliamentarians here in this place.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I want to remind the member that she had a chance to ask her question. If she has other questions, she can attempt to be recognized again as opposed to talking over the hon. member while he is responding.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Beauport—Limoulu.

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[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, allowing judges and police officers to make decisions is important, because they are the ones who are very familiar with the subjects and the people.

Earlier I heard a colleague say that they were going to abolish all sentences. That is not at all true. As I understand it, sentences could be two years, as is currently the case, but they could also be five years, or six months with rehabilitation.

Can my colleague tell us again about the importance of clarifying Bill C-5 with respect to prevention and rehabilitation measures for minor crimes?

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

I definitely agree with her when it comes to the discretion of judges and the courts. I think that it is important that both aggravating factors and mitigating factors be taken into account when examining a file. Rehabilitation and other measures can be considered as a solution to help the person move away from crime.

[English]

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the hon. colleague stated in his speech, and we know that the Liberal Party in government has said on many occasions, that he acknowledges that drug use and addiction have to be treated as health issues and not criminal ones. However, the bill before us would retain the criminalized attitude towards drug use; it would simply change the sentencing.

Can the member perhaps explain to the House and help members understand how the bill, by keeping drug use and addiction in the criminal sphere, would honour the concept of treating addiction as a health issue and not a criminal one?

• (1155)

**Mr. Kody Blois:** Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, we are moving in terms of our understanding in this country about how we treat these particular issues. I believe the member's riding covers the Lower Mainland, where the opioid crisis is quite severe. I would say that although it would retain the criminal powers, the bill would certainly give discretion to be able to treat this as a health issue, which is extremely important. We know there are other measures through the Minister of Health, whereby we can treat issues around the opioid crisis as a health crisis and be able to put measures in place.

I look forward to working with the member in the days ahead.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to stand in the House to speak to a bill that is not only a long time coming and not only important to many Canadians, but is one that touches upon a very real and profoundly important issue that touches every community in our nation.

The bill deals with the issue of mandatory minimums and the initiative of the government to remove mandatory minimums for a number of prescribed sentences. It would remove mandatory minimum sentences for all drug offences under the Criminal Code and then some others with respect to tobacco and firearms provisions.

I was in the House when many mandatory minimum sentences were put into the Criminal Code by the previous Harper Conservative government, and our party opposed that approach then and we oppose it now. We do so for a number of reasons. The New Democrats have long opposed the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences in our Criminal Code for all but the most serious of crimes. These are some of the reasons for that position.

First, it is a very blunt tool. It removes the discretion of a judge to shape sentences to suit the specifics of every case. I happen to have been trained as a lawyer, and I spent 16 years litigating cases in the labour setting. I would posit before the House that every single case that comes before a judge is unique. It touches upon unique individuals with unique circumstances and it occurs in very specific circumstances and conditions. The essence of justice is to fashion a resolution that suits the particular circumstances that come before a court.

Politicians should not be sentencing people from this chamber. In our system of government, we have separation of powers, the judiciary separated from the legislative branch, separated from the executive branch, separated from the police force. These are core elements of our modern democracy and they are very important ones.

I am always suspicious of attempts by politicians in the House to try to reach into the courtrooms of our nation to tell judges what to do in a particular situation. What is particularly wrong with mandatory minimums is that they purport to tell judges to sentence a person irrespective of the person before them and the circumstances of that case.

Second, mandatory minimum sentences are routinely ruled as unconstitutional in our country. I think we could safely say that in most cases, mandatory minimum sentences do not comport with our Constitution and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Third, the evidence is crystal clear now that mandatory minimums are a major factor that contributes directly to the overrepresentation of the incarceration of the most marginalized Canadians, including indigenous, racialized and poor people.

As an example, indigenous people make up about 4.9% of our population, but if we were to walk into our prisons, we would find that 30% of the people in prisons are indigenous. With respect to indigenous women, it is even more shockingly appalling that 42% of the women in prisons are indigenous. A major factor contributing to that is the use of mandatory minimum sentences.

Finally, mandatory minimum sentences do not work. I need only point to the United States as the best example for that. The United States locks up the highest percentage of its population of any country in the world, and it has done nothing to reduce the crime rates or the rate of violent offences in the United States. If it were true that the use of mandatory minimum sentences reduced crime, then there would be empirical evidence of that in our neighbour to the south, and it has been proven to be quite the opposite.

● (1200)

In fact, the State of Texas, one of the most tough-on-crime jurisdictions we will find on this planet, has publicly stated that mandatory minimum sentences have not worked. All that has happened is that it has locked up an incredibly high percentage of the population in that state, with no impact on crime rates.

Therefore, I support this measure and I support the bill. Discretionary sentences and diversion from prison are distinctly preferable to mandatory minimum sentences that lock up more Canadians, for longer time, with no positive effect.

However, make no mistake that the bill would do nothing, zero, to address the core problem with our drug policy; that is to treat drug addiction and substance use as health issues, not criminal ones. That is the root cause of the problem with our drug policy. Substance use and addiction are health issues, not criminal ones. They are not moral failings. They are not issues of character. They are pure issues of health. Addiction is a complex biopsychosocial illness. It results in compulsive behaviour that is rooted in trauma. Substance use disorder is listed in the “DSM-5”, which is a diagnostic manual that our medical professionals use.

This is one of those issues where I will say that the general population is far ahead of the politicians of our country and, dare I say, many politicians in the House. That is because no family, not one, is untouched by addiction or substance use disorder. Everyone has a mother or father, a sister or brother, an uncle or aunt, a cousin, a grandparent or maybe even himself or herself, who has suffered from substance use, whether that is alcoholism or addiction. These families know something that is important to acknowledge in the House: Those people who are suffering are not criminals; they are sufferers, they are patients, they are people struggling with an illness.

Dr. Gabor Maté, whom I consider to be an authority of global stature in our country, a great Canadian, has found that the basic cause of addiction is trauma. He is on record as saying that after treating people in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver for many years, he never treated a single person who did not have significant childhood trauma.

Therefore, what does criminalizing those people do to them? Criminal sanctions are society's way of imposing maximum trauma on citizens. They get accosted by the police. They go through the trauma of arrest. They go into the very serious, intimidating context of a court. They go through a trial. They go to jail. This system is designed to impose the most serious pressure society can possibly impose. In other words, what we do when we criminalize drug policy is we re-traumatize people whose main issue is that they suffer from trauma. That is completely counterintuitive. In fact, it is cruel and it does not work.

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If criminalizing drug use worked, we would have eliminated it years ago. We have spent billions of dollars, incarcerated millions of people around the world, harmed tens of millions of people, and achieved nothing. Today, Canada is setting, year after year, record deaths in opioid overdose. Every year since the government was elected in 2015, the death rate has gone up. Since 2016 until 2020, over 17,000 Canadians have died. In B.C., six and a half people die every day.

I will conclude by saying that stigma, shame and punishment are the core emotional issues of those suffering from substance use disorder and criminalizing their behaviour exacerbates and deepens that shame and stigma. We do not need to get rid of mandatory minimum sentences; we need to decriminalize drug use, bring in a regulated low-barrier safe supply, focus on education prevention and a treatment on demand through our public health care system. Then we will make progress on drug policy and use in our country.

● (1205)

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's support, with a caveat, for this bill. I agree with him that, and I think we all know, mental health and addiction issues are health issues and as such we need to treat them in that manner.

However, there is a fair bit of debate as to what those next steps would look like. We know that decriminalization of simple possession of drugs is one path forward, but it is important that there be enough supports in the communities around treatment, harm reduction and other sorts of things. There are models, like in Portugal and the Scandinavian countries, that, with certain debate, are effective in some manner.

I would be interested to learn from the member his thoughts on what steps need to be taken beyond just decriminalizing simple possession of drugs.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Madam Speaker, as I said, in terms of a mandate from Canadians, I fundamentally believe it is there. Most Canadians right now want their government to decriminalize drug use and to treat it authentically and comprehensively as a health issue.

The government has said on many occasions that it is guided by evidence, as it should be. The Liberals say that quite consistently. They have said it throughout the COVID crisis. Why do they not follow the evidence when it comes to drug policy? There is a consensus, from public health officers to the Canadian chiefs of police to addictions experts to people with lived experience to drug researchers, that we must fully decriminalize drug use and provide a different approach to this.

What we are asking for in the House is leadership.

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**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I noted that the member spoke primarily on mandatory minimums for drug possession as opposed to what this is. The bill would allow judges further discretion to deliver minimum sentences or define where they fit in that spectrum. The member is right on drug minimums, that we need to get a law that decriminalizes a lot of these activities.

However, the actual exhortation of the bill is to give more authority to legal people to determine what those are as opposed to Canadians who elect people to determine what those penalties should be or the breadth of those penalties. We are here to give that role, but we are usurping that role right now to somebody else.

How will we represent Canadians on what they expect in the criminal justice—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I have to give the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway a chance to make a comment.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Madam Speaker, again, I go back to what Canadians expect us to do here and I think they expect us to be guided by evidence, to be legislating with wisdom and passion, and to be coming up with good public policy.

The fundamental question for us in the House is this. We either fundamentally believe that drug use and addiction are health issues or we do not. If we do believe it, then they have no place in the Criminal Code. On tinkering with the sentencing, it might be preferable to have non-mandatory sentences, but it is still in the Criminal Code and we still use the sanction of criminality on something that fundamentally is inappropriate to do so.

As it says in the big book of AA, “Half measures availed us nothing.” This is a half measure and it will avail us nothing.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway for his sensible and measured speech. It is good to hear reasonable people speak in the House.

I would like to hear what he has to say about a specific issue. We know that the Bloc Québécois is also amenable to the idea of doing away with mandatory minimum sentences in general. However, there are certain exceptions, including repeat offenders, violent crimes involving firearms, and illegal arms trafficking. That is a huge problem right now.

What is the NDP's position? Is it prepared to examine these positions and adopt a more nuanced bill?

[*English*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, 15 seconds.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his kind words. He is quite right that I focused my entire remarks on the aim of the bill to eliminate mandatory minimums when it comes to drug sentences. I am aware that there are other sections of

the Criminal Code where mandatory minimums may be taken away.

When the bill goes to committee, those sections deserve closer scrutiny. I am sure I speak for my colleagues when I say that they will give every consideration to make wiser—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ottawa South.

**Hon. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the voters of Ottawa South. This is my seventh consecutive election. I am honoured and privileged to represent such a magnificent riding, a very diverse riding, with over 82 languages spoken and over 160 countries of origin. I like to describe my riding as “the United Nations of Ottawa South”.

A great deal of time has already been spent describing the objectives of Bill C-5, its proposed reforms and expected impacts. I support these changes, and I believe they will make a significant positive contribution to our criminal justice system. They will also contribute to efforts to address the undeniable and disproportionate impacts existing criminal laws have on certain communities in Canada.

We know that certain communities in Canada and other countries are involved in the criminal justice system at higher rates than other people. In Canada, the over-incarceration of indigenous persons and Black Canadians is well documented. The reasons for this are systemic, and they include our laws on sentencing. It is clear to me that the issue of over-incarceration must be addressed by revisiting our existing sentencing laws. That is exactly what Bill C-5 proposes to do.

Canada is not alone in recognizing that the increased and indiscriminate use of mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, has proven to be a costly and ineffective approach to reducing crime. Indeed, many jurisdictions comparatively around the world are moving away from this approach to criminal justice. While MMPs can be a forceful expression of government policy in the area of criminal law, we know that MMPs do not deter crime and can result in unjust and inequitable outcomes. The Supreme Court of Canada has been very clear about these issues.

Criminal justice policy is not developed in a vacuum. Evidence-based policy is informed by relevant research, including comparative studies from other countries. By examining a particular policy's successes and failures, we can develop reforms that build on what we know works and address what we know does not work.

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For instance, while the United States, both at the federal and state levels, has historically made great use of MMPs, in the last decade many states have moved toward reducing or outright eliminating mandatory sentences, with a particular focus on those for non-violent and drug-related charges. These trends reveal a shift motivated by, among other things, a need to address high levels of incarceration and the corresponding social and fiscal costs. One could speak to a California legislator about how expensive it has been for the state of California over the last several decades.

This is being done by governments of all political stripes in the United States, and I encourage all parties in this House to recognize the true impacts of MMPs and work to improve our criminal justice system. Some in the United States have termed this the “smart on crime” movement. It is an approach that recognizes the need to address high levels of incarceration of young Black and Hispanic Americans, who face disproportionate negative impacts because of the use of mandatory minimum sentencing laws in the United States, particularly, as I have already noted, for non-violent, drug-related offences.

Some have also pointed out that mandatory minimum sentencing actually encourages cycles of crime and violence by subjecting non-violent offenders, who could otherwise be productive members of society, to the revolving door of the prison system.

Recently, the President of the United States indicated his intention to repeal MMPs at the federal level, where he has jurisdiction, and provide states with incentives to repeal their own mandatory minimums as well. Other countries have made similar changes. For example, in 2014, France repealed certain MMPs, predominately citing evidence that the reconviction rate had more than doubled between 2001 and 2011, increasing from 4.9% to 12.1%.

● (1215)

When examining trends in like-minded countries, we can see a clear policy shift toward limiting the use of mandatory minimum penalties to the most serious of cases and restoring judicial discretion at sentencing. While international comparisons cannot be the only lens through which we develop sentencing policy in Canada, particularly given our unique cultural traditions and diversity, such comparisons provide a useful backdrop against which to assess the adequacy of our own sentencing laws.

Currently, the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act provide MMPs for 73 offences, including for firearms offences; sexual offences; impaired driving; kidnapping; human trafficking; sex trade offences; murder; high treason; and drug-related offences, such as trafficking, importing and exporting, and the production of certain drugs like cocaine and heroin.

In the last 15 years, 30 offences have been amended, almost entirely by the previous Harper government, to increase existing MMPs or to impose new ones.

I was in this House when those amendments were made by the previous government, and when they were introduced, and I had an opportunity to debate them at the time. I was opposed to them then, and I am opposed to them now. I was particularly struck at the time by evidence that was presented to the House, produced by the criminal law policy division in the Department of Justice, where the di-

rector happened to be a former Progressive Conservative member of Parliament. The evidence adduced and presented by the Department of Justice indicated that the amendments the government of the day was pursuing would not achieve the outcomes it desired. It had been warned and forewarned, not only by opposition members at the time, but also by the think tank insider at the Department of Justice.

Bill C-5 would reverse that trend, and in so doing, it seeks to make the criminal justice system fairer and more equitable for all. It would repeal MMPs for 20 offences, including MMPs for all drug-related offences, as well as some for firearm-related offences. This is not a signal from Parliament that drug and firearms offences are not serious and not worthy of important denunciatory sentences in appropriate cases.

Firearms and drug offences can be very serious, and I have full confidence in our courts to impose appropriate penalties. Bill C-5, as I said, would not repeal all MMPs in the Criminal Code. This bill does not propose changes to the penalties for child sexual offences and other sexual crimes, nor would the mandatory penalty of life imprisonment for murder be changed.

Some will argue the government should have done away with all mandatory minimum penalties. Others will be critical of the government's decisions to reform the MMPs that are included in this bill. This bill is an important and balanced step forward, and I know our justice minister is always open to considering further changes in the future.

Despite there being differences of opinion as to the role of MMPs in our sentencing laws, I would not want these views to distract us from our job, which is to examine the important changes in Bill C-5. We have a good bill before us that has been welcomed by a broad range of stakeholders. It would make critically important changes, not just in the area of MMPs, but also with respect to conditional sentencing and the way the criminal justice system addresses simple drug possession.

I will be voting in favour of these changes because I am convinced they will make our justice system fairer and better. I urge all members on all sides of this House to support the swift passage of Bill C-5.

● (1220)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his re-election. He began his speech talking about how certain historically marginalized communities, for instance Black and indigenous Canadians, are disproportionately represented in the prison population.

*Government Orders*

It seems clear one possible cause of that overrepresentation is that members of certain communities are receiving disproportionately long sentences relative to others for the same crime. It would seem that one way of combatting racism in the justice system is to ensure consistent sentencing. People, regardless of their background or race, for instance, receiving similar kinds of sentences for the same crimes in the same circumstances.

One way of reducing racism would be to have clear sentencing guidelines. Perhaps it is with mandatory minimums, or perhaps it is with sentencing starting points. This legislation, by removing mandatory minimums and widening the range for judicial discretion, does not seem to be combatting discrimination on that basis. Rather, it creates more space for the inconsistent application of penalties for the same crime. I wonder if the member has a comment on that.

**Hon. David McGuinty:** Madam Speaker, although I am desirous of seeing the kind of consistency the member alludes to, one size does not fit all. When there is a crime being adjudicated in a court, judges have a specific responsibility to adduce and hear all of the evidence; to consider it; and to take into consideration background, mental health and addiction. We have heard repeatedly on the floor of the House that this question of addiction is, on some sides of the House, considered to be a weakness, perhaps even a choice. Addiction is the antithesis of being free. When one is addicted, one is not free to make rational choices.

The answer to the question the member poses is that one size does not fit all. We now see that trying to force fit every case into a box, as the previous government did, has led to evidence of what we know to be the case, which is a small percentage of a population, for example, indigenous Canadians, being widely overrepresented in the prison system.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to hear more about the importance of maintaining discretion and flexibility for people qualified to determine appropriate sentences. A number of factors come into play, such as the circumstances, the individual before them and whether this person is a repeat offender or a young person who was led astray.

I would like to hear more from him on this subject and what he thinks about sentences for illegal arms trafficking. Right now, illegal arms trafficking is one of our biggest concerns.

[*English*]

**Hon. David McGuinty:** Madam Speaker, I want to pick up, if I could, where I left off, and that is the role and purpose of judges and the difficult role they fulfill when they sit as triers of fact.

I remember when I began my career as a young articling student with a criminal law firm, and I was struck by the difficulty judges face when these cases are presented to them. I was also struck by the connection between criminal activity and mental health and addiction. We know this to be true. We have seen the kinds of complexity which is put before courts and calls for the kind of judicial freedom to be able to assess meaningfully and find other opportunities to deal with a serious situation.

This bill would not do away with all mandatory minimum sentences. I said that in my remarks. There are occasions when that is the case, but we need to make sure that judges maintain that flexibility.

• (1225)

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, over 25,000 lives have been lost due to a poisoned drug supply since the Liberal government came into power. Liberals have heard from health professionals, police chiefs, addiction specialists and experts. Even their own expert panel from Health Canada on substance use is giving them clear direction and guidance to decriminalize the use of drugs and provide a safe supply as the first steps, yet they have not responded. Vancouver and B.C. are waiting on their exemption.

I truly believe, and maybe my colleague can indicate if he also agrees, that politics is getting in the way of politicians by not taking bold and courageous action. If the Liberals truly believe this is a health issue, will they treat this as a health issue and listen to the—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** We have time for a very short answer from the hon. member for Ottawa South.

**Hon. David McGuinty:** Madam Speaker, the answer is yes, we are treating this as a health issue. Yes, this government remains open to the concept of decriminalization based on evidence and comparative experience, and I would encourage the member to bring that evidence forward to committee when this bill is being studied.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am not sitting in my usual place, because Standing Order 17 does not apply. Government Motion No. 1 made sure of that, so I am taking advantage of that motion.

This is the first time I am rising in the House to give a speech of some length, although I have risen several times in Routine Proceedings and on some other things, but I want to thank my constituents, the residents of Calgary Shepard, for honouring me with this third term in the House of Commons. I am still in awe of this place. This is the cathedral of our democracy, as was said by one of my mentors who was a former member of Parliament.

I have listened to the debate we have had so far from different members on both sides of the House. Sometimes they are describing the content of the bill and other times they are speaking to its aspirations. I think the government side is getting carried away with the aspirations of this bill, and the hopes and dreams it has put into these words and this piece of legislation.



We Conservatives often get called the “party of law and order”. It is said that we are tough on crime, and that we do not see both sides: of the offender and of the victim or victims involved. Often times what I have heard from the government side is an exclusive focus on the offender or accused. The provisions of this bill only apply to offenders once they have reached the part of the proceedings in court where they are found guilty of a crime and sentencing is involved. Where does it talk about the victims? That is what I do not see here. That is what many of my constituents would say, some of whom are victims of crime. I know some of these victims of crimes. Members of our caucus have family members who have been victims of crimes.

I will add that if members look at my voting record in my third Parliament now, I was one of the members who did not vote for the life means life private member's bill. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan also voted against it. I also voted for, and can name him now because he is no longer a member, Larry Bagnell's bill. He was a great chair of the PROC committee and had to live through my 13-hour filibuster at committee. I promise not to do that here.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Never again, right?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Never again? Never say never again here, from the other side.

Madam Speaker, that was on Bill C-235, which Mr. Bagnell tabled in the House. We had a second reading vote on his private member's bill. Fifteen Conservatives voted with him. I was one of them, because I thought an assessment order for those with fetal alcohol syndrome should get them some type of special treatment in the courts and judges should be directed to look at that during sentencing. It was an assessment in that case that I thought was perfectly reasonable.

If we look at my voting record on other bills, members will realize that I am willing to look at bills as they come forward and judge them on the merits of their content, not the aspirations placed behind them. Judges do not look at the aspirational language we use in this place to describe bills.

I have heard members say this bill would help indigenous or Black Canadians get the type of treatment they deserve in the court system so they are not overly given harsh criminal sentences, but the words “race”, “racism” and “systemic racism” are not in this bill. Another member mentioned, aspirationally, that the bill would help to stop minorities from being overly sentenced harshly by the judicial system, but I do not see those words. The Liberals could have introduced an assessment order and a requirement for judges to consider that.

On that point, Liberal members have asked several times if we do not trust judges. Of course we trust judges. The government appoints them to sit on the bench and render decisions on behalf of Canadians. They are supposed to look at both sides, those of the offender and the victim, and determine what outcome would be fair and just for society while including an opportunity for rehabilitation and a punishment that would fit the crime, to ensure that victims also feel that justice has been served in their case.

### *Government Orders*

The Liberals talk about judicial discretion. How do they feel about the discretion of the Attorney General of Canada or those of the provinces? I wonder how Jody Wilson-Raybould would feel right now when we are talking about the discretion of judges. It was the current government, on the opposite side, that got itself involved in a criminal proceeding for favouring a particular party, so how does it feel about attorney generals using their discretion in the pursuit of justice?

● (1230)

I think it is hypocritical of government members to be talking about judicial discretion and the ability of judges to determine a proper sentence. We do not talk about attorneys general who give direction to prosecutors. In this caucus, we have several prosecutors on our side who have actually gone through this and used these sections of the Criminal Code to sentence people.

Many of our comments probably echo the member for St. Albert—Edmonton's terrific verbal dissertation on the merits of the bill's contents. However, I thought it remarkable that one of the offences that is being rolled back in the bill is the production and manufacturing of schedule I drugs, including hard drugs such as cocaine, heroin, fentanyl and crystal meth.

I live in a suburban community that is made up entirely of single-family detached homes, mostly next to a hospital. Just a few years ago, a fentanyl lab was found in my own community in one of the homes closest to Deerfoot Trail. I think two million or three million pills were found, including pill presses. This has been a common story in Calgary. These pill press mills are being found in residential neighbourhoods. In the past six years, this sleepy, suburban community also had two murders committed in it. One of these, if I remember correctly, was connected to the drug trade. Again, this is happening in all of our communities across Canada. We see the daily numbers of opioid deaths, and I entirely agree that it is a crisis.

However, again, the way in which the bill is being framed does not match the contents of the bill. What I see in the bill is a kind of softening of the minimum we can set for people who commit crimes such as robbery with a firearm or kidnapping, which are things that most of my constituents think is absolutely wrong.

Before I get accused of not caring about those who wind up in the prison system, in my riding we have the historic Ogden Hotel, which has been there for almost a century. A CP is located right next to it, and it is one of Calgary's original hotels. This is where Pastor Delaney runs the Victory Foundation for the church: It helps men who are getting out of the prison system to get back on their feet, find jobs and get some training and education.

*Government Orders*

I have had coffee there with people out of the prison system who are trying to get their lives back on track. I have a beautiful painting in my house from a gentleman who was homeless. He wound up in the judicial system and was charged, but I call him an expert painter from Calgary. He made a beautiful painting of an elk being attacked by a cougar, and he was helped by the Victory Foundation. I have met and interacted with these men and tried to better understand what they go through. Many of them will tell us that they wronged someone and that they have to right the wrong at some point.

There are two sides to the debate we are having here. Where is the voice of the victims who want to see fairness in the judicial system? If we are going to talk about judicial discretion, we have to talk about attorneys general being able to direct prosecutors to actually pursue these cases as well. Also, we set the box within which judges are supposed to rule, and the box shows what the minimum is, what the maximum is and what is reasonable in between.

A member on our side mentioned that it is an expectation of Canadians that a crime committed in eastern Canada, for example in Montreal on the south shore in beautiful Brossard, in the B section where I lived for part of my life, would be treated the same way if it was committed in downtown Calgary. The same crime would be looked at by judges in the same way and would be given a similar type of sentence. We say that every case is different and every case has particular circumstances to it, but that is what we are asked to do here. I am not a lawyer by profession, so I am unburdened by a legal education and can just give a layman's interpretation of what the judicial system should look like. I consider that a bonus, but maybe some lawyers do not.

Before I forget, I have a Yiddish proverb for members to consider: "When you sweep the house, you find everything." As I have gone through the bill, I have mentioned the fundamental aspects of the judicial system here. As I am sweeping across the bill, I look for those terms that have been mentioned by members aspirationally hoping that it would achieve the goals of not having offenders judged solely by immutable characteristics such as race, but only on the merits of their particular cases. That is a concept that I agree with, but it is not in the bill. There is no assessment order. The government could have taken an idea from our former colleague Larry Bagnell and applied it to the particular thing that they truly care about.

I cannot see how I can support this type of bill. This is the same thing as Bill C-22 in the last Parliament, and government members knew we would not support this type of legislation. They had an opportunity to fix it, but they chose not to take it. Between tabling Bill C-22 and the return of this Parliament, they lost the opportunity to find some type of consensus in the House on producing a bill to help Canadians and to help victims of serious crimes.

● (1235)

**Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am always happy to hear Yiddish proverbs in this place as a Jewish person. There are not very many of us in the House. It is a language that is close to being lost, so it is always nice to hear some of it.

First, I will make a clarification. In fact, sentences are not being removed. Mandatory sentences are being removed in this bill. Going forward, it proposes to actually confront the opioid crisis from a health perspective. I know that in my community, we have lost many people to the opioid crisis.

Does the member not support safe supply and treating the opioid crisis from a health perspective?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, I am glad the member enjoys my Yiddish proverbs. It is a disappearing language, which is why I refer to them. I will save the member me trying to pronounce it in Yiddish. My Yiddish pronunciation is not very good.

The member mentioned that part of the bill deals with the very serious crisis of people who are addicted to opioids. It is a health crisis, not a criminal crisis. I know people in my community and I have friends who are impacted by it. They became addicted to things like OxyContin and other opioid narcotics. It has a huge impact.

However, this bill also contains things like eliminating the mandatory minimum for offences such as robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting or knowing of it when it is unauthorized, and discharging a firearm with intent. Why mix the two in one bill?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, does my Conservative colleague realize that Bill C-5 does not do away with sentences, but simply eliminates the obligation to impose a specific sentence for a specific crime? Does he realize that in committee, we could determine which mandatory sentences should remain in effect?

There are things that we and the Conservatives agree on, including the treatment of violent crimes involving firearms and repeat offenders. However, does my colleague not realize that there are people who are qualified to judge the seriousness of a crime and the level of punishment warranted? A court's duty is more to protect society than to punish perpetrators.

Does my colleague recognize that the sentences can be just as harsh, even if they are not—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, of course I realize that Bill C-5 will not eliminate all sentences, only mandatory minimum sentences.

However, for serious sentences, it is up to us, the members of Parliament, to determine what the judge should consider for each offence. That is our decision. We can set the minimum and maximum sentences, but the judge will decide how they will be applied based on the specific circumstances of each case.

I would also like to say that I totally agree with the Bloc Québécois concerning offences involving firearms and minimum sentences. The hon. member is absolutely right, and I am certain that we can take that into account in committee.

*Government Orders*

However, I would like to see a bill that is properly written from the outset, that the committee will not need to revise.

[English]

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have appreciated working with the member for Calgary Shepard in the past.

Perhaps he could answer a question for me. At the same time as the former Harper government put in place legislation a few years back, it gutted the network of crime prevention centres across the country. Members will recall that \$100 million in funding for crime prevention was slashed by the Harper government.

As we know, \$1 invested in crime prevention saves \$6 in policing costs, court costs and prison costs. It did not make sense that the Harper government eliminated crime prevention across the country, including centres such as the B.C. Centre for Crime Prevention.

Could the member explain why the Harper government gutted one of the most effective tools in combatting crime?

• (1240)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, I think we have hit the twilight zone in this chamber. The Harper government has not been in power in six years. It has been the government of the member for Papineau for the last six, so we should ask questions about that. This bill has nothing to do with financial decisions or spending decisions, so I cannot answer the member's question.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member spoke about an excellent piece of legislation in a previous Parliament that sought to take into consideration the circumstances of people with fetal alcohol syndrome. I note that some of the members from the government who have spoken, the justice minister and the member for Ottawa South, opposed that bill.

Could the member share more about why he supported this excellent private member's bill and why we need to see something like it passed into law?

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** We have time for a five-second answer from the member for Calgary Shepard.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, five seconds is not enough. I will have to find another Yiddish proverb.

The member is correct. It was Bill C-235, proposed by Mr. Bagnell from the Yukon. He will forgive me for saying, "from the Yukon". I understand we are not supposed to say that, as it is the Yukon territory. It was an excellent piece of legislation because it carved out special treatment for offenders who have fetal alcohol syndrome. They should be treated differently in the judicial system.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to discuss Bill C-5.

[English]

It proposes important reforms to reduce the over-incarceration of indigenous people, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities.

I am going to spend my time primarily talking about conditional sentence orders. I would like to bring to this conversation today my experience as the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the Attorney General of Ontario. As we all know, responsibilities in the administration of justice lie at the provincial level. In my comments, I will share some of the frustrations I felt, when I was in my provincial roles, with some of the changes that were made during the Harper government that are trying to be undone by Bill C-5.

As we all know, a fair and effective criminal justice system is critical to ensuring that Canadians feel safe in their communities, have confidence in their justice system and trust that offenders are being held accountable in a manner that is equitable and transparent and that promotes public safety in Canada. The unfortunate reality is that far too many people face discrimination and systemic racism at all stages of our criminal justice system. This problem has been exacerbated by tough-on-crime sentencing policies, including the indiscriminate and broad use of mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment, generally known as MMPs, and added restrictions placed on the availability of conditional sentence orders, or CSOs. These restrictions were meant to keep Canadians safe, so to speak, but this missed the point because conditional sentences are never permitted in cases where public safety is put at risk.

These restrictions have prevented judges from imposing non-custodial, community-based sentences, even in cases where these sentences would otherwise be appropriate under the circumstances. This one-size-fits-all approach to sentencing denies the reality that offences can be committed in a broad range of circumstances with varying degrees of seriousness. Someone who steals to feed their family is less blameworthy than someone who steals goods to sell on the black market. One-size-fits-all sentencing has too often used the latter example as the baseline for sentencing laws and this has created problems in our justice system. MMPs also run counter to the fundamental principle of sentencing, namely that sentences must be individually tailored to the particular circumstances of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender before the court.

Bill C-5 is an important step forward to provide alternatives to incarceration where appropriate, including for indigenous people and Black Canadians. One important component of the proposed reforms is a series of amendments to the conditional sentencing regime that would allow the regime to fulfill its original purpose, namely to address the overreliance on incarceration for less serious crimes.

### *Government Orders*

To better explain the importance of Bill C-5's amendments in this area, let me take a moment to speak about their original legislative purpose. CSOs were enacted in 1996, and I believe Allan Rock was the Minister of Justice in the House at that time. They were enacted as part of a comprehensive set of reforms that recognized the need to address Canada's inflated incarceration rate, particularly as it related to indigenous people.

A CSO allows an offender who does not pose a threat to public safety to serve a prison term of less than two years in the community under strict conditions, including house arrest and curfew. The law governing CSOs provides judges with the ability to impose a broad range of conditions that balance public safety against other important objectives, including rehabilitation. For example, a judge can require an offender to attend an approved treatment program, which can help address the underlying reasons that led to offending in the first place. This makes good sense to me. As Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the Attorney General of Ontario, I addressed this, because if an inmate or offender is sentenced two years less a day, that person goes to a provincial prison.

● (1245)

In my previous roles, I visited enough jails in Ontario to know they are not the best places to be. For someone who is facing an addiction or mental health issue, jail is not a place where they will get the right care, as opposed to being in a community. Evidence shows that allowing offenders who do not pose a risk to public safety to serve their sentences in the community under strict conditions, while maintaining access to employment and community and health-related support systems, is far more effective at reducing future criminality than harsh penalties such as incarceration.

Indeed, evidence gathered after the original enactment of CSOs supports this finding. Within the first few years of the implementation of CSOs, recidivism rates declined and the incarceration rate decreased by 13%. Criminal Code amendments enacted by the Conservative governments in 2007, with former Bill C-9, and in 2012, with former Bill C-10, have since severely restricted the availability of CSOs. These amendments made CSOs unavailable for all offences prosecuted by way of indictment that are punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of 14 years or life, as well as those punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years if the offences resulted in bodily harm or involved drugs or the use of a weapon. The reforms also introduced a list of ineligible offences to the CSO regime, including for non-violent property crime.

Because of these restrictions, the use of CSOs was significantly diminished. Statistics Canada data shows that the number of cases resulting in a CSO decreased from 11,545 cases in 2004 to 7,022 cases in 2018. Studies have further shown that these restrictions have had a disproportionately negative impact on indigenous people. These restrictions have also resulted in an increased number of charter challenges and calls for reform.

Bill C-5 would return the CSO regime to what existed prior to the 2007 amendments while ensuring that CSOs are unavailable for offences of advocating genocide, torture and attempted murder, as well as terrorism and criminal-organization offences that are prose-

cuted by way of indictment and for which the maximum term of imprisonment is 10 years or more. They would also continue to be unavailable for any offence carrying a mandatory minimum penalty. CSOs would thus become accessible for all other offences where the sentencing judge determines that a custodial sentence of under two years is appropriate, provided that the court is also satisfied that imposing a CSO would not endanger public safety and would be in keeping with the fundamental purpose and principles of sentencing.

This approach would allow sentencing judges to consider all available sanctions other than imprisonment for all offenders, consistent with the sentencing principle of restraint, which requires sentencing courts to take into consideration all available sanctions other than imprisonment that are reasonable in the circumstances, with particular attention to the circumstances of indigenous offenders. These amendments strike the right balance between ensuring the availability of alternatives to incarceration where appropriate and recognizing the importance of public safety where serious offending is at issue.

This legislation is a key milestone in our government's ongoing efforts to transform the criminal justice system. I applaud our government for proposing reforms that would realign CSOs with Parliament's original intent, an approach that evidence shows would directly contribute to reducing the overrepresentation of indigenous people, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities in our criminal justice system, and would afford more opportunity for rehabilitation and better reintegration in appropriate cases.

These are the kinds of things that, when I was the Attorney General of Ontario, we were asking the federal government to undertake. I am thrilled to see that this is taking place through Bill C-5. I am also quite thrilled that in my new role as a member of Parliament, I am able to speak to this bill and will be supporting it. I encourage other members to vote in favour of it as well.

● (1250)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is evident that many members of the government are trying to set up a sort of straw person to argue against in the context of this bill.

The member talked about issues of racism in the justice system. Lowering sentences overall across the board would not address the particular impacts on people from certain communities who get longer sentences. We all agree that judicial discretion is important, but mandatory minimums do not set a one-size-fits-all penalty. They set a minimum that expresses society's moral condemnation and say that at least the minimum for certain kinds of offences should be at a certain level.

*Government Orders*

I do not think anyone in the House is proposing that people who have addictions problems or who have engaged in personal possession offences should be spending time in prison. I think we can all agree that people in those situations should not be sent to prison. However, let us talk about the core controversy of this bill, which is removing mandatory minimum penalties for violent crime.

Does the member think that mandatory minimum penalties are appropriate for serious violent crimes, yes or no?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Madam Speaker, the member has read the bill and knows that serious violent crimes are not included in our removal of mandatory minimum sentences. What is interesting here is that the Conservatives, in their opposition, are the ones who continue to create this straw man argument that somehow, by taking away mandatory minimums, we would be weakening the criminal justice system. No two offences are alike and no two offenders are alike, and the best person to determine what sentence should be allowed for a particular offence is a judge, who has the benefit of all the evidence and all the facts before them, and not parliamentarians of this House.

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, I would like to congratulate the member on his election.

There have been two great reports: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report and the MMIWG report. Both of them make a call to address mandatory minimums.

Why is the government only taking a half step toward reducing the overrepresentation of indigenous, Black and other racialized Canadians in the criminal justice system?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Madam Speaker, it is a very valid point the member opposite is making. As I said in my remarks, this is a first and important step forward, but there is far more work that needs to be done. I agree with the member, and I support her and look forward to working with her.

When it comes to the entire implementation of the calls to action in the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the calls for justice in the report on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, more work needs to be done. However, I think the bill would set a new baseline for us to work with. By repealing some of the most regressive changes that were made by the previous government, we can move forward and fully implement the recommendations outlined in the reports she mentioned.

• (1255)

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the comments by the member across the way, and he said that he has visited jails and they are not very nice places. Well, people are in jail for a reason, and that is why we trust judges' opinions, because they were sent to jail.

I will follow up on the comments by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. Does the member not think there should be jail sentences for some of the crimes for which he is now trying to take away the mandatory minimum sentences, such as human trafficking, crimes committed with a firearm and firing a firearm with the intent to harm someone? Are those not some of the crimes that people should be uncomfortably put in jail for?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Madam Speaker, I was not advocating at all that everybody be released into the community. I think we have to look at the circumstances of individuals.

I encourage and invite members to go visit jails in their local communities. The reason our jails are not fulfilling the purpose they are supposed to is that we have filled them up beyond capacity. We have put people in them who may have mental health and addiction issues. These are health conditions. Let us get them out into a community setting, where they can get appropriate services, not just put them in jail. Yes, serious offenders should be in jail—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

**Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Madam Speaker, this is the first time that I have been able to rise in debate in the House of Commons in the 44th Parliament and I would like to begin by thanking a few people.

Throughout my career I have been a public servant and I am honoured to once again be serving the good people of Kootenay—Columbia. The past 20 months have been a difficult time. Many have answered the call to assist fellow Canadians, and have done so quietly and without acknowledgement. Today, I want to acknowledge one of those groups. My sincere gratitude to the constituency and Hill staff employees who have worked tirelessly under difficult circumstances to diligently support every member of this House and the constituents we serve.

There is no elected path to this House, this chamber, that does not involve the tremendous support of family. Today I would like to take a moment to thank my wife, Heather, for her commitment to our family and democracy, and for her unwavering support for the work I do here on behalf of Kootenay—Columbians and, indeed, all Canadians. Pursuit of the greater good always comes with sacrifice. I am so proud to be the beneficiary of her love and support.

Today we will be talking about mandatory minimum sentences as part of the Bill C-5 discussion. I would like to begin by setting the record straight. Colleagues across the aisle have once again taken serious legislation and are using it as a tool for political division. They have created a nice narrative for themselves, suggesting they are hard at work undoing the Conservative mandatory minimum penalties, when in fact the majority of mandatory minimum penalties that Bill C-5 stands to eliminate are applicable to firearms offences that were actually introduced by previous Liberal governments.

For those listening at home, Bill C-5, presented by the government, includes the removal of mandatory minimum penalties for criminals who commit firearm offences, including but not limited to using a firearm in commission of offences, weapons trafficking and robbery with a firearm. The government would rather send criminals who commit these offences home.

### *Government Orders*

Bill C-5 hits close to home both personally and, of course, professionally, as I served on the front lines of the war on drugs and have dealt with violent offenders throughout my career. What I know to be the absolute truth is that it is difficult to come up with solutions to big problems like the ones we are addressing today without hearing from the victims. I have been in the room with parents who have lost a child to an overdose and I have investigated and arrested the most violent criminals. I have first-hand experience with the front lines of these issues and see a clear and widening gap between where this bill currently sits and where we need to get to in order to make changes.

While we come to this House from different perspectives, I do believe that everyone in this chamber has a desire to do right by Canadians. Let me be clear to my colleagues across the aisle. If they want change, this bill will not get them there. In fact, based on my first-hand experience, Bill C-5 will move us further away from where we need to be in our collective pursuit of safer communities.

Canadians need to know and I want to be crystal clear on what the Conservative position is. Convicted violent predators, those individuals who prey on the innocence of our daughters and sons, deserve to go to prison, not to the comforts of their own home, yet the government seems politically determined, at the cost of safe communities, to send these criminals on a backyard vacation.

Through Bill C-5, the government also seeks to eliminate six mandatory minimums in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act that target drug dealers. They include trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking; importing, exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting; and the production of heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and crystal meth. The government's own messaging leads Canadians to believe they are simply helping those who struggle with addictions. The minister fails to point out that the mandatory minimums being eliminated are in place for those who target criminals who prey on those with addictions. There are far too many Canadians struggling with addiction. Instead of being focused on removing and reducing consequences for criminals, Bill C-5 should instead be focused on offering the help that is so desperately needed for those who suffer from addiction.

My Conservative colleagues and I believe strongly that those struggling with addictions should be the priority and receive the help that is needed. We have an opioid epidemic across this country and in British Columbia the situation is pronounced. Far too many parents and loved ones are receiving that dreaded phone call, where they are left to process the brutal reality that their child has suffered an overdose.

I would like to take a moment to address the issue of drug use and recovery. The road to recovery, of which I have both professional and personal experience, is very difficult and a long-term commitment. Successful crime prevention starts with our youth and must continue throughout their lives. Education programs can be successful if delivered at the appropriate time. However, with addiction to opioids, for example, the effort and success takes years. We do know the present system is not successful and that it does require change, but we need an approach that is a positive solution for rehabilitation, one that is configured to help those who are addicted, instead of helping those who are profiting from the addiction.

• (1300)

Given the decline in mental health and its connectivity to the issue we are talking about today, I would like to take this opportunity to join my colleagues in calling on the government to commit to an implementation date of funding the national three-digit helpline in this House, unanimously passed in the 43rd Parliament. The government owes it to Canadians to activate that line and create meaningful legislation that will actually serve to make our communities safe. We asked yesterday for a date for 988 to be activated and there was no response.

Contrary to what the minister claims, this is not about reducing mandatory minimum penalties for simple possession. Mandatory minimum sentences for simple possession do not exist. Bill C-5 would do nothing to address that. Instead, it would eliminate mandatory prison time for drug traffickers who commit acts of violence. It would allow criminals who have committed violent acts to serve their sentences on house arrest rather than in prison and puts our communities at risk. I would really like to know who the government consulted. Did they talk to the victims?

Organized crime and gangs prey on our youth. A friend of mine had a 12-year-old daughter who was approached in an elementary school playground by a gang member and was tricked into using crystal meth. By the time the girl was 13, she had stolen most of her family's valuables to support her addiction. The organized crime gang forced her into prostitution. To consider reducing minimum sentences for these gang members is not a solution.

The minister says the purpose of the bill is to tackle overrepresentation of indigenous people and Black Canadians in our prisons. According to a recent article in *The Globe and Mail*, the bill would not meet that objective. The article states that for "a bill that is ostensibly about racial justice, every single provision in this bill is entirely race neutral." For nearly a year, the government has asserted that the selected mandatory minimum penalties disproportionately affect Black and indigenous people, but has offered no evidence to suggest they will meaningfully redress overrepresentation.

Bill C-5 leaves in place the harshest mandatory minimum penalties and their brutal effects for indigenous women, in particular. According to the 2019 Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview, a report released by then Minister of Public Safety, almost half of the women sentenced to mandatory life sentences are indigenous and most acted in the self-defence context of lifetimes of abuse and trauma. Clearly these women are victims and not the greatest risk to public safety in Canada, yet Bill C-5 would continue to serve Canada's harshest penalties. All Canadians deserve a more fair and just criminal legal system. Nanaimo, B.C. has a very successful restorative justice program. This is where we need to focus our path forward.

*Government Orders*

We are left to wonder who the government consulted on this legislation and whether those voices are present in this bill's current form. I am also left to wonder about its understanding of enforcement, as the bill adds to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act a set of principles that peace officers and prosecutors should use for determining whether to lay charges for possession. Surely the minister knew that police officers already had the flexibility to do this.

Conservatives have serious concerns with the government's proposal to allow criminals to serve house arrest rather than jail time for a number of offences, including sexual assault, human trafficking and kidnapping. This bill would put communities and victims at risk.

In closing, I ask all colleagues in this House consider the real-life outcome that they will be enacting by choosing to make life easier for violent offenders and drug traffickers. It seems apparent that we should instead be holding these criminals accountable for their actions and focus instead on creating meaningful legislation that will help victims and those with addictions to make our communities safer.

● (1305)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his re-election.

I want to pick up on a couple of his comments, especially with respect to evidence of the disproportional impact of MMPs on racialized communities, particularly indigenous and Black communities. There is overwhelming social science research and a number of court cases that have indicated that this does have a disproportional impact. Also, when I was part of developing the national anti-racism strategy in 2019, we heard from so many different communities across Canada on this.

I am wondering where the member is picking up the evidence that there is no impact in removing MMPs on these particular offences that he cited from *The Globe and Mail*. The overwhelming evidence is that there is a disproportional impact because of MMPs to racialized communities.

**Mr. Rob Morrison:** Madam Speaker, that is not exactly what I said. Just to clarify, it was a comment in *The Globe and Mail*. I am an evidence-based individual and believe in following the evidence as to how we move forward. I would ask the member to show me the evidence on how this bill would help people who are marginalized right now.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ):** Madam Speaker, a very long time ago, a man named Thomas More wrote a book called *Utopia*. In the book, he basically says that a society's customs and habits can end up supporting crime.

Here is my question today. In some cases, is our society not supporting crime by failing to invest in social systems, by failing to provide support and supervision for young criminals, who could turn away from crime if they received the necessary support instead of being locked up for long periods of time with far more hardened criminals?

[*English*]

**Mr. Rob Morrison:** Madam Speaker, yes, absolutely we do need to help our youth. The opioid crisis is a great example. If we were to have a program that could help them and get them on the right track, a rehabilitation program that would get them through this so that they were being helped rather than continuing in the criminal justice system that would be a huge bonus.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for talking about the opioid and overdose crisis. Chief James Ramer from the Toronto Police Department wrote in a letter to Dr. de Villa, Toronto's medical health officer, that the force supports a new approach to decriminalization. He said:

We agree that the current approach to managing drug use does not support safe communities or advance the health of people who use drugs.

He cited that:

Decriminalization of the simple possession of all drugs - combined with the scale-up of prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services - is a more effective way to address the public health and public safety harms associated with substance use.

He said that a decriminalization model should include a safe supply of drugs, something health care workers have demanded for years.

Does my colleague support the Association of Chiefs of Police, medical health officers across this country and experts in their call to action to end the poison drug supply crisis and save lives?

● (1310)

**Mr. Rob Morrison:** Madam Speaker, having been a former member of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, I am very familiar with where they are going and I agree that right now we are in decriminalization of most drugs because the courts cannot handle that. That is at the discretion of the members and that is where they are working right now.

I believe that we need to do a lot of work to support people with addictions and that criminal prosecution is not the answer in many cases, especially for those who are addicted to opioids, for example.

**Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP):** Madam Speaker, this being my first time rising to give a speech of this length, I wanted to pause to give some thanks. First of all, I thank my neighbours across Kitchener Centre for placing their trust in me to be our community's voice in this place, as well as the hundreds of people who joined to knock on doors and make phone calls. In particular, there was a core group: Jackie, Devon, Ros, Joanna, Janet, Zoe, Scott, Wayne, Noah, Greg, Brenden and Jenna. As well, I give a special thanks to Mats for all the work over the last three years leading up this point, and of course to Asha, who managed both campaigns. I would not be here without them.

*Government Orders*

I give a final thanks to my mom, my dad, my brothers Brad and Rob, and my sister Emily. They have been there alongside me every step of the way, including knocking on doors and making calls, all of which has led me to having the privilege to speak in moments like these, in this place, on our community's priorities.

This brings me to Bill C-5. I would like to start with what I appreciate about this proposed legislation, which is the stated goal of addressing systemic racism in Canada's criminal justice system. By targeting mandatory minimum penalties, I appreciate that the government is seeking to address the fact that in 2020, despite representing 5% of the Canadian adult population, indigenous adults accounted for 30% of federally incarcerated inmates; that the proportion of indigenous offenders admitted with an offence punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty has almost doubled between 2007-08 and 2016-17, from 14% to 26%; and, finally, that in 2018-19, Black inmates represented 7% of the federal offender population but only 3% of the Canadian population.

By removing the mandatory minimum penalties included in this bill, I appreciate the government's intent to address these injustices. That being said, we need to be honest with ourselves. Mandatory minimum penalties do not deter crime, and all mandatory minimum penalties contribute to systemic racism. However, Bill C-5, as currently proposed, targets less than one in five of all mandatory minimum penalties in full. That is just 13 out of 73, less than one-third in full or in part, or 20 out of 73, and only 10 of the 28 that courts have already found unconstitutional.

In this way, it seems reasonable to assess this bill as one of half measures. I have been in this place for only just over three weeks, and I often hear the word "reconciliation" used. On this topic, I would like to read call to action 32 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which states the following:

We call upon the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to allow trial judges, upon giving reasons, to depart from mandatory minimum sentences and restrictions on the use of conditional sentences.

I note, particularly for the members in this place who purport to support every single one of the calls to action, including, I assume, call to action 32, that this does not say one in five.

I would also like to read call to justice 5.14 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which states the following:

We call upon federal, provincial and territorial governments to thoroughly evaluate the impact of mandatory minimum sentences as it relates to the sentencing and over-incarceration of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people and to take appropriate action to address their over-incarceration.

I have heard the members who are concerned about crime, including the most recent speaker in this House. To be clear: Removing mandatory minimum penalties is really about placing our trust where it should be, which is in the judiciary.

In place of mandatory minimum penalties, sentencing judges would still be required to impose a sentence that is proportionate to the degree of responsibility of the offender and the seriousness of the offence, taking into account all aggravating and mitigating factors. This includes the risk to public safety. It also includes the individual and all relevant circumstances of the case in front of them, including acknowledging and redressing the realities of colonialism

and systemic racism in the lives of indigenous people, Black Canadians and other racialized groups.

● (1315)

A final point I would like to make is that this bill misses a significant opportunity, which is that even with mandatory minimum penalties removed, people across the country would still be going to jail for simple possession of illicit drugs and would continue to die from addiction and from a dangerous supply. We would continue to be applying an outdated understanding of drug use from the 1980s instead of applying the very clear public health advice from experts, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which we have in front of us. That advice is to decriminalize illicit drugs, to offer a regulated safe supply, and to treat this like the mental health and addictions crisis that we know it to be.

So far this year, in my community alone, we have lost 120 community members to a poisoned drug supply. Since January 2016, across the country, over 25,000 lives have been lost, each one a preventable death. For this reason, I support the calls made by others in this House, encouraging the minister to move this bill to committee before second reading so its scope can be expanded to include decriminalization.

In closing, I would like to offer two considerations to the government. The first is to consider expanding the list of mandatory minimum penalties to be repealed by this bill to address the government's stated intent of addressing systemic racism. The second is to consider offering clear evidence that the small fraction of mandatory minimum penalties currently included to be repealed by Bill C-5 would in fact reduce the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in federal prisons.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to welcome our new colleague from Kitchener Centre to the House. I congratulate him on his election.

With respect to the bill itself and to conditional sentencing orders, what does he think the overall impact of that will be on ensuring that we have off-ramps for those who are just getting involved in the criminal justice system? Could he comment on its potential impact on the overall incarceration of racialized people?

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** Madam Speaker, I congratulate the parliamentary secretary on his re-election.

We heard a significant amount from a previous member on CSOs. I would rather focus the commentary, whether it is now or in committee, on expanding the number of mandatory minimum penalties that should be repealed. Doing so would be the effective way. We have seen in the research that it is by repealing the mandatory minimum penalties that we have the best chance of reducing the overrepresentation of Black, indigenous and racialized inmates in incarceration.



*Government Orders*

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Madam Speaker, with respect to the offences of possession of a controlled substance under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, where in section 4 of that act does it speak to any mandatory minimum penalties? You spoke about automatic jail sentences. I would like clarification—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I remind members that they are to speak through me, please. I did not say anything. The member may complete his question, but just speak through me and not directly to the member.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Madam Speaker, I would like the hon. member to inform me where in section 4 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act it speaks to mandatory minimum penalties.

● (1320)

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** Madam Speaker, again, the point I was making is that for all mandatory minimum penalties, when they are repealed, sentencing judges would still be required to impose a sentence proportionate to the degree of responsibility, and I trust in the judiciary to follow through appropriately.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, what people know of St. Anne's Residential School is that it was where children were tortured in an electric chair. What they know is that the justice department suppressed thousands of pages of police evidence.

We just had a new report by a justice, a total whitewash, in which it says that the adjudicators who rejected claims of survivors who were tortured in the electric chair were right because, at the time, torturing indigenous children in an electric chair was considered a form of entertainment by the priests.

If we have that view in 2021, that justice is the right of the government to suppress evidence when it comes to indigenous rights, and that it is okay, how can we expect that anyone in this system who is indigenous will ever get justice in Canada?

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** Madam Speaker, that is why I am so glad to have members like the hon. member for Nunavut in this place, so that the voices of indigenous peoples are increasingly being heard directly in this place. I included citations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the national inquiry, because this place is better served when the voices of indigenous people are heard directly and their calls are answered appropriately, as they should be.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it truly is a pleasure for me to speak to this bill today. It is unfortunate that we are already seeing the government's soft-on-crime approach come up at the first available opportunity.

Bill C-5 is the unfortunate perfect example of this approach. This bill would do nothing to make our communities safer for Canadians. Instead, it would reduce punishments and accountability for drug dealers and for those who commit violent gun crimes. This bill would see the individuals responsible for harming our communities serve their time in our communities alongside victims, rather than in prisons where they truly belong.

Bill C-5 would be responsible for eliminating a large number of mandatory minimum sentences for some of our most serious crimes, like robbery with a firearm, weapons trafficking, discharging a firearm with intent and extortion using a firearm. These are

just a few of the crimes that would no longer be served with mandatory minimum sentences. If this bill is passed, it clearly would not achieve the result of making Canadian communities safer.

The crimes this bill would affect are incredibly serious offences. Canadians would be alarmed to learn that the mandatory minimum jail time for the possession of an unauthorized firearm, possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm, possession of a weapon obtained by commission of an offence, and possession for the purpose of weapons trafficking would all be reduced by this bill.

The government must assume Canadians lack common sense if it thinks this bill would stop gun crimes by reducing the mandatory minimum prison sentences for criminals. The Liberals propose that this bill would help those struggling with addiction to find the treatment they so desperately need. Canadians who are struggling with addiction should be able to access treatment. Instead, this bill would eliminate mandatory prison time for the criminals who traffic and import or export these deadly substances under schedule I or II.

To be clear, the Liberals are proposing to let drug traffickers and manufacturers off the hook, while at the same time claiming this would help people suffering from addiction. This pandemic has shown us just how serious the opioid crisis is in parts of our country. Now is the time we should be cracking down on those who are poisoning our communities. The Liberal solution is to take away the mandatory prison sentences those fuelling this crisis should face.

We have heard a representative of the government state that it would be getting rid of the minimum penalties put in place by those nasty Conservatives. Many of those laws were put in place during the mid-90s, when Pierre Elliott Trudeau was prime minister, by the Liberal government of the day. The Liberals blaming Conservatives for the laws of a previous Liberal government is a little steep.

The Liberals try to convince Canadians they are helping addicts and communities, but what they are actually attempting to do is reduce the sentences and eliminate accountability for those who traffic and manufacture the drugs that fuel crime, addiction and death in this crisis that we are seeing in communities across our country. Instead of punishing gangs, they are attempting to crack down on law-abiding firearms owners.

### *Government Orders*

We have a very thorough system in place in our country for law-abiding firearms owners. The firearms community, hunters and sport shooters are all in agreement that we need a robust system. Background checks are already in place. They are proven to be very effective. It should be no surprise that we do not understand how this bill would tackle firearms offences by eliminating mandatory prison sentences for the gangs and criminals who do not follow the already robust system.

It should not be a surprise that during the last Parliament, the government had its members vote against a Conservative private member's bill that would have seen punishment for those who traffic weapons strengthened. Now we see the government proposing to weaken the punishments. The disconnect could not be more obvious.

I have seen what these types of offences can do in my own community of Oxford. Canadians are seriously concerned about the rise of violent and drug-related crimes in their communities. It is extremely concerning to see the government taking a soft-on-crime stance and not one that stands up for victims and their communities.

As a former police chief in my community, I have witnessed the struggle that officers have had to continue to go through in keeping our communities safe. Instead of providing officers with the expansion of resources, the Liberal government would like to see fewer protections for our victims and softer punishments for criminals. We are talking about criminals. These are people who have been convicted in our courts, convicted of crimes such as robbery with a firearm, trafficking firearms, and the production of schedule I or II substances, such as heroin, cocaine or fentanyl. These are the people the government would like to see let out of their sentences earlier.

● (1325)

Further, the government would like to see the expansion of the use of conditional sentences. Kidnapping, sexual assault, human trafficking or the abduction of a minor are all crimes the government would like to see criminals serve on house arrest in the communities where these crimes were committed.

We keep hearing the government say that it wants to help those struggling with drug addiction. We know the justice system and police in our country already have the ability to utilize discretion in dealing with folks who are struggling with addiction, such as for a simple possession. The government needs to get serious about the expansion of support for people who are struggling with addiction and their mental health.

Canadians have elected all of us to the House to take action. Where is the action on the call that was passed in the House for the institution of a national three-digit suicide prevention hotline? This would be an example of concrete action. It is unfortunate that it seems the only reason the government is dragging its feet on this action is because it was one of my Conservative colleagues who proposed it.

We heard the Prime Minister state that one of his reasons for calling a \$600 million election in the middle of a pandemic was because of a lack of co-operation with the opposition parties in the House. Where is that co-operation from the Prime Minister's gov-

ernment? It took two full months, after what the Prime Minister called our most important election in Canadian history, to get the House back to sitting. Now that we have reconvened, the government takes one of its first opportunities to introduce a bill that is seriously concerning to Canadians. Drug and gun traffickers and manufacturers belong in prisons, not in our communities.

This bill is what sport fishermen would call a "catch and release". It really is not going to help our communities.

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the member touched on the fact that he was a former police chief in his community, and I would like to thank him for his service. I suspect in the lead up to becoming the chief of police, he would have served on the front lines. He has mentioned, of course, some of the diversion elements of the bill that try to treat individuals who have an addiction to drugs and who have simple possession and to pursue other means.

When he was on the front lines and dealing with individuals who had addictions, did he see that through a criminality lens or did he see that as people who had health issues and perhaps have different ways to help solve their challenges?

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Madam Speaker, police officers see it from a variety of lenses. The biggest single lens they see it through is the individuals before them. It may be someone who has committed a criminal act, but needs help and will not go to prison. It is also trying to help the victims to see that justice is being served by having help provided to the individual. The member is absolutely right. There are a variety of resources in our communities, but we need a lot more of those resources. Letting the traffickers and people who manufacture drugs get a one-way ticket to freedom is not right.

● (1330)

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, I have been concerned today hearing the Conservatives' view about their labelling criminals, and criminals being criminals. I do not think criminals are born criminals. They become criminals because of the system in which they live.

Does the member recognize that criminal records for personal possession of drugs is a significant barrier to employment and housing? Both are necessary for recovery from addictions based on the situations they have been forced to live in many for years, decades and maybe even generations, especially given the communities in which they live. All we have heard today is that most over-incarceration rates are racialized communities. *Qujannamiik*.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Madam Speaker, in actual fact, there are so many reasons crime occurs, but getting a record for simple possession is not one. Police officers have not been laying those charges for an awfully long time. It goes back into the sixties perhaps, but I do not think we will find those charges being laid in the last 30 years.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Madam Speaker, in the province of Ontario, where the hon. member is also from, we had a very unfortunate circumstance a few years ago. An indigenous inmate who was 24 years old was held for four years in solitary confinement in a prison in Thunder Bay, Ontario. My colleague spoke about various mental health conditions, supports and considerations that must be taken into account when we deal with legislation that is put forward.

Could the member comment on that from his perspective as a former police chief? Could he also comment about the irony of the fact that we have a Liberal government introducing this legislation when it was the Liberal government under which this unfortunate circumstance in Thunder Bay took place?

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Madam Speaker, I am not familiar with that situation, but it sounds horrendous. It should never have occurred. That is a mental health issue, but this bill would not help that situation. It is abominable that someone would serve four years in solitary confinement in any institution.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I know my colleague spent time as a police chief. His time in the House has been extensive and he has a lot of experience to share. Does he see anything in the legislation that would actually prevent, restrict or reduce crime?

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Madam Speaker, absolutely not. One factor missing in all of this are the victims. Nobody is asking who the victims are and where they are getting their help from. One thing we need to do as a society is to help victims, and we are not doing that.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-5.

This bill was introduced during the previous Parliament. It is very important for all Canadians, but especially for Black Canadians and indigenous people. It is also important for the safety of Canadians in general, because Bill C-5 seeks to address two problems with our system.

First, it is important to do away with minimum mandatory penalties in the penitentiary system. Second, the bill provides for more flexibility, more latitude, which is a good thing when it comes to conditional sentencing.

I therefore hope that all members will not only support the bill, but also add measures that are in keeping with the spirit of the bill, so that we can do even more. In my opinion, it is extremely important that my colleagues support this bill.

I want to begin by talking about mandatory minimum penalties.

It makes no sense to keep incarcerating people and eliminating the flexibility that every judge and court needs.

Judges have a responsibility to judge a situation and enhance Canadians' safety. They also propose a sentence that reflects the severity of the crime that was committed.

Removing flexibility and having parliamentarians set an arbitrary duration makes no sense. This does not help keep Canadians safe and, in many cases, it also punishes people because they receive the wrong sentence.

Members of the House of Commons enjoy two remarkable benefits. The first is that we have the right to visit any Canadian Armed Forces unit; the second is that we have the right to visit prisons or penitentiaries.

In 2015, after my election, I did that very thing. I would not say it was a pleasure, but I can say that it completely changed the way I look at Canada's penitentiary system. I had the chance to visit institutions where the incarcerated were serving maximum, minimum or medium sentences.

It was remarkable and it really opened my eyes. I saw the conditions people were living in. I must say, in all sincerity, that I do not think those conditions are conducive to rehabilitating incarcerated people. I soon came to the conclusion that we have to leave prisons for people who truly pose a risk to Canadians.

● (1335)

People may have mental health or addiction issues for any number of reasons: not having been able to keep a job, learning survival of the fittest on the streets of Canadian cities. These people do not need to be incarcerated. They need access to other options, such as addiction treatment. These are people who may never have felt a sense of belonging.

As a father of three and grandfather of two, I know just how crucial that sense of security and belonging is to young people. Some never have that with their family, so they find it with a gang because there are no other options.

I feel it is our duty as parliamentarians to find and fund ways to make sure that these people have other options before throwing them in jail. As I said, prison is the worst possible place to put people if we are hoping to mould them into model citizens. That is not how it works. I would encourage my colleagues to visit a prison during their time in politics. They should see how it works with their own eyes.

I am hearing some people say that because handgun use is skyrocketing in my hometown of Montreal and other Canadian cities, this is not the right time to introduce a bill like this. They are saying that they do not want to lighten the penalties in place, that it is not the right time. I have to ask, though, when will it be the right time?

*Government Orders*

Let us look at the situation logically. In the current environment, where these minimum sentences exist, we are seeing an increase in the use of handguns. Nothing has changed. For a generation, we have been tightening up and toughening up penalties, but the result has been the skyrocketing use of handguns. Let us then try something different. We cannot keep doing the same thing and expecting different results. That does not make sense.

I think we need to start looking for a new model, a new way to respond to the current situation. We have to trust that judges will use their judgment. We need to invest money to give these young people options other than street gangs. Bill C-5 is a step in the right direction.

I hope we will be bold enough to do things differently and provide a solution that can finally keep Canadians safe.

• (1340)

[*English*]

**Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the citizens of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I was struck by the hon. parliamentary secretary's comments when he said that sentences are getting stiffer. I would first ask him what empirical evidence he has to back up that proposition.

In my experience as somebody who worked in the correctional system in penitentiaries, and in the community in the federal correctional system, I would agree with him that rehabilitation can be challenging. One of the comments he made was that these types of penalties should be restricted for the most serious of offences and those people, as I understood his comments through translation, who are a danger to the public. Would he agree that people who target other people with shootings are a danger to the public as well?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Speaker, first I would like to congratulate my colleague for being elected to the House of Commons.

From the comfort of our living room at home, wherever we might be in Canada, we believe that incarcerating people and toughening sentences will magically make Canadians safer. However, that is just not true, as the data collected over a generation has shown us.

We need to focus on another approach, specifically helping people, giving them the chance to be part of a community, and working in every way possible with community groups in each region to ensure that people see there are alternatives to violence.

• (1345)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague's comments about providing funding for support and rehabilitation. This could be accomplished in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada through a health transfer for support and social programs.

The government could do both. It could eliminate mandatory minimum penalties, which do nothing to reduce crime, and let judges decide, while also transferring 35% of total health care costs

to Quebec and the Canadian provinces, as they are calling for. Why will the government not do that?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou. We had the opportunity to work together before this past election and I truly appreciate her wisdom.

We agree on the basic premise of her question. We want to reduce mandatory minimum penalties, so I commend her on that. We also want to increase funding for the community groups that help these people; we do not want to needlessly incarcerate them. We do share the same values.

[*English*]

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have struggled today to listen to the debate in the House and hear many members talk with the assumption that this is a level playing field and that people come to be involved in crime from a place of equality. I appreciated that the member took some time today to talk about that not being accurate. There is uniqueness to each story and each individual, and that needs to be accounted for.

I also appreciated that he said today that Bill C-5 is part of the solution. The problem is that it is only a part of it. We know that individuals who are suffering from the opioid crisis need access to a safe supply and that decriminalization is the best way to move forward. This is keeping people in the criminal system.

Would the member not agree that decriminalizing possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use is a better strategy?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Speaker, first of all, let me thank the member from Edmonton for her work and support on these files. I certainly have heard her throughout the last Parliament advocating for this.

I will be very, very quick. We do not all start off with an equal playing field. We do need to make sure that we invest in ways that can respond to the individual needs of the people and not a cookie-cutter approach, which we have tried for the last 30 years, and which has clearly failed on any measure. I will not let—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak today on Bill C-5, a seriously flawed and dangerous piece of proposed legislation. My commentary and opinion on this are shaped by my experience as a lawyer for almost 30 years, the last 18 years as a Crown attorney for the Province of Ontario.

*Government Orders*

A week ago today, members in the House stood in solidarity to honour and remember the victims of the Montreal massacre. Fourteen women were murdered, and 10 women and four men were injured. That day was an opportunity for the House, and especially the Prime Minister and his government, to stand strong against all forms of gun violence and to inform Canadians in very clear terms that they would take immediate steps to curb the ever-increasing tide of this criminal behaviour. What is most disturbing is that, less than 24 hours removed from this commemoration, the justice minister introduced Bill C-5, which was a tone-deaf and ill-timed response from this government.

The Prime Minister in the last election promised peace, order and good government. He said that Canada needs leadership that would not back down in the face of rising extremism and that he would take action to put an end to gun violence in our communities. Bill C-5 is the complete opposite of this pledge and proves to be another example of virtue signalling to all Canadians.

Bill C-5 is identical to Bill C-22, which was first introduced in the last Parliament. That bill never made it past the second reading before the unnecessary federal election was called. The bill would eliminate mandatory minimum penalties for 14 of the 67 offences in the code, 13 for firearm offences and one for a tobacco offence. Notwithstanding what we have heard over the last week by the justice minister and his government, this dangerous bill is not targeted at less serious gun crime.

As an example, let us take a look at section 244(1) of the code, which reads:

Every person commits an offence who discharges a firearm at a person with intent to wound, maim or disfigure, to endanger the life of or to prevent the arrest or detention of any person

I would ask any member of the House to somehow convince me that that would constitute a less serious gun offence.

The bill would also eliminate all six mandatory minimums for offences under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. These include the very serious offences of trafficking, importing and exporting, and the production of controlled substances. I invite members to think about that for a moment. This soft-on-crime, ideologically driven Liberal government believes that those who traffic and produce fentanyl, the most deadly and lethal form of street drug, which is being sold to millions of addicts, is causing an opioid crisis, and results in daily overdoses and deaths, should not expect to receive a minimum period of incarceration. It is utterly shameful and dangerous.

As a rookie member and political aficionado in Ottawa, I have repeatedly heard a false narrative from the Prime Minister and his government that Prime Minister Harper is to blame for everything that has gone wrong in this country. Perhaps it is about time for this government to engage in some self-reflection.

Contrary to the justice minister's talking points about the government "turning the page on a failed Conservative criminal justice policy", the fact remains that it is keeping the other 53 mandatory minimums in the code intact and keeping most of the ones introduced by the Conservative Party. The justice minister needs to be reminded that it was former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in

1977 and prime minister Jean Chrétien in 1995 who introduced several mandatory minimums for firearm offences.

These penalties have been rooted in our criminal justice system since the early 1890s. Legislators, over the decades that followed, have relied upon mandatory sentencing tools to mitigate inconsistencies in the exercise of judicial discretion. A key feature of our system of government is that Parliament constantly reviews all legislation and passes new legislation to ensure its laws, including sentencing laws, properly align with the demands of justice. Those demands of justice speak very clearly that there is a tremendous increase in gun violence across this country.

Conservatives believe that serious violent offences committed with firearms deserve mandatory prison time. If government members will not take our word on this subject, then perhaps they will listen and reflect on what eloquent jurists have said about gun violence in our communities.

● (1350)

Firearm use and possession is not a momentary lapse in judgment. Heavy regulation of firearms and ammunition means that those who possess them had to make a concerted effort to do so. A person does not stumble upon an illegal handgun. There is a process of purchasing from a trafficker and secreting the handgun to avoid detection and prosecution. There is a high degree of deliberation and contemplation. Loaded firearms, especially in public, add a dimension of heightened risk.

Hear the words of Justice D. E. Harris:

A person with a gun in their hands has a god-like power over life and death. Virtually all that is necessary is to point at another person and to apply a few pounds of pressure on the trigger in order to end a human life.... The ease of killing with a gun...is an exigent danger to us all.

He said, "Such immense power with so little reason must be opposed with everything at our disposal."

Listen to these chilling words from Justice Molloy in the decision of Ferrigon:

A person who loads a handgun with bullets and then carries that handgun, concealed on his person, into a public place is by definition a dangerous person. Handguns are used to shoot people. A person who carries a loaded handgun in public has demonstrated his willingness to shoot another human being with it. Otherwise there would be no need to have loaded it. That person is dangerous. He is dangerous to those with whom he associates; he is dangerous to the police and other law enforcement personnel; he is dangerous to the members of his community; he is dangerous to innocent bystanders, including children, who may be killed or maimed by stray bullets.

*Statements by Members*

According to Public Safety Canada, violent crime involving firearms is a growing threat to public safety in our communities. Gun violence is on the rise: an 81% increase in violent offences involving guns since 2009; one in three homicides in Canada are firearm related; and 47% of Canadians feel gun violence is a threat to their community. Gun violence impacts people and communities across Canada. It happens in urban, suburban and rural communities across every province and territory, in all age and socio-economic groups and, last, among those who own guns and those who do not.

This is a moment in time to strengthen our gun laws to emphasize the principles of denunciation and deterrence. This is not the time to advance a soft-on-crime bill that puts communities and victims at risk.

Mandatory minimum sentences are an important tool for ensuring, not inhibiting, justice in sentencing. Rather than eliminating a judge's ability to assess a proportionate sentence, mandatory minimums set a stable sentencing range for an offence, permitting citizens to understand in advance the severity of the consequences that attend the commission of that offence.

The justice minister stressed that Bill C-5 was not aimed at hardened criminals but at first-time low-risk offenders. He was quoted on December 8, stating:

Think about your own kids. Perhaps they got into trouble at some point with the law. I bet you would want to give them the benefit of the doubt or a second chance if they messed up. Well, it is a lot harder to get a second chance the way things are now...

That is such a disturbing message from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. I cannot think of any other example of being tone deaf to the obvious. We are indeed focusing on serious violent offenders and not misguided, mischievous youthful first offenders.

The Liberal government claims the bill is to address racism in Canada's criminal justice system. As noted by the Alberta minister for justice, Kaycee Madu:

While Ottawa's new justice bill...contains some reasonable measures, I am deeply concerned about the decision to gut tough sentencing provisions for gun crimes...Removing tough, mandatory penalties for actual gun crimes undermines the very minority communities that are so often victimized by brazen gun violence. I also find it disingenuous for Ottawa to exploit a genuine issue like systemic racism to push through their soft-on-crime bills.

As a former Crown attorney, I am very much aware and wholeheartedly accept that there is a disproportionately higher rate of incarcerated indigenous and Black Canadians. We as parliamentarians have the tools necessary to put into place measures to address this problem. We already have principles that mandate jurists to consider the background of indigenous offenders.

The Liberal government last year committed \$6.6 million to produce better informed sentencing decisions based on an understanding of the adversities and systemic inequalities that Black Canadians and members of other racialized groups faced.

Furthermore, Parliament has an opportunity to put into place a safety valve known as a constitutional exemption that would allow judges to exempt outliers for whom the mandatory minimum would constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

This flawed and dangerous bill would also substantially alter the conditional sentence regime, which would now allow such a sentence to be imposed for sex assaults, criminal harassment, kidnapping, human trafficking, arson and abduction.

• (1355)

What I found most ironic is that yesterday we heard from the justice minister that this legislation would reduce a significant amount of charter challenges and speed up the disposition of criminal cases. What he failed to address was how the changes to the conditional sentence regime would result in a plethora of increased litigation as the proposed amendments were lawfully unavailable.

A condition precedent to the availability of the conditional sentence is that a justice must be satisfied that serving a sentence at home would not endanger the safety of the community. Offenders convicted of sexual assault, criminal harassment, kidnapping and abduction are indeed dangerous.

Furthermore, section 752 defines the above offences as a serious personal injury offence, which the provincial appellate courts have consistently excluded from conditional sentence consideration.

The number one priority for the federal government is to keep Canadians safe. The Liberal government has been derelict in its responsibility. This soft-on-crime, ideologically driven bill needs to be defeated.

• (1400)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member will have five minutes for questions and comments after Oral Questions.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, this holiday season, I would like to highlight the importance of supporting all those who support others during this time of year.

Organizations and volunteer groups across the riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook are stepping up to help less fortunate people during the holiday season. Organizations like Freedom Kitchen in Lower Sackville, the Lions Christmas Express in Fall River, the Eastern Passage-Cow Bay Community Food Bank and community groups across the Eastern Shore are stepping up to make a difference and help others.

I encourage Nova Scotians and Canadians to find ways to donate time or money to different organizations in our communities that work tirelessly to help support individuals in communities across my riding and across Canada.

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### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise today on a matter of great concern involving workers in my region.

I thank the workers and Unifor representatives for alerting me to a brewing EI crisis. This crisis has many faces. It impacts expectant moms, who have had to use their regular EI at the expense of their maternity benefits. One mom was eligible for only one week of maternity benefits, one week of what should have been several months to bond with her baby.

I am thinking of the 450 assembly plant workers on extended layoffs due to a global chip shortage; the laid-off workers in the feeder plants, seven for each one in the assembly plant; and the 854 active on-layoff Local 444 casino workers who have exhausted their EI benefits.

Some workers in our region have only worked nine weeks this year. Facing an anxious Christmas and uncertain future, they need a compassionate and swift response from the government.

\* \* \*

### SAULT STE. MARIE

**Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I stand here today in this the first session of the 44th Parliament, and once again humbled and honoured to continue to serve my constituents of Sault Ste. Marie for a third term.

With that, I am incredibly grateful and thank my family, and many volunteers and supporters of my team who worked tirelessly in every possible way to get out the vote. I thank them for the profound trust bestowed on me.

From my family to everyone's family, may beautiful moments and happy memories fill our hearts and home with joy this holiday season. We wish everybody peace, love and blessings always, and best wishes for the New Year. May Santa Claus bring joy to everyone's heart that will last all year.

I would like to give a special shout-out to my mom and dad, who have been supporting me now for the past 25 years in local politics. I love them both.

### Statements by Members

[Translation]

### SISTER JEANNE VANASSE

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all art lovers to visit the Musée des cultures du monde in Nicolet to see the work of Sister Jeanne Vanasse who, at the age of 100, is presenting an exhibition called “La Genèse, un début sans fin”.

Sister Vanasse studied at the École des beaux-arts de Québec for four years, in the class of the famous painter Jean Paul Lemieux. In the 1960s, she began exhibiting her paintings and prints in all the major exhibitions in Quebec.

In 1967, she submitted her famous thesis on the visual arts to the minister of education. As a teacher at the Cégep de Trois-Rivières, she also participated in study trips to France, Spain and Italy.

As she is nearing the end of her journey on this earth, the artist wanted to delve into the beginnings of the world, as if the end and the beginning were one and the same phenomenon. She approaches the entire process with works that express surprising serenity.

I applaud her. Many of us will go to visit her exhibition and wish her a happy 100th birthday.

\* \* \*

[English]

### NOELVILLE

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the community of Noelville from the French River region. This year, Noelville was chosen as part of Canada Post's limited-edition holiday commemorative stamp set. This gesture honours this special town and Noel Desmarais, who was the first merchant in the community.

[Translation]

I want to thank Canada Post for spreading holiday cheer. I also thank its employees for the long hours they put in so that everyone can receive their deliveries in time for the holidays.

We are grateful to all the frontline workers, and I would like to sincerely thank all the volunteers who support Nickel Belt's most vulnerable people, as well as its seniors and food banks.

I wish everyone a wonderful Christmas and good health, and to paraphrase the lyrics of a little tune my father used to play on the fiddle, I hope that is how it goes in the new year.

*Statements by Members*

● (1405)

[English]

**GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE**

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, polio is a horrible disease. It affects one's central nervous system, creating paralysis and even death. While Canada is now 20 years polio-free, the disease remains endemic in the countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Fortunately, organizations like Rotary International have raised over a billion dollars in their mission to eradicate polio.

I would like to highlight the efforts of one particular Rotarian from my riding, Dr. Robert Scott, who has dedicated over 40 years of his life to the eradication of polio. For 10 years he was the chairman of the Polio Plus international committee, a committee dedicated to the eradication of polio. He travelled the world, rallying global leaders behind the cause of eradicating polio.

I thank Rotary International, all Rotarians and Dr. Bob.

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**CHILD CARE**

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this government understands the need to support people. We have done that through the pandemic, where we saw programs that supported real people, such as CERB for over nine million Canadians, small business supports, the wage subsidy, loan supports and rent subsidies.

However, today I rise to emphasize the importance of two programs that are dear to my constituents and that provide the type of support that is so essential. I am talking about the child care program of millions of dollars, along with the guaranteed income supplement, which takes people out of poverty and provides millions of dollars of support to Winnipeg North every month. Now the child care program, a true national care program, is going to help families.

As a government, we understand the importance of supporting real people.

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**BEVERLEY WOOD**

**Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be in the House today to recognize the legacy of a long-time community builder in my riding of Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill: Beverley Wood.

In 2006, Beverley founded Welcoming Arms, a program that provides warm meals and essential goods to low-income families. It also spearheaded the creation of a community garden, a financial literacy program and holiday dinners. Beverley was an angel to all those in our community who felt they could turn to her in challenging times. She responded to everyone's concerns with a listening heart. During the pandemic, Beverley responded to requests from the mayor of Aurora and created a task force to identify the needs of the most vulnerable.

Beverley passed away earlier this year, but the impact of her tireless service to the riding will carry on for years to come. Welcoming Arms continues its work with families in need, and during this holiday season the continuing work is so appreciated, as need is experienced more acutely during these times. May we all respond to those in need this holiday season with welcoming arms and a listening heart. Happy holidays to all.

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**PRINCE ALBERT**

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the constituents of my riding of Prince Albert for giving me the honour of serving as their member in Canada's 44th Parliament.

As we all know, no one gets elected by themselves: it takes a team, and I had a great team. My success is a result of their hard work. I thank my EDA president and campaign manager, Ralph Boychuk, for his tireless work and solid advice. He is a true friend. I thank all the volunteers, too many to name, and EDA board members who took on a variety of roles across our riding. Their help was tremendous. I thank my staff, who have provided such a high level of service throughout the years. As well, I thank my wife Jerri and my family. They have sacrificed the most, and I could not do this job without their love and support.

Christmas is now just days away. I want to wish everyone a merry Christmas and a safe festive season. Merry Christmas and good health to all, and may we have a prosperous new year and a Conservative government in 2022.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**ANTONINE MAILLET**

**Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on November 24, a grand dame of Acadian literature, the author and playwright Antonine Maillet, was honoured at the Élysée Palace in Paris.

On that day, President Macron promoted her to the rank of commander of the Legion of Honour, the highest honour that can be awarded to a person outside France.

In Acadia, we all know the woman who, in 1979, was the first non-European to be awarded the Goncourt literary prize. Her works, including *La Sagouine* and *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, were among the first to focus on Acadia and its history, challenges and resilience.

Over and over again, her characters continue to make us laugh and cry and to give pause to an entire people.



On behalf of the Acadian diaspora and on my own behalf, I want to thank Ms. Mailet from the bottom of my heart. Her writing and her passion for Acadia keep inspiring us and encouraging us to continue the never-ending battle so that future generations continue to speak the language of Antonine.

\* \* \*

• (1410)

[English]

#### LEEDS—GRENVILLE—THOUSAND ISLANDS AND RIDEAU LAKES

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to thank the people of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for their continued trust and confidence in returning me to Parliament with a clear mandate. The people have been very busy over the last three years with federal elections. They continue to demand strong representation in Ottawa with a focus on securing funding for infrastructure, lowering taxes and making life more affordable. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the hard work of my many volunteers. There are too many to name, but I give special shout-outs to Joan Lahey, Barb O'Reilly and Heidi Piper-Ward for their tireless work on my campaign. Of course, I thank my wife Amanda and our children Luke, Ama, James, Nathan and Michaela for their enthusiastic door-knocking and for being the best sign installers in the last election.

I will say to the people of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes that I will continue to advocate for them, their families and our community. I thank them and wish them a merry Christmas.

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#### MEL LASTMAN

**Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, he was the first politician who ever got my attention, and not because we almost share a name, although the confusion has always been beneficial for me. Former Toronto mayor and businessman Mel Lastman will always be remembered as a larger-than-life politician whose love for his family, community and city was infectious. With little in the way of education, he started, like so many of his generation, with nothing but a dream. A man who sold sofas, tables and chairs shifted his focus to the biggest chair in North York for 25 years before amalgamation.

His popularity soared as the megacity's mayor for six years after that. In Toronto he will not be remembered for lowering taxes or for picking up garbage. He will forever be known as the guy who was just like us.

Mayor Mel passed away this Saturday. He lived his last years in Thornhill. We extend our condolences to his children and grandchildren. I hope they find comfort in the memories of a life well lived.

There is one thing we will never forget: "Who's better than Bad Boy? Nobody!"

#### Statements by Members

#### MENTAL HEALTH

**Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, around the world, including in my home of Yukon, this is a time of festivals and celebrations, yet despite the brightness and joy this time of year can bring these are also the darkest days of the year. Not everyone has family, friends and loved ones to share the time with, and due to COVID-19 not everyone is able to gather. This time of year can often exacerbate mental distress and illness. Thanks to the pandemic, this is being felt more acutely than ever. I want to recognize in particular the mental stress and exhaustion faced by our frontline health care and public health workers.

I came to Ottawa to help build a better future for all Yukoners. I want to take part in improving supports for mental health in Canada, supporting our health care workforce and moving forward urgently on the opioid epidemic, which Yukon is tragically leading in deaths per capita.

As the new year approaches, I ask my colleagues to join me in committing to work together to build a better Canada for all. May all Canadians find solace, peace and joy this holiday season no matter where they are or what life has brought them.

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#### OCEAN PROTECTION

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the international seabed covers 50% of the planet and is considered the common heritage of humankind. The International Seabed Authority is tasked with protecting the seabed in international waters, but Canada has been missing in action as a member until recently by only sending one delegate to International Seabed Authority meetings and missing six opportunities in the last six years to comment on its work.

The international seabed is the last untouched region of the world. It supports much of the Earth's biodiversity as well as critical fishery resources. It is now at risk of being mined as early as 2024, as mining regulations are being rushed through at the International Seabed Authority.

Canada must step up and show leadership in ocean protection. Many countries, including the EU Parliament and hundreds of international NGOs, are calling for a moratorium on seabed mining to allow for the advancement of critical scientific research so we can better understand the deep ecosystems of the sea.

*Oral Questions*

• (1415)

[Translation]

**GILBERT PIGEON**

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last month, a chapter in the history of Saint-Eugène-de-Ladrière came to a close, as a distinguished regional politician, Gilbert Pigeon, retired after 38 years of service on city council.

A paragon of dedication and community service, Mr. Pigeon has had a most inspiring career. His accomplishments included being mayor of his municipality for 34 years, director of the Fédération québécoise des municipalités for 20 years, president of the Fonds de défense des intérêts des municipalités du Québec for 10 years, and reeve of the Rimouski-Neigette RCM for six years. In recognition of his life's work, he was awarded the Quebec Lieutenant Governor's Medal in July 2020.

I would like to thank Mr. Pigeon for the time, energy and heart he has put into our community over the past four decades. His hard work and convictions have brought more vibrancy and vitality to our beautiful region. I wish him success in his new endeavours, and I thank him from the bottom of my heart.

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**VOLUNTEER HOME CARE**

**Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to thank voters in Beauce for re-electing me to serve a second mandate and be their voice here in the House. I would also like to thank my family for their invaluable support, and my team, who worked so hard during my campaign and are still working hard to this day.

I would like to tell everyone about an organization in my riding called Lien Partage. For the past 45 years, its mission has been to provide volunteer home support services to people who need assistance and to make health promotion services available to those over the age of 50.

It is so easy to forget how lucky we are to be healthy and independent. Anyone can lose their independence, and not everyone is lucky enough to have loved ones to look after them.

I am grateful to all the organization's volunteers, past and present, for their dedication to serving our communities. I thank them for focusing on others for a few hours a week, making sure they get food to eat and helping them feel less lonely. Their actions make all the difference, and I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart.

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**RAÏS ZAIDI**

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the holiday season is upon us, and I would like to take a moment to thank the organizations and volunteers in Hochelaga who continue to be there for our communities, year after year.

Today, I especially want to highlight the exceptional contribution of Raïs Zaidi, a resident of Hochelaga, who is better known as the

“food pirate”. For several years now, he has been distributing free food to those most in need, all on a volunteer basis.

I congratulate him on his incredible generosity, his dedication and his local engagement. He fights food waste and distributes food three times a week in the neighbourhood, simply on a table set up in front of his house on Dézéry Street. Thanks to him, many families in our riding and beyond will be able to spend the holiday season with a better-stocked fridge.

I invite everyone here to give generously, following the example of the “food pirate”, and I wish everyone a very happy holiday season.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, amid the global energy shortage and soaring prices, American President Joe Biden has begged countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, places with no commitment to climate action, where women are not seen as people and gay men face the death penalty, to increase their oil production for the Americans. However, the U.S. cancelled the Keystone pipeline and is challenging Line 5.

Can the Minister of International Trade explain why the Americans want Saudi and Iranian oil over lower-carbon Canadian energy?

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite well knows, the world of energy is changing all around the world. We are seeing record levels of investment in clean technologies and renewable energy.

In fact, if we look at which part of Canada is receiving the most investment in renewable energy, it is not my home province of Quebec, and it is not Ontario or British Columbia. It is in Alberta that we are seeing record levels of investment in renewable energy. This is what the future will look like.

• (1420)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is right about one thing, which is that global demand for energy is changing. The Americans want more Saudi oil as opposed to Canadian low-carbon energy.

The Americans probably want this type of energy because they know Canada's Liberals will roll over on human rights-abusing oil cartel countries; they could care less about energy prices, and they love offshoring Canadian jobs.

*Oral Questions*

Can the Minister of International Trade, as opposed to letting a man stand and answer her question, tell Canadians what she has done and who she has met with to promote Canadian energy to the American government?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the way the hon. member has framed this. I am perfectly happy to stand up in this House and respond to questions raised.

I will always stand up for Canadian industries. I will stand up for Canadian workers. Every single day, that is what we do on this side of the House, and we have been successful.

**The Speaker:** I do not know what is in the water today, but I just want to remind everyone that questions are being asked and they are being responded to. I just want to make sure everybody has the opportunity to hear the question and the answer.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that minister will not stand up for, and that is Canadian energy and Canadian energy worker jobs.

Let me translate what she just said. She says she has not once promoted Canadian energy to the Americans. At a time when we need continental energy security, cheap energy bills and climate actions, the Liberals have offshored our jobs and increased energy prices, and they are happy about it.

Will the Minister of International Trade commit clearly to promoting Canadian energy to the Americans, or will she give more word salad and keep offshoring Canadian jobs to climate-destroying countries?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to promoting the energy sector in Canada.

The member on the other side knows well that not only do we promote the energy sector, but we landed the first blue hydrogen project in Canada, in Edmonton, Alberta. On this side of the House, we know how to stand up for the energy sector. We know how to stand up for workers. We know how to stand up for Canada.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, Canada and the United States have had an integrated automotive industry for 60 years.

Everyone also knows that electrification is the future of the industry, in light of the billions of dollars being invested by private businesses. Now President Biden's tax credit is threatening jobs in Canada. What is the Liberal government doing? It is doing absolutely nothing.

When will the government stand up for Canada's auto workers?

[English]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear to the Americans that the protectionist and discriminatory provisions for electric vehicle credits are discriminatory to Canada. We have been building automobiles together for 50 years and integrating our supply chains for over 50 years, and Canada will be prepared to stand up for its national interest.

We want to work towards a solution. We are working very hard at that. Canada will stand up for its interest. Canadians have seen this government do it, and it will do it again.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is right. If the Liberals do the exact same thing they did with steel, aluminum and softwood lumber, Canada's auto workers run the risk of losing well-paying jobs, because the government talks a good game but takes no action.

Why is the minister not at the U.S. Congress right now, working directly with U.S. senators and representatives to convince them that protecting Canada's industry is a win-win situation?

• (1425)

[English]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is precisely why I was in Washington, D.C., working with the American government and working with congressional leaders to make the case for Canada. The Deputy Prime Minister and I just released a letter last week to the congressional leadership indicating that we would stand up and introduce retaliatory measures should we need to do that.

Members have seen this government work. When we were faced with section 232 tariffs, we stood up for Canadian jobs. We will always stand up for Canadian jobs.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I will have to start asking everyone to put an ear-piece on if that is what it takes to keep everybody quiet. It seemed to work so well.

The hon. minister has about 15 seconds left, if she wants to finish up.

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Speaker, we are not going to take any lessons from the Conservatives. We stood up against section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminum. We were successful then. We are prepared to stand up for national interests now, and we will be successful this time too.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***JUSTICE**

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister revealed his strategy for the Bill 21 dispute: in the early stages, let the opponents duke it out without getting too involved, so as not to give the Government of Quebec the chance to claim federal interference.

For now, the Prime Minister is not interfering at the federal level because he knows full well that this is Quebec's jurisdiction. We know it and he knows it. Knowing that, will the Prime Minister promise not to interfere in legislative disputes that do not fall under his jurisdiction? In other words, will he mind his own business?

**Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our position has always been clear: No one should lose their job because of what they wear or their religious beliefs.

What is happening in Chelsea is that a community is rallying to defend one of its members, a teacher. Obviously, there are some difficult discussions ahead. We are continuing to monitor the situation closely. Quebecers are defending their interests in the courts.

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can say whatever he wants about Bill 21. Honestly, we are used to it, but at least it does not go beyond this place.

However, Bob Rae, the Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, went too far in sullyng Quebec's international reputation. He claims that Bill 21 quite simply violates the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Quebec will not allow itself to be insulted by Canada's representative to the UN, especially given that Quebecers pay for that representation. Will the Prime Minister call on Bob Rae to explain his completely unacceptable comments?

**Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and our government have always been clear: We will allow this to play out in the courts. Some Quebecers are defending their rights before the courts and our position is clear. This bill was adopted by the Quebec National Assembly and we will leave it up to the courts.

\* \* \*

*[English]***SENIORS**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today's fiscal update is an opportunity for the government to respond to inflation, which is driving up the cost of living and making it harder and harder for Canadians to make ends meet. In particular, vulnerable seniors are feeling the impact of inflation because of the government's clawback of their GIS. We have heard stories from seniors who are struggling to put food on the table and who are struggling to stay in their homes, many of whom have already lost their homes.

We have been fighting the government since August. When will the government commit to fixing the clawback and ending it so that seniors are no longer put in this vulnerable position?

**Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the pandemic began, our government acted very quickly to help millions of Canadians, including seniors, especially the most vulnerable. We have stepped up to support them with payments and historic investments, on top of the other boosts we delivered for seniors.

When it comes to the CERB and GIS, we know it has been challenging for some seniors this year. However, as I have said before in the House, we are committed to finding the right solution to support those affected. We will have more to share with the House soon. We will always have their backs.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the economic update is an opportunity for the government to address inflation, which continues to drive up the cost of living. In particular, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find affordable housing. The government has tools to address this crisis.

Will the Prime Minister commit to responding to the crisis with appropriate measures?

• (1430)

*[English]*

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making life more affordable for Canadians. That is why we have invested in child care agreements around the country, it is why we support our seniors and it is why we made a historic investment of \$72 billion in the national housing strategy. We will continue to make housing affordable and ensure that housing affordability is a priority for our government and for all Canadians.

\* \* \*

**CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS**

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' failed relationship with the United States continues to go backward. The Conservatives have been warning about trade challenges for years, yet the Liberals called an election instead of spending time in the U.S. building relationships and standing up for Canada. The trade minister is now warning that Canada should "prepare for the worst". The Conservatives had a Canadian buy American exemption and a softwood lumber agreement. Despite photo ops and feel-good words, the trade minister comes back empty-handed every time from the United States.

How much worse does the trade minister expect it to get?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are not going to take any lessons from the Conservatives on this. When we were negotiating NAFTA, the Leader of the Opposition said that we should just capitulate and take any agreement. On this side of the House, we will make sure that we get a good agreement for Canadian workers and for Canadian businesses. We have done that before and we are going to do it again.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we should not be surprised that the Canada-U.S. relationship is not a priority and is failing. It was not even mentioned once in the throne speech and the U.S. is our biggest trading partner. A small manufacturing business in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country exports to the U.S. military and will be affected by the buy American policies. It is being failed by the Minister of Small Business and by the Minister of International Trade. That is right; it is the same minister.

When will the minister get off her hands, do her job and stand up for Canadian businesses?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, throughout the pandemic, as hard as it has been for Canadians all across this country, on this side of the House we have stood up for small businesses. We have provided unprecedented supports so they can continue to operate, keep their people on payroll and pay their bills. We have incredibly strong programs to help Canadian businesses start up, scale up and access new markets, including programs for women entrepreneurs and Black entrepreneurs.

This is about helping the Canadian economy recover. We are doing it on this side of the House, and I challenge my colleagues to join us in supporting our small businesses.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, facts are facts.

The countervailing duties that the United States is imposing on Canadian softwood lumber are a slap in the face to our industry; they have doubled. The money is being collected at the border rather than being invested in our businesses. As is the case with inflation and the labour shortage, the government is not interested in this issue because it is not interested in the economy.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to resolving this issue before the holidays?

[English]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear: Canada's forestry sector and its workers are incredibly important to the Canadian economy. We have also been very clear that the tariffs the U.S. has levied against us are unjustified. We have defended our interests. We defended them in CUSMA, before the NAFTA panels and before the WTO. It has been ruled that Canada is a fair trading partner.

We are going to continue to stand up for Canadian forestry workers and the industry, which employs so many incredible Canadians across the country.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister visited the United States.

After his Minister of International Trade visited Washington and after the Minister of Finance talked about imposing retaliatory measures, nothing has been done to eliminate the U.S. countervailing duties. It has been one failure after another.

I call on the Prime Minister to rise and tell the House what the next steps will be in resolving this issue.

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I share my hon. colleague's concerns; we all do. The forestry workers in his riding and in ridings represented by all parties of the House are of primary concern to us.

I want to reassure my hon. colleague that we are looking for an outcome that is acceptable to the industry and to workers. I encourage the member opposite to work with team Canada.

• (1435)

[English]

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it has been weeks since the U.S. jacked up softwood lumber tariffs on communities like those in my riding, yet the government seems to have given up, thrown in the towel. Workers in my riding cannot afford to give up.

Why does the government not seem to care at all about fighting for forestry jobs?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's forestry sector is incredibly important to the Canadian economy, and I understand the frustration from my colleague on the opposite side. While I was in the United States, I had an opportunity to meet with the National Association of Home Builders, which agrees with us that the high duties and tariffs on softwood lumber hurt its plan for building more affordable homes for Americans.

We are going to keep doing the work here to ensure that we defend Canada's softwood lumber workers and our industry. That work continues.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, workers in my riding cannot take the minister's statement to the bank. Communities in my region have been beset by fires, floods and now a government that has given up. They work hard and they deserve a government that works hard for them. Sadly, the Liberal government does not consider these families and these communities a priority.

What do the forestry workers in my riding have to do to make the government care? Do they have to donate to the Liberal Party?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member will agree, as we all do and as he said, that the forestry sector and its workers are incredibly important. It has been a very, very difficult year for Canadians in that sector, and indeed in all sectors, living through this pandemic. I am very proud of the work we have been doing to support our forestry workers all across the country. We will continue to stand up to the United States on this very important issue around softwood lumber.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, by renewing the lease for its temporary facilities on Roxham Road, the government is signalling its intention to let the problem get worse and worse for another five years. Who benefits from the federal government's inaction? It is human smugglers who sell refugees a fantasy.

Thanks to the Liberal government, they just found out that they will be able to keep getting rich at refugees' expense for the next five years. This is also good news for Liberal donor Pierre Guay, who is leasing the temporary facilities to the Liberal government. He just secured another five years' worth of public funds.

Does the Liberal minister really think this is good news for families that will continue to cross the border through the woods in the dead of winter?

[English]

**Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, transparency and accountability are critically important to our government. The rental agreement that was negotiated was based on fair market value at a competitive price. Given the location of the hotel and its proximity to the border, this was an ideal location to CBSA for use for this purpose. Our government is delivering open, fair and transparent procurement processes while obtaining the best value for Canadians.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, that is a bunch of hokey.

Now that we have identified who benefits from Roxham Road, let us talk about those who do not. This situation does not benefit families who pay smugglers a fortune so that they can risk their safety crossing the border. It does not benefit Quebec, which has to take on 97% of Canada's irregular claims, and it does not benefit Quebecers, who pay for all the services provided to that 97% of

claimants, which is far more than their fair share compared to the rest of Canada.

Why is the Liberal government making Roxham Road permanent instead of suspending the safe third country agreement?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. member opposite will appreciate, Canada has both domestic and international legal obligations in how we need to treat irregular asylum seekers who cross the border into Canada. I am pleased to let the hon. member know that I am doing everything in collaboration with my counterparts in the province of Quebec, and I had the opportunity to have a productive conversation last week. I had a conversation with the ambassador to the United States this week so we can continue the effort to modernize the safe third country agreement.

Adult problems require adult conversations. I invite the hon. member to join one.

• (1440)

[Translation]

**Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, renewing the lease on the facility near Roxham Road is yet another Liberal ethical failure.

The mere fact that the renewal was concluded in secret and untendered, and that it was awarded surely by chance to a Liberal donor, confirms this.

Providing smuggling services at the border is illegal, and yet Ottawa is making it easy for people to cross. It is illegal and unsafe to cross the border anywhere other than at border crossings, but Ottawa facilitates it. To top it all off, this is an ethical failure because the government is facilitating something that is illegal.

Why is the government making it easier for people to circumvent the law rather than controlling border crossings?

[English]

**Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said, transparency and accountability are critically important to our government. The rental agreement that is in question was negotiated based on fair market value to arrive at a competitive price, and that is the price that we did arrive at. Given the location of the hotel, this was important to CBSA for this purpose.

Our government is going to continue to deliver and keep Canadians safe in a fair, open and transparent way.

## CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week, the government sent a strongly worded letter to U.S. senators about the electric vehicle tax credit and its devastating impact on the Ontario auto industry, but the same government has not contacted Democratic Senator Joe Manchin who, three weeks ago, called on President Biden to approve Keystone XL even though the Canadian oil and gas industry contributes six times more to the economy than does the auto sector. Is that because this government values the auto sector over the oil and gas sector?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a really important issue for our government. Of course, we are standing up for all sectors of the economy. The issue around the EV credits is before the Senate right now. It is why I was there last week. It is why we ensured that we communicated clearly to the American government that this issue is important to the hundreds of thousands of workers who are in this sector of the economy.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government says that it stands up for all sectors, it says that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, but it acts like a government of the Laurentians not a government of Canada.

When Ontario's auto industry is threatened, it stands to attention, but the softwood lumber and Keystone XL issues languish for years. When is this government going to stand up for all Canadians and all economic sectors, not just those in the backyards of Liberal cabinet ministers from Ontario and Quebec?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. This government stands for all industries, all sectors, all across this country. We will do it every single day, and we will continue to do that for all sectors all across the country.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government's relationship with the United States continues to deteriorate. The latest example is the American Beef Labeling Act in Congress. The act calls on U.S. trade representative Katherine Tai and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to make country-of-origin labelling WTO-compliant. If this does not happen, it automatically comes into force.

This has a devastating impact on the cattle industry in Canada as well as North America.

My question is to the Minister of International Trade. Will she act now or wait until it is a crisis?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada and the U.S. share one of the largest agricultural trading relationships. The WTO ruled in 2015 that the mandatory country-of-origin labelling measures in the U.S. discriminated against Canadian exporters, and we expect the U.S. to continue to abide by this ruling and the WTO obligations.

Our government will continue to stand up for Canada's beef industry and its workers, and we are firmly opposed to any new pro-

## Oral Questions

posals from the U.S. to resurrect mandatory country-of-origin labelling for beef or pork.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it sounds like they are just going to watch and listen and do nothing.

The government has a terrible record with the Biden administration in responding to trade irritants with our most important trading partner, whether it be softwood lumber, electric vehicles, Keystone XL, aluminum, potatoes, Line 5 and now beef. This government's failure on trade relations continues to cost Canadians their jobs. Again, I ask the minister: Will she act now or is she going to wait until it is a crisis before doing something?

• (1445)

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the United States is Canada's largest trading partner. It is a relationship that has benefited workers on both sides of the border. Every day we work very hard to stand up for our industries and our workers, and to develop opportunities for businesses to grow and to export.

I just had a wonderful meeting with the American ambassador yesterday. We agreed that we can absolutely work on helping our businesses start up, scale up and access that very important market, which is the United States of America.

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## GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in the last two months, food banks across Manitoba have seen a 70% increase in individuals accessing services compared to last year. Instead of the Liberal government choosing to help people, it continues to claw back GIS and CCB payments from individuals and families already living in precarious situations. We are in a food security crisis. When will the government implement a national food strategy and immediately end clawbacks to GIS and CCB?

**Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her important advocacy on this issue.

*Oral Questions*

Let us recall that it was this government that brought in the Canada child benefit that saw close to 400,000 children lifted out of poverty. Let us recall that it is this government that is committed to bringing forward a national food strategy to ensure that children around this country have access to healthy meals. We know that is one of the best ways to set our kids up for success and to make sure that they can learn everything that they need in school.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's chief public health officer just issued a dire warning. She said our public health system is stretched dangerously thin, our public health workforce is understaffed and burnt out. We were not prepared for COVID-19 and we are not prepared for the next emergency.

Decades of underfunding under Liberal and Conservative governments are putting Canadians at risk. Dr. Tam is calling for transformational investments in Canada's public health system. Will the government finally listen and provide the resources needed to keep us all safe?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are currently living through a very serious challenge caused by omicron. I would remind all Canadians listening and everyone in this House to be extremely careful. We must follow public health measures, get vaccinated and get boosters whenever they are available. Now is not the time to travel.

\* \* \*

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Armed Forces is one of Canada's most venerable institutions, but the reality is that it has not always lived up to the values that Canadians expect from the military. Many service members who have bravely come forward to serve their country have instead experienced sexual trauma at the hands of the very institution that is sworn to protect them.

Could the minister update the House on the steps this government is taking to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces finds restitution of survivors?

**Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Armed Forces have always had our backs, but far too many of them have suffered because of sexual harassment, sexual assault and discrimination. That is why yesterday, General Eyre and Deputy Minister Thomas and I offered an apology to all victims and survivors. An apology cannot mend deep wounds, but it is the right thing to do and we will now move to enact further reforms to address these behaviours.

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*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the last free trade agreement with the United States was devastating for Canadian dairy farmers. Now our American neighbours have

gained market share on our Canadian dairy products because of that free trade agreement.

Can the Minister of International Trade confirm that the Americans are respecting the agreement signed between the two countries?

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague. We are working closely with the Americans and making sure that the agreement is respected. There are procedures in place, and they will be followed if necessary.

● (1450)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is still not giving us straight answers about dairy products crossing the border and, more specifically, about measures to monitor compliance with our free trade agreements.

What assurances can the minister offer Canadian dairy producers about measures being taken to make sure the quantity of dairy products crossing the border is in line with our trade agreements?

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again, I can assure my colleague that we are working with border services and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We are doing what we need to do to ensure compliance with the free trade agreement with the United States and Mexico.

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*[English]***JUSTICE**

**Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are calling for action on serious gun crimes, yet incredibly the government just introduced a bill that for serious crimes like robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm and weapons trafficking, it would eliminate mandatory jail time and, further, bring about house arrests for crimes like kidnapping and sexual assault. That is just the opposite of what Canadians are calling for.

Will the minister not agree with most Canadians that, if a person commits a drive-by shooting or weapons trafficking, they deserve mandatory jail time?

**Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague had read the bill very carefully, he would have seen that in some instances we also propose to raise maximum sentences for serious firearms sentences. What I find ironic is that the party opposite, the Conservative Party, has flip-flopped so many times on firearms, on protecting Canadians that it just stretches credulity that it has any credibility whatsoever in this House.



I am calling on Conservatives to join the Government of Canada and all members in this House to ensure that we stop gun violence and keep Canadians safe.

**Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the soft-on-crime government is completely out of touch with what Canadians are calling for. It is the job of the Parliament to pass legislation that ensures that mandatory jail time is there for an individual who commits a crime like a drive-by shooting and gets them off the streets and into jail.

Can the minister declare what crimes he does support mandatory jail time for? We know he does not support it for robbery, for weapons trafficking and for extortion with a firearm. Can the minister please tell us where he does believe a mandatory minimum sentence is appropriate?

**Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of that question. I would ask the hon. member to read the bill.

Serious crimes will always be punished seriously. All we are doing in this bill is selecting a number of crimes that have a serious impact on the overrepresentation of indigenous and Black people in the criminal justice system, in order to give back flexibility to judges by eliminating certain minimum mandatory penalties and by allowing for the possibility of conditional sentencing orders, and in order to attack systemic racism in our criminal justice system.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, trade with the United States is challenging these days. As members know, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to American senators, threatening them with retaliatory actions if they go after Canada's electric vehicle sector. We agree.

However, we have to wonder why Ottawa is not doing anything about softwood lumber. When the Americans announced that they were doubling their tariffs, there was no letter, no announcement and no retaliation.

This is good for Ontario's automotive sector, but why does softwood lumber get a big fat zero like the one in Ottawa?

[English]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, to the softwood lumber industry and the many workers who are in the member's riding and, in fact, in many, many ridings across the country, I want those workers and the industry to know that we are absolutely standing up for their interest. I raise this at every opportunity with the American administration.

We have taken this issue to panels at CUSMA and the WTO. We will continue to defend the interests of the Canadian softwood lumber industry strongly. They can count on us to do that.

#### Oral Questions

• (1455)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I was part of the delegation that went to Washington, but the minister did not mention that in her answer just now. I went to Washington to defend our softwood lumber industry. I reminded the minister that it is important to stand up for Quebec's forestry industry. I did not get the impression that she really did her best to get the softwood lumber tariffs eliminated.

The proof is that the government showed up in Washington with what it calls Team Canada to protect Ontario's automotive sector. Auto jobs are important, but what will it take to get Ottawa to stand up and protect forestry jobs in Quebec?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, things cannot be good for the Bloc Québécois. They are looking for other talking points.

First it was the Internet, and we fixed that. Then it was social housing, and we fixed that. Then it was day care, and we fixed that too.

The Bloc Québécois spends its days looking for a fight and showing a lack of respect for the people of Ottawa. Ottawa has an "O", not a zero.

The Bloc should show some respect for the people of Ottawa and recognize that the Liberal Party, the Liberal government, is there for Quebec.

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[English]

#### PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a sole-source contract to rent property as a welcoming centre at the illegal border crossing at Roxham Road was handed out to a Quebec businessman by the Liberals. The lucrative sole-source deal comes after \$23,000 in donations was given to the Liberal Party. Now, before the Liberals stand up and say, "Yes, but he donated to the Conservative Party," I note the Conservative Party never greased this donor's palms with a lucrative sole-source contract.

Would someone from the side opposite just stand up and admit that this was a kickback for donating to the Liberal Party?

**Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, transparency and accountability are critically important to this government. The rental agreement was negotiated based on fair market value. That was the agreement that we came to. It is about the location of this particular hotel and its proximity to the border. It was perfect for the CBSA's purposes, and that is why we secured this deal. Our government is delivering open, fair and transparent procurement processes while obtaining the best value for Canadians.

### Oral Questions

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, in Quebec that is called *graisser la patte*.

It has been an “all you can eat” buffet for connected Liberal insiders and cronies during the pandemic, who lined up to gorge on half a billion dollars in COVID spending, much of it untendered and sole source. With WE, Frank Baylis and SNC, the list is long, and here we have another example. The sponsorship scandal will look like a speck of sand in the desert compared with what has gone on.

Yesterday the Liberals rejected my motion at the ethics committee to investigate COVID contracts, saying they did not want to stir the pot. I wonder why.

Why do they not just get it off their chest and admit that this was payback for a Liberal donation?

**Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the House has a lot of extraordinarily important matters in front of it. The question that has been posed by the member opposite, in my opinion, does not really have to do with the business of either this nation or this Parliament. If he wants to play politics and games, the space is right over there.

\* \* \*

### ETHICS

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would not expect anything less from the Liberals.

Last week, I asked the CRA to investigate a claim that the Liberal member for Calgary Skyview was directing people on how to fraudulently claim the CERB in his riding before he was elected as an MP. According to The Canadian Press, seven in 10 people over 15 in the riding received the CERB, one of the highest percentages in the country. When I asked the minister about this, she said that she takes all claims of CERB fraud seriously, even if it is against a member of the Liberal caucus, and will launch an investigation.

Can the minister inform the House whether she has in fact started an investigation against the member for Calgary Skyview?

**Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are various places that we can spread allegations to see whether or not there is any truth to them. I would suggest that instead of using the privilege in this place to explore conspiracy theories, the member use the processes that are available to verify whether or not there is anything—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. government House leader can continue. He was cut off.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Mr. Speaker, I am ready to continue. Hopefully we will get a question about the business of this nation.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### SMALL BUSINESSES

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government announced the first-ever women en-

trepreneurship strategy, or WES, a \$6-billion program to advance women's economic empowerment.

These investments are important social and economic measures that will be critical to building back better and promoting an inclusive economic recovery.

Can the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development update us on the WES and how this program contributes to the success of women entrepreneurs?

● (1500)

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, by unlocking the potential of women entrepreneurs, we add \$150 billion to the economy. Through the WES ecosystem fund, our government is supporting major projects across the country. In budget 2021, we invested \$147 million to provide women entrepreneurs with greater access to financing, mentorship and training.

I look forward to announcing more good news soon.

\* \* \*

[English]

### HOUSING

**Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as housing affordability spirals out of reach for young working Canadians, the Prime Minister continues to cite the first-time homebuyer incentive as the signature policy for homebuyers. This program was ridiculed by industry and ignored by consumers, and has utterly failed to have any effect on access to home ownership.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the first-time homebuyer incentive was nothing more than a cheap pre-election gimmick that does nothing to increase housing supply?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the problem the Conservatives face is that before the election they had done nothing on affordable housing. They proposed no clear policy ideas. For nine years in government, they invested zero dollars in affordable housing. In fact, they downloaded affordable housing onto the provinces and municipalities. Now, when they have a chance to actually support policies that work, they do not propose anything. In fact, in the housing—

**The Speaker:** I am going to stop the minister. I believe we have a technical problem.

I will ask the minister to start over. Hopefully this time it will be quieter in the chamber and we will be able to hear the whole answer.

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Mr. Speaker, the problem the Conservatives face is that for nine years in power, they did not really invest in affordable housing. They did not have a program like the first-time homebuyer incentive. In fact, they downloaded housing responsibility and investments in housing onto the provinces and municipalities. They did nothing to invest in the capacity of more Canadians to become homeowners, and they did not have the words “affordable housing” in their election platform. In fact, their recent housing motion did not have the words “affordable housing” in it.

Now that they have a chance to support the throne speech commitments with respect to housing, they refuse to do so. They have no credibility on this issue.

\* \* \*

**SENIORS**

**Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, seniors living on a fixed income are among the hardest hit by the inflation crisis. There are quite a few seniors living in villages in my riding, often retired steelworkers from Hamilton. These are the seniors who built this country and made it strong. Recently I heard from Heinz in Flamborough, who had already been struggling with high heating costs and high grocery costs before this crisis. He has now been pushed to the brink.

When will the government get serious about the inflation crisis so that seniors like Heinz will not go cold and hungry this winter?

**Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have always supported seniors, especially the most vulnerable seniors. One of the first things we did as a government was to restore the age of OAS and GIS from 67 to 65. We have enhanced the CPP, we have raised the GIS for single seniors and we have invested \$6 billion in home care.

We have an ambitious agenda for seniors. We have always had their backs and we will continue to make sure we do just that to support them.

\* \* \*

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, inflation is the highest it has been in 20 years. It is making everything more expensive, like the essentials: groceries, gas and heat. This is especially hard on people living on a fixed income like veterans. Our nation's heroes are watching their pensions lose buying power by the day, and they are being asked to get by with less and less.

Why is the minister forcing our heroes to use food banks during this inflation crisis?

● (1505)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a bit rich from a party that did nothing but slice veterans' funds. My hon. colleague—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I will stop the minister. He is standing right next to me and I can barely hear him.

The hon. minister.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that my hon. colleague is giving me a chance to indicate what had happened and what has happened since we formed government.

The fact is that we have invested billions of dollars in veterans to make sure they receive the appropriate funding they deserve. When the previous CPC government was in place, it slashed funding, fired Veterans Affairs employees and cut funding to veterans. We, as a government, have supplied more funding for veterans to make sure they have the appropriate funds they need. There is more to do and we will do more.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, over the past 18 months, our government has made historic investments in Canada's biomanufacturing sector to quickly reverse years of neglect under Conservative governments. Earlier this month, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry announced an exciting new agreement with Merck to manufacture life-saving COVID-19 therapies right here in Canada, in my riding of Whitby.

Could the minister please elaborate on how this agreement will help further ensure the health and safety of Canadians as we move forward?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his leadership. As members in the House know, it has been my absolute priority to grow the biomanufacturing sector in this country to ensure the health and safety of Canadians for generations to come. Our agreement with Merck means that we will be manufacturing therapies against COVID-19 right here in Canada, in Whitby, Ontario. This project will help grow our biomanufacturing sector and will help make Canada's expertise recognized around the world.

We will continue to invest in biomanufacturing. We will continue to attract investment in this country for our workers and our health and safety.

*Government Orders***REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, within the most recent supplementary estimates, the Liberal government has allocated no money to the regional economic development agency that supports small businesses, arts, tourism and community organizations in Alberta and the Prairies. This is outrageous at a time when the omicron variant is surging and Alberta's economy is suffering. The Prime Minister said he would have Canadians' backs, but clearly that is not the case.

Will the Liberals immediately reverse this unfair decision and make sure all Canadians are supported through another long winter of COVID?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the regional development agencies have supported Canadians from coast to coast to coast from the beginning of the pandemic through the regional relief funds and now through the tourism relief fund. There was \$15 billion for the tourism sector alone.

The funding will continue. The supports will continue. We have had Canadians' backs and we will continue to do so.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a new report from the Canada Energy Regulator says that oil production in 2050 will be pretty much what it is today. It is no wonder Canada is at the bottom of the G7 when it comes to climate action. We also have the Prime Minister's promise to plant two billion trees. That was a failure because what has he actually planted? It is only 0.5%. The only net zero that the government has actually delivered on is the Prime Minister's environmental credibility.

Earth to the environment minister. The planet is on fire. When is he going to start showing up to help Canadians?

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague knew anything about tree planting, he would know that we need to grow the seedlings for between two and three years. I have planted trees—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, go ahead, from the top.

• (1510)

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, anyone who has planted trees would know that it takes between two to three years to grow them so they can be safely planted. I have planted trees. I have even been known to hug trees from time to time.

Our government is engaged in fighting climate change. We have invested \$100 billion in the last six years, with more than 100 measures, and we will keep going.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was very concerned with the comments that were being made during extreme heckling from my Conservative colleagues. Could the

environment minister tell us how long it takes to actually make a tree?

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member, but that is not a point of order. The member will have to ask that question at the next question period.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**CRIMINAL CODE**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government understands that judges play a very important role in providing additional discretion when looking at the circumstances while sentencing. Why does the Conservative Party not have faith in our judges in Canada?

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had actually listened to my speech, he would know that at no point in time did I indicate that we, as the Conservative caucus, have no faith in judicial discretion in levelling appropriate sentences.

As a Crown attorney for the last 18 years, I was in front of judges every single day. My point was that sufficient tools already exist within the Criminal Code for judges to exercise that discretion. They certainly do not need any further assistance from the Liberal government.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly listened intently to the member's speech. His experience as a Crown prosecutor in Ontario excellently lends itself to the debate.

There are changes in the bill to conditional sentencing. Obviously, if any mother were to see that someone who is charged with kidnapping could be given a conditional sentence, as in house arrest, they would find it egregious and wrong. Are there other offences that the member believes should not be subject to a conditional arrest?

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. In my respectful opinion, everything in Bill C-5 concerned with removing those offences, which are currently delineated under section 742, the conditional sentence regime, all relate to serious violent offences.

To the member's point, kidnapping, sexual assault, criminal harassment and abduction are all serious personal injury offences. In my speech, I was trying to indicate that there are absolutely zero references to amending section 742 to highlight that those offences the bill is delineating can still be substantiated by way of a conditional sentence.

A condition precedent to section 742 is that justice must be satisfied that an offender serving that sentence in the community does not pose a risk. Those offenders convicted of a sexual assault, criminal harassment or kidnapping most definitely pose a community risk. Moreover, section 752 of the Criminal Code talks about excluding any offences where there is a serious personal injury offence. Kidnapping certainly qualifies for this, as do sexual assault, criminal harassment and abduction.

● (1515)

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot of people talk about what is missing in this bill and the shortfalls in this bill, especially when it comes to dealing with the health crisis of the overdose and opioid crisis. We have heard many people calling for decriminalization.

As a judge, does the member agree with the police chiefs association, medical health officers, social workers, those in science and those leading experts in dealing with the overdose crisis that we need to decriminalize personal possession and ensure that everybody has a safe supply.

I would love to hear his perspective as a former judge, given that this is becoming a well-rounded support from right across the country, including the requests from Toronto, British Columbia and Vancouver for an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague personally for the elevation of my past career. I was not a judge of the Ontario provincial court or Superior Court. Rather, I was a Crown attorney.

To address the important issue the member raised, there already exists a regime that vests federal prosecutors, as it does with provincial prosecutors, in exercising their discretion appropriately to deal with individuals struggling with substance abuse, and to be very creative in how they wish to prosecute or what sort of representations they make to a justice to deal with the rehabilitation issue.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a huge privilege and honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-5.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the people of Courtenay—Alberni for re-electing me for the third time. I am deeply honoured. I also want to extend my thanks not just to my supporters but to my family as well, especially my three children, who have been there supporting me on this incredible journey to fight for our country and for their future.

When it comes to Bill C-5, we are hearing a lot from the Liberals that this is a silver-bullet approach to addressing racial injustice and the overdose crisis by eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for drug offences and a few other firearms and tobacco offences. This is naive, and it is misplaced.

### *Government Orders*

As New Democrats, we support removing mandatory minimum penalties for all but the most serious offences. This means that we support the removal of mandatory minimums for all drug offences, expanding access to alternative incentives for personal possession and diversion programs. Decriminalization of personal possession remains the preferred option for minor offences, as it would remove police, prosecutors and courts as barriers to addiction treatment.

When it comes to the crisis we are dealing with, we need to ensure that we are taking action quickly. The idea of making conditional sentencing more widely available for court sentences for minor drug cases is just not enough to address the runaway public health emergency, this opioid crisis, that is taking place, which is in parallel to the COVID crisis.

A simpler and less costly approach is the full decriminalization of possession of drugs for personal use and the expungement of previous criminal records for personal possession, combined with access for drug users to get a regular safe supply, treatment and supportive housing. We are talking about a comprehensive strategy to address the overdose emergency and save lives. This needs to happen urgently.

We could be debating a more comprehensive strategy, but instead the government has put very little effort in the bill before us, choosing instead to reintroduce almost exactly the same bill from the 43rd Parliament, which could have been passed. Instead, they held an unnecessary and costly election. The Liberals have failed.

Canadians who use drugs must be free from the threat of criminalization and the fear of losing their liberty and access to substances on which they depend. Criminal records for personal possession must be expunged to remove an often insurmountable barrier to employment and housing. We must assure the right of users to a safe supply of low-barrier, regulated drugs as an alternative to the poisoned substances, which are resulting in an epidemic of overdose deaths. Access to treatment therapies that address the root causes of drug use must be available as a component of public health in our system, and supportive housing, complete with the wraparound services essential for maintaining healthy lifestyle balance, must be made available.

New Democrats are not alone in calling for a comprehensive approach to addressing the overdose crisis and the implementation of these measures. We are in good company.

First and foremost, Canadians across the country support the overall decriminalization of possession for personal use. With every passing month, the calls for decriminalization become louder, as Canadians are confronted with the evidence of the overdose public health emergency in their communities.

*Government Orders*

Every one of us in the House dreads the call from a constituent who has lost a son, daughter, parent or friend to an overdose from a poisoned drug supply. I have received this call far too often over my six years in the House, and it is not an exaggeration to say that the majority of my constituents know a family affected by the tragedy of overdose.

I hear from them about drug users hiding in the shadows in fear of apprehension and criminal prosecution. In fact, my daughter was just at the funeral a week and a half ago of her friend, an 18-year-old young woman who died from a poisoned drug supply. Sadly, this situation is not uncommon to hear about in the House.

In addition to hearing from everyday Canadians, we have heard from public health experts from across the country. Dr. Bonnie Henry, the B.C. provincial health officer in my province, continues to call for decriminalization. Most recently, Dr. de Villa, the medical officer of health for the City of Toronto, as well as the former medical officer of health for Yukon, who now sits in the House, and their colleagues from one municipality and provincial jurisdiction to another, from coast to coast to coast, are pleading for simple possession to be decriminalized.

• (1520)

It is not a matter for the criminal justice system. It is a health issue. We keep hearing the government say it is a health issue, but it is still treating it as a criminal issue. In this bill, the government is continuing to do that.

These are the same public health experts that I just mentioned, who guided our response in the COVID-19 pandemic. We listened to them and heeded their professional advice often, and now we are ignoring them when it comes to the opioid crisis. They are saying the same thing, that we need evidence-based science to lead us out of this terrible crisis, and they are being ignored by the government. They are calling for decriminalization of possession of illicit drugs. This bill could have done that.

Standing with the public health community are Canada's police chiefs, who also called for decriminalization. They know first-hand the failure of the criminalization of drug use. They know first-hand the deadly consequences of exposure to an increasingly toxic supply of street drugs across this country. Increasingly, we are hearing the same message from local and national media across the country. It is like Groundhog Day. Every day we read another editorial by journalists who are hearing from their readers and seeing the evidence of a public health emergency that requires the decriminalization of personal possession, the expungement of criminal records, access to a safe supply of low-barrier regulated drugs, therapeutic support through treatment programs, and supportive housing for those in need.

We are in good company in calling for these measures. Public health experts, law enforcement officials, the media and everyday Canadians across the country, persuaded by overwhelming evidence, have determined that exposure to death by overdose must stop now.

The evidence that is underpinning this call for a comprehensive approach is an 87% increase in opioid overdose deaths in Manitoba last year over the previous year. In British Columbia, as we just

heard, there were over 200 deaths in one month. That is the most on record. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it worse, forcing the closure of harm reduction locations and driving users further underground. Currently it is estimated that eight people are dying every day in Ontario, over six in B.C., and 20 across our country. In fact, the overdoses have increased in all regions of this country. We are seeing how it is disproportionately impacting Black, indigenous and racialized Canadians.

In October, B.C. chief coroner Lisa Lapointe noted that illicit drug toxicity killed 201 people, the same number as an entire year of deaths 10 years ago. She is calling for a regulated safer supply and decriminalized possession of small amounts for personal use. Just last week, she said that a comprehensive plan to ensure access to safe supply is essential. Shifting from a punishment and stigmatizing regime to a decriminalized, health-focused model is a critical step in reducing suffering and saving lives.

Again, we keep hearing from the Liberals that they are treating this as a health issue. We have heard the overwhelming advice from police chiefs and health officials that we need to take the first steps, which are decriminalization of personal possession and providing a safe supply.

Why has the Liberal government chosen not to listen to its own health professionals? To end the stigma, the government needs to act, but the stigma starts with the Prime Minister. He has not taken action. He is ignoring his own health experts. He is ignoring parents. He is ignoring the moms and the dads, the parents who have lost loved ones.

I am going to go straight to Gary Mason, who wrote this in *The Globe and Mail*:

I feel a sense of hopelessness. Giving out free drugs such as heroin to “addicts” just seems to be too big a leap for governments and society generally. Allowing people to die from their addictions is easier to accept. Which is just crazy when you think about it. Imagine seeing more than 8,500 people die from a drug overdose in just over five years as easier to accept than making a courageous effort to do something that could really make a difference.

At this point, what is there to lose?

I guess the answer is votes.

It is true that politicians are in the way of saving lives right now, and people are dying as a result of the inaction.

• (1525)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member opposite about the conditional sentencing orders that are being introduced here in Bill C-5, to see how that will impact his community and ensure that there is more fairness in the criminal justice system.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Speaker, I had a hard time hearing the question, but I will say that this bill does not even come close to going far enough. Right now they are talking about leaving it in the hands of judges and police. This is not going to prevent people from coming out of the shadows and from using small amounts of drugs.

We heard the evidence. The government's own expert panel on substance use from its own department suggested decriminalization and safe supply as first steps. Why is it ignoring its own expert panel? Why is it taking so long? Every day it does not take action, lives are lost in this country, over 20 a day. Why? Why is it taking so long?

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament from British Columbia, I will also just recognize the impact that the opioid crisis is having. We are seeing a record number of people dying. I presented a motion in the last Parliament regarding steps we could take, including recovery programs, investments and so on.

Some of the debate here seems to be a little off as far as debating Bill C-5. I am thinking about mandatory minimums. I think of a girl called Heather Thomas, who died. She was suffocated and killed when she was 10 years old, and her body was thrown into a lake not far from where I live. The criminal was also stalking someone I love.

I wonder about mandatory minimums for people who do these sex crimes against young people. Can the member comment?

• (1530)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Speaker, we have made it absolutely clear that we are not talking about supporting or removing mandatory minimum penalties for the most serious offences. Judicial discretion gives judges the ability to ensure that those who have committed heinous crimes pay the price. The member is very wrong to say that I am delineating away from the bill. The bill is talking about still criminalizing people for personal possession of drugs.

I wonder why the Conservatives are going to sit on the sidelines. They have not brought any comprehensive ideas forward that will save lives right now. They are part of the problem. They are failing to take the bold and courageous action that is necessary, to listen to the science and to listen to the experts across this country, including the police chiefs and medical health officers. They are failing.

We need to do more. We need to work collaboratively together. We need to let science, our health officials and our police chiefs guide us through this terrible tragedy that is taking place in our country.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns about diversion. Obviously, drug use is a health issue that we must do more to address, and it is not a legal issue. We are not going to heal people by sending them to prison.

That being said, I have already expressed my discomfort with the fact that the government is proposing to reduce or abolish minimum sentences for firearms offences while these firearms are circulating illegally on our streets in Montreal.

Would my colleague agree that the government should address the problem of the illegal circulation and importation of firearms before proposing to reduce or abolish these minimum sentences, if not at the same time?

[*English*]

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague and good friend. That was a good question.

Right now in the Criminal Code, section 718.2 allows judges to increase or decrease sentencing depending on aggravating circumstances, so it still does give judges the discretion to ensure that they are taking action on these serious offences.

In terms of the conversation I have been having a lot around decriminalization, safe supply and taking action on the opioid crisis, I hope my colleague and the Bloc will support the work we are doing in this House, so we can all work collectively together to listen to those experts, especially the expert panel on substance use here in Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to debate Bill C-5. I have to say that this is not a straightforward subject; it is extremely complex.

As I am not a lawyer, I, too, have to make sense of it all. I want to thank the office staff of the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who have really helped clarify this issue. Bill C-5 addresses two extremely important issues. I believe it would be worthwhile to have two separate debates, and I will move a motion about that a little later.

Debating both issues at the same time is complicated because we might be against abolishing mandatory minimum sentences and in favour of decriminalization. This complicates the debate a little. In the case of mandatory minimums for offences committed with a firearm, we are looking at 20 specific mandatory minimums. In the case of simple drug possession, we are looking at decriminalization. I think we need to look at these two issues separately.

As I said, I am not a lawyer. However, I have heard lawyers on the same team debate this subject and it is hard to have a simple opinion. It is hard to choose black or white, because there are several grey areas in all of this. We will try to untangle it all together and weigh the various arguments.

There are several arguments in favour of eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, and there are several against it. In my opinion, it is important that we consider all the arguments.

*Government Orders*

The Liberal government promised to quickly reintroduce Bill C-22 from the last Parliament. It also promised to reintroduce what we referred to as Bill C-236. By merging these two items into one bill, the government is giving the impression that it wants to act hastily. However, when we try to move too fast, we often make mistakes or do things wrong. I think the impression we give people is important.

In the current context, Bill C-5 sends out a peculiar message. Let me explain: Canada is in the midst of a gun violence crisis. My colleagues have likely heard me talk about firearms and the situation in Montreal and other major urban centres during the various question periods. Almost every day, we hear about a new firearm death.

The circumstances and timing are therefore not really appropriate. We have been calling on the minister for three weeks to take the first real step to combat the trafficking of illegal firearms, and to tighten gun control and border measures. Ultimately, the first step the government took was to introduce this bill, which proposes eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for certain firearms offences.

The message that sends is a bit odd. It does not really reassure anyone. Montreal families are worried, especially mothers who have lost a son and are waiting for gun control measures to be tightened. People are afraid to go out in the evening and take a walk in their own neighbourhood, which used to be safe. I doubt that these people feel reassured when they are told that the only thing the Liberal government has done so far to combat gun trafficking is to abolish the mandatory minimum sentences related to such offences.

The context is different and we, as parliamentarians, have to consider that. Everything is changing. The context is changing. When Bill C-22 was introduced, the context was different, even though this was a problem across the country. I think that we have no choice but to take that into consideration.

I am talking specifically about firearms because I am very familiar with this file. It should be noted that some mandatory minimum sentences that are set to be eliminated have to do with drug possession while the opioid crisis is raging both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. It is rather odd to be introducing this bill at this stage.

That being said, the Bloc Québécois is usually in favour of the principle of rehabilitation and crime reduction in a different context.

• (1535)

There is a tendency to have a fairly high degree of trust in judges, and I think they should be given the benefit of the doubt and the flexibility needed to decide what sentence to impose for an offence.

It is important to keep in mind that if certain mandatory minimum sentences were to be abolished overnight, that does not mean that someone who has committed offences will not be charged. It means that we are leaving it up to the judge to decide the best way to ensure public safety.

If a mandatory minimum sentence exists, the judge can impose a harsher sentence if they feel that that is the right thing to do. However, the judge cannot go below the mandatory minimum. That is

my concern. If individuals can be punished for their offences, but rehabilitated in ways other than being sent to prison, I think that can be beneficial. People often become more criminalized as a result of entering this cycle. Other options need to be considered. That is a pretty strong argument, I think, for abolishing mandatory minimum sentences.

Another argument is that it has long been accepted that mandatory minimum sentences do not deter certain kinds of targeted crimes. For example, it is a well-known fact that mandatory minimum sentences have virtually no effect on drug trafficking. Research in the United States and Malaysia has proven this. Both countries have strict minimum sentences for drug trafficking. However, this has not led to any change in drug use within the population. Rather, this only puts more small dealers in prison. Unfortunately, the focus is on the bottom of the ladder, when these individuals are often not irrevocably on that path. We could remedy all that and not necessarily send them directly to prison.

As for the effects of mandatory minimum sentences on firearms, no credible study has established that sentences have a deterrent effect on firearms offences. I think that someone who is planning to commit a crime or who commits a crime that is not premeditated does not say to themselves that they will not do it because there is a mandatory minimum sentence for that offence. Those who commit gun crime are either not aware of the consequences or they do not care about them and will commit the crime anyway.

I believe that even though the context is problematic, we agree that abolishing mandatory minimum sentences can be a good thing. However, it is not just about the context. Some details warrant further study.

In this case, Bill C-5 abolishes several mandatory minimum sentences for second and third offences. As I was saying, mandatory minimum sentences for a first offence may impact social reintegration, but keeping certain mandatory minimum sentences for second or even third offences could be justified to uphold the credibility of our legal system.

For example, the use of a firearm or imitation firearm to commit an offence is currently punishable by a mandatory minimum sentence of three years, which also applies to a second or subsequent offence. Under Bill C-5, this would be scrapped.

However, an individual who uses a firearm or imitation firearm for a second or third offence deserves to be held accountable for that, in my view. It is worth considering.



*Government Orders*

My time is running out, so I will not have time to go into the second item that this bill addresses, diversion. What I would suggest to the government is that it simply split the bill. The government should withdraw Bill C-5 and introduce two new separate bills. I think that would be a good solution.

The first bill would deal with diversion, which is represented by the part entitled “Evidence-based Diversion Measures” in the current Bill C-5. The House could vote on the principle of the bill at second reading.

The second bill would deal with mandatory minimum sentences and would be sent to committee before second reading. That would give members a chance to examine the principle of the bill prior to second reading and propose amendments that would change its scope. Immediate referral to committee before second reading would allow for a full study on the subject.

That is the Bloc Québécois' proposal to the government. I hope it will be well received.

• (1540)

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

First, I would like to say that on the issue of gun violence, nothing in Bill C-5 removes penalties for those involved in serious gun crimes.

My question is simple. With respect to the discretion that judges have to assess the specific circumstances of a case, does my colleague agree with me that judges are in a better position to have that discussion than members of the House?

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with my colleague, and I did talk about that.

Judges are best equipped to do that, and they need the flexibility to decide what penalty best fits the crime. The good thing about mandatory minimum sentences is that sentences can be greater; unfortunately, they cannot be lesser. That is the problem.

There has to be a way to offer another solution, such as reintegration or other alternatives that would enable us to get incarcerated individuals out of the cycle of crime.

[*English*]

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. friend a couple of questions. First, does the Bloc Québécois stand for the proposition that all mandatory minimums under the Criminal Code and CDSA ought to be eliminated?

If her response is yes, I would ask her this. Because she feels that judges are best equipped to render appropriate sentences, does she feel all judges across this great country all think alike and will all deliver sentencing to appropriately deal with all of the sentencing principles with respect to gun offences, such as denunciation and deterrence?

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Mr. Speaker, I would not go so far as to say it is a panacea. We cannot lump everything together because every case is different, as evidenced by the fact that Bill C-5 covers 20 specific mandatory minimum sentences. I have expressed reservations about some of them, especially gun crimes, so I think we need to keep things in perspective.

Judges have all the skills to determine which response to a given offence will keep people safe. Two different people commit the same offence, but the response to each can be very different.

We cannot lump everything together and say that all mandatory minimum sentences should be abolished tomorrow morning. I think it has been shown that they can be beneficial in some cases.

[*English*]

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great care to the speech by the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia because I am trying to understand the Bloc's position on this bill. She very eloquently laid out the arguments against mandatory minimums and talked about how they in fact do not accomplish what people think they do.

Then she said the timing was awkward. I cannot imagine why there would be bad timing for anything that would take away one of the main measures that results in more indigenous people, Black people and people living poverty ending up in prison, so I am confused. Why is that an objection to the bill?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Mr. Speaker, I would say to my colleague that it is fairly simple. We support abolishing certain mandatory minimum sentences. However, there are shootings practically every week in Quebec and Canada.

We have asked the ministers and the government to take a first step to show that they are serious about this issue and that they can tighten gun control. However, the government's first step was to introduce Bill C-5, which will eliminate certain mandatory minimums for firearms offences. That sends a peculiar message.

I understand that there is never a right time to introduce any legislation, but we have to move forward with this type of bill. The proposal to split the bill would make it possible to take the time to better study each element.

We should remember that the situation in Montreal is difficult right now. We are asking the government to take action to control gun trafficking, but Bill C-5 does not seem to be the appropriate response.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me start with this. Someone who is battling an addiction does not need a jail cell: they need treatment. They should not be judged. They should be helped. I think there is universal acceptance of that statement. There is not a Canadian or a member in the House who does not know, by a degree of separation, somebody who has been impacted by battling addiction.

Here is the sad part of where we cannot agree. Violent criminals, drug dealers and traffickers should be held accountable with mandatory jail time for preying on vulnerable people. I had the opportunity to speak to Bill C-5 in the last Parliament, and in my opinion it is a terrible bill that protects drug dealers and people who are trying to profit from and prey on those battling addictions as opposed to protecting the victims of crimes.

Here is what Canadians are not being told by the government in this legislation. There is not mandatory jail time for simple drug possession. That does not exist. Sadly today, what also do not exist are anywhere near enough treatment beds to get people who are battling addiction the help they truly deserve.

The government called an unnecessary election a couple of months ago. It took 62 days for the House to come back, and one of the government's first bills here does not give more beds or a program to create more beds across this country to help those battling addiction. Rather, on page 10 in the Speech from the Throne, there is a simple line that says, "there is more work to be done on mental health and addiction treatment". That is it. There is no plan or strategy, but rather eliminating mandatory jail time for very serious crimes.

The Minister of Justice said earlier in question period, and I heard my colleague from the NDP say a little while ago, that there are still serious consequences for serious crimes. I think they have a very warped definition of what a serious crime is in this country.

Let me specifically say that Bill C-5 would eliminate a number of mandatory jail time provisions relating to gun crimes: robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, discharging a firearm with intent, and using a firearm in commission of offences. There is also the expansion of conditional sentencing, where the bill would allow greater use of conditional sentencing orders such as house arrest.

Some of the new eligible offences in the bill would include arson for fraudulent purposes. Somebody who commits arson by burning somebody's home or property down may be eligible for house arrest in their own home. The height of irony of that knows no bounds.

The bill does not help people in this country who are battling addiction to opioids or other drugs, whatever they may be. What we know is that police officers already have the ability to use their discretion when determining whether to lay charges. One of the most profound and impactful opportunities I have had in my two-and-a-bit years as a member of Parliament has been to do ride-alongs with the Ontario Provincial Police and the Cornwall Police Service in my community of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

I saw first-hand, late on a Friday night and early into the morning, the amazing work that our frontline police officers do. I also saw, thankfully and confidentially, their ability to use that discretion on the front line. I saw that discretion was being used. What was not there was the availability and ease of getting treatment for somebody who clearly had an addiction issue, so they could get past their problem. Over and over again, we talk to law enforcement about tackling this issue and getting better service for treatment. Getting people the help that they deserve needs to be top priority, not letting off drug traffickers for gun crimes or violent criminals with the opportunity for more lenient sentences after they have been convicted.

The Public Prosecution Service of Canada has previously issued a directive to prosecutors to avoid prosecuting simple drug possession cases unless there are major public safety concerns.

● (1550)

That is clear. This bill would do nothing to change all of that rightful practice that is in place. Instead it would give breaks and the opportunity to provide breaks to people who are trying to destroy the lives of people battling addictions and profiting off it.

In my riding, there have been several news stories of how the opioid and addiction battles, not just in eastern Ontario but across this country, have unfortunately only gotten worse during the pandemic. I look at a news release that came from the Cornwall police service and the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, warning about increases in drug-related overdoses in Cornwall and area from April of this year.

Inspector of field operations for the Cornwall police services, Chad Maxwell, says, "Opioids are endangering the lives of vulnerable members of our community and we are dependent on everyone to take this messaging seriously."

I look at the headline in the Cornwall Standard-Freeholder, "A hidden pandemic in the Cornwall region—opioid overdoses and deaths"; or the headline in the Morrisburg Leader, "Opioid overdose numbers rise during pandemic in EOHU region." The Seaway News shared the same news back on April 9.

As we wrap up Parliament in the next few days for the year, having been back for a few weeks, when I go back home, I have the opportunity to liaise, as I mentioned, with the Ontario Provincial Police, the RCMP, the Cornwall police service and the Akwesasne Mohawk Police. I also have the tough job of having to hear the stories of parents who have lost a child or sibling to addiction. I go back to them this week to tell them that there is no more money for residential treatment beds for people battling addictions, that there is no plan to address it or to fill that massive gap we all heard about in the recent election and that we know exists. However, I will have to tell them that there is a bill on the table that would lower the bar for convicted violent criminals.

*Routine Proceedings*

Whether it be in Morrisburg, or Cornwall or Crysler, addiction impacts every community in the country. I would encourage members from the Liberal and NDP side, who are strongly promoting this bill, to ask their constituents if they want an increased number of residential treatment beds as a priority for this Parliament or if they want the list that I exhausted earlier of all the mandatory jail times where leniency can be given upon conviction for these serious crimes.

I will wrap up today by quoting something that was in our Conservative platform earlier this year, "Canada's Conservatives will treat the opioid epidemic as the urgent health issue that it is." The last thing those suffering from addiction should have to worry about is being arrested. Any interaction the government has with them should be focused on keeping them safe and helping them recover. We believe that law enforcement should focus on dealers and traffickers.

We need more residential treatments. We need a better plan at the federal level and in every part of our country to get people the help they need and deserve. Bill C-5 would not go after dealers and traffickers appropriately. It would lower the bar and open the door. That is wrong. Our opposition will stand every step of the way against this terrible, misguided bill.

● (1555)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague might not be aware that for the first time in Canadian history, there is a cabinet minister whose primary objective and role is for mental health and addiction. It would be a far stretch to suggest that this government does not take mental health and addiction extremely seriously.

The problem is that the member is trying to conflate two issues as though they are exclusively together. He talked about police officers having discretion. Police officers have discretion on whether to charge or not to charge. They do not have discretion as to what the outcome, or rehabilitation or various measures might be if charged and found guilty.

Could the member please explain why he thinks the discretion is okay with a police officer, but not with a judge?

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Kingston and the Islands does like to pack a lot into the question.

Appointing a minister to say that the government is going to do something is not a result. We hear this time and again. There are so many examples of the government saying that it is spending  $x$  number of dollars on this or that they have appointed so-and-so to study this. Nothing happens in terms of changes on the issues. Again, a minister has been appointed, but there is no plan before us to tackle the very issues I addressed in my comments.

When we talk about discretion, there is a difference between the discretion for simple possession and supporting and having a universal process and agreement on it. Even further, on some challenges, there should be mandatory jail times for robbery with a firearm, prison breach, sexual assault, kidnapping, motor vehicle theft, theft over \$5,000. When it comes to that, there is a difference

between simple possession and all these things that are included in Bill C-5.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for delineating between what should continue to have mandatory minimum sentencing and what should not. I would like to hear an explanation on why it is important that we tackle and address the mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offences.

In my community of Edmonton Griesbach, for example, we know how far that kind of policy would go to help marginalized people, particularly indigenous and Black community members in my riding, in getting the access to rehabilitation services that are so desperately needed. Would the member elaborate on how that kind of process would be beneficial for his community as well?

● (1600)

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, we talk about delineating things in the bill. The government is talking about help for opioids and addiction and is lumping everything into this bill that would not address that. There is a massive difference between a simple drug possession of a minor nature and somebody committing robbery, arson, kidnapping of a child and so forth. There need to be serious consequences. The government says that its definition is serious. I am not even sure what that is defined as now.

What is not in the bill and what continues to be ignored is a real, tangible plan that we get more residential treatment beds, that the focus be on recovery and on assistance to get people with addictions out of a bad cycle, on the right path and given the supports they need. There is nothing in the bill and there has been no news from the government on that key part of addressing Canada's addiction battles.

**The Speaker:** That is all the time we have for now. The hon. member will have one minute of questions coming to him when we come back. We will have to work that in.

It being 4 p.m., pursuant to order made Monday, December 6, I now invite the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to make a statement.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1605)

[English]

### WAYS AND MEANS

#### NOTICE OF MOTION

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1) I wish to table a notice of a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, and other measures.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

*Routine Proceedings*

[Translation]

I also have the honour to table a notice of ways and means motion to introduce an act to implement a digital services tax. I am also asking that an order of the day be designated for consideration of this motion.

\* \* \*

[English]

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE 2021**

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, colleagues in the House and Canadians, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the economic and fiscal update 2021.

Twenty-one months ago, a global pandemic reached our shores. Few of us had any idea how long it would last or the toll it would take and, today, we are facing omicron, an even more virulent variant of this virus. However, we can be confident we will get through this, because our government did understand from the very outset that to save lives our economy would have to be locked down, so we put in place unprecedented measures to meet this unprecedented challenge.

We supported municipalities and we supported provinces and territories. We supported our health care system and we supported schools. We provided free vaccines, PPE, rapid tests and therapeutic medicines.

[Translation]

Our focus was on people and jobs. We helped millions of Canadians with income supports. We delivered direct payments to seniors and families.

We kept businesses going, particularly small businesses, and helped workers stay connected to their jobs, with the wage and rent subsidies and loans for small businesses. We did this because it was the right thing to do. We also did it because we knew it was an investment in our economy that would pay off.

Our goal was to prevent economic scarring. We wanted to emerge from this with our economic muscle intact, ready, as a country, to come roaring back. Keeping the Canadian economy on life support as we went into COVID-19 hibernation was expensive, but we knew that keeping Canadian families and businesses solvent would help our economy rebound.

[English]

This economic and fiscal update provides Canadians with a transparent report of our nation's finances. It also includes targeted investments that will ensure we have the weapons we need to finish the fight against COVID-19, an effort more urgent now than ever with the surge of omicron.

First, we are protecting children with pediatric vaccines, now available for free for all children five and over. Booster shots are free for all Canadians too, just as first and second doses have been.

Omicron makes boosters more urgently important now than ever. I ask people to please go and get a booster as soon as they are eligible. I have booked mine and I am very glad to have done so. We

have enough boosters for everyone, and boosters are an essential defence against the mounting threat of omicron.

We are investing in new antiviral drugs for COVID-19 patients that prevent hospitalizations and will save lives. We are investing in ventilation improvements to prevent outbreaks at schools and workplaces.

● (1610)

[Translation]

To date, our government has delivered nearly 80 million rapid tests to provinces, territories and indigenous communities, free of charge. This fiscal update sets aside a further \$1.7 billion, enough to procure more than 180 million additional rapid tests. Rapid tests are a useful tool in the intensifying fight against omicron. We are buying and distributing them, and we encourage Canadians to use them. We are also providing support to provinces and territories for proof of vaccination credentials. As we brace ourselves for the rising wave of omicron, we know that no one wants to endure new lockdowns. That is why vaccines, vaccine mandates, boosters, ventilation and rapid tests are so essential.

Over the past 21 months we have all learned that fast, local action to limit outbreaks is much less costly than waiting and being forced to impose wider and deeper restrictions. In that knowledge, and out of an abundance of caution, we are proposing local lockdown support for workers and businesses. These measures are an insurance policy for our country, and are in place to help local public health officials make the right decisions in the coming months, knowing their communities will have the support they need. We are also moving forward on 10 days of paid sick leave for workers in federally regulated businesses.

[English]

We are also provisioning an additional \$4.5 billion to pay for possible further costs of fighting omicron and other COVID-19 surges, including spending on border measures and on income and business supports.

The COVID pandemic triggered the steepest economic contraction in Canada since the Great Depression. At its worst, it cost three million Canadians their jobs, as our GDP shrank by 17%. This was a once-in-a-generation trauma. When it first hit, many predicted it would take years to rebuild. That is why we are so pleased to report that Canada has largely recovered from the economic damage inflicted by COVID-19 and is poised for robust growth in the months to come. We have now surpassed our target of creating a million jobs. In fact, we have recovered 106% of the jobs lost at the peak of the pandemic, significantly outpacing the United States, where just 83% of lost jobs have been recovered so far.

From the start, we have understood that few things are more central to the economic well-being of Canadians than having a job. That is why our investments have been so singularly focused on employment and why Canada has experienced the second-fastest recovery of lost jobs in the G7.

Our GDP has already returned to near pre-pandemic levels. Our GDP growth of 5.4% in the third quarter outpaced that of the U.S., the U.K., Japan and Australia. OECD projections suggest that by 2023, Canada's recovery will be the second fastest in the G7.

This update shows that the size of the Canadian economy this year will be \$2.48 trillion. When we published our economic forecast in the 2018 budget, that is almost exactly the size we expected our economy to grow to by this year, and we made that forecast when none of us had any idea that our economic growth and our lives would be so deeply disrupted by COVID-19. We are back on track and that is good news for all Canadians.

Canada posted a \$25.1-billion surplus in our trading goods in October as our exports rose. Fewer businesses went bankrupt over the past year than in 2019, before the pandemic. There are now an additional 6,000 active businesses in Canada compared with before the pandemic. Household employment income is now 7% above its precrisis level, and Canadians have used this difficult time to pay down their personal debt relative to their income.

Our recovery from the COVID-19 recession has significantly surpassed Canada's recovery from the 2008 recession. We have already more than recovered lost jobs, a healing that took eight months longer after the much milder 2008 recession. We are on track to recover lost GDP five months more quickly than after the 2008 contraction.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Provincial government balance sheets were sheltered from the pandemic thanks to strong support from the federal government. Provincial and territorial government revenues actually increased in 2020-21 because of substantial federal support, both through direct transfers and through Canada's COVID-19 economic response.

This assistance helped put a floor under provincial and territorial government revenues thereby limiting their deficits and debt. Fully \$8 out of every \$10 provided to fight COVID-19 and support Canadians through the pandemic came from the federal government. Our government will continue to be agile as we navigate the highly volatile and evolving global economy and health industry.

### *Routine Proceedings*

We need to continue to manage the spread of this sneaky and unpredictable virus. The pain of the families who lost a loved one can never be measured. Our guiding principle will continue to be the conviction that the best economic policy is a strong health policy. Because we have been steadfast in putting saving lives first, this is the approach that has driven our strong economic performance and the second-lowest mortality rate in the G7.

As we look ahead, we are mindful of elevated inflation and its impact on the cost of living for Canadians. We know inflation is a global phenomenon driven by the unprecedented challenge of reopening the world's economy. Turning the world economy back on is a good deal more complicated than turning it off.

During the lockdown, Canadians' incomes remained strong, on average, but opportunities to spend on services were severely restricted. The result was that Canadians spent more on durable goods, without spending on meals in restaurants, personal care or vacations. Canadians spent their disposable income on renovations, new furniture, appliances and cars. It will take some time for supply chains to catch up and for our economy to rebalance itself.

To help unsnarl Canada's supply chains, today we are announcing \$50 million to launch a call for proposals that will help Canadian ports acquire cargo storage capacity and take other measures to relieve supply chain congestion.

• (1620)

[English]

Our government understands that a strong monetary policy framework is the best weapon in our arsenal to keep prices stable so that Canadians can afford the cost of living. That is why yesterday we renewed the Bank of Canada's 2% inflation target to ensure that the current rate of inflation does not become entrenched.

Canada was a pioneer when we established an inflation target to guide our central bank in setting interest rates. In the 30 years since, the Bank of Canada has successfully maintained price stability in our country. Our government has every confidence the bank will continue to deliver on this essential mandate. Canadians should be wholly confident in their central bank.

*Routine Proceedings**[Translation]*

Many Canadians worry about paying their bills. That is why we are glad we indexed the Canada child benefit to inflation, and are committed to continuing to index old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, the goods and services tax credit, and other benefits for the most vulnerable.

We are committing today to provide guaranteed income supplement or allowance beneficiaries who also received the Canada emergency response benefit with a one-time payment to alleviate the financial hardship they may have faced as a result of an unintended interaction between the two benefits. We are also laying out a plan to provide debt relief to students who need to repay the Canada emergency response benefits they were not eligible for by proposing to offset their debt with the Canada emergency student benefit amount for which they were eligible.

We are establishing the \$60-million Canada performing arts workers resilience fund, which will support initiatives that improve the economic, career, and working conditions of live performance arts workers, including independent contractors.

*[English]*

Early learning and child care costs are like a second mortgage for many young Canadian families. Child care that is too expensive or just not available keeps many mothers from going back to work, which is an unacceptable brake on our economy at a time when we are facing labour force shortages.

We knew that high-quality, \$10-a-day child care would make life more affordable for Canadian families and drive economic growth. That is why our \$30-billion investment in early learning and child care was the cornerstone of the April budget.

Our plan was widely supported, but many Canadians were skeptical about our ability to get the job done. I understood them. After all, Canadian women have been trying to establish a national system of early learning and child care for more than half a century and, with the exception of Quebec, we had not succeeded.

Today, I have great news for Canada's working mothers and fathers. Less than eight months after we announced our bold project in our budget, we now have child care deals with nine provinces and one territory. Within five years, Canadians will proudly rely on \$10-a-day child care just as our universal, publicly accessible health care system has come to define us as a society. This is a historic accomplishment that will transform the lives of every parent in Canada and of every future parent in Canada for generations to come.

Let us give this effort a final push and conclude agreements with Ontario, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. We can and we must get this done now.

Immigration is another important driver of economic growth and is a Canadian competitive advantage. Our government is committed to bringing in 411,000 immigrants in 2022. It will be the highest number in Canadian history. To help support this effort and reduce processing time for permanent- and temporary-resident and Canadian citizenship applications, we are investing \$85 million in our immigration system.

Housing prices are a real concern, especially for middle-class Canadians hoping to buy their first homes. Housing affordability remains a priority for our government, and we will take further action in the upcoming budget. As we announced in the spring budget on January 1, 2022, our government will apply Canada's first national tax on vacant property owned by non-resident non-Canadians.

As we said we would, the government is also bringing forward legislation to extend the northern residents deduction so Canadians in the north can claim up to \$1,200 in eligible travel expenses on their taxes starting next month. The government will also bring forward legislation to extend small businesses' deadline for the repayment of Canada Emergency Business Account loans, and to ensure that seasonal workers who received pandemic benefits can still qualify for the EI seasonal workers pilot project.

● (1625)

*[Translation]*

Climate change is causing increased volatility in the economy. Recent and tragic floods in British Columbia devastated homes, farms, and critical infrastructure, and further disrupted supply chains. Severe droughts, including across our Prairies, have contributed to increases in food prices. We are taking action to fight climate change.

Canada has a world-leading price on pollution that is helping to lower emissions and grow a cleaner economy. In fact, as many countries in the world look to up their level of ambition they are seeing inspiration in our plan. We are also working to finalize Canada's first National Adaptation Strategy by the end of next year. The green transition of the global economy is under way. It is one of the great economic opportunities, and one of the great challenges, before us.

Our government is determined that Canadians must emerge from this international transformation even more prosperous than we are today. We will ensure that there are good sustainable jobs for Canadians in every corner of the country, for decades to come.

[English]

Above all, we know that our national focus, once we emerge from COVID-19, must be growth and competitiveness. Measures to promote them will figure prominently in the budget. Our government understood from the start of this pandemic that the best way to maintain strong public finances was to keep our economy strong. That is what our emergency spending achieved. This fall, Moody's and S&P both reaffirmed Canada's AAA credit rating.

We know that Canadians work hard to earn a living, and expect us to be careful with their money. We know we have a duty to do the right thing for today and for tomorrow. We understand that our debts must be repaid. We came into this crisis with the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, and in fact we have increased our relative advantage during the pandemic.

We remain committed to the fiscal anchors that we outlined in the spring budget: to reduce the federal debt-to-GDP ratio over the medium term and to unwind COVID-19-related deficits. In October, we pivoted from necessary but costly broad-based support programs to more narrowly targeted, less expensive measures, as we had promised we would. Our government will continue to be a responsible and prudent fiscal manager.

This update reports a deficit of \$327.7 billion for the last fiscal year and of \$144.5 billion for this fiscal year. This compares favourably with our forecast of \$354.2 billion and \$154.7 billion, respectively, in the April budget.

• (1630)

Our debt-to-GDP ratio in the last fiscal year was 47.5%. It will peak at 48% in this fiscal year and then fall steadily, as will the deficit. This contrasts positively with our prediction in the April budget.

In budget 2021, we forecast that in this fiscal year, 42% of our bond issuance would be long-term debt of 10 years or more. Today, we can forecast that it will be 45%. Members will recall that in 2019, only 15% of our debt was locked in over a long-term horizon. Pushing more of our debt into bonds with a longer maturity ensures that Canada's debt servicing costs are sustainable.

Thanks to an improving fiscal outlook, the amount of money we will need to issue and borrow into this year is \$35 billion lower than forecast in budget 2021. Despite a necessary and unprecedented level of spending to support Canadians during COVID-19, our public debt charges as a share of GDP will be the same this year and next year as they were in 2018 and 2019, before the pandemic.

This fiscal update includes a provision to settle the cases on harm to first nations children currently before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and to invest in transforming the services offered to first nations children and their families. We have provisioned \$20 billion for compensation and \$20 billion to improve the system going forward.

The Government of Canada is working toward an agreement with the parties on this issue. We know that paying our historic debt to indigenous people is paramount, and that we must act to ensure that these injustices do not happen again. We will not and we can-

### *Routine Proceedings*

not evade this essential commitment. That is why we are today setting aside the funds to pay for it.

It has been a hard 21 months, but we are succeeding because we are doing what Canadians do in a crisis. We are helping each other, we are working together and we are doing what needs to be done, whether it is as big as the wage subsidies or as small as wearing a mask at the grocery store.

With winter upon us and omicron now among us, we know that there will still be tempests ahead, but we are resilient. Our plan is working and once we finish the fight against COVID-19, we will turn our resolve toward fighting climate change, advancing reconciliation with indigenous people and building an economy that is stronger, fairer, more competitive and more prosperous for all Canadians.

• (1635)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Speaker, I am simply rising to say it has long been the practice of the House that when an update is given of this nature, copies are distributed of the documents that are being debated. Today, I am quite frustrated that the government has not supplied nearly enough copies of the document for members of Parliament to be able to look at those documents while the minister is speaking. I ask you to come back to the House and rule on whether this is appropriate.

This is a critical issue. Members should have access to those documents right in front of them in paper form. This has long been the practice of the House. I am not sure why the government is not respecting this practice.

**The Speaker:** That question was asked during the speech and we did look around. There were not enough hard copies provided to the opposition lobby to be passed around. My understanding is there is an electronic copy coming their way shortly. Unfortunately, I do not have any control over that. That is something the government provides.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Carleton.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I guess with all the money-printing deficits, the Liberals did not have enough paper left to print these documents.

*Routine Proceedings*

I want to thank the minister of inflation for her presentation today. It reveals that inflation is in fact 50% higher than she promised in the budget, and the deflation she said we would have a year ago has definitely not materialized. A half a trillion dollars of inflationary deficits mean more dollars chasing fewer goods and higher prices. The result of course is that housing and gas are up by a third, making it hard for people to get to work or house themselves; food prices will rise \$1,000 for the average family next year, not to mention that taxes cost the average family more than food, clothing and shelter combined. The more the government spends, the more Canadians pay.

To add insult to injury, we learned today that the government is collecting a windfall of tax revenue as it gets higher taxes on higher prices. It is called the inflation tax or, as the Liberals would say, “just inflation”. My question is a very specific one. How much in extra tax revenue will the government collect as a result of higher-than-expected inflation on the backs of Canadian consumers?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that question was a very general and meandering one, so I am going to offer a general and specific answer.

Let me be very clear. Yes, the government did undertake extraordinary spending to support Canadians during the fight against COVID-19. In this fiscal update, we are making a provision for further spending in that fight. We are spending on therapeutics. We are spending on rapid tests. We are spending on boosters. We are making a \$4.5-billion provision to account for potential additional costs imposed by omicron. I am absolutely confident that the vast majority of Canadians understand that this spending is not only necessary, but also essential to protect health and to protect our economy.

The results speak for themselves. Our economy has already more than recovered all the jobs we lost to the COVID recession. GDP is nearly at pre-pandemic levels, which is a better performance than most of our peer countries around the world.

• (1640)

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, for several months now, Quebec and the provinces have been unanimous in calling for an immediate payment of \$28 billion to cover health care costs, with a 6% escalator. Why, then, is the minister proposing that the Canada health transfer escalator be maintained at 3%, the legal minimum, until 2027, when that is far below the annual increase in health care costs?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that this announcement underscores the extent of the federal government's support for Canadians and for the provinces and territories, including in the health sector.

The government has purchased vaccines, boosters, tests and therapeutic medicines. As I pointed out in the economic statement, \$8 out of every \$10 spent by all levels of government in Canada came from the federal government.

This government is there for Canadians and Quebecers when it comes to health. The federal government is there to support businesses and people, and it will do its fair share.

[English]

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, alongside low-income advocacy groups, seniors advocacy groups and affected seniors themselves, the NDP has been pushing for months now for action on the GIS clawback. We see some indication now of the approach the government intends to take, but it raises some questions.

The solution we were advocating for was to not count pandemic benefits in the eligibility calculation for the guaranteed income supplement. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that would affect about 88,000 seniors and would cost about \$434 million. The government is instead proposing a program it says will affect about 200,000 people at a cost of about \$742 million, and says it will be a one-time payment. It is unclear if seniors will be paid back for the income they lost. It is unclear if their monthly payments will be restored, so that they continue to have the monthly income they need to pay rent over the next number of years, or whether they are just going to be receiving a cheque.

Could the minister provide some clarity to these seniors? Some of them have lost their homes and have been waiting for an announcement on what their life is going to look like going into the future. How is the government going to determine how much is paid to each individual senior; how is it going to roll out the funds; when is it going to happen; and how is it going to help ensure they have the money they need to get back in an apartment and pay rent for the next 12 months, instead of getting just a one-time “thank you very much and sorry for the inconvenience” from the government?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Speaker, our government agrees, and I think all Canadians would agree, that seniors have been so hard hit by the pandemic. Seniors who qualify for the GRS are among the most vulnerable people in Canada, and we have to support them. That is why I am really glad that in this update I was able to confirm that we will compensate those seniors who have had their GIS clawed back because they received the CERB.

The most important thing I want to do today is reassure all of those seniors, who I am sure are really worried about paying their bills, that it is going to be fixed and they will be compensated for that clawback. We are going to ensure that the compensation meets the amount of clawback for all the seniors who were affected by this.



*Routine Proceedings*

• (1645)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is along the lines of where this government has been over the last number of years, in terms of being there to properly support Canadians. We know the government has been there every step of the way, and with the onset of omicron and the potential of what outbreaks could mean in our country, what is the message we want to give to Canadians right now, in terms of properly ensuring they have the resources to protect themselves and to get through and finish the fight against COVID? We know that employment, despite the fact that it initially went down, has bounced right back up, and we want to know if the minister could provide some direction and some comment to Canadians about what they can expect in the weeks and months to come.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Speaker, I have three messages for Canadians today.

The first is a bit of a tough one, and that is that COVID is still with us. The omicron variant is serious and we need to take it seriously. That is not a message anyone wants to hear as we head into the holidays, and I know how hard it is for us to really accept that, but it is the reality. One thing we have all learned from this virus, and by the way it is the way Canadians tend to behave anyway, is that it is better to do the right thing now and to take action now to avoid something more serious in the future. That is message one, to be careful.

Message two is that the government is supporting Canadians with all the tools we need: the health care tools and the economic support.

Message three is that we have been doing a great job; our economy has largely recovered from the COVID recession.

Let us keep on going. We are almost there.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has proven her government has no economic plan for our country. That is how I started my response to last year's economic update and, unfortunately, the exact same thing rings true today.

Today, the Liberal government shared a snapshot of Canada's economic position. The minister is actually hoping to fool Canadians into thinking everything is fine. After shutting down an economy for over a year and spending half a trillion dollars, of course one will see some growth and some employment gains. What the minister neglected to point out is how the government's mismanagement has led our country and Canadian families to the edge of an economic cliff. Inflation, in fact, is helping to fudge the Liberal numbers while hurting families and seniors across this great country. "Just inflation" is good for the Prime Minister's budget but bad for Canadians' budget.

Canadians are living through a cost of living crisis. We hear that all across the country people are living through an inflation crisis that the finance minister predicted a year ago would be deflation; she was wrong on all the fundamental projections upon which the cost of living is based.

Canadians, new families and seniors are struggling with a housing crisis across the country, and the Liberal government is now focused on making life more expensive for Canadians. It plans to tax the sale of homes, including colleagues' homes. On January 1, 2022, it is going to start raising taxes. While the Liberals have no plan for our recovery, they certainly have a high-tax, high-debt agenda, and that is the last thing Canadians can afford right now.

During my response to the Speech from the Throne last month, I spoke about Peter from Nova Scotia, who owns a boat charter and lobster eatery in Peggy's Cove. Small businesses like his are struggling with rising costs. They are struggling to make ends meet, and they are going to be struggling to pay the government's new payroll tax.

I spoke about Clifford from rural Alberta, who felt completely left behind by the Liberal government. Clifford is a senior on a fixed income and he is struggling with rising prices. Gas is up; food is up; home heating is up. Everything is going up except his benefits.

Do the Prime Minister and the Liberal finance minister know about the real struggles these Canadians are facing? Are they listening? Sadly, Canadians like Peter and Clifford, like millions of Canadians across this country, are being left behind by a government that is continually out of touch. That is why the Conservative opposition will be here to be a voice for the millions of Canadians being left behind in the Liberal economy.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Canadians are under increasing pressure. Their paycheques are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living. Average salaries are increasing by about 2%, while inflation is increasing by almost 5%. This means that the average family has had a 3% drop in salary this year alone.

[*English*]

Canadians are getting priced out of their own lives. Merry Christmas from the Liberal government.

To cope with rising home prices and stagnant wages, Canadians have been piling on more and more personal debt in recent years. Now many Canadian families have their finances close to a breaking point. Is the government listening? Twenty-seven per cent of Canadians say they are insolvent and cannot pay all monthly bills and debt payments as costs are going up. Half of Canadians say they are \$200 or less away from financial insolvency each month. Canadian household budgets are fragile. When we see increases of 20% to 30% for gas, fuel, rent or food, that crisis is out of control. Thirty-five per cent of Canadians are concerned that future interest rate increases could drive them toward financial bankruptcy.

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The Bank of Canada recently said that interest rates will go up next year. Some experts expect rates to be increased five times or more next year. In *The Globe and Mail*, the head of C.D. Howe had a column that warned about this, called “Brace for impact: Rate hikes are coming”. He said, “Investors, homeowners, businesses, and our big-borrowing governments need to get ready,” as interest rate increases are coming. This is at a time when the government is starting the new year by raising taxes on Canadians on January 1. Happy new year.

This is why inflation matters. This is why monetary policy matters. This is why the budget, job creation, our competitiveness, trade with the United States and our economic future matter. By 2023, the Prime Minister will have doubled the national debt, spending more than all previous prime ministers combined. That is astounding, and there is hardly even a notice from a Prime Minister who thinks that budgets balance themselves and might think that Canadians' credit card bills do the same. That is not the case.

We have a government coming out of COVID that spent more per capita than all our allies and has some of the worst results. In today's fall economic statement, cleverly snuck in just before the Christmas break, the Minister of Finance bragged about how Canada's deficit numbers are better than expected, so let us take a look at that. We know the Minister of Finance has already been flagged for a misleading video on Twitter. Maybe we should look at the numbers behind her claim.

Inflation is boosting the Liberals' tax revenues. If they raise the general price level by almost 5%, that boosts GST revenues by 5%. Our deficit numbers are smaller because their inflation is higher. When the shadow minister for finance asked a simple question of the Minister of Finance on this issue, namely how much more revenue the government has collected from driving up inflation, she would not answer the question. Canadians are paying the price. Inflation may look good to pad the Liberals' budget, but it makes it impossible for Canadians to meet their budgets.

Inflation is rising by almost 5%, the highest in 18 years, and the Bank of Canada is warning that it will get even higher in the months ahead and stay that way through parts of next year. For families with tight budgets and seniors on a fixed income, these are alarming numbers. Our country is drowning in the rising waters of debt that is being fuelled by inflation and by ideological policies that are driving away investment and making Canada one of the last places people will come for their economic recovery. Now we are watching the consequences of the government's decisions in real time.

Heating our homes as we head into the Christmas holiday will be more expensive, with natural gas prices up nearly 20%. Filling up a car to go visit grandparents on Christmas Eve will be too, with gas up almost 42%. Even the cost of that big breakfast on Christmas morning will be higher, as eggs are up 7.4%, juice is up 5%, jam is up 8% and bacon is up 20%. We are almost losing our appetite with the rising inflation.

However, the Liberals' lack of action on competitiveness and supporting Canadian workers is the real canary in the coal mine for our economy.

• (1655)

Canada is bleeding capital investment. More investment and production are going to the United States and overseas. This means that we are becoming even more dependent on foreign countries and on foreign supply chains that are not choosing to get supply to Canada but to themselves.

This is a government whose only record achievement beyond debt is record failure in negotiations with the United States. It has failed energy workers, it has failed forestry workers, it has failed farming families, it has failed auto workers and, with buy American, it is failing every supply chain in manufacturing, including steel and aluminum, across this great country. It is failing millions of Canadians. It is no wonder President Biden said that Canada under this Prime Minister is his “easiest” relationship. It is easy for the U.S. to win under this government.

[*Translation*]

Businesses are grappling with a dire labour shortage. Everyone can see it, except the Liberals.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Does he have a plan and concrete solutions that will solve the labour shortage crisis?

As always, the Prime Minister refuses to listen. It is time for the Liberal government to tackle the labour shortage affecting Quebec and all of Canada. That is why he must make it easier for immigrant workers to enter Canada, invest in specialized training programs and encourage people to embrace the trades. He must also offer incentives to employers and employees, as this will encourage people to return to work.

Time is running out. Business owners are out of patience, and so are we.

[*English*]

Business investment declined by an average of 1% every year from 2016 to 2019, reaching a 25-year low as a percentage of GDP, and that was just before the pandemic. Canadian factories are operating with the lowest levels of capital investment in 35 years, which will lead to lower productivity, fewer jobs and lower wages. Businesses across Canada, but particularly in southern Ontario, are investing and creating jobs, but Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio are moving to a more competitive, less burdensome regulatory environment where they do not see payroll taxes going up the first of the new year and where they see incentive and opportunity as opposed to being held back by ideology.

The saddest part is that we are losing an opportunity to build the future economy. Canada should be booming, firing on all cylinders, investing in new technologies, innovating and providing upward pressure on wages because of growth. We can get back to building prosperity and great jobs for Canadians, but the Liberal government, it is clear, has no plan to make that a reality.

The Conservatives believe in a Canada where everyone has the chance to work hard, everyone has the chance to own a home and everyone has a chance to build this country up and give it to their children for a successful future. However, half of Canadians under 30 are giving up on owning a home. That is a failure of leadership of epic proportions. Nationwide, the average price of a home has jumped by \$54,000 in just the last few months, up 30% and worse. According to RE/MAX last week, real estate prices are expected to surge another 9.2% next year.

Do we really want to be the country where young people, a generation of them, are giving up on the idea of owning a home? Do we really want to be increasingly a nation of part-time and contract jobs, and no long-term jobs with growth potential for all Canadians? The government is giving up on the next generation of Canadians.

• (1700)

For those who already own a home, the Liberals are going to tax the sale of it. They are slowly coming after Canadians' home equity under the guise of a solution to the housing crisis they have presided over in the last five to six years.

[*Translation*]

This tax targets hard-working Canadians who want to use the sale of their homes to fund their retirement. Simply put, this tax deprives them of their hard-earned savings.

[*English*]

The government's solutions will only make the housing crisis worse and will attack people as they approach retirement. The Conservatives have pressed for concrete actions to address our housing crisis, build more homes and return the dream of home ownership to millions of Canadians. Unlike the Liberal government, we are not giving up on Canadians under 30.

What we see in another hollow economic statement released on the eve of a Christmas break is empty promises, massive debt, higher taxes and no real economic plan. The finance minister is not telling Canadians the real story. Inflation is hurting Canadian families but helping Liberal finances.

The Conservatives will continue to be a voice for the millions of Canadians being left behind by the Liberal government. We are going to fight to build more housing, tackle the cost-of-living crisis and hold the Liberal government to account for giving up on the next generation. We are going to build a plan to restore Canadian prosperity and make Canada an economic powerhouse.

Right now, Canada should be focused on proposing solutions to lift up Canadian families with great jobs and rising wages. We need to build a dynamic economy that benefits people in all sectors of our economy and in all regions of the country. From the resources in the ground to the ideas in our heads, we need Canada to build,

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discover and strive. We need a generation of Canadians who want to win, not settle for second, third or 10th best.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

It is time to simplify the tax system and cut red tape. It is time to make Canada the best place in the world to invest, create, develop, build and start a business.

We will make Canada a country with the most innovative economy in the world, a country with ultra-competitive tax rates, a country with incentives for innovation and an advanced research agency focused on the private sector and the economy of the future.

[*English*]

Let us provide financing and investment capital to small businesses so they can flourish. Let us build world-class infrastructure all across this great country, not fund more bureaucratic programs. Let us also be proud of our resource sector and the millions of direct and indirect jobs from it. It is the only thing really driving our current account balance, and the Prime Minister and his ideological ministers want to end it. Our energy is the most ethical, our critical minerals are the most accessible and our commitment to emission reduction and indigenous participation is the most reliable in the world.

It is time for a new approach, not more empty words and failed promises. It is time to create a dynamic and more prosperous Canada, one that grows, that strives, that wins. It is time to stop being happy with last place. It is time to stop being happy with record debt, higher taxes and more government intervention.

Canada's Conservatives are here to build. We are here to hold up. We are here to win. We are here to fight for our children's future.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the worldwide pandemic hit Canada, the Prime Minister and this government stepped up and made it very clear that we were going to be there for Canadians. Over the days, weeks and months that followed, programs flowed to support Canadians in a very real and tangible way. Whether through wage subsidy programs, the CERB program, direct payments to seniors or direct payments to people with disabilities, we were there. The Conservatives, depending on which member is speaking, will talk about the deficit trying to imply that we spent too much. We were there to support Canadians.

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We now have Bill C-2 before us. It is a continuation of supporting Canadians. Will the leader of the Conservative Party and the Conservatives ensure that the ongoing support for Canadian workers, businesses and Canadians in general, will be there by supporting Bill C-2 and ensuring it passes before Christmas?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, Canadians who might watch the debates in Parliament know that there is another inflation in the last few months in this Parliament. It is the inflated word count by that member, and the inflated amount of outrage manufactured, fiddling while our economy burns.

Let us talk about who stepped up at the beginning of this crisis. It was the Conservatives who asked for the border to be controlled when the pandemic first broke, two months before the government did. It was I who, two months before the government acted, spoke about the EI system and said the military had to help our health care system. It was the opposition who said a 10% wage subsidy would not save a single job. It was our shadow minister of finance who said let us save as many jobs as possible and not have people not work.

We will always put the health and well-being of Canadians first, but right now, the cost-of-living crisis, the housing crisis and the inflationary crisis facing our country hardly warrants a mention by the finance minister. I would ask that hon. member to raise his voice tomorrow in caucus and stop neglecting Canadian families in the cost-of-living crisis we are facing.

• (1710)

[Translation]

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this is unbelievable. Quebec has problems in its health care system. Quebec and the provinces unanimously called for a payment of \$28 billion with a 6% escalator to cover up to 35% of total spending. However, there is nothing in today's announcement about that. The Minister of Finance is telling us that the government will work on helping, but the minister is not doing that at all.

The same thing goes for seniors. They are paying 7% more for their groceries. What did they get from the federal government? A single cheque. Meanwhile, Quebec and the provinces are unanimously calling for a recurring increase in old age security. The Bloc Québécois is asking for a recurring increase of \$110 per month. However, in addition to offering no recurring increase, the federal government has created two categories of seniors: those age 65 to 75, and those age 75 and over.

The government seems exhausted. The labour shortage needs to be addressed, but we have no measures to address it. On one small street in my riding, four restaurants and a clothing store have closed down.

The Bloc brought forward the *Émilie Sansfaçon* bill to help sick people, such as those fighting cancer, who get only 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits, while all other claimants get 52 weeks.

These are all critical issues. I do not know about my colleague, the leader of the official opposition, but as far as I am concerned, today's economic statement completely misses the mark. Needs are not being met and it is incredibly how exhausted this government is, having just been elected.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are here for all Canadians and all Quebecers.

It was a serious mistake to not say anything about the labour shortage in the Speech from the Throne. There is a crisis in Quebec and throughout the country. We proposed policies to address the labour shortage, speed up the process for foreign workers and provide training in partnership with the provinces.

In my speech, I talked about Beauce Atlas, a company in Beauce that is dealing with a labour shortage. It is now the victim of another crisis because of the Buy America policy in the United States. No action has been taken with respect to steel or aluminum and we are now seeing the effect of tariffs on our businesses. Competition is fierce for our businesses in Quebec and across the country.

Only the Conservatives will be there for Quebec businesses, Quebec families and Quebec seniors. We are here for the well-being of all our citizens.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is faced with an affordable housing crisis. There is no question that those trying to get into the market and own a home for the first time are having a real tough go of it. We need to address that. One of the ways the NDP proposes to address that is through financialization, not treating housing as though it is a stock market.

Beyond that, there is a whole spectrum of people experiencing the housing crisis, those who are unhoused and there are those who are homeless. Right now, outside the Confederation Building, there is a homeless man on the street, in the snow, in the dead of winter in Ottawa. There are those who cannot afford to pay rent. I am not talking about high-cost rent for fancy apartments, just regular apartments, and they cannot even afford that. What needs to be done is to address the whole spectrum of housing needs, not to mention the incredible need for indigenous peoples, who are 11 times more likely to use a shelter. Across the country, 235,000 Canadians use a shelter each year.

Will the Conservatives and the Liberals support the NDP's proposal to build 500,000 units of real affordable housing, including co-operative housing, so that people can get housed and get off the streets and have stability and, finally, make sure we actually have a "for indigenous, by indigenous" urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy?

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• (1715)

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that there is no question there is a housing crisis in Canada right now, particularly an affordable housing crisis, a first-time home-buyer crisis, a crisis of homelessness and opioid addictions. I agree with her. The only party that does not seem to acknowledge that fully is the Liberal government that has completely ignored the issue in a major way in the fall economic statement.

I would also invite the member and all Canadians to look at the great program Conservatives ran on in the election. We talked about the million new homes in our plan. We are more ambitious than just building 500,000 units. We had a plan to dedicate 15% of federal properties to accelerate the building of homes, including affordable homes. We were going to tie federal infrastructure investments to density. We had a “for indigenous, by indigenous” policy in our platform.

I am very proud that we were the only party to really represent the crisis that is being faced at all levels right now in terms of people at the margins, first-time homebuyers and many seniors. As I said, half of Canadians 30 and younger are giving up on home ownership and the government is giving up on them. Canada's Conservatives will never give up on home ownership for Canadian families.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating myself, there was an election at the end of the summer.

There was certainly no need for that election.

We wondered why the election was called, what purpose it served, what were the priorities, what should be asked and what should be changed. Today, we are right back where we started: The Liberals have a minority government. Again, the people did not have enough confidence in the Liberals to give them a majority. In Quebec, we kept the same breakdown and the same number of seats for each party.

Instead of calling a pointless election, we could have carried on working and sitting. We could have followed through on support measures. We could have followed through on everything that was in the previous budget, the one tabled in April 2021. We could not do any of that because of the election. Then we were subjected to what I would call an insipid throne speech. What was the next logical step? What vision did the throne speech have to offer? In the wake of a so-called necessary election, there was nothing new under the sun.

Today we got the economic and fiscal update. We were expecting it because it was promised in the last budget. We were told there would be one in the fall. Quite frankly, the economic and fiscal update was a bit lightweight compared to what we are used to, both in the number of pages and the measures and vision within it. I suppose that was to be expected given the unnecessary election and the vacuous throne speech.

Two months after the election the Liberals called, the government has run out of steam. It is exhausted. It has no ideas, no new proposals. This is ridiculous, unprecedented and discouraging.

Five days ago, all the provinces got together for the Council of the Federation. United, they asked Ottawa to deal with the health care problem. They want a meeting. It is urgent; it is a priority. This is not a frivolous ask, anything but. As the Parliamentary Budget Officer's analyses remind us year after year, when it comes to spending and the budget, the problem is with the provinces. That is true. Why is it true? The reason is that Ottawa has not been paying its fair share for a long time. Ottawa is not spending enough money on health care.

The Conference Board of Canada, the Council of the Federation, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and all the provinces are saying that, the way things are going, the provinces are heading towards a tax wall, while Ottawa's fiscal situation will be exceptional, despite the extraordinary expenses incurred during the pandemic. Health care spending is increasing, and Ottawa's transfers are not keeping pace.

The provinces repeated all of this five days ago. What was Ottawa's response? The government is basically telling them to take a hike. Why do I say that? It is because, based on the projected numbers and budgets, there is no increase relative to what is being requested. Until 2027, there is no increase. The government is on the warpath, and the provinces are being challenged. They need health care funding, but they will get nothing.

The document is about 50 pages long, not including the annexes. Two or three pages are devoted to the speech, and about two and a half pages are used to explain why the provinces will not get a penny more for health care. The Liberal logic is that extraordinary spending was needed during the pandemic, so they feel they have done enough. Since the provinces have benefited, they will not get a penny for health care until 2027. The government's logic is to say that it paid the wage subsidy and indirectly helped the provinces because the people who received the wage subsidy pay taxes to the province. I want to believe that this was necessary and important spending, but it does nothing to address the fundamental problem. The federal government needs to pay its fair share of health care spending. Nothing has been resolved, and war has been declared on the provinces. This is unacceptable and we strongly condemn it.

• (1720)

Furthermore, there are few measures in the update, although there are some that we applaud, in particular the measures for working seniors who receive the guaranteed income supplement.

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My colleague and I have been raising this issue since the summer. We wrote to our respective counterparts on the government side during and after the election and as recently as this week. The government said that it would solve the problem. We proposed solutions, such as including the CERB as employment income when calculating the GIS, or recalculating the amount for the current year for those who were not supposed to receive the CERB or who received too much money and now have to pay it back. To resolve this situation, Service Canada and the CRA really should sit down together and talk.

The government listened to our suggestions and responded that technical considerations ruled them out. In the economic update, the proposed solution is altogether different from what we suggested. We are disappointed because we had some good solutions. That said, we do not have the inside track, and since we do not have access to the inner workings of government, we may be unaware of certain considerations because we do not know what they are. For example, there may be some software that cannot process this information, even though it seems quite straightforward.

Throughout the pandemic, the government responded in the same way to all the measures we suggested. That said, the government is nonetheless proposing a solution, which is a payment to make up for the loss of income, as seniors will no longer receive the CERB after one year. It is a big, rather odd band-aid approach to solving the problem, but it might work. The stumbling block here is the time frame.

As my colleague from Shefford knows, seniors in these situations are facing serious challenges. We hear horror stories in our ridings. Some seniors are having to leave their homes, sell their furniture and move. They sometimes have to stop taking medications and go to the hospital, where their medications are covered. They cannot afford medication because of the drop in their income. These are actual, real-life situations.

The government has proposed to solve the problem by sending them a payment, but not until next May. This situation has been going on since the summer, so that would mean that seniors will have been struggling with this issue for nearly a year. What will happen to them? We are very concerned about this. We will certainly do everything we can to get this payment out quicker, because there is a serious need. This wait is neither reasonable nor acceptable.

We also spoke out about the fact that the government created two classes of seniors, which is unacceptable. Seniors do not like it. We are calling on the government to fix this by increasing old age security by \$110 a month for all seniors. It is a simple, concrete and effective measure that would support seniors whose income is not adjusted to inflation, which is currently hitting record highs.

There was not a single word about this, however. There are still two classes of seniors, and the government did not propose a single meaningful measure to combat inflation, aside from child care, which does not exactly make up for the increase in grocery bills. We are still very worried about seniors. We appreciate that a solution was proposed to the problem with the GIS and the CERB, but it comes too late and is flawed.

• (1725)

As I said, the budget was pretty slim. Our in camera meeting began at 11:45, and I would say we had covered pretty much everything by 1 p.m. Members of our party had to stay in camera until 4 p.m. Thank goodness people had some good jokes to tell to help pass the time.

It was our understanding that one element of this budget, as detailed in annex 3, would be in the notice of ways and means we would be voting on. During questions and answers in camera, we were told that the notice of ways and means contained nothing else. That is what I told reporters. By the time I returned to the House, the notice of ways and means had been tabled. It was 92 pages long and included the digital services taxation issue. I was surprised to see that, and I will get back to that in a minute.

That is a good thing, but the fact remains that annex 3 of the economic update includes a measure to tax residences, dwellings, condos and homes of foreign owners who do not occupy them. This is a token measure to slow housing inflation, curb speculation and make housing a little more affordable. The idea is to create an incentive so that non-residents and non-Canadians find it less appealing to buy housing in Canada that they do not intend to occupy and therefore contribute less to the economy.

We agree with that principle. Yes, we have to be careful, and, yes, all the housing units have to help people. The Bloc Québécois has major reservations, however, because this is a property tax. I am sure the federal government's reasons for collecting a property tax are noble, but the tax would supposedly be temporary. What has history taught us? Every time the federal government pokes its nose into a new tax field, no matter how small or temporary, there is no going back. The government has kept increasing this form of taxation every time.

Among the various forms of taxation that exist, such as consumption taxes, income tax, corporate taxes and many others, there was one tax field that was not yet occupied by the federal government, to my knowledge: property tax. This is essentially managed by municipalities, under provincial legislation. For instance, Quebec gives municipalities the power to levy property taxes.

Ottawa had been staying out of it, until now. However, according to annex 3 and the budget, Ottawa wants a cut. We have serious concerns, because this leviathan always tends to have an unquenchable thirst for tax dollars. We will certainly have to revisit this. I would remind the House that the principle is interesting, but seeing Ottawa interfere in this area of taxation is really worrisome for us in the Bloc Québécois.

During the election campaign, we kept hearing the same complaint from small and medium-sized businesses day after day. My colleague from Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel could attest to that more than anyone here. I am talking about the labour shortage. We thought that with an economic and fiscal update in the last week before the break, the Liberals would take the bull by the horns and come up with some solutions.

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During the election campaign, the Bloc was the political party that proposed the most solutions, in particular to address productivity, to make it easier for seniors to return to part-time work by putting fiscal measures in place, and to accelerate the whole immigration process, for both temporary and permanent workers.

● (1730)

I could go on like this, talking about innovation and increasing productivity, and so on.

Other than that one line that says that the government is investing in immigration to try to speed up the process, everything else in the document just says that the government will propose something in the coming year. However, today was not the time for the government to say that it would come up with something in the next year; it was the time for the government to say what action it would be taking. Our party has put forward a number of solutions, and the update was an opportunity for them to be put into practice. That did not happen and we are speaking out about it. We are very disappointed.

As I was saying, this feels like a government that is exhausted and out of breath, that no longer has any ideas and proposes nothing, barely two months after it was elected. That is worrisome.

Another thing that concerns us is the issue of inflation. The document contains private sector forecasts. For this year, they say they expect a rate of 7.6%, which is higher than what we are seeing now. Prices could continue to rise if these forecasts are accurate. Now, on the bright side, the rate will come back down as early as next year and the problem will resolve itself in subsequent years, which was our read on the problem.

We would have expected the government to be more focused on this issue. We need only consider low-income households or, as I was saying earlier, seniors whose income is not indexed to the cost of living.

In rereading my notes, I see that many small measures were announced, such as an increase in the tax credit for teachers and ECEs purchasing supplies for children, up from 15% to 25%. That is fine, but the government could have brought in better measures.

There is one thing I would like to address. In April, the budget that we had been waiting for for two years was finally tabled. That budget contained a lot of announcements about money and measures, and it was thick and wide-ranging. The government pushed it through. It contained some worthwhile measures, notably those pertaining to support measures, the recovery and the green recovery. We said that we would pass it.

After the budget came Bill C-30, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 19, 2021 and other measures, which incorporated a small part of the budget. We adopted that one as well, figuring that we would wait to see what came after the budget.

Nothing came after the budget, however, because the government called an election. The Liberals campaigned on measures that were in the budget that we had adopted, but today's update, which was presented after the election campaign, does not incorporate those measures. They are gone, which means they were nothing

more than election promises that were only useful on the campaign trail.

The budget presented last spring contained 52 legislative measures and 100 pages of tax measures. Most of them did not end up in Bill C-30 and are not in today's update either. With this update, the government is therefore telling us that everything it announced in its last budget was only there to get the Liberals re-elected and to win a majority. It did not win that majority, however, because we wanted to keep it a minority. It is trying again with this budget.

That is the message being sent. It is very worrisome. The government seems to have no vision. I cannot get over it. This is my third election, and it is the first time that I have seen Parliament's return delayed, since we had to wait two months to come back. The ministers were late getting appointed. The Speech from the Throne was short, and there was not much in it. It was also boring, especially in the way it was read. I will refrain from being too critical about that, but it is true that the person who read it has to be held responsible.

The update is the logical next step in all this, having been tabled by a government that acts because it is forced to, but that is tired and breaking down. It needs a bit more pep.

● (1735)

If the government is out of ideas, the Bloc Québécois has plenty. It has energy too. The government needs to listen to us because we are going to propose some legislation to bring in.

Let us start with resolving the issue of health. Polls show that it is the top priority. We do not want conditions imposed on the provinces, we want transfers. That is what the provinces are calling for. The government needs to fix this because it is urgent, and so is the situation with seniors.

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Joliette for his speeches this morning and this afternoon.

I am sure all members of the House think a robust health care system is a good thing, but I think we also need to consider a sustainable plan to increase funding for things like the health care system.

Does the member support reducing interprovincial trade barriers to generate the necessary revenue and ensure sustainable investments in health?

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Madam Speaker, I will start with the end of my colleague's remarks. Interprovincial barriers are subject to negotiations among the provinces and fall under their jurisdiction. The Bloc Québécois wants to respect their areas of jurisdiction, but Ottawa is always insinuating itself into areas under provincial jurisdiction or, as in today's economic update, areas under municipal jurisdiction.

We would like the federal government to respect its obligations properly in areas such as borders and health care funding.

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Sustainable health care funding requires adequate funding. The Bloc Québécois understands what the provinces need and supports the Parliamentary Budget Officer's studies, which state that, if we want sustainable health care systems, we need equity, and that can be achieved only if Ottawa transfers the money unconditionally. That is very important.

Not every member in the House is in favour of a sustainable health care system. The Minister of Finance certainly is not, because her update does not include any increased funding for the health care system. We are still at 3%, which is below the rate at which costs are increasing, while what the provinces and everyone else want is to make up the shortfall and get to 35% funding, plus an annual escalator of 6% to maintain the increase. That is what is necessary, and that is what is needed.

With this economic update, the Minister of Finance and this government are now declaring war on the provinces. We have chosen our camp, and it is the camp of the people and health care funding, not the government's camp.

● (1740)

**Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Joliette for his comments.

[*English*]

Knowing we have had incidents of climate-fuelled weather events across the country, and in Quebec as well, over recent years, my question specifically concerns climate adaptation. Noting that in this fiscal update there is only one mention of climate adaptation, and it is for a strategy to be developed by the end of next year, I am wondering if the member would comment on the need for the federal government to be doing more in climate adaptation.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague from Kitchener Centre. This update offers absolutely nothing for the environment. Last spring's budget did include some measures, and we even expected to move on from the pandemic and into the recovery by greening our economy to achieve net-zero emissions, which would mean a major environmental shift. The Bloc Québécois has all kinds of ideas for this, such as a green finance plan to get the private sector involved and encourage it to finance this shift.

In the end, once we rose for the summer, we saw announcements across Canada all summer for all sorts of projects that often had nothing to do with the environment. We certainly did not see the green economic shift we had hoped for. This update is a continuation of the government's intentions: if a slogan works on the campaign trail, the government is all for it; if not, it cannot be bothered.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I know the issue of self-employed workers in the arts and culture sector is one that the Bloc Québécois talked about at length during the debate on Bill C-2. We in the NDP talked a lot about seniors and the guaranteed income supplement.

We heard a little bit about those two issues in the economic update, but it was very vague. We did not get much in the way of details.

I am a little concerned that what the government has in mind may not be an adequate solution for seniors who have already had their guaranteed income supplement taken away.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the vague program announced for arts and culture workers. Is he confident that the Liberal government will do a good job of implementing such a program?

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, with whom I have the pleasure of working on the Standing Committee on Finance. I have seen how hard-working and brilliant this member is, as we have sat intensively over the past week. He is motivated to serve the public, he does it for the right reasons and he is very talented. I salute him.

My colleague raises some good points. A solution with respect to the GIS and the problem with CERB is being proposed here. Based on the answers we got from officials in the briefing, it seems to address the problem, although it is different from the solutions we had considered. However, the time frame is still a major concern. Officials told us that the payment would be sent in May, but we see that as an unacceptable delay. We will obviously keep an eye on this.

There is nothing in the update about self-employed workers in the cultural sector. What was announced is another measure in response to what we asked for more than a year ago. The Bloc Québécois is reassured by what the Minister of Canadian Heritage said at committee. We obviously look forward to seeing this targeted program, which will be presented by the government and the Minister of Canadian Heritage. It was a core condition for our support of Bill C-2, which deals with the extension of wage subsidies.

Even though the minister made links to Bill C-2 in her speech, the update is not Bill C-2. The two should not be confused.

● (1745)

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Joliette. It is always a pleasure working with him.

My colleague stated that Ottawa has declared war on the provinces with respect to health. Ottawa has also declared open war on seniors' groups, which are fiercely standing up for seniors in financial straits. Their situation was already precarious before the pandemic. The pandemic did not fix anything.



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I would like to know what my colleague thinks of this tendency to give one-time assistance to seniors. For example, they were sent a cheque only once during the pandemic. It solved nothing. Then a cheque was sent to seniors 75 and older just before the election campaign. It was an election ploy, and seniors were insulted. In 2021, officials are incapable of finding a solution for seniors or workers in the cultural sector. I attended a meeting of the finance committee on Friday, and we were told that it was too complicated. There is something wrong.

We are still in a crisis, so the priorities the government should be looking to invest in are health care and seniors. Seniors have been hit hard by the pandemic, having essentially gotten two blows to the face, one on each cheek. I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks about the fact that a government in 2021 is so bad at listening.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and her comments. She is clearly committed to the people the Bloc Québécois defends, and seniors in particular. I was very touched by what my colleague, the member for Shefford, said.

I would say to her that the government is doing things piecemeal. It gave a little, hoping to do the bare minimum and still save face.

With respect to the working-life income replacement rate in retirement and the increase to account for the impact of year over year inflation on seniors' purchasing power, it is clear that things are getting worse.

We want a long-term solution, and we will be here to keep an eye on this file. I am out of time so I will stop there.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, Canadians are currently grappling with extremely serious economic challenges. They are paying more for food and housing, and they are having trouble finding work. At the same time, some employers are having trouble finding workers. Canada is at a crossroads.

We want to figure out how to bring about a just post-pandemic economic recovery. We also have important questions about the climate crisis. We want to figure out how to bring about a just transition for the climate and for workers. What we need right now is leadership.

The economic update was an opportunity to showcase the government's leadership, but what we got was a defence of the status quo. This is not an innocent status quo; it is a status quo that works very well for the wealthiest but makes the lives of ordinary working people more difficult.

We wanted the government to propose solutions, but there are none to be found in the economic update.

The NDP believes that when it comes to the big economic issues, it is very important that the basis of our analysis be the most financially vulnerable people, or the workers who have a little bit of money but are wondering if it is enough to pay all the bills, considering the pressures of inflation.

• (1750)

[English]

We are at a crossroads in this country, just as we are in the world. Depending on the day, the Liberals will tell us that we are out of the pandemic, the economy is back to normal and everything is good, or, when it suits their purpose, they will tell us what most people already know to be true, which is that we are not out of the pandemic. Some things are better, but many things are still very bad.

People are still looking to find their way, whether it is collectively, at the level of their country, province, city or community, or individually. They are looking to find how they will fit into what will become the new economy as we come out of the pandemic. To be sure, this is because of some of the pressures we are still facing around supply chains and other things that have been caused by the pandemic, but it is also an economy that was already going to change because of climate change.

We have seen so much evidence. I look to my colleagues from B.C. who are seated around me. They know all too well the real cost of climate change, and the economic consequences and real financial cost of not dealing with climate change.

Here we are, at that crossroads, trying to figure out what this recovery from the pandemic is going to look like, and how to transition into a sustainable economy that can mitigate, as much as possible, the impact of climate change.

New Democrats believe that, in all of this pain and all of these challenges, is an opportunity to build the infrastructure and the framework for a more just economy and a better Canada. We need an economy that recognizes it is wrong to have an economy in which, and we just heard this from the Parliamentary Budget Officer last week, 25% of all the wealth produced in this country goes to just 1% of the population and where 40% of all the people in this country are asked to share just 1%. That was not always the case. That is getting worse and worse.

When we see the government defending a status quo that is creating those kinds of outcomes, Canadians have to know it is not just defending 25% of the wealth going to 1%. It is defending the trend line that continues to see more of that wealth going to fewer people. While Canada's economic pie has been growing, the proportion that goes to the 1% at the top has been growing much faster, leaving less for the rest of us.

As we come out of the pandemic to the extent that we have, which is not anywhere near as far as the government sometimes likes to pretend, and as we venture into this uncertain future with so many more extreme weather events as a result of climate change, we need to make sure we are getting the principles right that will ensure that everybody gets to partake in a prosperous future, not just the people who already own all of the important assets.

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The word there is “capitalism”. We have had less and less regulation of the market and less and less fair taxation, which has allowed the people who own assets to continue to own more and more. Unless there is a way to rein that in, eventually we will get to a point where what is shared among the rest of us is not enough for most of us.

That is why I am very proud to be the finance critic for a party that is talking about a pandemic excess profits tax. The tax recognizes that while many businesses have suffered through the pandemic, some have done extraordinarily well compared with their pre-pandemic performance, and it would make sense to ask them to pay a bit more on that extra they have made to help with some of the things we need to get the rest of the way out of the pandemic and to build a just future.

That is why I am proud to be the finance critic for a party that ran on imposing a 1% wealth tax on fortunes of over \$20 million. That is not a lot of people, but it is a lot of money that could do a lot of good. It is money that would go to people who benefit from the investments that we all make in public infrastructure. It is right and good that, when they receive such a disproportionate amount of the benefit, they pay proportionally more to create infrastructure and to do things that protect people at the bottom.

There has been a lot of talk in this place about inflation over the last three and a half weeks. The fact of the matter is that the money that went to the financially vulnerable is not what is driving inflation. It was not the CERB payments and it was not the wage subsidy payments. People bought groceries. They paid bills. They fixed their cars. The people who were on the wage subsidy got 75% of what they were used to making. I do not know how it would cause inflation when people have a 25% decrease in their salaries. Let us not pretend that the help that went to people who needed it was the cause of the inflation here. That matters because those folks are still hurting and they still need help. It is why it was wrong of the government to cut the CRB with just two days' notice.

It is also why it is wrong for the Liberals to be dragging their heels on promises such as a Canada disability benefit. That is something that they promised a while ago now, and is something people living with disabilities who are not able to work need in order to be able to live life with dignity.

It is why the government should be doing the same for seniors on the guaranteed income supplement. We have talked a bit about the clawbacks, but I want to talk about the fact that even when it is not being clawed back, the guaranteed income supplement does not provide enough for a person to live at the poverty line. It is still below the poverty line. That is all part and parcel of working toward a time in Canada when we can have a livable basic income for everyone who needs it. We got close with the CERB. It was an interesting time.

That is why it is such an important moment. We could say that these were just temporary things: we are out of the worst of it now, and we are going to drop all these people like bricks again and get back to the status quo that led us to the point where 1% of people own 25% of the wealth. It could also be an opportunity to say that we learned how to do things differently and that it was an important moment in our history and, notwithstanding some of the very real

problems with the way programs were delivered, the principle is an important lesson for our future.

Today, the Liberals could have taken some real action on one of the structural things driving inflation in Canada right now, which is in the housing market. Anyone knows. Whether it is somebody trying to get into the housing market or parents who are contemplating the futures of their children, everyone is worried about the housing market, and we know that a record number of mortgages now in Canada are actually held by investors.

● (1755)

There are things the government could seriously consider, such as a moratorium on allowing real estate investment trusts to acquire more property while the market is so hot. The government could create an acquisition fund so that non-profits in the business of creating social housing and other forms of affordable housing can compete with some of these investors in the market to snap up buildings and land as they become available. Those are some of the things it could do now to help bring down the temperature in the housing market and create some hope for Canadians for the future so that even if they cannot afford a home tomorrow, they know we are on a trajectory that will allow them or their children to afford a home in five to 10 years. There is nothing in the statement that talks about that. There is a little bit of poking around the edges, but we are in a difficult time that calls for real leadership and real measures.

When we talk about affordability, what is one of the biggest cost pressures for Canada's seniors? It is the price of prescription drugs. The Liberals promised an answer to that as long ago as 1997. The temptation is to get tired of talking about it because we talk about it so much and nothing happens. However, that would be a victory for the Liberals, who have cynically promised it so often, and it would be a victory for the pharmaceutical industry, which would like nothing more than for the NDP to shut up about pharmacare so that it can get on with making money without having to worry that one day we are going to do right by Canadians, organize our purchasing and make sure that everyone is covered and they actually save money. I hope I get to see the day when we do that with dental care as well.

When we talk about what to do to create employment and fight inflation, there are opportunities when it comes to the climate challenge as well. We ought to be out there helping people retrofit their homes to make them more efficient and transition the way they heat their homes so they get off fossil fuels. If we do this in the right way, particularly for lower-income households, they could realize savings in their monthly budgets. That is an investment we absolutely have to make if we will ever have a hope of realizing our emission reduction targets. It could provide some tangible financial relief to households that are struggling right now. What better time to do it than now? However, we do not see anything on this.

This is also about committing to a large-scale, ambitious retrofit project and a real nation-building project that is not about building a pipeline but about building the other critical things we need, like a western power grid that would allow for solar and wind energy produced in Alberta and Saskatchewan to work collaboratively with the hydro energy we have on both ends of our western region. That could create a lot of jobs. An ambitious retrofit program, together with that, could create a work forecast that would allow employers in the trades to plan well into the future while working with the government to train a whole generation of tradespeople who are working on environmentally sustainable infrastructure and helping us reduce our emissions. They could have good, well-paying jobs that are building the future economy of Canada. What better time to do that than now? However, there is hardly a mention of the climate crisis in this economic statement.

One would think it has not happened. There is much-needed money for our brothers and sisters in British Columbia who are hurting after the severe weather events there, but that is just a response to what has happened. As we heard earlier in the House, the only proactive thing the government talks about is coming up with another plan. I do not know how many times we will have to hear about the next great plan the Liberals will come up with to finally start reducing emissions while we are an embarrassment in the OECD with the highest emissions increases. Stop it with the plans. Pick something and do it. This has been researched to death.

When we talk about inflation we are also talking about supply chains. In particular, we are talking about the exposure of supply chains not only to things like the pandemic, which we saw, but also to the climate crisis. We saw that in B.C. One of the inflationary pressures in Canada right now is the Port of Vancouver, which was decimated by the extreme weather events there.

• (1800)

One solution that the government might adopt, when we talk about supply chains and trying to reduce the extent to which Canadians are exposed to that kind of international pressure, is to actually talk about things that we want to make here. We heard we had a hard time getting personal protective equipment and other essential medical goods during the pandemic. There were a lot of Canadian companies lining up to say they could do that work here. They would have loved nothing more than to train Canadians to do that work in their facilities.

They said they could scale up, but all they needed was for the government to choose to invest in them instead of giving more money to the multinational companies that have been offshoring

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their manufacturing for decades. They wanted the government to invest in them, in Canadian success stories, because they knew they could do it. However, that was not the path the government chose. There is nothing in here talking about how we could reshore some important manufacturing.

I just went to Washington. They are contemplating things there, and Canada is going to be collateral damage in its efforts to reshore. We are at a disadvantage in a place like Washington because we cannot talk about our automotive strategy. We cannot talk about what we are going to do to ensure that future generations of Canadians get to work in a high-paying, highly unionized sector, which is incidentally not a coincidence, in Canada because we do not have a plan. Instead, we keep reacting to what other people are doing. That means the U.S. is going to continue to drive the agenda, and we are going to have to continue jumping up and down to get its attention to try to be at the table.

What would be helpful would be to be able to say, "This is Canada's plan." There is a lot of talk these days about producing batteries for electric vehicles. If Canada is going to get serious about that, we are going to need partners. China is knocking on the door. Germany is knocking on the door. The U.S. should be knocking on the door.

I would love for the government to be able to show them a national automotive plan for Canada that is working and continuing our long-term partnership with the United States, as well as one that would see Canada partnering with China or Germany. That would allow us to say, "This is our preferred option, to continue the well-integrated automotive sector we have, so don't cut us out." I believe that would have been a far more effective argument in Washington, but we refused to plan.

I am from Winnipeg, where the aerospace industry is important, just as it is important in the province of Quebec and other areas. We do not have a national plan for that. We saw our government scramble in the pandemic, not knowing really what to do. Aside from the wage subsidy, which the Liberals were unfortunately not open to taking advice on how to close the loopholes so it ended up being abused in a number of ways, there was no sense of urgency that it was important that Canada maintain passenger air service, even though we are one of the largest countries in the world, with the most distance to travel.

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We even need it for this place to work, and for people to be represented in the House of Commons, so each part of the country requires a well-functioning passenger air service. That is a fundamental strategic asset for Canada, yet the government had no plan and continues to have no plan. There are the one-offs of doling out money here and there, but there is no cohesive strategy for how such an integral sector will be maintained and how its benefits will be maximized.

Those are just some of our reflections on this side of the House about the fall economic statement. As I think members can tell, the real problem with it is that it is not unlike the Speech from the Throne. We had this election because the government said that we were at a pivotal point in our history, there were big decisions to be made that would go above and beyond what we were already doing in the House of Commons, and it had to get a mandate, which is meh.

That is what we got out of that \$600-million election that nobody, except for the Prime Minister, wanted. We saw it in the Speech from the Throne, and we have now seen it in this so-called fiscal update. It is just not good enough for the moment we find ourselves in, when more Canadians are struggling to get by while people at the top are taking a larger share of the economic pie. It is not good enough when Canada is a laggard in reducing its emissions and our housing market is getting out of control. The government has no real proposals about what to do about it all.

Let us look at other countries. New Zealand, for instance, has brought in a policy stating that people who already own a home will need a larger down payment if they purchase a second home, and so on and so forth. This is to discourage people who are in the financial position from snapping up properties and ensure more people are able to acquire a family home.

• (1805)

That is just one example of a government that is clearly serious about doing something and is being creative. We see some creative work at the municipal level in the city of Vancouver by the mayor, who is a former NDP MP. He is doing some interesting work in trying to figure out how to enable more density on residential lots, and not so developers can take all that money. They will get some of it.

The guys at the top always seem to be worried they will not make any money. There is a lot of money to be made while one pays one's fair share. We are not talking about them not making any money, we are talking about them making a fair amount of money and ensuring they are reinvesting in the communities and the infrastructure that allows them to make that money in the first place. It is about ensuring that the people who live in the communities around their developments are able to live in dignity even if they cannot buy the premium apartment on the top floor. That is what we are talking about.

I think most Canadians can get behind that vision for Canada, but it is not one that will happen spontaneously on its own. It is one that will take some leadership. It is one that will take good public administration and good public policy instead of the kind of chaotic mess we have seen over the last number of weeks with a government that can hardly get its own legislation through the House.

We are here to try to hold the government to account. We are here until we are the government, which I hope happens soon, to try to help its members be their best selves. It can make a big difference in the lives of a lot of Canadians. We see that with the guaranteed income supplement. We have an announcement today that is the result of a lot of public pressure. It was not a negotiated solution. We know that because it is not the solution we proposed.

However, it is some kind of solution, but we have yet to see the details. We are hoping it is going to actually help and it is going to help quickly, but we need more. I wish the Liberals would stop hanging on to it for the big reveal. Some people are living in their cars, waiting for that reveal, when they would much rather be in a home.

Let us get past the suspense and the buildup and let us get to the project of getting those people back in a home, as they were just four months ago before the government decided callously to claw back their GIS benefit.

That is why this is a very dissatisfying economic statement. For Canadians listening, if they do not take anything else away from this speech, there are people in this place who are thinking about real actions the government could take. We are not all just here to blow steam. We are also here to do a real job and to try to find the policies that will find their way to them and make a concrete difference in their lives. We are here to continue to apply that pressure and ensure those things really happen instead of passing by in a sound clip on the news and then people thinking the issue is settled.

We are here to remind the government these issues are not settled. They will not be settled until there is real action. That is what we are here to push for, and we will keep pushing. We will keep pushing for some of these concrete things to be in the Liberals' budget. They missed the opportunity on the Speech from the Throne and they missed it in the fall economic statement. Let us be damn sure to have some of it in the budget.

• (1810)

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I certainly heard a couple of things from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance that my hon. colleague seems to have not heard. One is the fact that we have returned 106% of the jobs pre-pandemic. Our government has been there to help grow the economy.

The member certainly talked about Canadians needing support. Omicron is something we are watching. We know countries around the world are taking this seriously. There are small businesses in my riding that are mom and pop type of tourism-related businesses that the member just voted against.

*Routine Proceedings*

Could the member explain why he and his party would have voted against the measure that would support small businesses and the individuals who he said he supported and wanted our government to support more?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Madam Speaker, I would talk about the folks in my riding who also work in the tourism industry, an industry that is 85% women, who are independent travel agents who work out of their basement or home office. There is nothing in there for them. The government should not pretend. It should not pretend, because we have heard this again and again.

The fact is we support getting help in the way the government says it wants to help certain businesses. It is not that we do not want the help to be there for them, but this divide and conquer strategy of the Liberals hives off certain groups and delivers help to them while abandoning other groups like independent travel agents and like a lot of people who are working in the arts and culture sector. They are still waiting on some kind of program, but all the government had to do was include them in the Canada worker lockdown benefit without the requirement for a lockdown.

There are ways the government could be delivering help to a lot more people who really need it. Bill C-2 is about the basic structure of Canada's recovery, and it is a complete failure from that point of view. The government should stop pretending that we are somehow against helping the few people it wants to help, when we are clearly making a statement about the nature of the recovery and all the other people who need help but for whom the government is not there.

• (1815)

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is a real privilege to rise in the House. I thank my colleague for the passion he is displaying on the floor of the House.

I am sure he shares, along with me and several of us on this side of the House, the concern for the rising cost of living and the impact this is having on young families and seniors. The dream of owning a home, for the young couples and families who want to get started and have that, seems to be getting further out of reach. Our seniors are not making enough to even keep up with the rising costs of living on a regular basis, let alone the inflationary pressures such as increased gas prices and increased costs for heating their homes and getting groceries.

Does the hon. member share those concerns and would he like to add any comments on that?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Madam Speaker, I certainly do share those concerns, and it is part of why the NDP has been such a loud and consistent advocate for seniors who have seen their GIS clawed back. That is why we have been talking for a while about trying to get the guaranteed income supplement level up to the poverty line so our most vulnerable seniors are not legislated into a life of poverty.

When it comes to housing, I mentioned in my remarks some of the initiatives we have been contemplating. I would be curious to hear some concrete measures from the Conservatives that might help. They are good on the critique right now, but on the solutions we have not heard a lot that would make a big difference, including

on inflation. There is a lot of talk about the impact of inflation, and we share their concern about that.

The Conservative finance critic is very adamant that we need to not talk about things like a dual employment mandate, like they have in the States, or have more interesting mandate ideas like they have in New Zealand, which asked its central bank to consider housing prices in the way it sets monetary policy.

Instead, he was very focused on the 2% inflation target, which is what is going to cause the rise in interest rates that his leader was just talking about earlier today. Those interest rates in the current economy, given how stretched Canadians already are, will also cause a real crisis for those who were able to buy into what is a really hot market. They are not going to be able to sustain their home if we see massive interest rate hikes, which is what it means to doggedly pursue a 2% inflation target.

There are some big discussions we need to have here. Conservatives have been big on the critical side lately, but I think they really need to get their act together on proposing some solutions, because that is where the dialogue on that side of the House is falling apart.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I applaud my colleague's advocacy and his strong desire to make concrete proposals to help the citizens we represent. I thank him very much for his passion.

As everyone knows, even before the pandemic, every province and Quebec already had health care funding problems. The pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. The Bloc Québécois has long been behind Quebec, but it is also behind the provinces. We unanimously demand an immediate and unconditional increase in health transfers. The federal government has no place trying to show us how to care for our people and run our hospitals. We need the money to do it.

What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

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

One of the reasons I first ran to become a member of Parliament in 2015 was that I thought the Harper government's position of keeping the annual health transfer escalator at just 3% was unacceptable. At the time, the current Prime Minister also said it was unacceptable. Once he became Prime Minister, however, he decided to adopt the Harper government's policies as his own.

Health transfers need to be increased. The NDP has been calling for that for a long time.

*Routine Proceedings*

• (1820)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the member referenced the fact that the government needs to have some sort of retrofit housing program, one that has energy efficiency, and he was disappointed we did not have that.

Let me alleviate his disappointment. We have a program. There are 700,000 applicants expected for grants. It is all about making homes more energy efficient. It is good for the economy; it is good for the environment and it is good for our housing stock. It is helping many people who would not have the finances to buy a home.

I wonder if the member would at the very least acknowledge that his dream of having something of this nature is actually a reality, that it is a good thing and that he will support it, much like he should be supporting Bill C-2, but that is another issue.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Madam Speaker, I am happy to acknowledge that it is a real talking point of the Liberal Party, as was the national housing strategy, which continues to be a dream of the NDP. However, we found that when the time came to deliver the money and actually get the work done, the government was not able to deliver.

I had also asked for an ambitious program, and by that I mean one that gets the work done. When I start hearing in my community that people are amazed at how many homes are getting done in their neighbourhoods and that people are upgrading their homes and changing the way they heat them, then we will have arrived, not just when we are hearing in the House of Commons that 700,000 applicants are expected in a country with 40 million people. I noticed the member used the term “applicants”, and there are a lot of weasel words in this place, so I wonder how many of those “applicants” are going to see a successful delivery of the program. I will believe it when I see it.

I recognize that the Liberals are talking that way, just as they have talked about pharmacare for decades now. When people in my communities start telling me how happy they are that they, their friends and their relatives are able to retrofit their homes, that is when I will know we have arrived.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** It being 6:22 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, December 6, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:22 p.m.)

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