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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 11, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1000)

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I will be moving a unanimous consent motion, but on the business of the day, let me say that I am extremely disappointed, as I mentioned yesterday in the Thursday question, that the government is effectively using a hammer to propose and fast-track two pieces of legislation that are important but that come at a significant cost in the multi-billions of dollars. Effectively, the Liberals are not allowing for any parliamentary scrutiny, not allowing for committees to have a look at this and not allowing for any ministerial accountability or transparency.

We understand that these are important bills. We want to move them through the process quickly. However, there is no reason for this type of tactic to be used by the government, a tactic that has shown its pattern, over the course of this pandemic, of ramming pieces of legislation through. The Senate is not sitting next week, so even if this tactic is successful, the challenge is that the two pieces of legislation will sit there and will not be able to go through the Senate.

There have been discussions among the parties, and the Conservatives are proposing this unanimous consent motion for a timely and thorough examination of these two pieces of legislation.

I move that, notwithstanding any order, special order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19, be disposed of as follows: (a) the bill be ordered for consideration at the second reading stage on Monday, February 14, 2022; (b) at the conclusion of the time provided for Government Orders on Monday, February 14, 2022, or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, all questions necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill shall be put without further debate or amendment provided that if a recorded division is requested, it shall not be deferred; (c) if the bill is read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, consideration in committee shall take place on Tuesday, February 15, 2022, and the committee be instructed to report the bill to the House before 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday, February 16, 2022, by depositing it with the Clerk of the House provided that the Minister of Health be ordered to appear as a witness before the committee during its consideration of the bill, and that if the committee has not

completed the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill by 11:00 p.m., all remaining amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved and the Chair shall put forthwith and successively, without further debate, every question necessary to dispose of the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; (d) no notice of motions in amendments shall be allowed at report stage; (e) the report stage and third reading stage of the bill be ordered for consideration on Wednesday, February 16, 2022; and (f) when the order is read for the consideration of the bill at report stage, the motion to concur in the bill at report stage be deemed carried on division and the House then proceed immediately to consideration of the bill at the third reading stage, provided that at the conclusion of the time provided for Government Orders, or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the bill be deemed read a third time and passed on division.

I hope this is considered by other parties. It is in the best interests of our democracy, scrutiny and parliamentary oversight to make sure that we have time, and it is a very reasonable request.

• (1005)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 8—PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-10

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-10, An Act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19, be disposed of as follows:

- (a) the bill be ordered for consideration at the second reading stage immediately after the adoption of this order;
- (b) when the House begins debate at the second reading stage of the bill, two members of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may each speak at the said stage for not more than 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments, provided that members may be permitted to split their time with another member;
- (c) at the conclusion of the time provided for the debate at the second reading stage or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, all questions necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill shall be put without further debate or amendment, provided that, if a recorded division is requested, it shall not be deferred;

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(d) if the bill is adopted at the second reading stage, it shall be deemed referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed;

(e) during consideration of the bill, the House shall not adjourn, except pursuant to a motion moved by a minister of the Crown;

(f) no motion to adjourn the debate may be moved except by a minister of the Crown; and

(g) upon completion of proceedings on the said bill, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to talk about the motion before us today.

Some parts of the country are starting to relax public health restrictions within their jurisdictions, but we have to assess the current situation carefully to determine what to do next.

As all members of the House of Commons know, protecting Canadians from COVID-19 continues to be this government's number-one priority.

[*English*]

We are very lucky to have a number of tools at our disposal, including screening and testing, to help us determine when and how we can lift restrictions as safely as possible. Rapid tests have proven themselves to be a powerful tool over the last few months. Let me start by outlining the impact of COVID-19 testing and reducing the transmission of the virus, which in turn helps us move past some restrictions and return to certain forms of normalcy.

COVID-19 will continue to be part of our lives, and testing and screening will remain important tools to rapidly detect and isolate new cases, to support follow-up with close contacts and to prevent outbreaks in the community by breaking the chain of transmission. While those who have symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate, the fact of the matter is that someone can have COVID-19 and not know it. Testing is the only way we can confirm if someone has COVID-19. Someone knowing they are infected is a really important aspect of protecting their family and the people they are going to encounter.

● (1010)

[*Translation*]

Over the past two years, right up until Omicron hit, public health units across Canada relied heavily on PCR tests and contact tracing to confirm the presence of COVID-19. That was funded by \$3 billion from the Government of Canada under the safe restart agreement.

[*English*]

The data has been really useful in understanding who has an infection, where in our communities the virus was spreading and how much the virus might be circulating in our communities. As an additional layer of protection, rapid tests have allowed us to expand testing to a broader range of situations. Rapid tests have proven to be safe, effective and very easy to administer. They produce results in as little as 15 minutes, allowing for immediate self-isolation and breaking the chain of transmission right away.

Regardless of the type of test, we have seen from our international partners that testing matters, whether we look south or to Europe, where testing has been used throughout the pandemic. Rapid tests, including self-tests, have helped and will help individuals reduce the risk of spreading the virus to their families, co-workers and communities. They also empower Canadians by providing them with additional information about their own health and can help inform their choices and personal risk management. This will be even truer as other public health measures begin to get lifted. With the availability of new types of tests, the use of PCR tests is also shifting. As we transition out of omicron, there are a variety of testing options available.

Recognizing the importance of widespread testing across Canada, the government has taken a number of measures to procure, fund and distribute COVID-19 tests, and intends to continue to do so in the near future. The Government of Canada has been buying and providing rapid tests free of charge to the provinces and territories since October 2020 when the first rapid test was approved by Health Canada. These rapid tests have supported the broader testing strategy that the provinces and territories have implemented in response to the highly transmissible omicron variant, including expanded school-based testing, community testing and workplace screening.

We have been behind the provinces and territories from the very beginning, working in conjunction with public health authorities in the provinces and territories, and we will continue to support them throughout this pandemic. This is why, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have purchased more than 490 million rapid tests at a total cost of almost \$3.4 billion. About 140 million tests were purchased for the month of January alone, and those are on their way to communities today. These tests have been provided free of charge to the provinces and territories and distributed to workplaces and community organizations to reach those most at risk. More rapid tests are being secured as we speak, to be delivered on an ongoing basis.

Because our government wants to support the safe reopening of our economy, we have also been supporting businesses, not-for-profit organizations and indigenous communities to get access to free tests. The Government of Canada has provided \$6.6 million to the Canadian Red Cross to distribute tests to charities, not-for-profits and indigenous organizations. The federal government also provides rapid tests to first nations and northern, remote and isolated communities.

We have provided \$8.1 million to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce to support distribution to small and medium-sized businesses throughout local chambers in an attempt to support the reopening of the economy and a safe return to the workplace. Indeed, I can say this is true, because my local chamber of commerce in Milton contacted my office just the other day to ask if we would like some of those tests, as I am a member of the chamber in Milton. I thank the chamber for its ongoing work.

Organizations of 200 or more employees, including federally regulated businesses, are also able to receive free COVID-19 rapid tests directly from the Government of Canada. Through the distribution of more than 8.5 million rapid tests, these screening programs have been a really effective tool in identifying individuals with COVID-19, helping to reduce transmission and community outbreaks.

In all of the above initiatives, the government is working closely with our partners, because a challenge that is national in scale requires a cohesive and unified national approach. However, as this pandemic evolves, so must our actions. With the omicron variant, we have seen a sharp increase in demand for rapid tests. Canadians realized that they had to have an additional tool to manage their own risks, and that is why the government introduced Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19.

If passed, Bill C-10 will allow the purchase and distribution across the country of an additional 2.5 billion dollars' worth of COVID-19 rapid tests for the upcoming months. If passed, this funding will allow the government to continue providing the provinces and territories with an adequate supply of rapid tests to allow the early detection of COVID-19 positive cases and mitigate the transmission of the virus by reaching out to a greater number of Canadians. It will allow us to continue to partner with the Canadian Red Cross to deliver rapid tests to community organizations, and will allow us to continue to support screening programs operated by private businesses and federal departments and agencies. It will also allow Canadians across the country to access rapid tests to better manage their risks as they go back to their activities and we all learn to live with COVID-19.

We all know that COVID-19 remains a global threat. We recognize that we will need to learn to live with it and find the right balance between a progressive return to normalcy and an ongoing surveillance of virus transmission in order to quickly identify and isolate cases. Rapid tests will help us toward that transition. The evidence bears out that testing is an integral component of the suite of public health measures to keep the economy open and Canadians safe.

• (1015)

[Translation]

To that end, the Government of Canada is committed to helping supply tests to the provinces and territories, business, non-profits and federal workplaces. These initiatives and other public health measures are integral to protecting Canadians from COVID-19 and supporting the economy as we move into the next phase of the pandemic.

[English]

I welcome questions from my colleagues.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, my question does not pertain to the substance of the bill specifically, but rather to the closure motion.

It is quite clear that all members want to pass this bill quickly, and yet gag orders are still being used excessively. Does my col-

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league not think this bill should at least be sent to committee for study so that we have the opportunity to ask government officials and ministers about the implementation of the bill?

The bill provides for certain procurement processes as of January 1, and we would like to know what has been happening since then.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I will answer my hon. colleague's question in English.

[English]

The last three weeks or so, our health committee have been deliberating on this matter. Her colleague from the Bloc Québécois would be able to reinforce how much conversation we have had at the health committee regarding this.

In an update in January, we did touch on the bill with the minister, but if more conversations, more debate and more interventions are necessary at committee, I am at the member's disposal. Certainly I am more than willing to talk to the Bloc Québécois member of the health committee to discuss this important bill.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, that was an interesting intervention today. The hon. member spoke a lot about rapid tests and testing. I agree it is an excellent tool to help us get through this pandemic and move into the next stage and go forward. Certainly my family has used many of the rapid tests. I have school-aged children, so that is something that we have been able to do. There has been some discrepancy in Alberta, though and I want to just double-check with him. There has been discrepancy with what the provincial government says we have versus what the federal government says it sent.

I am wondering what pieces are in place. Where is the transparency on rapid testing and the rapid tests that are being sent to the province to make sure that they are being publicly delivered, publicly available and free of charge?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, that was a very important question. I will be honest that I agree with her. As an MP here in Ontario I had some questions when we heard that rapid tests were broadly available through certain means and that the federal government had procured and delivered tests to the provinces, yet the tests were challenging to find and procure.

In fact, over the Christmas holidays I recognized, as an employer here in Milton with my constituency staff, I did not have enough rapid tests to safely bring them back to work in the new year, so I bought some. They came from Alberta via mail.

I would be happy to sit down with the member to discuss the particular issues in Alberta and make sure the accountability is there and that transparency is available to every member as we go forward with these rapid tests, which will be and continue to be a very important tool in fighting COVID-19.

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• (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the legislation we are talking about really highlights the important role that both Ottawa and our province play, where Ottawa is acquiring literally tens of millions of rapid tests and the provinces are distributing them to the population.

Within this legislation we are now also continuing to support small businesses. Making sure Canadians get rapid tests is a high priority for this government.

Could the member provide his thoughts in terms of the degree to which there is a high sense of participation and co-operation from the different levels of government, and from Canadians in general, on the importance of rapid tests?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more. Since the beginning of this pandemic, Canadians have all wanted to know when this is going to be over and when we can go back to normal, and various levels of government have been working together to ensure that it is as quickly as possible. We are in regular contact with public health officials here in Halton, municipal members, as well as local clinics to make sure we have that vertical approach and that all of our services to community members are aligned. Every step of the way we have had to adjust some of these measures, develop proposals, introduce programs, deliver them and ensure they are communicated to Canadians in a timely manner.

The drop in omicron cases recently means that we can now make some more changes. Things have already begun to change across the country and various levels of government and different jurisdictions are making those decisions based on local numbers, but we are going to follow the science. We are going to follow the evidence. We are going to continue to keep Canadians safe and react to evidence, numbers and science, not just which way the wind is blowing or what the headlines are saying in the newspapers.

As legislators in this place, we have an obligation to make the most responsible decisions, not always the most popular ones. Like everybody, I would like nothing more than to go to a crowded concert or a Raptors game this weekend, but it is not time for that just yet. I understand how frustrated Canadians are. I count myself among them, but if we want to see an end to this pandemic, then we have to continue to trust science and get people vaccinated. I want to thank once again the over 97% of Miltonians who have already received their first dose.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, like Alberta, in British Columbia we also do not know how many rapid tests we are getting, and individuals are having a tough time accessing them. I personally experienced that with my children, and for myself. From that perspective, it would be very useful if the parliamentary secretary could provide information to all members of Parliament with respect to how many rapid tests have been distributed to provinces and the distribution process, so that we know.

Also, will the Canadian government ensure that rapid tests will be available free of charge at pharmacies for all Canadians?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I am happy to follow up with specific numbers for British Columbia. I do not have

them at my disposal, but I will follow up through email and make sure the member has access to that information.

I agree that pharmacies are the most logical place to deliver rapid tests and things of this nature. I find it bizarre that they have been given out at various places like fast food joints and LCBOs in Ontario, but the point is that however we can get them into the hands of Canadians the quickest is the best strategy. We have continued to work with provinces and territories to ensure that is the case. I fully recognize and agree they have not been as available as possible and that just adds further credence to the necessity of getting this bill passed as quickly as possible so that we can continue to ensure that there is a reliable pipeline of rapid tests available to Canadians through various means. It is not a one-size-fits-all methodology. The pharmacy might work for some people, whereas other people might want another method of delivery.

The mail has come up quite regularly. I am surprised it did not come up today in questions. When I have raised that with officials, there is concern about the freezing of the matrix that is necessary to do the tests. If they were to sit in my mailbox in Milton today where it is snowing, I know they would freeze and then, unfortunately, not be useful anymore. There are challenges with distributing them in cold weather, but we are going to continue to do our best to make sure they are available to Canadians as quickly as possible. I ask my fellow members in the House to ensure this bill passes expediently so that we can get them into the hands of our neighbours as quickly as possible.

• (1025)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have known since the beginning of the pandemic that testing and tracing were key components of dealing with COVID. We knew that back in early 2020, yet by the end of 2021 the federal government had procured only 120 million rapid antigen tests for that whole time. That sounds like a big number, but it is not when we consider we have 38 million Canadians. That is about three or four tests per Canadian. In January the government announced that it would deliver 140 million tests by the end of the month, but as of January 21, it had only delivered about a third of that. I am in favour of having many more tests, but as Canadians across the country know, they are having difficulty accessing rapid tests and PCR tests.

This is a large amount of money. The government's spirit is in the right place, but how can it assure Canadians that these big numbers will actually result in tests being procured and distributed to Canadians where they need them?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Vancouver Kingsway for his expertise and willingness to work together on the health committee. We have been collaborating quite efficiently and I hope that can continue.

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As the member identified, testing is an important way to fight this. It is not the only way. Rapid tests have not been the only source of testing, but—

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

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester has the floor.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, I stand before the House of Commons having been asked to undertake the great task of helping others understand why we should allow free and open debate on a bill that requests to spend \$2.5 billion, billion with a “b”, on rapid tests.

To some in the government, that may not seem like a great deal of money. However, it is to me and to the constituents I represent in Cumberland—Colchester. Like many of us in the House, I grew up in modest circumstances. I grew up in a trailer park in New Brunswick, where my mother of 88 years still lives. I am not going to stand here and tell people that I went without many things because that would not be true. However, I will say that my father worked hard for the money he made and my mother chose to stay home to raise my brother and me.

Some might wonder how this is relevant to spending \$2.5 billion. I believe it is important the taxpayers of Canada understand there are those of us who have been elected to the House of Commons who remember their upbringing and choose to understand the value of a dollar.

I was fortunate enough to have done well in school and had the great pleasure of attending medical school. However, given my roots, my parents were not able to fund any part of my education. Therefore, I worked different summer jobs, such as building houses, landscaping and building roads. Sadly, all of these things were still not enough for me to fund a medical education, and therefore I joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. This enabled me to be on a much better road financially, and I have no regrets.

Around the same time, I met my wife of now 31 years. Some might find this strange, but not long after we had been dating she asked me if I had a budget. At the age of 20, I had met the love of my life, who asked me if I had a budget. In my mind, I did have a budget. I made money in the summer jobs I mentioned. I paid my residence fees, which included my food. I paid for my tuition and all the books I desired and then I spent the rest. That is a budget. The only good thing about such a budget was that I did not have any debt. I had a roof over my head and I had food in my belly.

As the years passed, my wife continues to make it clear that, if I had not met her, today I would have no savings for my future. As well, being a physician, I do not have a pension. These are things that concern me. If we do not examine the spending habits of the Liberal government, where is the “pension” for Canadians? If we allow the government to spend unchecked, unabashedly and irresponsibly, then what is going to be left for Canadians in the future? Who is going to pay this massive debt?

Do I take it seriously when I think about spending \$2.5 billion? I do. It is also important that Canadians realize the context of \$2.5 billion. The Canadian median total income is \$40,770 as of 2019. In Nova Scotia in 2019, it was \$38,080, for people in what they call

couple families. For single people, it was significantly less at \$30,780. Doing the math on \$2.5 billion would give 81,221 citizens \$30,780 each, or it would give one person \$30,780 for 81,221 years. It is certainly not an insignificant amount of money.

Often now in government we throw around huge numbers and sums of money without even giving it its due consideration. It is important people consider the vast amount of money this truly is.

Given that Canada's deficit this year is approximately \$144 billion, this \$2.5-billion expense expected to be passed without any debate is approximately 1.75% of the overall deficit. Once again, to perhaps keep this in context for the everyday Canadians who are raptly listening to the great words I am saying today, this would be equivalent to 40,000 times 1.75%, which is equivalent to about \$700.

• (1030)

Some may say, sure, they would be happy to give that to a group of people without asking what they would want to use the money for.

However, I believe that for the people I represent in Cumberland—Colchester, there is a better-than-average likelihood that they would at least have some conversation as to what the money would be spent on.

Do not forget that the \$40,000 median income for Canada also means that half of Canadians live on less than that amount. Once again, I would suggest that simply giving out money as requested, without any debate on the matter, is foolhardy and not in keeping with the role we are asked to play here in the House of Commons.

Another way to think about it is that the Canadian dollar is approximately 19 micrometres thick. With mathematics, one metre equals a million micrometres, and if I have done the math correctly, that would be a stack of \$1 bills, if we still had them, 47.5 metres tall or 156 feet.

To try to keep this in perspective, that would be about 28 of me stacked on top of one another.

I will give a final example, which is important when we talk about a ton of money. We should think about that. We often say “a ton of money”. If there are \$2.5 billion in loonies, that is equivalent to 2.5 billion multiplied by 6.27 grams, which then equals 15,675,000,000 grams. When we multiply this by 0.001, that means we have 15,675,000 kilograms. From kilograms to tons, we multiply by 0.0011, which would then equate to 17,242 and a half tons of loonies.

That is a veritable ton of money, or at least a ton of loonies.

The other important thing I think Canadians need to be reminded of is the sad state of financial affairs in this great country we all call home. The current federal debt in Canada, according to debt-clock.ca, is over \$1.2 trillion. That is, oddly enough, about \$31,000 per Canadian, or right around the median income. The debt is growing at \$424 million a day, or \$17.6 million per hour.

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For those folks out there who perhaps do not usually think about monetary policy or other such things, I believe it is time to give them their due consideration. If someone wants to dig even deeper, my share of the debt when I was born 53 years ago was \$688. That gives me reason to pause and gives me great cause for concern.

Therefore, when I am asked, we should debate spending \$2.5 billion. I think it is important that we do so.

Members should have a look at debtlock.ca to understand what a person's personal portion of the debt is at the current time, and how much it is increasing.

My colleagues and friends, that is simply talking about the financial aspects of this motion. I also believe it is our democratic responsibility to have our elected representatives constantly and consistently keeping the government in check, and I realize the need for us to do so on this side as Canada's official opposition.

That, of course, does not mean we simply have to oppose everything. It does mean that everything should be given good consideration and, when appropriate, given up to vigorous debate.

We have seen, during my short time here in the House, that, of course, this is not always the case. Indeed, we have given unanimous consent to a bill. We have also seen another opposition motion to modify the Constitution proposed by the opposition that has passed in the House.

For those who wish to simply argue that this is a means to argue a frivolous concept, or something that should very easily pass with unanimity or without debate, clearly that can be done in very particular circumstances. As I have mentioned, we have been able to accomplish this during the past four and a half months in the House.

• (1035)

Further, as taken from a lecture given by Larry Diamond in 2004, when questioning what democracy is, he defines it through the following four important concepts: one, a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; two, the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; three, protection of the human rights of all citizens; and four, a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

Of course, in our democracy, the elections that are alluded to above chose the 338 of us sitting in this House to be everyone's proxy, or to voice the opinions that we believe are most representative of those in our ridings. For example, as I mentioned previously, my riding is Cumberland—Colchester in Nova Scotia. Each riding consists of 70,000 or more people. Of course, there are ridings that have significantly more people and those that may have fewer. This then leaves us with the idea of representation from all parts of this great nation. The diverse opinions brought to this House of tradition form all parts, not just geographically, but represent all people who make up the citizenship of Canada.

Therefore, we realize it would be very easy to understand that often there is a multitude of opinions as to how the House should proceed. I would suggest that the presentation of said opinions through, as I said previously, vigorous debate would be the underpinnings of how to move forward. Simply acquiescing to the de-

sires of one party or another on issues of great import would seem all but impossible, and not respectful to the rule of democracy and the representation we have been tasked to give to those constituents in our respective ridings.

Given my own history, as someone who has served in our military, I would be remiss not to remind all of my fellow parliamentarians of the great sacrifice those who have served in the military, and their families, have given to fight for democracy and the freedoms we hope to enjoy here in Canada. I had the fantastic opportunity to attend the 75th anniversary celebrations of D-Day and be on Juno Beach on June 6, 2019. Certainly, everyone here who has had an opportunity to visit Juno Beach would have had a similar experience. However, the ability to walk on that beach, exactly 75 years in the difference, wearing a military uniform and representing the Nova Scotia Highlanders, was special.

This tour allowed us many different opportunities, such as visiting the graves of fallen Canadian soldiers, immaculately kept up by the French, and having the awesome opportunity to speak to and enjoy a beer with Canadian veterans who had aged reasonably well and made the incredible trek back to where they had stormed the beaches 75 years prior. To have had that opportunity to meet, converse with and simply be in the presence of such men is a privilege I shall recall the rest of my life. I think it is short-sighted in any way, shape or form to dishonour the memory of these men in the fight for democracy and against tyranny that they performed on behalf of all of us who have followed them.

To bring this thought around democracy to a close, we also had the opportunity at that time to visit the Ardenne Abbey. For those who do not know, on June 7, 1944, 20 Canadian prisoners of war, many from the North Nova Scotia Highlanders regiment with whom I was the honorary colonel, were massacred. They were either shot in the head or bludgeoned to death. Why bring up such graphic detail? These are the individuals who fought for our democracy and against tyranny.

These are the men we are tasked to represent here in the House of Commons in our great democratic system. Of course, we all know that the loss of life did not end on June 7, 1944. We are all well aware that soldiers have put on the uniform to defend our country, our way of life and our democracy before these folks I spoke of and ever since this time. We wish to continue to honour and mourn the loss of those souls. Lest we forget.

● (1040)

This has reviewed for parliamentarians the vast sum of money the current government is asking us to spend without any debate. At this juncture, I hope there are those out there who realize that this is our sacred duty, not just related to the democratic process for which we were elected, but also in response to the significant sacrifice made by those who have worn a military uniform and allowed us the democratic process that we now represent.

I would now like to turn my attention and these remarks to the concept of leadership. Unfortunately, there is a lack of leadership shown by the Liberal government. The uniting voice for all Canadians simply does not exist. Due to the significant number of emails my office receives every day, and I know every office of every parliamentarian across Canada is receiving similar emails, it is very clear that Canadians are not happy with the leadership, or certainly lack of leadership, shown by the Liberal government.

When Canadians reach out to their members of Parliament with such grave concerns, I think it even more important that we understand the weight of the democratic process and the need to debate the policies and bills put forth by the government. Canadians are unhappy with the current state of affairs. Therefore, I believe parliamentarians would be remiss in their duties should they not take this opportunity to voice the concerns of their constituents and bring to debate the ideas of the government.

As I may have mentioned previously during other debates this week, there is a significant vilification, stigmatization and division of Canadians. It is unclear, at the current time, what the motivation is for this lack of leadership and the division of Canadians, and I think it is germane to once again review the 13 rules of leadership put forth by former Secretary of State, General Colin Powell:

1. It ain't as bad as you think! It will look better in the morning.
2. Get mad, then get over it.
3. Avoid having your ego so close to your position that when your position falls, your ego goes with it.
4. It can be done.
5. Be careful what you choose. You may get it.
6. Don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision.
7. You can't make someone else's choices. You shouldn't let someone else make yours.
8. Check small things.
9. Share credit.
10. Remain calm. Be kind.
11. Have a vision. Be demanding.
12. Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers.

The final one is:

Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.

I would say to my friends and colleagues that some of these rules may be debatable and of course do not apply in all discussions, in all areas and in all leadership positions. However, I believe several of them may be applicable at the current time. One might consider, "It can be done", that things can actually be done. "Remain calm" is very important. "Be kind" is also a great saying, as is, "Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier."

Government Orders

As we reflect upon these rules of leadership, perhaps we should ask ourselves the following: What type of leader are we, and what type of leader would we like to follow? What type of leader would benefit Canadians, and what type of leader should lead a nation in a time of crisis? What type of leader should lead a nation during an unprecedented pandemic? What steps should a leader take to protect the citizens of a nation: are there times that mandates, lockdowns and restrictions are appropriate? Should they be time-limited? Should there be a reasonable plan put forward by leadership to give its citizens hope? That would be a novel idea.

● (1045)

When nations do not have faith in their leadership, which could be judged by metrics such as the outpouring of emails, political commentary, social media posts and the general uproar being experienced by Canadians at this time, then of course, those of us elected to represent Canadians should take on the responsibility of debating important issues. Issues on which the government wishes we could all just get along and agree with their ideological agenda.

Perhaps if we had leadership that was not dividing Canadians, which sought to unify Canadians and was generally agreed upon by Canadians, then the idea of the possibility of agreeing to forgo debate on lofty matters could be considered. As we all know, Canadians feel miserable at the current time. We have heard this before. This, of course, comes from the misery index. Not for one second do I believe that this is solely related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This, of course, is related to a multitude of issues that are gripping our nation: a 30-year high inflation, the loss of 200,000 jobs last month alone, a loss of hope for the future, and uncertainty in our physical and mental well-being. All of these difficulties I place squarely at the feet of the leadership of the Liberal Party.

The job of great leadership is to inspire others to want to follow them. It is not to coerce, bully, mock, name-call or frighten them into following. It is to unify people and to recognize, of course, that those things which bind us together in the greatness of this Canadian nation are greater than those things which citizens may think are tearing us apart.

Mike Myatt, in *Forbes* magazine, gave us a leadership job description in 2012. It reads:

I would suggest much of what we view today being represented as leadership is actually...a cheap imitation of the real thing by those who are role playing, but clearly are not leading.

The article goes on:

Leadership isn't about maximizing a W-2, and it's not about personal glory or media attention. Put simply, true leadership isn't about the leader.

Leadership is more than a title; it's a privilege and therefore a burden of the highest responsibility. Nothing is more dangerous than a leader who loses sight of their real purpose—to serve something greater than themselves.

I will continue to quote that article, because I think it bears learning what leadership is. It is:

Government Orders

Courage, character, humility, vision, wisdom, integrity, empathy, persistence, compassion, aggressivity, discernment, commitment, confidence, a bias to action, the ability to resolve [a] conflict, a servant's heart, determination, creativity, self-discipline, love, loyalty, outstanding decision making ability, engaged, authentic, transparent, a great strategic thinker, passion, a positive attitude, intelligence, great communication skills, common sense, generosity, the ability to identify and develop great talent, someone who creates a certainty of execution, attention to detail, faith, an active listener, a prolific learner, respect for others, innovative, excellent tactical capability, charisma, extreme focus, a high risk tolerance, a broad range of competencies, and the list goes on...

I will end the there, as there is much food for thought in that quote.

● (1050)

I realize that was very long. However, I think some of the best writings were embodied in this description of leadership qualities. Not once in there did we hear the words “division”, “stigmatization”, “mocking”, “name-calling” or “villainizing”. Those are not in that list of great leadership qualities. These words are important for all of us parliamentary colleagues, and for Canada in general, to reflect upon, as I believe Canada is now in a crisis of leadership of this nation. This makes it more important for those things we now know are up for debate to be debated.

I realize that many of my colleagues simply wish to move on to the topic at hand of rapid tests and their deployment to the provinces for the use of all Canadians. Certainly, the Conservative members on this side of the House have been advocating for the deployment of rapid tests for perhaps 18 months now, almost two years. That is why we are here almost two years into the pandemic and the government is now asking to spend \$2.5 billion on rapid tests. Is this now perhaps too little, too late and not at the right time? This has become the motto of the Liberal government.

I spoke to one person about it, and we talked about how, as we begin to learn to live with COVID-19, as it becomes endemic and not pandemic, perhaps all of us will simply learn to stay home when we have symptoms. What would the usefulness of rapid tests be at that point? Perhaps that is a rhetorical question.

Would it give us any further protection? What is the sensitivity and specificity of the rapid tests? Where do they come from? Are they domestically produced? Should they not be domestically produced? How useful are they in the period before people have any symptoms? During this dynamic time of new science and great controversy associated with my aforementioned remarks, the answers to those questions will be difficult, debatable and downright unanswerable. However, I do think that, should the use of rapid tests give Canadians some increased awareness of the possibility they may have COVID, and we balance this with the false reassurance that they do not, then there may be some usefulness in procuring these tests at this time.

Another concern is that, since many Canadians are frustrated and exhausted, unfortunately there is more than an equal chance that many of these tests will sit on shelves and go unused until their usefulness expires. Besides the potential for giving false hope to those Canadians who indeed have the illness but are given a false negative test result, the expiry of these tests on the shelf without being used could be the greatest tragedy of all, after having spent the \$2.5 billion the Liberal government is asking for now.

Good decision-making is about having the right data, at the right time and in the hands of those capable of making the right decision. Once again, I would say to my fellow colleagues, I would be exceedingly concerned that the government continues along with its decision-making motto of “too little, too late and not at the right time”.

I would also suggest it is important the government, along with these tests, roll out a plan for adequate instruction to the Canadian population. Many have had PCR tests in the past, and the possibility of collecting an improper sample using a rapid antigen test is significant. From the current medical literature, it would also appear there is a possibility that collecting a throat sample and then a nose sample may be more accurate. Hopefully it is not the other way around.

● (1055)

Of course, many Canadians have seen such news and the actual manufacturer would have to weigh in on those discussions. The most appropriate thing would be to have a national plan with advertising both on social media and on television with video coverage, which would be appropriate to give Canadians good instruction so that an adequate sample would be collected to give the best possible result. This would take time and significantly more financial resources, which would have to be added to the \$2.5 billion already requested simply for the tests themselves.

Also, we have to understand the hon. parliamentary secretary talked about giving these out at pharmacies for free, which is not unreasonable. We are funding them as a government, but should we expect pharmacists to be the ones who have to instruct people how to use them? That would be unacceptable, and therefore it would be important for the media to help us with that.

We looked at budgetary considerations, the massive amount of money and that \$2.5 billion is 17 tonnes of loonies. We looked at the issue of democracy and the vast responsibility and history that is behind this democratic institution for which we all have a responsibility and to which we have been elected to support the ideals of our constituents. We have discussed the significant lack of leadership shown by the Liberal government, which in and of itself would necessitate that any legislation brought forward by it would require a debate.

We have also talked about the tests themselves and the potential for improper use, the potential for inaccuracies and the potential that they may not be used at all, given the state of this pandemic Canada finds itself in.

I would be remiss in my remarks if I did not mention the desertion of at least three caucus members of the Liberal Party. To me, what this suggests is that even within the confines of the Liberal Party, notwithstanding those of us who sit in opposition, there is dissension as to which direction the government should go. This has been supported by several media interviews, and of course by said members. Perhaps even more will follow. If within the party these desertions continue and the dissension continues, how could other parties simply support putting forth a bill without any debate?

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[English]

UKRAINE

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a few years ago I had the honour of travelling to Ukraine to oversee the elections as part of our delegation of Canadian parliamentarians. It gave me an opportunity to get to know Ukrainians up close and personal. In my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville, we have a vibrant Canadian Ukrainian community, including my lovely wife Christina, who is of Ukrainian descent. All of them are deeply concerned for their families and friends in Ukraine. They are worried about the Russian aggression, which is a threat not only to Ukraine but to all of Europe.

Like our Minister of Foreign Affairs and our Right Hon. Prime Minister, who have strongly voiced that we stand with Ukraine, we are working with our NATO allies and have extended Operation Unifier. When Ukraine needed financial support, we were there. We stepped up with more support for military training and cyber-intelligence. Our commitment includes doubling the number of Canadian Armed Forces members who are working alongside our NATO allies to help Ukraine.

We will continue to do whatever is needed to de-escalate the current situation and we continue to stand with Ukraine.

Slava Ukraini.

* * *

HAROLD R. JOHNSON

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege today to rise in honour of the life of Harold R. Johnson. A member of Montreal Lake Cree Nation and a resident of La Ronge, Harold has been a voice for northern Saskatchewan through his work as an author, capturing the essence of the region, the communities and the people.

Harold joined the Canadian navy at the age of 17 and afterward became a logger and miner, as so many northerners do. He followed that experience with a decision to return to school, eventually earning a law degree from Harvard University. After years of running his own private practice and then becoming a Crown prosecutor, Harold pursued his passion of writing and began an illustrious career as a published author. His book *Firewater: How Alcohol is Killing my People (and Yours)* was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for non-fiction. Harold's influential voice in northern Saskatchewan and all of Canada will live on through the words he has left us.

I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing the life and the legacy of Harold R. Johnson.

* * *

PAPOU'S PLACE

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I would like to highlight an amazing small business located in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler. Pa-

Statements by Members

pou's Place Subs and Ice Cream, affectionately known as Papou's, has been a fixture of Hespeler's downtown core and a local favourite for 25 years.

Owner Chris Bogas purchased the business when it was in its infancy, and through hard work and determination, has turned it into the award-winning icon that it is today. Immigrating from Greece and trained as a butcher, Chris is a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit that makes Canada great. He has provided locals not only with great food and friendly service but also with countless fond memories for the people of Hespeler to cherish.

As Papou's bears such local significance, I was saddened to learn that it will be closing its doors later this month. While we will all deeply miss Chris's presence here in Hespeler, he has assured me that his Galt location will remain open and he looks forward to serving his loyal customers there. Trust me, it is worth the drive.

I speak on behalf of all those in Hespeler when I thank Chris for all the memories and his many years of service to this community.

* * *

CO-OP HOUSING

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, during the recent election, many issues were raised by the great people of Vancouver Kingsway, but none came up more often than the housing crisis. To respond to this, I recently held a town hall to focus on one concrete measure to provide affordable homes to Canadians: co-op housing. This was born out of my visits to the many thriving co-ops in my riding that were built through the federal co-op housing program of the 1970s and 1980s.

I was joined by several outstanding members of our community who shared their experience, knowledge and vision as to how we can expand this incredibly successful housing model into the 21st century. Bernie Foyle of Still Creek Co-op, Cassia Kantrow of Trout Lake Co-op and Nancy Hannum of Falls Creek Co-op provided their first-hand perspectives, and UBC professor Patrick Condon lent excellent economic advice.

What is clear is that we can and we must get all levels of governments working together now to build many more of these secure, affordable, community-building gems.

Statements by Members

● (1105)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today is International Day of Women and Girls in Science, a day that highlights the importance of ensuring equal access and full participation of women and girls in science and technology.

Our role is to ensure that women and girls are not only present in science, but also empowered to play leadership roles and to be innovators and change-makers.

I want to recognize some of the organizations in my riding, Sudbury, that are making a difference. Women in Mining Sudbury, Women in Science and Engineering Sudbury and Modern Mining & Technology Sudbury are all working to strengthen the role of women and girls in science, not only as beneficiaries of change, but also as forces of change.

* * *

[English]

BOB EDMUNDSON

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Bob Edmundson.

Bob passed away last month after a battle with cancer. He served as my campaign manager for my nomination and in my first campaign. He would later serve my constituents as outreach coordinator. It is fair to say that if were not for Bob's steadfast support, I would not be here today.

Bob was a man of faith and family. He loved watching his boys, Joel and Jesse, play hockey, not only as a dad but as a coach. He was especially blessed to watch Joel win a Stanley Cup.

His unwavering dedication to help others was Bob's way. He was a true coach, and not just in sports but in life.

I was honoured to call Bob my friend. I will miss his wise words and witty sense of humour. My heart goes out to his wife Lois and all his family.

May Bob rest in peace. He will be missed.

* * *

HOUSING IN SACKVILLE—PRESTON—CHEZZETCOOK

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was very excited to announce two initiatives that will bring 20 low-income units in my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook. The Souls Harbour Rescue Mission project, representing \$3.38 million, will bring a facility of 12 affordable units to the Chezzetcook area, focusing on vulnerable women. The Fairfax Homes project was designed by the folks from Akoma. It will bring \$3.1 million of funding and produce eight affordable housing units for African Nova Scotian seniors and those with disabilities who live in the Cherry Brook area.

Both projects will capture the spirit of rapid housing, how important it is and why it was designed. I look forward to the completion

of these projects and, of course, the continued investment in Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

* * *

OLYMPIC GAMES

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 12 years ago tomorrow, my riding was proud to host many events of the 2010 winter Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. These games were an unqualified success for Canadian athletes, who won the most gold medals ever won by a country at the winter games. Infrastructure investments greatly enhanced the quality of life of the entire region, and the event served as a turning point for reconciliation with indigenous peoples. The region is now again launching a bid to host the winter games in 2030, but this time it is being led by the four host first nations, a first for the Olympic Games.

As the people of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country continue to make Olympic history, I want to highlight seven athletes in my riding who are competing in Beijing: Broderick Thompson, Simon d'Artois, Sofiane Gagnon, Natalie Corless, Trinity Ellis, Reid Watts, Marielle Thompson and the many other high-level athletes that continue to train in the region.

I wish them all the best of luck and know that they will continue to make our community and our country proud.

* * *

[Translation]

CAMPUS SAINT-JEAN

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the only French language post-secondary institution west of Winnipeg, Campus Saint-Jean plays a fundamental role in maintaining the vitality of the francophonie in western Canada. It is a true cultural hub for the Franco-Albertan community. We know that there is a growing demand for bilingual employees. Campus Saint-Jean is ready to meet the needs of a qualified and bilingual workforce.

Unfortunately, since 2003, the federal government has been blocking the Campus's operating funding despite growing enrolment and student numbers. It is time for the government to set aside partisanship and ensure adequate, ongoing, predictable funding indexed to the cost of living to ensure the survival and growth of Campus Saint-Jean.

This should be done not only for the Franco-Albertan community, but also for the viability of the entire network of francophone communities across Canada.

Statements by Members

• (1110)

*[English]***JOHN HONDERICH**

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with the passing of John Honderich, we lost a dedicated city builder and a newspaperman who believed deeply in the value of journalism, both in the service of progressive values and as an essential part of a healthy democracy.

Born into newsrooms, John started as a copy-boy and night reporter with the Ottawa Citizen before joining the Toronto Star as a reporter, going on to become bureau chief, editor, publisher and chairman. Receiving the CJF Lifetime Achievement Award, John called attention to the crisis in journalism today. He spoke of quality journalism as a form of public service and of the need to confront lies with truth, and he challenged all of us to make quality journalism thrive in Canada.

On behalf of our 416 caucus, we pay our respects and remember John Honderich for his philanthropy, mentorship and humility, as a passionate advocate for social and racial justice, as a fierce defender of his reporters and of journalism, as an advocate for Toronto and a new deal for cities, and above all as a champion of newsrooms that believed that the newspaper was there to do the public good.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE LOWER MAINLAND

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, the people of my riding of Langley—Aldergrove are pleased to have a commitment from all levels of government now to extend the Metro Vancouver SkyTrain from downtown Surrey into downtown Langley. It is exactly what is needed by Langley, one of Canada's fastest-growing urban centres, but it is not enough.

Every day, thousands of commuters are stuck in traffic on Highway 1, westbound in the morning and eastbound in the afternoon. The 264th Street interchange has not been expanded since it was first built in 1964, despite explosive growth in the area.

We are looking to all levels of government to commit to widening Highway 1 from Langley through Aldergrove and into Abbotsford. This critical section of the Trans-Canada Highway is vital to all of Canada. It is the Lower Mainland's primary highway link to the rest of Canada. It services Canada's largest port, the port of Vancouver, in our third-largest urban centre.

It is time to get the job done for my riding, for British Columbia and indeed for all of Canada.

* * *

*[Translation]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us be proud of all forms of Canadian energy and their history.

On February 13, 1947, 75 years ago this Sunday, Leduc No. 1 struck oil for the first time.

[English]

After 133 unsuccessful attempts, the famous Vern “Dry Hole” Hunter finally found what he was looking for. This discovery was the launch of the greatest energetic and economic development in Canadian history.

[Translation]

This discovery benefited all Canadians. More than \$500 billion has been shared with the provinces. Today, let us be proud to see that Canada is one of the countries in the world, if not “the” country, with the toughest environmental rules.

[English]

Speaking of that, canadaaction.ca stated that the world needs more Canadian energy, that we can support both climate action and Canadian oil and gas, and that success is tied to our record of environmental innovation and emission reduction.

[Translation]

Yes, the environment and energy can go hand in hand. One does not preclude the other. As long as we need energy, let us make sure that energy is Canadian.

[English]

Let us be proud of all Canadian forms of energy, and happy 75th anniversary to Leduc No. 1.

* * *

NAGULA THARMA SANGARY

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to honour Dr. Nagula Tharma Sangary, a Tamil-Canadian scientist and educator. He obtained an electrical engineering degree from Texas A&M University, masters and doctoral degrees from McMaster University and an MBA from Oxford.

He was a pioneer in wireless technology and served as a principal scientist at BlackBerry. He was an adjunct professor at both McMaster University and the University of Waterloo. At Waterloo, he helped form the Centre for Intelligent Antenna and Radio Systems.

Dr. Sangary left an indelible mark in the realm of Canadian innovation, having secured over 20 inventions, published 36 publications and reviewed over 3,000 patents. He believed in the value of education and will forever be part of an awe-inspired generation of scientists around the world.

He is deeply missed by his loving wife Christalyn, son Joshua, and his family and friends. May his soul rest in peace. *Bonjo Anna.*

Oral Questions

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, the convoy is affecting people in communities across the country. Health care workers, retailers, grocers, truckers, small business owners and residents have faced harassment, intimidation and even violence during these occupations.

Blockades in Windsor are disrupting our supply chain, and auto factories in the city and elsewhere have been forced to close. Schools in Ottawa and Manitoba have also been targeted. Thousands of workers are finding it harder to put food on the table and pay their rent.

Rather than showing leadership these past weeks, the Prime Minister has spent more time coming up with excuses than he has trying to find solutions. Canadians are fed up with excuses. The government owes it to them to use all the tools available to put an end to the occupations that are harming Canadian workers and their families. The government needs to work on a plan to put a stop to all this.

* * *

● (1115)

PARLIAMENTARY INTERPRETERS

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, today, I rise to thank all those who ensure that French continues to be used in this supposedly bilingual institution. I am talking about the interpreters.

Being an interpreter is a challenging but rewarding job. They need to work online, because of the pandemic has made that job a lot tougher. Many of our interpreters are dealing with cognitive fatigue and auditory injuries. I have repeatedly talked up this fascinating job to Noémie, a young translation student who is very close to me.

I greatly admire the interpreters for the resilience, dedication and professionalism they have shown to this day. They chose this profession because they love it, and I hope they will stay the course despite the challenges associated with the hybrid Parliament. The entire Bloc Québécois team and I are extremely grateful for all that they do, and we look forward to continue working with them.

* * *

[English]

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the deliberate politicization of the pandemic has undermined trust in our public health institutions and has damaged national unity, with western alienation, rich versus poor, urban versus rural and vaccinated versus unvaccinated. The divisions in this country are real.

During the election, the Prime Minister chose to capitalize on Canadians' fear and sowed division for his own political gain. Shame on the Prime Minister, who, for the first half of the pandemic, told Canadians there were vaccines for those who wanted them. Then, sensing political gain, that message morphed into one of par-

tition. He said people have the right not to get vaccinated, but they do not have the right to sit next to someone who is.

The Prime Minister's opportunism has created two classes of Canadians. Canadians now watch as the rest of the world moves forward with ending mandates and removing restrictions, while our government has no clear plan to do the same. It is time for the government to listen to the experts, trust the science and find a more sustainable way to end the pain, the trauma and the frustration of two long years of isolation.

* * *

VACCINE MANDATES

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, early in 2020, we were all facing an unforeseen global crisis. It was a life-and-death situation, leading to anxiety, fear and confusion. Our Prime Minister and his team took the measures necessary to keep Canadians safe and to keep our economy going during the pandemic. On behalf the residents of Brampton Centre, I would like to thank the right hon. Prime Minister for his leadership, for standing up for Canadians and for having their backs when they needed it most.

This deadly virus is not yet defeated. Vaccine mandates help keep Canadians safe. We must not allow a small group of extortionists to sabotage those efforts. Let us not squander the hard-fought victories of the past two years by abandoning the fight before victory is achieved.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, to work together and to unify, that should be the message of the Prime Minister's speeches in these extremely difficult times, when everyone is tired of the pandemic. Unfortunately, we learned this week from the chair of the Quebec Liberal caucus that the Prime Minister had decided to use an approach to divide and stigmatize.

Millions of Canadians, the opposition parties and more and more Liberal MPs believe that it is time for the Prime Minister to present a plan for getting back to normal. When is the Prime Minister going to present a plan that will give hope to Canadians?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from the outset, we have been supporting all the cities impacted by the convoy.

We added resources. For example, RCMP officers can provide tactical and logistical support. The RCMP is ready to provide additional assistance. Today, we had a productive meeting with the City of Ottawa.

We will keep following the evidence and continue our strategy of getting out of this pandemic through vaccination.

• (1120)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is not a plan.

The Prime Minister should have listened to Canadians months ago. He is responsible for what is happening right now. Canadians are suffering and looking for a sign of hope. He cannot just tell them that he understands and knows what they are going through. He is the Prime Minister; it is his responsibility.

The well-respected member of Parliament for Mount Royal and parliamentary secretary agrees with us and said as much in the House yesterday. Why does the Prime Minister still refuse to present a plan to put an end to the vaccine mandates and restrictions?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have a strategy and a very clear plan. Our strategy is to use vaccination to get us through the pandemic.

We will continue to listen to government public health experts to make decisions about measures at the border. That is the plan, and it is a very effective one.

The convoy needs to leave Ottawa. What is happening is not a lawful demonstration. People living in Canada must obey the law.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, let me explain to my colleague that Canadians are rightly wondering what criteria will be used to lift restrictions.

We have vaccine mandates. People are working from home. We have PCR tests at the border. Is the Prime Minister waiting until 100% of Canadians are vaccinated? Our vaccination rate is higher than any other G7 country's. Canadians have done their part, and we are proud of them.

Here is my last question for the Prime Minister. What is his plan for putting a quick and peaceful end to the demonstrations, which continue to grow? All this is happening because of his lack of leadership.

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Canadians have worked hard to stop the spread of COVID-19, but we cannot stop now. We all have an important role to play in stopping the spread of COVID-19. We need to work together to get through this crisis.

[English]

By getting vaccinated and following public health measures like physical distancing, wearing a mask and, yes, as my hon. colleague pointed out, getting vaccinated, we are all keeping our communities safe. I thank the members opposite for ensuring their communities continue to do so.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians need and want a clear plan to end the mandates and restrictions. This week, four Liberal MPs came out against their own government and are demanding that the mandates be removed. I agree with them, and I also completely agree with the Liberal member for Louis-Hébert, who said that the Prime Minister has inten-

Oral Questions

tionally stigmatized and divided Canadians for political gain. The Prime Minister has stopped basing his decisions on science. He is now basing them on political science, doing whatever it takes to save his own political skin.

When will Canadians have a clear plan to end the mandates?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, ever since the beginning of the pandemic, Canadians have all wanted to know when this will be over and when we can go back to the way things were before. I count myself among them. Every step of the way, we have had to adjust measures. We have developed new proposals and introduced novel programs to help keep Canadians safe and to ensure that Canadians know what is going on in a timely manner.

The drop in omicron cases recently means that we can make some changes. Things have already begun to change across the country, but we are going to continue to follow the science and the evidence. We have done that from the start and it has kept Canadians safe. I reject the notion that we are allowing politics to get in the way when the member opposite is clearly—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is not based on science. It is based on political science.

Yesterday at the ethics committee, Ann Cavoukian said she found it disturbing that the government collected phone data without informing the public first or, worse, without their consent. Serious questions remain about whether the privacy rights of Canadians have been protected. The Privacy Commissioner has received so many complaints that he has opened an investigation. Canadians want answers. They also want PHAC to halt this program until their privacy can be guaranteed.

Will the government respect the decision of the House of Commons to immediately suspend this data-gathering program until we are sure the privacy rights of Canadians have—

• (1125)

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

Oral Questions

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our top priority from the very beginning of this pandemic has always been keeping Canadians healthy and safe while upholding the privacy standards that Canadians expect. Over the course of the pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Canada has used de-identified and aggregated data to perform and inform our government's response to COVID-19, and to transparently provide Canadians with information on the pandemic. That mobility data is released to the public and updated weekly via COVIDTrends and the WeatherCAN application, and while the mobility data being used by the Public Health Agency of Canada contains no private personal information whatsoever, we will continue collaborating with the Ethics Commissioner and remain committed to safeguarding—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, reinforcements are on their way to Ottawa for the weekend. Once again, these reinforcements are not coming to support the police, but rather the occupiers.

The Ottawa police chief requested an additional 1,800 officers four days ago.

Police officers and the Parliamentary Protective Service have been working around the clock and deserve federal support.

Will the minister confirm that law enforcement will get the required 1,800 officers, or will the occupiers get the upper hand for the third weekend in a row?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from vandalism to violence, the convoy has disrupted the lives of the people of Ottawa. No one is above the law, and we expect the law to be enforced.

We have been there from the beginning to support the City of Ottawa and the police, and this includes providing additional RCMP officers. Our top priority is to end the illegal blockades, enforce the law and help the people of Ottawa return to normal life.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, Ontario has just declared a state of emergency, but you would not know it on Parliament Hill.

What started as a protest against vaccine mandates is transforming into a full-on siege of downtown Ottawa.

It is transforming into blockades in Windsor, in Manitoba and in Alberta. These blockades are threatening the supply chain and the economy.

It is also transforming into an international movement, spilling over into the United States, France, New Zealand and more.

Rather than ease tensions, the federal government's laissez-faire approach is ramping them up. When will the minister realize that a non-answer is the strategy—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague did not hear the news.

The federal government has already taken action. We added resources to help the Ottawa Police Service not once, not twice, but three times. We added officers to assist the Ottawa police officers. We also did that in Coutts, where we continue to work in collaboration with the Government of Alberta.

Since the beginning of this convoy, this government has taken meaningful action such as—

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

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, protests financed and backed by wealthy far-right Americans forced thousands of Canadians out of work this week, as border crossings are shut down and supply chains are completely blocked. Communities are asking for federal leadership, and the Prime Minister seems caught frozen in place, like a deer in the headlights. Even our neighbours note the absence of leadership. The Washington Post reports this morning that the Biden administration wants the Prime Minister to “use federal powers to resolve this situation”.

Why is the Prime Minister so incapable of managing this crisis? Why is he passing the buck to everyone else?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, right from the beginning of this convoy, we have been showing strong leadership by providing law enforcement with all of the resources they need in Ottawa, in Windsor and in Coutts, Alberta.

My colleague refers to seeing leadership at the federal level. Yesterday, I was very pleased to have participated in a call between the Prime Minister and all opposition parties. I think that was a very constructive dialogue.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Marco Mendicino: While our colleagues are heckling, I am calling on the Conservatives to join the federal government in calling on the convoy to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the convoy is blocking Canadians—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Speaker, the convoy is blocking Canadians from going to work across the country. People in my region of southwestern Ontario are heavily impacted. All Canadians are missing much needed national leadership during this crisis. They are tired of jurisdictional excuses and they just want this to stop.

The vast majority of Canadians have done their part. They are following public health measures and we owe it to them to use every tool available to stop these occupations and to work on a plan.

When will the government end this occupation that is harming Canadian workers and their families?

• (1130)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely correct in that 90% of Canadians have taken up their vaccinations. It is a small, angry lot that continues to participate in these illegal blockades, which is why the government will provide law enforcement with all of the tools and resources they need.

Our number one priority is very clear and that is to end the illegal blockades, uphold the law and make sure we get trade and travel moving again. That is why it is so imperative that every member in the chamber call on the convoy to go home.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, provinces and countries around the world are removing mandates and restrictions. The Liberals lack compassion and empathy and are not in line with our allies and other G7 countries. Is the Prime Minister waiting to once again be the last to act? For the last two years, Canadians have been continually let down by the Liberal government. It is time for Canada to have a clear path out of the pandemic. Canadians have sacrificed to keep our community safe but now they are being ignored and discredited.

When will the Liberals stop dividing and end the mandates?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, ever since the beginning of the pandemic, all Canadians have wanted to know when it will be over and when we can go back to the way things were. I count myself among them. I am eager to get back to normal as well.

The reality is that we will continue to do what is right for Canadians and keep people safe throughout the pandemic. Different jurisdictions have handled things differently and we have seen that every step of the way. This includes some jurisdictions across the country, which we have been there to support, and different countries that have had much worse outcomes in some cases and even with more restrictions.

I am proud of the fact—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, unfortunately there are no gold medals for spin

doctoring. The Prime Minister has stumbled from failure to failure on the COVID-19 response. He seems to have forgotten the most pressing need for Canadian families: a foreseeable and successful return to normal public life.

Instead of dismissing and stigmatizing Canadians who voice valid concerns, he needs to rise above politicizing the pandemic and provide answers.

When will the Liberal government stop alienating those it disagrees with and find a way—

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

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, personal attacks aside, I am proud of Team Canada and I will give them a quick little shout-out over at the Winter Olympics. I am sure all of the members of the House are proud of our team. I do not know why she would want to take a personal dig at me for that.

The reality is that we want to continue to support Canadians and we want to keep them safe, healthy and alive. We have to recognize this pandemic is not over. We need to continue to trust science and encourage our neighbours to get vaccinated. I understand how frustrated Canadians are. I count myself among them. However, we need to stay focused on keeping Canadians safe and that includes some restrictions.

I will point out that most of those public health restrictions are provincial in nature.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, almost two years have passed. Canadians toughed it out and got through this pandemic.

It is time for the government to table a plan that will let Canadians from all across the country plan for the return to normal life.

We are asking it to stop playing politics. The government must have a plan to reopen. Let us give Canadians hope.

When will the plan be tabled?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for this very important question.

We know that the omicron variant is spreading quickly around the world. That is why the government quickly put health restrictions in place at the borders in order to continue protecting Canadians against the spread of COVID-19.

Oral Questions

As stated earlier, our government is officially recommending that Canadians avoid all non-essential travel outside the country. Collectively and individually, we all have a role to play.

* * *

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, we do not want to hear about restrictions. We want a plan to reopen.

Almost 90% of Canadians are vaccinated. Protesters came to Ottawa with the message that they want some freedom back. The Prime Minister's partisan attitude turned this protest into a blockade that is now entering its third weekend.

Will the Prime Minister undertake to quickly and peacefully bring an end to the blockade?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member that the blockades are causing harm in our communities, so I would ask him to ask all of his colleagues on the other side to ensure we are all encouraging people to go home. As we have seen recently, the member for Carleton says he is proud of the trucker convoy. The anti-vax protests are exactly what he wants for his new political agenda, so let us encourage everybody to go home and to evacuate this blockade in Ottawa that is causing so much harm so that we can get on with our lives and continue to support Canadians and keep them healthy.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, from the Liberals we continue to see the politics of division. Instead of talking to Canadians, they try to divide them. Instead of doing their job, they pass the buck to the provinces on what is squarely the government's jurisdiction: our international borders. It was the current Prime Minister who once said, "The role of the PM is to build a stronger country, not make it easier for some to break it apart." Leadership means having conversations, even when they are with people we disagree with.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to have these conversations and to peacefully and quickly end the impasse this country is facing?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just last night the Prime Minister had a conversation with the leader of the Conservative Party and all other leaders. Of course we do not agree on all of the ways in which we are going to get out of the pandemic, but the single golden thread that has run through our strategies is that we have to get people vaccinated. It is nice now to see that the Conservatives have finally realized that we can have disagreements but we cannot break the law. That is why it is important that we all encourage the members of these illegal blockades to go home.

No one is above the law. I would think the Conservative Party, which is a party that claims to be the party of law and order, would do the same thing.

HEALTH

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians deserve a plan from the government on when it will end the federal mandates. Countries around the world and provinces across this country are making that decision. Even Canada's top doctor has said it is time to return to normalcy. Like the minister said, nine out of 10 Canadians have been vaccinated. Is the goal from the government 100% before it reopens? If that is the case, the Liberals need to tell Canadians that life will not get back to normal until 100% of Canadians are vaccinated.

Canadians have done the hard work. It is the time for the government to do its work. What is the plan to reopen?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what my colleague from Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes tends to like to ignore is that every person who gets vaccinated is one person fewer who is likely to experience severe outcomes, head to the hospital or, indeed, die from COVID-19. Canada is a big country and public health advice can vary across the country due to local epidemiological situations in various jurisdictions. As such, it is the responsibility of each government to take decisions that are most appropriate to its local epidemiological context.

We also know Canadians want to finish this fight against COVID-19, and I would ask the member to encourage his community to continue to get vaccinated. I know there is a very high uptake in his community—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Manicouagan.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the federal government has finally realized that it is inhumane to reduce the GIS for the poorest seniors because of CERB.

It has introduced Bill C-12, which will stop the reductions, but not until the July payment, even though seniors have been making sacrifices at the grocery store and even the pharmacy for the past year. Twelve months of daily sacrifices. This is crucial income for these seniors, but the government plans to keep reducing that income until the early summer.

How is it humanly possible to move so slowly?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we can all agree just how challenging this pandemic has been on seniors, and our government has been there from the start to support them. We committed to help seniors by issuing a one-time payment to those on GIS where it was reduced due to pandemic benefits. Additionally, as the member said, we introduced Bill C-12 to exclude any pandemic benefit for the purposes of calculating GIS going forward.

I urge the member and all those on the other side to put politics aside and support Bill C-12.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the federal government should be better than that.

Six months will have passed between the point at which the government publicly admitted it had made a huge mistake in reducing the GIS for the poorest seniors in December and the point at which it will actually stop the reductions, in the payment to be sent out at the end of June.

The solution here is not complicated. All the government needs to do is stop cutting benefits for seniors.

How could this possibly take six months to implement?

- (1140)

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, low-income seniors rely on the different benefits that they receive and we know that they count on them to make ends meet. That is why we boosted GIS for seniors who need it most and we will deliver as soon as possible this one-time payment to seniors to compensate for any loss of GIS for taking a pandemic benefit. As soon as the minister was appointed, she worked with officials and took action. I have to say, I was proud during the economic and fiscal update when we announced this solution.

* * *

HOUSING

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Association of Interior Realtors recently reported that the selling price of a typical single-family home in Kelowna has jumped to more than \$1 million. That is up from \$760,000 just the year before. The Liberals' housing plan is hurting families by making housing unaffordable and has been a failure. Home prices inflated \$240,000 in just one year.

Does the minister honestly believe that a \$1-million home is affordable for the average Canadian family?

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Since taking office, we have been wanting to address the critical issue of affordability and access to housing.

We were very clear in the throne speech. We are going to propose several initiatives, including the housing accelerator fund, a more flexible first-time homebuyer incentive and a rent-to-own program. We also plan to levy a 1% annual tax on the value of residential real estate belonging to non-residents or non-Canadians.

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals continue to be unclear with Canadians when it comes to their idea to introduce new taxes on home sales. The CMHC backed a study into the supposed benefits of such a surtax but the minister responsible for CMHC says he does not back that study.

Why is his department studying policies he says he opposes and wasting taxpayer dollars on an organization that conducted the study that endorsed the Liberals in the last election? Unless it is about helping Liberal friends.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I would just like to remind her that it is hard to take the Conservatives seriously on the issue of affordability and access to housing when they voted against a tax on non-resident foreign buyers. Just last week, the member for Calgary Centre reiterated her opposition to this measure.

The Conservative Party may not want to address the problem of foreign investors driving up the cost of housing, but we will. I would like to clarify that we will not be imposing a capital tax on—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Beauce.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

I am going to tell him a little secret. Constituents of mine who are struggling could not care less about the country's GDP when they are having a hard time putting food on the table. Many people have to choose between heating their homes and eating tonight.

A year ago, we were all cleaning our groceries. Now the groceries are cleaning us out.

When will the minister give us the tools and solutions to fight constantly rising “Justinflation” across the country?

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we cut taxes for the middle class twice and raised taxes for the 1%. The Conservatives voted against that.

We created the CCB, which is indexed to inflation. The Conservatives voted against that.

We came up with a plan and the funds to create a national early learning and child care plan for Canadians. The Conservatives voted against that.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada's economy needs to improve productivity, and for that we need to grow our workforce, with more highly skilled immigrants and more people with the skills, training and knowledge that employers require. However, here is the problem. People cannot afford to live in some of our economic-generating cities because of out-of-control housing inflation.

When will the government take concrete steps to curb inflation, increase the housing supply and get Canada back into a leadership position in the G7?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his enthusiasm for immigration as a strategy to grow the economy. I look forward to tabling my plan with immigration levels for the next few years in Canada sometime next week.

He is right. We need to manage immigration in an appropriate way so the workers who come here to fill gaps in the labour force to maximize our economic potential have a place to live. With record labour shortages, despite the fact we have more jobs in Canada now than before the pandemic, immigration is going to be an important part of Canada's growth strategy. I look forward to working with our Minister of Housing to ensure the national housing strategy makes housing more affordable for Canadians, including those who come to Canada.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, last year B.C. commercial, recreational and indigenous fishers caught fewer fish in order to protect our salmon populations. They made big sacrifices that impacted their livelihoods to contribute to conservation efforts. However, a recent report confirmed that Alaskan commercial fishers caught an estimated 800,000 sockeye salmon bound for B.C.

Will the minister work with her U.S. counterparts to the Pacific Salmon Treaty, help Canadian fishers and allow stocks to recover?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is obviously a very important topic to the Pacific coast and for all of Canada. We are going to continue to work with our partners to do deep dives to determine how we can best help this industry. We will continue doing that, as we always have, with our stakeholders in a collaborative and coordinated fashion.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, hundreds of fish harvesters on B.C.'s coast applied for employment insurance based on the eligibility criteria on the department's website. After they applied, the department changed the criteria on its website and now is rejecting their applications. These fish harvesters have borne the brunt of recent fisheries closures. After years with little or no income, many are just barely hanging on. Either the government failed to communicate the eligibility criteria or it changed the goalpost at the last minute.

Could the minister please inform the House which it is?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as on the east coast, where I am from, we understand the importance of helping our fishers through this troubled time. We were there during the pandemic, and we will continue to be there after the pandemic to ensure that people have the ability to stay afloat and stay on a good course. We will continue to work every step of the way with fishers to make sure we are there 100%.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week we saw the Canadian Environmental Protection Act introduced in the Senate. CEPA is the cornerstone of federal environmental protection legislation in Canada, which aims to protect Canadians and the environment.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change inform the House on how this bill will further protect our environment?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Surrey Centre for his environmental advocacy.

Bill S-5 would modernize the Canadian Environmental Protection Act for the first time in 20 years and has support from both industry and environmental organizations. CEPA will recognize, for the first time, that every individual in Canada has a right to a healthy environment. This legal right will lead to stronger environmental protections in tune with evolving science, especially for vulnerable communities exposed to harmful levels of pollution.

HEALTH

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, in 2006, the CRTC shamelessly said no to the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention's request to bring a simple three-digit suicide hotline to Canada. It has been 427 days since my motion to bring 988 to Canada passed unanimously in the House. In that time, 4,600 Canadians lost their lives to suicide and over 117,000 Canadians attempted suicide.

What is the Liberals' plan if the CRTC heartlessly says no again?

• (1150)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our hearts go out to all the families and loved ones of those we have lost to suicide and to those who struggle with suicidal thoughts.

It is essential for Canadians to have timely access to suicide prevention, and in addition to working to fully fund a national three-digit mental health crisis and suicide prevention hotline, we are developing a pan-Canadian suicide prevention service. This initiative will provide access to crisis support whenever Canadians need it, and using the technology of their choice, it avoids—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for North Okanagan—Shuswap.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, at the fisheries committee, officials from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency could not identify who in government is responsible for ensuring imported seafood is not caught illegally or by using exploited workers. Illegal harvesting and the use of exploited workers are despicable. The government needs to get serious about stopping these activities.

Why is the government not able to identify who is responsible for ensuring that fish and seafood imported to Canada is not caught illegally and is free of exploited labour?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. friend, who I sit with on the fisheries committee.

First and foremost, in terms of focusing on where our product comes from, how it gets there and how healthy it is, the government believes in a couple of things. It believes in science, it believes in process and it believes in getting things right. Over the past six years, we have been doing that. There is room for improvement and we recognize that. That is why we embrace a study on seafood labelling, and that is why we focused on it in the last—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

Oral Questions

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are calling for leadership in moving from pandemic to endemic and managing the country as it learns to live with COVID. In another example of poor management, public health policy is now set against immigration legislation. As of February 28, some guest workers who legally came to work in our country will have their working permits expire and they will not be allowed to leave. This creates the situation for illegal immigration, as individuals may enter Canada unvaccinated and now know they can stay.

To the minister, is this intentional?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is essential when it comes to Canada's immigration system that we have a rules-based process to protect the integrity of the system and to ensure that those who are coming to Canada meet the requirements of admissibility to Canada. It is also essential that we work with the Minister of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada to put in place protections that will protect our communities and our residents against the spread of COVID-19.

I look forward to continuing my work with the Minister of Health and any member of the House who has questions about the integrity of our immigration process and the need to protect Canadians, including through ensuring adequate coverage of vaccination right across the country.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, \$1.7 million is not the price of a house in Hollywood Hills, California. That is the average home price in the town of Caledon in my riding. It is up 35% in one year. The government will say it is spending all kinds of money doing this and doing that. I have a message from my constituents: It is not working.

When will the government realize that what it is doing is having no effect? It is an absolute disaster. When will it do something to help Canadians afford a home?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Once again, it is hard to take the Conservative Party seriously when, last week, it again voted against one of the measures we put forward to give all Canadians access to housing.

Oral Questions

The budget for the national housing strategy is \$72 billion over 10 years. That is the biggest investment the government has made in years.

I would invite my colleague to contribute to all the measures we will be putting forward, including the first-time homebuyer incentive—

• (1155)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, people are bitter about this winter's lockdowns, and I am not talking about the truckers. I am talking about the people who are following the rules and were proud to make sacrifices to protect the most vulnerable.

This winter, we feel like we are paying the price for decades of federal underfunding in the health care system. The chronic underfunding in health is almost as much to blame as the virus for causing the system to break down during the pandemic.

Will the government finally take action and increase health transfers to cover up to 35% of costs?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is a very important question, so I will answer it in English.

[English]

Our government has invested incredible amounts of money to ensure that we have been able to get through this COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided \$63.7 billion to support Canada's health response, including \$14 billion for vaccines and \$5.3 billion for PPE and medical health equipment. In 2020 and 2021, the Government of Canada provided \$41.9 billion in cash to support the provinces and territories through the Canada health transfer—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, that is precisely the elephant in the room.

The health care system has become fragile because it is underfunded by the federal government, which bears a huge share of the responsibility in this. We now have a duty to rebuild the health care system to ensure this never happens again. That is the provinces' responsibility.

This is essential if we are to provide citizens with the care they deserve and for which they pay taxes. It is also absolutely crucial to ensuring that we will never again have to resort to lockdowns in order to protect a system.

Can we paddle in the same direction? Will the government increase health transfers to meet the demands of Quebec and the provinces?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his important question.

During the election campaign, we committed \$25 billion over five years, which means more support for health care. The provinces and territories will receive over \$47 billion through the Canada health transfer in 2021-22, and the territories will receive \$500 million to help them prepare and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

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[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, last August a 17-member Canadian Forces evacuation operations advance team arrived at Ali Al Salem Air Base near Kuwait City so it could link up with the U.S. and U.K. teams already on the ground in Kabul to save Afghans desperate to flee the Taliban. They sat idle for days awaiting orders to deploy, wasting precious time to evacuate Afghans, with many losing their lives. Why?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we will not stop until we have gotten every remaining Canadian out of Afghanistan, and we continue to engage with all—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Can we listen to the answer, please?

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, this issue continues to be of the highest priority to the Canadian government. We will continue to work with allies and with affected people until we have brought all Afghan Canadians home, as well as any of those who have helped us as Canadians in our forces. We will continue to work until we have brought over 40,000 people to Canada.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will tell members why since the government's answers are absolutely useless. The government was more focused and had a higher priority on saving itself and on triggering a selfish and unnecessary election. While our allies were collectively evacuating over 70,000 people, the government told its own Liberal MP to mind his own business when he pleaded with the PMO to help those Afghans. Canada has not even met 20% of its target to help fleeing Afghan refugees. This is despicable.

The government has damaged Canada's reputation and honour. Will it accept any responsibility—

• (1200)

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

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our Canadian Armed Forces did everything we asked of them under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Canada was part of an air bridge with our allies that saved as many people as we could. Our armed forces worked around the clock to evacuate as many people as possible for as long as conditions permitted, including our former interpreters and local staff and citizens of allied countries.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Immigration, we are committed to bringing 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, experts, NGOs and veterans have all been critical in their analysis that one of the leading reasons for Canada's failure last summer in saving Afghans' lives was due to a lack of leadership and not having one Liberal minister assigned as the lead department. Testimony this week at the Afghanistan committee indicates nothing has changed, as many of the ongoing issues cross Global Affairs, Immigration and Public Safety.

My question is simple. Would the lead minister responsible to coordinate the solutions to this ongoing humanitarian-aid crisis please stand up?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to clarify that I have been appointed as the lead minister responsible for the resettlement of 40,000 Afghan refugees. I am further pleased to share that hundreds of Afghan refugees have arrived on 20 different commercial flights in the past few weeks and we are seeing a regular pace of arrivals.

With or without the co-operation of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, we will move forward and we will not waver until we achieve our goal of successfully resettling at least 40,000 Afghan refugees, which represents one of the most substantial commitments of any country in the world.

* * *

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, across the country, businesses are gradually reopening, and they want to improve their ability to guarantee the safest environment possible for their customers.

We know that ventilation that replaces indoor air with outdoor air is an important tool for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Can the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance tell the House how Bill C-8—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance.

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Halifax West for this excellent question.

Bill C-8 would give businesses a 25% refundable tax credit to improve ventilation systems by increasing outdoor air intake or improving air purification.

Owners of small local businesses who need help buying a HEPA filter can take advantage of this new measure. It is an excellent measure for businesses. I hope that the opposition will support it.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadian dairy producers are tired of the government ignoring their expertise. In 2018, the former minister of agriculture announced the new dairy vision working group. This group was meant to craft a vision for the future of Canadian dairy, yet industry officials explained to me that the minister has only consulted scientists and has yet to work with farmers.

If the opinion of the dairy farmers is key to the successful future of this industry, why is the minister following the lead of the Prime Minister and not meeting with actual dairy farmers?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, dairy farmers in my riding must be laughing. I have hundreds of dairy farmers in my riding and I am in close contact with them. I am in regular contact with the Canadian Dairy Commission and the Dairy Processors Association of Canada. We work closely together. They are working on their—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Can we listen to the answer that the minister is trying to provide to the question?

The hon. minister.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Speaker, I follow the dairy file very closely. I have hundreds of dairy farms in my own riding. I am in constant collaboration and discussion with their leaders, and I can assure the member that we are working closely together for a vision for the industry.

*Oral Questions***ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE**

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Madam Speaker, municipalities in my riding appreciate the essential work that the RCMP does in our communities. While municipalities expected increased policing costs in the recent negotiated agreement, the increases are much higher than anticipated. Despite their exclusion from this process, the municipalities are still on the hook for these costs and, for my constituents, this bill ultimately means fewer essential services or higher taxes.

Will the Liberal government throw them a lifeline and absorb the one-time cost of this back pay?

• (1205)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can assure my colleague that we are in touch with her community. I also want to say that the arrangements that exist between the RCMP and provinces and municipalities are well established, so there is a framework there to ensure that there is a cost-sharing agreement. Of course, we want to be fair and equitable as much as possible and those processes will follow.

I want to take a moment to thank the RCMP for all of the concrete support that it is offering communities right now with the illegal blockades, which is why it is imperative that the protesters go home.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, RCMP members are the providers of public safety in rural Canada. They deserve the increase in pay they negotiated with the federal government, but it should not be left to local municipalities to foot the entire bill. Rural communities and municipalities do not have the Liberal government's capacity to borrow or print money. They are required to balance their budgets.

Why is the soft-on-crime Liberal government sticking municipalities with the entire bill and putting rural public safety at risk?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, to be clear, there are long-standing arrangements that exist between the federal government, the provinces and the municipalities. Of course, we remain in very close touch with them to ensure that there is fair and equitable support when it comes to the RCMP.

We will always be sure that the RCMP are properly resourced so that they can provide public safety in communities across the country, which is something that we need now more than ever as we see illegal blockades. It is important that those blockades end and protesters go home so that Canadians can get back to their normal lives.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my constituents in Etobicoke Centre consistently share with me that they expect us to do all we can to fight climate change. Transportation accounts for one-quarter of Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions and many Canadians are reducing their carbon footprints by making a switch to zero-emission vehicles.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources please explain what our government is doing to ensure that Canada's charging and refuelling infrastructure is keeping up with and anticipating the growing adoption of zero-emission vehicles?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for that important question about zero-emission vehicles and the infrastructure across our country. Expanding Canada's infrastructure for zero-emission vehicles is important to making sure that we support Canadians to make that choice for these vehicles.

We have invested in expanding the network. People can now drive from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Victoria using a zero-emission vehicle. However, we are doing more, including a recently opened program in Toronto and the GTA that will expand the network by up to 300 new chargers to support—

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

* * *

CANADA POST

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, last week, reports emerged that the government has been polling to see if it could get away with cutting back the Canada Post services Canadians rely on. Across the country, hundreds of thousands of people including seniors and people with disabilities rely on door-to-door delivery.

While he says he is a friend to labour, the Prime Minister continues to undermine union rights and good-paying jobs. He failed to restore the door-to-door mail delivery cut by Stephen Harper despite a 2015 campaign promise to save the service.

Will the government confirm today that it will not cut the Canada Post services and the jobs that Canadians rely on?

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from coast to coast, Canadians rely on Canada Post and its employees. Canada Post works to ensure its services are available to every Canadian in a timely manner. As the member said, we imposed a moratorium on removing home delivery back in 2017. We are going to continue to provide excellent services to all Canadians through Canada Post.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADIAN OMBUDSPERSON FOR RESPONSIBLE ENTERPRISE

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the annual report on activities from 2019 to 2021, as prepared by the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise.

* * *

• (1210)

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-254, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (change of political affiliation).

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to address the issue of floor crossing, with great thanks to the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for seconding this bill.

Elections are an essential opportunity for voters to express their democratic preferences, but when parliamentarians cross the floor they unilaterally negate the will of their electors. This is a betrayal of trust of the first order. For example, in my riding of Vancouver Kingsway, David Emerson ran as a Liberal in the 2006 election, only to cross the floor to sit in the Conservative cabinet within weeks of being elected. Kingsway citizens of all political persuasions were incensed. They know that the only people who have the right to determine which party represents them in the House of Commons are the voters themselves.

This legislation would not prevent MPs from leaving their caucus or changing their political affiliation, but it would require members who wish to join another party's caucus either to obtain the consent of their constituents or sit as an independent until the next election.

I urge all members to support this important measure to protect the fundamental democratic rights of Canadian voters to choose how they wish to be represented in their House of Commons.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

OTTAWA HOSPITAL

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today to present a petition signed by over 100 Canadians about the site of a new Ottawa hospital.

The National Capital Commission ran a six-month consultation, consulted with the hospital to evaluate 12 different sites and recommended the release of 53 acres of surplus federal office space at Tunney's Pasture for this new hospital. The City of Ottawa seemed

Routine Proceedings

to accept this, but within 72 hours summarily changed its mind and recommended that the new hospital be built on a site of precious green space that included Queen Juliana Park and the Central Experimental Farm.

These petitioners ask that the Government of Canada restore the National Capital Commission's recommendation of Tunney's Pasture as the site for the new hospital. They ask that Queen Juliana Park and the Central Experimental Farm be preserved as green space, and they ask the federal government to support the request for a public inquiry, led by the Province of Ontario, into why this site recommendation was changed so quickly and so summarily.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I also rise today to present a petition signed by Ottawa residents. Over 8,000 Ottawa residents have also signed a petition on an alternate site called change.org on this very issue.

I will summarize the petition. In response to the inexplicable decision without consultation to change the location of where the new hospital should be built from the previously recommended site at Tunney's Pasture, which was recommended by the National Capital Commission, to a site that involves cutting down and destroying an area of forest of over 750 mature canopy trees, ironically at a time when the government says it wants to establish more urban parks within Canada, a panel was put together of eminent Ottawa residents including former Ontario Supreme Court judge Madame Monique Métivier, internationally celebrated Canadian medical physicist Dr. David Rogers, distinguished Canadian environmental engineer Dr. Frank Johnson and award-winning international investigative journalist Dr. Declan Hill.

That panel sought answers from the City of Ottawa and received none, and the panel unanimously called for a public inquiry.

The petitioners call on the government to restore the National Capital Commission's original recommendation to preserve Queen Juliana Park, respect the memory of the Canadians who died in the liberation of the Netherlands, the over 7,600 Canadians in whose honour this park was created originally, and support the panel's request for a public inquiry as soon as possible.

• (1215)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, forgive me for interrupting the business of the day. I was just wondering if the Speaker had called for reports from committee, or motions from committee.

It is my first week as the deputy House leader on the opposition side, and I did not hear the Speaker say that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I did call it, and have been following the orders of the day. As well, we checked the video and it has been confirmed that I did call it.

I presume the member is referring to presenting reports from committees, which I absolutely called. I remember calling it.

Government Orders

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In the matter of a committee report that is incidentally overlooked, I wonder if the hon. member might seek unanimous consent to be able to present his report at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I believe there is confusion with the orders of the day, because the hon. member was asking if I had called for motions, which I did as well. The video confirms this. We are not going to go back on orders of the day.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for giving me a terrific idea. I ask for unanimous consent to return to earlier in Routine Proceedings so we can accept a report from a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

* * *

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 ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1220)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 7—PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-12

Hon. Kamal Khara (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (Guaranteed Income Supplement), be disposed of as follows:

- (a) the bill be ordered for consideration at the second reading stage immediately after the adoption of this order;
- (b) when the House begins debate at the second reading stage of the bill, two members of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may each speak at the said stage for not more than 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments, provided that members may be permitted to split their time with another member;
- (c) at the conclusion of the time provided for the debate at the second reading stage or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, all questions necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill shall be put without further debate or amendment, provided that, if a recorded division is requested, it shall not be deferred;
- (d) if the bill is adopted at the second reading stage, it shall be deemed referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed;
- (e) during consideration of the bill, the House shall not adjourn, except pursuant to a motion moved by a minister of the Crown;

(f) no motion to adjourn the debate may be moved except by a minister of the Crown; and

(g) upon completion of proceedings on the said bill, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day.

She said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak virtually in the House from my constituency of Brampton West, which is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Ojibwa and Chippewa people, and the land that is home to the Métis and is the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague, friend and excellent Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors.

It is my pleasure to speak to the House today to discuss Bill C-12, an Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (Guaranteed Income Supplement), and why we should move quickly to adopt it.

The motion to expedite this matter reflects both the urgent nature of this bill to support the most in-need Canadians and the ongoing collaboration and agreement between parties on this, as well as the simplicity of the policy content.

On the day I was appointed minister, I began discussing this issue, recognizing there were low-income, working seniors who were having trouble making ends meet and that the pandemic benefits they received should not have been a penalty against them, especially not in the subsequent year as the system was set up.

Nothing about this pandemic has been normal, and I would argue that therefore neither should this be. They received CERB and CRB in 2020, but they spent it on things they needed at the time. It helped them to pay for their rent or the groceries or medicine they needed at the time.

I recognize that we cannot go back in time to exempt that income and that, at the time, we were 100% focused on moving quickly to set up benefits and save Canadians' livelihoods. We did that.

This bill would do one thing. It would exempt pandemic relief benefits from the calculation of guaranteed income supplement or allowance benefits beginning in July, 2022.

It is a very short bill. I could quickly read it out, and still have plenty of time in this speech. In fact, the bill is the product of much collaboration among parliamentarians and parties already. I want to take an opportunity to give credit to all the members who represented their constituents by raising the stories of seniors affected, both here in the House and with me directly through my office.

Further, I would like to also thank the stakeholders and the affected seniors themselves for raising this very important issue.

We all understand that this is an extraordinary situation. Working, low-income seniors deserve to be given a break from worrying if the pandemic benefit income they received will impact the low-income supplement they receive.

As mentioned, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit was put in place very quickly in 2020 to help people avoid catastrophic income loss during COVID. An unprecedented pandemic required an unprecedented response.

The CERB and the Canada Recovery Benefit did just that. They allowed Canadians who did not know what was next to not have to worry or choose between a roof over their heads or food on the table.

I will speak more about the merits of the bill during the second reading debate, which I hope we can get to quickly. Today, I am here to say that we need to adopt this motion to quickly move through the stages of the bill. I understand the importance of Parliament's time to scrutinize bills and debate ideas; however, this is one that we have all said we agree on. All parties have said they agree with the bill's content and intent. We all have limited time before officials would no longer be able to effectively implement this and ensure the best results for affected seniors.

Further, we have to consider our colleagues in the other chamber, who also have to consider this matter. We ask a lot of them when we send them emergency pieces of legislation, and I believe it is fair to try to give them adequate time as well.

However, it is clear from what has been said in this place that this matter is urgent. It is urgent that we remove the worry seniors have, and prevent this possible reduction of the guaranteed income supplement due to pandemic benefits.

This has been an extremely challenging time to navigate. Seniors, especially low-income ones, need the security and surety to know that the government will not be counting these pandemic benefits as income when it comes to their GIS calculations. It is simply not a normal time still.

• (1225)

Every July, entitlement to the GIS or the allowance is reassessed based on an individual's income, or the combined income of a couple as reported on the tax return. However, the CRA and ESDC have a lot of work to do together in the months leading up to July. We need to give them the time to make major system changes to make this exemption possible.

The Income Tax Act technically defines pandemic relief benefits as taxable income, which has meant that they are also considered as income when determining entitlement to the GIS or allowance benefits. In order to exempt that income, and to prevent lower benefit payments to some guaranteed income supplement and allowance recipients because of the income they received from these pandemic benefits, Parliament has to pass this bill by early March. Every day thereafter causes immense challenges for the system, and will have an impact on seniors' files. We need to move quickly to rectify the situation.

This is the unprecedented aftermath of an unprecedented response to certainly an unprecedented crisis. During my speech at second reading, I will further discuss our government's one-time payment that would help seniors affected by 2020 benefits as announced in the economic fiscal update. I recognize—

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. If I could interrupt the minister for a moment, I know you had wanted to share time with the parliamentary secretary. Since this is the opening round, you have unlimited time, plus you cannot not actually share that unless there is unanimous consent to allow the parliamentary secretary to take his time as well. The hon. parliamentary secretary may make that ask.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as a custom of the chamber, we often allow members to split their time. I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to allow the minister to share her time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the minister to share her time with the parliamentary secretary?

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: There is no consent.

What we can do is try to bump the parliamentary secretary down into the next sequence for the Liberal Party.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I think we all recognize, and all members have agreed with me, that we should do this payment as quickly as possible. We are supporting Canadians through an automatic, one-time payment to compensate the full amount of the loss of their GIS as soon as possible through the same one-time payment system that we have used in the past for seniors. I am happy to continue speaking to hon. members who want to support their constituents quickly, as we can all agree it is an extremely important issue. I have certainly had many conversations with hon. members on all sides on this extremely important point.

However, that is not what this bill is about. Bill C-12 would permanently exempt federal pandemic benefits from the calculation of GIS or allowance benefits beginning in July 2022, preventing this from happening again on a go forward basis. We are rectifying the previous situation and now, through this bill, we would make sure that it does not repeat itself. I think we can all agree that this bill would ensure a consistent approach for low-income seniors throughout this pandemic. We can continue to discuss the one-time payment for seniors, but we truly have a chance to expedite this bill over to the other chamber for further scrutiny.

As I mentioned, Bill C-12 is a very short, simple and clear bill, and something that I have spoken to members in other parties about. It is a simple exemption that would help seniors who really, truly need it. I certainly respect Parliament, and I am happy to make myself available to speak to parliamentarians on this.

Government Orders

We have to think about Canadians and those affected seniors. Our officials have certainly made immense strides towards making it possible for us to support these tens of thousands of seniors across the country. We should take this opportunity to show Canadians how this minority Parliament can work quickly, collaboratively and positively to achieve real results, and the motion today truly helps us do just that.

I am hopeful that hon. members will agree that Parliament has many important matters to discuss but should not belabour a point that we all agree on. In fact, I am appearing at the human resources, skills development and persons with disability committee on Monday about my mandate letter. This mandate letter commits me to, “Ensure seniors’ eligibility for the Guaranteed Income Supplement is not negatively impacted by receipt of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit...and the Canada Recovery Benefit...” I will certainly be discussing this with committee members during that meeting, and they can pose questions to me and my officials on this extremely important bill during that appearance.

As I have said, I have had conversations with members from all parties on this, and all have agreed that it is something we need to move forward on. We know that seniors are looking forward to all of us doing the right thing, and by working collaboratively, we can really show Canadians how, in a minority Parliament, we can all come together and do the right thing.

We are constantly working hard to find permanent solutions that will bring ongoing comfort and relief to the men and women whose hard work has contributed to the Canada we are so proud and privileged to call home. Seniors deserve nothing less than the best. We acted very fast to resolve this issue, and I truly hope that my hon. colleagues agree that this bill deserves a swift passage.

• (1230)

I will speak to the bill itself, and to start, I would like to remind hon. members that GIS is an income-tested benefit payable to low-income seniors who receive the old age security pension. The allowances are income-tested benefits payable to those aged 60 to 64 who are spouses, common-law partners, widows or widowers of GIS recipients, and every July an individual's entitlement for these income-tested benefits is reassessed based on individuals' income or the combined income of a couple. Therefore, the GIS and allowance benefits would be able to increase, decrease, stay the same or be seized, according to the changes in a person's annual net income.

The Income Tax Act defines pandemic relief benefits as taxable income, which has meant that they also are considered as income in determining entitlement to the GIS or allowance benefits. Unfortunately, that meant that some GIS and allowance recipients may now be facing lower benefit payments because of the income they received from these pandemic benefits.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we are requesting for unanimous consent to allow the parliamentary secretary for seniors to also speak for no more than 10 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: There is a request for unanimous consent to allow the parliamentary secretary to speak for 10 minutes, with questions and comments for five minutes after. Any members opposed to the motion will please say nay.

It is agreed.

I will go back to the minister to finish her speech.

• (1235)

Hon. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, I will conclude, so my parliamentary secretary can continue this conversation.

We are constantly working hard to find permanent solutions to bring ongoing comfort and relief to those seniors who have contributed to making Canada what it is today. I think this motion truly showcases that we can all come together in all parties, and I think Canadians are looking at all of us to do the right thing. It is a very simple bill, and I am happy to chat about this more, as I will with my hon. colleagues at the HUMA committee on Monday.

This is really an opportunity for us to come together, and I hope my hon. colleagues will agree that this bill deserves to move swiftly through its passage.

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AN ACT RESPECTING CERTAIN MEASURES RELATED TO COVID-19

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I give notice that, with respect to the consideration of Government Business No. 8, at the end of the next sitting day of the House, a minister of the Crown shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that debate not be further adjourned.

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, furthermore, I give notice that, with respect to the consideration of Government Business No. 7, at the next sitting of the House a minister of the Crown shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that debate not be further adjourned.

* * *

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 7—PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-12

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister suggested today that she is looking at moving quickly and collaboratively. It is a brilliant notion, but my concern is that we have been looking to move quickly and collaboratively since I became a member in September.

Government Orders

If the idea is to move as quickly and collaboratively as we and our stakeholders would like to, what has taken so long?

Hon. Kamal Khara (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we all agree why the quick passage of this bill is so important. We know how difficult this pandemic has been for those most vulnerable seniors. The bill is short, concise and clear. Bill C-12 would do what I said. It would exempt pandemic relief benefits for the calculation of GIS or allowance benefits, so that seniors who took pandemic benefits last year would have the security that their GIS will not be impacted.

It is something that the hon. member and I have chatted about. This is on top of the work that was announced in the fall economic statement. I think all parties agree on the merits of the contents of the bill. Let us get it passed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is saying that we need to move quickly with this bill. However, even if we were to pass the bill today, nothing would change for seniors until the summer.

I remind members that we have been sounding the alarm on this issue since August. Could the minister tell me at least one other thing, aside from the bill being debated today, that she has considered to address the situation?

[*English*]

Hon. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, I have had conversations with the hon. member's party. I know we all agree. I also understand why there is urgency with this bill and of course, I share her concerns when moving quickly on the one-time payments we announced.

When I was appointed to this role, we moved very quickly and worked extremely hard with our officials and the Minister of Finance to make a major investment in the fiscal and economic update. My colleagues from all parties have received briefings on this. I assure them we will work quickly on that front. This bill will ensure that this does not happen again. That is what Bill C-12 is all about. I hope we can put aside our partisanship and move forward to ensure those—

The Deputy Speaker: We will continue with questions and comments.

The hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in May 2021 the NDP sent a letter to the government outlining very clearly that we saw this as a huge risk and that action needed to be taken immediately.

When the minister talks about the government moving quickly, I simply do not buy it. We were very clear. We knew that the poorest people in our country, seniors who receive GIS and parents who were receiving the child tax benefit, would potentially lose a significant portion, if not all, of those benefits. We alerted the government to this and asked for rapid action. This is ridiculous, in my opinion.

Why is the government choosing not to listen to Campaign 2000, which called out for an advanced payment? Waiting until May is simply too long for people who have been waiting since July.

• (1240)

Hon. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her advocacy on this issue. She and I have had conversations about this as well. From the day I was appointed Minister of Seniors, we moved very quickly on this. We worked extremely quickly with our officials and the Minister of Finance to put a major investment in the fall economic statement to fully compensate those seniors who were affected last year

I think we can put aside our partisanship for one second. This bill will do exactly what all the parties have been telling us to do. All the stakeholders are telling us to do just that. It will exclude any pandemic benefit incomes for the purposes of calculating GIS going forward. I think we have a real opportunity to work together to showcase to Canadians how a place can work in collaboration to help those most vulnerable. I want to thank the hon. member. We are going to make sure the most vulnerable seniors have the supports they need.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for allowing me to speak with unanimous consent. This is very important to low-income seniors across the country, but extremely important to me as well.

While the Minister of Seniors provided a lot of important context on the urgency of this bill and the merits of passing this motion, I want to add a few points of support that hon. members can consider as we move forward.

First, I would like to acknowledge that I am joining the debate on the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people here in beautiful Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia. I am here to discuss government business no. 7, which would expedite Bill C-12, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act. In short, this bill would exempt pandemic relief benefits from the calculation of the guaranteed income supplement or allowance benefits beginning in July of 2022.

I would like to explain why we are proposing this amendment and I hope that hon. members will see the urgency and the merit of rapid adoption.

As hon. members know, we put in place the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB, and the Canada recovery benefit, CRB, to help people at the height of the pandemic, and the financial sector has confirmed that these benefits have helped families avoid catastrophic income loss. However, we also know that these benefits were counted as income and had an impact on some of our most low-income seniors. This is happening because eligibility for the GIS and the allowances is based on how much net income an individual earned the previous year.

Government Orders

Since the CERB and the CRB are taxable, they can and do impact GIS eligibility. Unfortunately, that meant that some GIS and allowance recipients may now be facing lower benefit payments because of the income they received from these pandemic benefits. We recognize that some seniors were facing significant challenges as a result of this and we needed to move quickly to rectify the situation.

In the 2021 economic and fiscal update, our government committed \$742 million for one-time payments to support seniors who were experiencing hardship because of this. I want to tip my hat to the minister for this because I know how hard she worked and how determined she was to get that in the economic and fiscal update. GIS and allowance recipients who received CERB or the Canada recovery benefit in 2020 will get help. We are going to compensate seniors for their loss of GIS or allowance benefits, and we are going to make it simple. Seniors would not need to take any action to receive the one-time payment. They will receive it automatically, in the same way that they receive their GIS or allowance benefits.

This automatic one-time payment will support those who saw a loss of GIS or allowance by compensating them for the full annualized loss amount. However, we did not just want to provide a quick fix. Instead, we wanted to ensure that seniors will not be facing a loss or a reduction in benefits again.

That is why we introduced this bill. Bill C-12 would exempt federal pandemic benefits from the calculation of GIS or allowance benefits beginning in July. This bill speaks directly to the needs of seniors that have been raised by members on every side of this House. Once again, we are proposing this crucial change to the Old Age Security Act to ensure that this problem never happens again. To do so, we have a very short window of opportunity at a very busy time of the year. We must have royal assent on Bill C-12 by March 4 to guarantee that this takes effect as of July 1.

Going forward, GIS and allowance recipients who received pandemic benefits will not experience any loss or reduction in their future benefits. This is something that should resonate with all members, and we have heard from so many members that it has and that they care about seniors in their communities. This will automatically prevent this from happening again to constituents.

These proposed measures are just a few of the many activities that we have undertaken, both before COVID struck and in the two years since. Indeed, the well-being of seniors has been a priority for our government since 2015. In 2016, we increased the GIS for nearly 900,000 low-income seniors. As a result of this and other government initiatives, an estimated 45,000 seniors were lifted out of poverty between 2015 and 2019. We also put thousands of dollars back in the pockets of future seniors by restoring the age of eligibility from 67 to 65 for GIS benefits and the old age security pension.

Then, when the pandemic hit, we stepped up to protect the most vulnerable among us, including seniors. To help seniors cover increased costs by COVID-19, we provided a one-time, tax-free payment of \$300 for those eligible for the OAS pension and an additional \$200 for OAS pensioners who were eligible for the GIS. We also provided a special top-up payment through the GIS credit in April 2020. More than four million low- and modest-income se-

niors benefited from this top-up, which gave an average of \$375 for single seniors and \$510 for couples.

● (1245)

Our Government of Canada will also increase the OAS pension by 10% for older seniors aged 75 and over. As a first step, we have provided a one-time payment of \$500 to the OAS pensioners who will be aged 75 or over as of June 30, 2022, to help meet their immediate financial needs. In July 2022, the OAS pension will be permanently increased by 10% for seniors aged 75 and over. That increase will provide an extra \$766 to full pensioners in the first year and improve the financial security of seniors later in life.

These are just some of the supports that our government has provided to improve the lives and financial situations of Canadian seniors. We continue to search for ways to improve our supports and services for seniors, and we will listen to all members who have suggestions.

During the pandemic, we focused our support on people. We put in place the CERB and the Canada recovery benefit to help people at the height of the pandemic. We helped millions of Canadians pay the bills and put food on the table with this support. However, we also know that it is now having an impact on some of our most vulnerable and we are taking action today to deal with that.

This bill is focused on dealing with this issue on a go-forward basis. We need all members' support to make that happen quickly. With Bill C-12, we would make an important legislative change that would provide seniors with peace of mind and certainty in knowing that they will not face any undue financial hardships if they continue to access pandemic benefits in the future. We hope they will not have to, but we committed to being there for Canadians as long as it takes. The pandemic has highlighted the many challenges facing our most vulnerable seniors. We have done a lot, but it is an area where we still have more to do.

The minister and I will continue to be available throughout this process to talk about this bill. We have already spoken to many members in the House about this. I know that all members here have expressed that they want to solve this issue in exactly the way this bill would do. All parties have suggested that.

Therefore, we should put politics aside and put people first in this case. Canadians expect that much of us when it comes to low-income working seniors who need this worry taken away. Let us support these most vulnerable seniors by quickly passing this bill, through this motion.

• (1250)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, this government motion will push through Bill C-12 with minimal debate, zero committee study and no opportunity to improve it or strengthen it. Can the member perhaps acknowledge that this is deviating from standard practice that is entrenched in this place?

Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her advocacy on this very important topic.

We have been asked by all members in the House to move quickly. This bill would do what we have been asked to do and what is needed to do to help these most vulnerable seniors. Moving quickly is very important. That has been said in the House many times. I urge this member and her colleagues on the other side to support this.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois sent many communications before and during the election campaign, but the government did not realize until December 2021 that things were not okay.

My question for the parliamentary question is simple. He used the word “quickly” a lot, so I would like to know what, exactly, “quickly” means to this government.

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Bloc members for being supportive of Bill C-12. There have been lots of conversations with the critic and with individual members and I know that the Bloc supports this. If the Bloc will be willing to support Bill C-12, through this motion today, we will move this along more quickly.

The last thing we need to have happen is to have this go past the March 4 deadline and delay this any further. This is a simple fix. This bill is not pages long. It is five lines and it speaks to what is needed and what has been asked for.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary just mentioned, this is a simple fix. This, of course, could have been done before the last election. It was something the NDP brought to the government's attention as a critical issue for seniors. Of course, the government did not do that and the election happened. Even after the election, it is not until now that this bill is being brought forward.

With that being said, even if the measures in the bill go through in an expedited fashion, seniors will still not get the resources they need to survive. In my riding of Vancouver East now we have seniors who are getting evicted. They cannot wait some more months to get the help they need. Will the government do what Campaign 2000 asked for, which is to advance payments to seniors before the bill is passed?

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Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Speaker, the urgency in the hon. member's voice is exactly why we need to move quickly to get this passed, pronto. If we think back to Tuesday, when we had the Conservative opposition day motion, everyone in the House knew it was the right thing to do and voted together in support. Let us not let perfect be the enemy of better. Let us pass this bill quickly so this does not happen to our lowest-income, vulnerable seniors in the future.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this has been a source of such grief. I do not think there is a member in this place who has not heard from distraught seniors about the unintended consequences of their decision to accept the CERB and then be punished in the way they have been punished. I regret that it took legislation to fix this mistake.

However, I want to make the point I have been trying to make throughout the morning about how quickly this is going through and share this with perhaps the newer members who are not as used to seeing how often members of Parliament pass billions of dollars of spending without a chance to look at that at all. My first time here, actually it was in Centre Block, there was a Speech from the Throne under the Harper government. I walked down to the Senate chambers to listen to the speech. I was waiting for a hip replacement in those days, so I walked back slowly. By the time I got back to the House, this entire place, through unanimous consent, had deemed that over \$5 billion of spending had been studied by committee, had been reviewed and we all said we should spend the money. It is not uncommon.

I think this will get studied at committee, so I want to ask if this is uncommon in the experience of the parliamentary secretary.

• (1255)

The Deputy Speaker: I will allow the parliamentary secretary about 30 seconds to finish that up.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Speaker, I did not think I was going to have any time to respond to my friend from the Green Party from Saanich—Gulf Islands. I thank her very much for the question and for everything that she does in the House. I know she is a person who does not put politics before the things that are important to Canadian seniors in this country, so I hope she will support moving forward on this simple five-line bill.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping to rise today to speak positively of the first piece of legislation in my portfolio. I wanted to share with the House how helpful the new Minister of Seniors has been. I wanted to be able to point to the past week as an example of this legislation putting aside partisan differences to deliver results for Canadian seniors. Instead, what we have is the government House leader's office using Canadian seniors to play petty procedural games.

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The situation is urgent today. It was urgent a month ago. It was urgent a year ago. Many Canadian seniors are feeling neglected and desperate. After we raised the hopes of low-income seniors, they are exhausted, fed up and tired of hearing the government has their backs.

A payout timeline for May 2022 would leave impacted seniors waiting over 10 months. This situation did not happen overnight. It has been a long time coming, and it was not acted upon until the government was continuously pressed on this by my colleagues of all stripes in the House.

Our Prime Minister identified that it was an unintended conflict between the CERB and the GIS programs. If the magnitude of the impact of the GIS clawback were truly understood or fully appreciated by the federal government, distribution of the clawback repayment would have and should have already happened. The outrage I have heard from constituents and stakeholders in Hastings—Lennox and Addington and seniors across our great country is alarming. We need to get the money into the pockets of our seniors immediately.

Let me tell a story. A fine gentleman of 71 years old from my riding is working hard with extra shifts to cover increased rent. He is too proud to acknowledge to his own family how much he is struggling. He opened up to me. He shared stories with me from the good old days, stories of his late wife and the family reunions and trips they used to go on. Today, sadly, he lives very modestly. He volunteers at the food bank two days a week, in part because he loves the social aspect of it, but more importantly because those are two days he can have a warm meal. Another gentleman, whom I have known most of my life, is now evicted and is living in his car.

These are just a few examples of hundreds of real stories of human lives being affected. Our vulnerable seniors are feeling sad and forgotten. Everyone has a story. Everyone makes choices on how they navigate through life. However, we can all agree this country is in chaos. Many of our Canadian seniors have stepped up and done what they needed to do, and now it is time for our Prime Minister and the Government of Canada to do the same.

Growing older, becoming more seasoned and entering into a different phase of our life can be beautiful. Aging gracefully and staying engaged mentally, spiritually and physically in our retirement years is a special chapter of life to embrace. Sadly, this is not the case for all. Many of our vulnerable seniors are done. They are tired of living. Heating their homes is more expensive. In fact, yesterday I spoke with a constituent who has ice on her window ledge in the room where she sleeps, and she bundles up with extra blankets. On top of this, many are experiencing loss and loneliness, which have been highlighted by this pandemic, regret, lack of proper care, lack of hygiene, dementia, financial and physical abuse, and fear of technology. The list goes on. Now seniors are being put on the sidelines until May so that between now and May, they need to live each day in the hope that they can persevere until the next.

● (1300)

Currently, COVID-19-related benefits are not listed exemptions under the act for the purpose of benefit calculations. The proposal is to amend the definition of income in the OAS by deducting the amount received from three COVID-19 benefit acts. Do not get me

wrong. I am delighted that the government wishes to move forward on this. The goal of the legislation is not to have a repeat of the 2021 GIS clawback. This is great news. My concern is, why the delay? More specifically, why would we not be allowing the House to properly and respectfully review the options that have been presented, respect the process of healthy debate and swiftly move forward in the best interests of all seniors being impacted? I can appreciate that time is sensitive and action is required, but not at the expense of ensuring that this bill is presented in its best, most thorough possible form.

Yesterday, in response to the Thursday question posed by my very capable colleague from Barrie—Innisfil, the government House leader indicated that the reason for ramming through Bill C-12 was to move as “expeditiously as possible”. I nearly fell out of my seat when I heard the member say that, and this is why. When ministers are called before committees, they have a document prepared for them. It briefs them on topics that may be raised, including answers to potential questions. These binders are available online for anyone to read.

In May 2020, the then Minister of Seniors appeared before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. As is standard practice, the minister was prepared a binder by departmental officials. In that binder in section 7, under the heading “Questions and answers—COVID-19 Economic Response Plan: Support for Canadians and businesses” and under “Interaction with CERB and GIS”, the following question appears: “Will income from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit be used in the calculation of Guaranteed Income Supplement benefits?” The answer is as follows:

It is considered to be taxable income and must be considered when determining entitlement to the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and the Allowances.

This being said, this will not affect the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and the Allowances for about a year. Income received from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit in 2020 will only affect GIS and Allowances benefit amounts beginning in July 2021, as those benefits will be based on 2020 income.

That is a direct, verbatim quote from the government's own briefing binders, proving the government was aware of this issue for at least 21 months and chose not to act. We keep hearing that this legislation is urgently needed. On this side of the House, we have been constantly asking the government about this, since I have been here and for months before that. Flags were raised to the government and it did not do anything. In fact, not only did it do nothing to address the issue, but it actively chose to dither. Its own briefing binders point out that this was going to be an issue a year down the road.

The government, knowing full well what its decision would mean, did nothing. After tens of thousands of seniors began reaching out to their members of Parliament, including, I would suspect, every single member on the other side as well, the decision was to do nothing. To be clear, I do not necessarily pin all of this on the minister. I can certainly appreciate that it takes time to settle into a new role and get accustomed to the file, especially one that stretches laterally across so many different policy areas, as the seniors file does.

• (1305)

While I am so happy to see movement on this file, I must reiterate that government inaction is the reason we are even considering the motion before us. This should have been addressed months ago. Hopefully, moving forward, the government will realize that there are real costs to inaction, which are being borne by our most vulnerable seniors during the deadliest pandemic in a century. It did not have to be this way. Canadian seniors did not need to be placed by the government in a position to choose between food, medication and shelter, but this is where we find ourselves, and I pray that it will never happen again.

The government's motion would ram through Bill C-12 with minimal debate, zero committee study, no ministerial accountability and a total denial of an opportunity for amendments to be proposed to improve and strengthen those very important measures. While this may be fairly obvious to my colleagues in the House, we must be absolutely positive that any deviation from standard practices is considered greatly and not done without heavy thought.

What I am particularly concerned about here is the divergence from long-standing, well-established practices. In their defence, I will turn to the wisdom of those who came before us, those who have examined and established the rules of today.

On September 24, 1968, the House of Commons ordered a special committee of this place to be struck. Its objective was to “report upon the advisability of making changes in the orders concerning the business of supply, the business of ways and means, the stages of the legislative process, and the operation of the standing committees of this House”. Over 26 meetings, the Special Committee on Procedure of the House produced its report. The fourth report recommended changes to the legislative process and is the genesis for so much of what we have today, including what our predecessors envisioned as the role of each stage of the debate process. The authors had this to say:

10. In considering the reform of the legislative process your Committee has taken into account the need to eliminate obsolete procedures; the desirability of providing more meaningful opportunities for Members, and particularly back benchers, to participate in the consideration and shaping of a bill; the desirability of identifying the crucial stages in a bill's passage which, in your Committee's opinion, should occur later rather than earlier in the legislative process; and the necessity of ensuring that the legislative programme of a session, following reasonable consideration by Parliament, should always be completed in this age of heavy governmental responsibilities.

11. In the hope of achieving these aims the Committee's recommendations, which are contained in its Fourth Report, are based on the following principles:

(d) The motion for the Second Reading would read:

“That this bill be now read a second time and referred to a committee”.

This motion, if passed, would imply that the House had given preliminary consideration to the bill and that, without any commitment as to the final passage of the bill, had authorized its reference to a committee for detailed scrutiny. Your Commit-

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tee believes that the significance of the Second Reading stage has been exaggerated in the past, and that the decisive stage should occur later in a bill's passage after it has emerged from a committee. The purpose of the Second Reading stage is to define the scope of a bill, and to extend its significance any further is, in our opinion, to distort the meaning of the legislative process.

I do not believe the authors could have been any more clear. It is extremely evident that they placed a great importance on the committee stage, and subsequently on third reading over second.

• (1310)

The report continues:

The motion for Third Reading would read: “That this bill be now read a third time and passed.” This wording would indicate clearly and unambiguously that the final and most crucial decision relating to the passage of a bill would be taken at the Third Reading. At present the Third Reading is seldom debated and has become almost a formal stage. Your Committee does not envisage that a debate should necessarily take place at the Third Reading, but it attaches great importance to the preservation of the opportunity for debate at this stage. We wish to emphasize that the Third Reading should always be the decisive stage and that in the case of a highly controversial bill it could be a most crucial debating stage.

The report of the Special Committee on Procedure also had quite a bit to say regarding the importance of committee, another key stage of the legislative process that this motion would do away with.

It further states:

It will be apparent from the recommendations already made in relation to supply and the legislative process that your Committee envisages a significant extension of the functions of the Standing Committees and in consequence a substantial strengthening of their importance and influence. They would become the forums in which the details of expenditure and legislation would be closely considered. They would investigate the operations and continuing programmes of government departments and would develop areas of subject specialisation. We would expect debate in the Standing Committees to be well-informed and pertinent; their members to become influential in the areas of their specialised experience; and their reports to the House to assume a critical significance related more closely to the national interest as a whole than to simple political differences. We also anticipate that the business of the House would be greatly expedited and handled more efficiently through exploiting the potential of the committee system of the House to the full.

The importance of these stages of the legislative process cannot, and must not, be understated. What we have in front of us is admittedly a very important piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation that should have come long ago. Many Canadian seniors are waiting. Many are desperate, and our federal government has a significant role to play.

I have mentioned before while standing in the House that the role of an effective opposition is not just to oppose and critique. Our responsibility is to build solutions. We need to ensure that all low-income seniors who saw their GIS clawed back in 2021 are included in appropriate and timely, yet thorough, legislation. This portfolio need not be partisan.

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I welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the minister to ensure that we are working together in the best interests of all Canadian seniors. This brings forward the very obvious question of how we balance the importance of legislative scrutiny with the need to get this legislation passed in a timely manner. I think I have the solution.

Therefore I move that the motion be amended as follows:

(a) in paragraph (a), by replacing the words “immediately after the adoption of this order” with the words “at the next sitting of the House”;

(b) by deleting paragraph (b);

(c) in paragraph (c), by replacing the words “the debate” with the words “Government Orders on the day the bill is considered”;

(d) in paragraph (d), by deleting all the words after the words “if the bill is” and substituting the following: “read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, consideration in committee shall take place the following day, provided that the Minister of Seniors be ordered to appear as a witness before the committee during its consideration of the bill, and that if the committee has not completed the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill by 11:00 p.m. that day, all remaining amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved, the Chair shall put, forthwith and successively without further debate, every question necessary to dispose of the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, and the committee be instructed to report the bill to the House, by depositing it with the Clerk of the House, no later than three hours before the next sitting of the House”;

(e) in paragraph (e), by deleting all the words and substituting the following: “no notice of motions in amendment shall be allowed at report stage”;

(f) in paragraph (f), by deleting all the words and substituting the following: “the report stage and third reading stage of the bill may be considered during the same sitting and be ordered for consideration at the next sitting following the presentation of the report”; and

(g) in paragraph (g), by deleting all the words and substituting the following: “when the order is read for the consideration of the bill at report stage, the motion to concur in the bill at report stage be deemed carried on division and the House then proceed immediately to consideration of the bill at the third reading stage, provided that, at the conclusion of the time provided for Government Orders that day or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the bill be deemed read a third time and passed on division”.

● (1315)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

● (1320)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated many of the comments the member put on the record this afternoon. I, for one, would love to see a reform of our Standing Orders. There are a number of things that we could be doing. It is not to give a strategic advantage to an opposition party or to a governing party. I think we need to modernize our rules. Many of the issues she has raised today, and I think other members have raised previously, would be well served by revisiting our Standing Orders. I hope to, at some time over the next couple of months, engage in doing that.

In regard to the legislation itself, the member seems to see the value of it. She understands the shortness of the legislation. If the member could wave a wand, when would she like to see the legislation enacted?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Madam Speaker, I can certainly acknowledge that I agree this is a bill of urgent nature and yes, with regard to the minister, she suggested that there is simplicity in its nature. She also suggested that every day we wait to pass this, we are impacting seniors.

However, I must acknowledge that we have been waiting. Canadian seniors have been waiting, and I do not think that, with respect to due process, if we respect the democracy of this place and the voices of all here, we can still proceed in a timely manner.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with some of the member's speech, especially around the reality that it was known a very long time ago that the pandemic benefits were going to have significant impacts not only on seniors and the GIS, but of course on families and the child tax benefit. It is especially sad when we look at these two benefits and how they directly link to keeping Canadians out of poverty. Having those clawed back, especially during the pandemic, seems very careless.

Would the member respond to Campaign 2000? It is asking for an advance payment to be directed to the seniors of this country who had their GIS clawed back, sort of as an interim measure as they assess and get to the next step of the final payment.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Madam Speaker, we can certainly acknowledge that we want to move as quickly and collaboratively as we can. We want to be able to help Canadian seniors as quickly as we can. With regard to the advance payment, it should have already happened, so the sooner the better. It has been too little, too late.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her nice, long speech.

I just want to point out that seniors were the first to be affected by the pandemic. This came at a time when they were isolated, living with anxiety and losing money.

There were also the retired nurses and health care professionals who decided to return to work but whose GIS payments were clawed back as a result.

I could also talk about the two classes of seniors this government has created: those aged 65 to 74, who have been abandoned to live in financial insecurity, and those aged 75 and up, who have been recognized by the government.

What does the member think we could do with this bill to address these two classes of seniors?

[*English*]

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Madam Speaker, it seems that it does not matter where we go. At age 55, we are seniors at Shopper's Drug Mart, and at age 65, we are seniors somewhere else. At age 70, we are seniors somewhere else.

What we need to address here is that we respect the intention of the bill in principle. We want to make sure that it is heard and equally debated and listened to. The thorough passage of this, and thorough understanding and debate, are critical to moving forward.

• (1325)

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would agree with my hon. colleague. It certainly strains credulity when one considers that it was known for so long that this was an issue. Moreover, we had a Prime Minister who called nothing but a vanity election and then waited for months to reconvene Parliament. I echo the member's sentiments, and understand her sentiments questioning the need to ram this through.

She spoke about the necessity of debate in a democratic system. What sorts of things does she wish to hear about, or what types of witnesses does she wish to hear from, and what topics may be undertaken in a study at committee?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Madam Speaker, let us not be mistaken. We are all delighted that the government is finally moving on this, and we want to work together collaboratively to make this happen. With regard to listening to real Canadian stories of hardship and loss, Canadian seniors have been struggling. Low-income seniors are worthy of some healthy debate by the people they elected to be here. There is a tremendous amount of study, but this is not something that we would belabour. We need to act on it quickly. It does not need to be long and drawn-out.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with intent during the member's speech and there are a couple of things I would like to comment on before I get to my question.

The government has been there for seniors since it was elected in 2015, whether it was increases in the guaranteed income supplement or the emergency payments during the pandemic. We have brought 250,000 seniors out of poverty and we are also proposing to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$500 above and beyond what this legislative measure represents.

Constituents in my riding remember that when the Harper Conservatives were in government, they increased the OAS eligibility up to 67. I know the member opposite was not part of that government at the time.

I am proud of the government's record. I am concerned that the member, in one breath, says that we have to get support out to seniors, but yet procedurally is saying it is absolutely important, notwithstanding the fact that we could have agreement in the House to move forward with this measure, and she does not want to move in that fashion.

My question to the member is on solutions. The Conservative Party is often calling for pulling back on finances. I am fine with that if that is its principle, but at the same time, she is saying we need to do more for seniors. What would her solutions be? Is it to put more money back into seniors' pockets by government spending more? Is it spending less, and if so, what impact would that have on seniors? Can she speak to that?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, six years ago I still had a BlackBerry. I was not part of the Harper government and I will not speak to that today. The focus of

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the debate is seniors. The official opposition, the Conservative Party of Canada, is suggesting constructive, thorough and timely action. We are not disagreeing with the government. This should have been acknowledged months ago and I am happy to be part of the solution.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about a subject that is very dear to my heart, namely, the living conditions of our seniors. I would also like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mirabel.

Bill C-12, which is currently before us, seeks to amend the Old Age Security Act to exclude any pandemic relief benefits from the calculation of the guaranteed income supplement.

It is important to note that, as it now stands, the bill would exclude those benefits only as of July 2022. It will come as no surprise when I say that my Bloc Québécois colleagues and I will support the bill introduced by the Minister of Seniors because it is a first step, however timid, toward correcting the tragic injustice that has befallen thousands of seniors, who are being penalized for taking advantage of measures that were supposed to help them.

It is appalling that, after working their entire lives, our seniors are experiencing a lower quality of life, a loss of purchasing power and a loss of dignity because of an uncaring government's administrative incompetence.

The Bloc Québécois has a deep and unwavering conviction that we must either acknowledge or at least have the decency to make it possible for each of our seniors to live with dignity, sheltered from financial insecurity.

As a Quebecker from the Lower St. Lawrence, I know that the progressive, prosperous and proud society that I had the good fortune to grow up in, and now devote my work to, was built by those who came before me. Architects and labourers of the Quiet Revolution, our grandparents and parents dedicated their lives to building today's modern and innovative Quebec.

On a more personal level, I would like to acknowledge that I am lucky and privileged to represent the people of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. In my region, the Lower St. Lawrence, 26.8% of the people are 65 or older, while the Quebec average is around 19.7%. By 2040, it is estimated that more than one-third of my constituents will be 65 or older.

It goes without saying that measures that have an impact on the living conditions of seniors are acutely felt in my neck of the woods, and the current problem is no exception. In fact, at my offices in Rimouski and in Témiscouata-sur-le-Lac, I have gotten many calls and messages from seniors distressed by cuts to their GIS since July 2021.

These benefits help them meet their basic needs, and the hardship they are experiencing cannot be overstated. They do not understand why the government is failing to show any leadership to correct the situation.

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Take for example Ms. Gagnon from Trois-Pistoles. She was receiving a combined pension of \$1,409 a month, and she received the CERB in 2020 after abruptly losing her job. In October 2021, her monthly income went from \$1,409 to \$719 when her GIS was completely cut off.

Imagine having \$690 clawed back from one day to the next. Ms. Gagnon could not maintain her standard of living when her benefit barely covered her rent. To put food on the table, she had to resort to a food bank. To fill the tank, she had to max out her credit card. That is because Ms. Gagnon is now being taxed at an effective federal rate of 50%, which is almost twice the marginal rate that Canada's wealthiest taxpayers pay.

My hon. colleague from Mirabel is an economist by trade. Given that we are talking about marginal rates, of course it made sense to share my time with him.

Even though it was decided at the beginning that the CERB would be taxable, nobody in the federal government notified GIS recipients that collecting the CERB would cut into their benefits quite this much.

• (1330)

It makes absolutely no sense that the most vulnerable seniors in our society should have to face such an injustice. Furthermore, the corrective measure proposed in Bill C-12 does not take effect until July 2022. This means that GIS recipients will have had to cope with a drastically reduced monthly payment for 12 long and difficult months. Why did the government not act sooner?

The Bloc Québécois wrote to the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Finance before the last election was even called this past August to bring this matter to their attention before it was too late, but to no avail. This government decided to call an election in the midst of a pandemic, and meanwhile, it is taking more than a year to correct a situation that is having a devastating impact.

The Bloc Québécois has also called for the measures in the bill to take effect as of March 2022 rather than July. We were told that this was impossible for IT-related reasons, which is both absurd and appalling. How can an IT system be so rigid that the government would rather force seniors into financial insecurity than change the parameters of the system?

In closing, not only is Bill C-12 arriving far too late, it is missing a core element for it to really address the problems that the pandemic relief measures created for GIS recipients. What is strikingly missing from this bill is the \$742 million in retroactive one-time payments promised in December's economic and fiscal update. This one-time payment was supposed to compensate GIS recipients who had received the CERB or the CRB in 2020, by alleviating the financial difficulties they are facing.

This government promised \$742 million to vulnerable seniors who desperately need it. Today, it has chosen to take a pass on keeping its promise. How long will seniors have to wait before receiving the amounts they were promised and are owed?

Need I remind my colleagues that Quebec and Canada are facing the highest rate of inflation in 35 years and that the poorest are bearing the brunt once again?

Instead of debating a bill that focuses solely on stopping the undue slashing of seniors' benefits, we should stand together to increase their pensions. The Bloc Québécois has been proposing a \$110-a-month increase in old age security for seniors 65 years of age and over for a long time. As I stated earlier, I will support Bill C-12, but, when I see all these blind spots and missed opportunities, all I can say is that the Liberals squandered an opportunity to do much better.

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree in the House that supporting seniors is an important initiative, and that is why this government has been working on a lot of different elements.

I do not know what the member opposite's profession might have been before he came to the House, but the problem I have is that it is easy to get up and say he wants to increase old age security by \$110. In fact, the Bloc Québécois brought a motion in the 43rd Parliament to do just that. Unfortunately, what he does not explain is the actual cost of delivering that program, which would have been approximately \$8 billion a year, year over year. This is the same member who also talks about increasing health transfers by \$28 billion.

How does the member square how, within the fiscal framework, this is possible? Could he perhaps bring forward some ideas about how we are going to raise funds for 35 billion dollars' worth of initiatives added to the fiscal framework of the Government of Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Kings—Hants for his question.

What is surprising is how the government was digging in its heels during the previous Parliament. It did not want to increase seniors' income. However, during the election campaign, the government saw the light and decided that it could use this opportunity to show some goodwill and increase the guaranteed income supplement for seniors starting at age 65.

What I can tell my colleague is that some of the money from the increase to the old age security pension will go back into the economy. These seniors will have more purchasing power and will be able to spend more, thus enabling the government to recover some of that money through taxes.

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• (1340)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned several times that this legislative measure will finally correct a mistake made on something that the government should have known from the start. I agree with him on that. Many Conservative and Bloc members mentioned it, and the government changed its mind on the subject during the election campaign.

Does my colleague think it is a good idea to try to rush the bill through the House, as the government House leader has decided to do, rather than taking a little more time in committee to debate and to hear from witnesses who might be able to share some other ideas on how to fix this law so we can ensure that seniors get the benefits they deserve?

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Calgary Shepard for his question.

I think he would agree that the Bloc Québécois is not exactly a fan of gag orders. We do not understand why the government, which took a month to recall Parliament after that pointless election and then took another month to hand out mandate letters to its ministers, waited two months after Parliament resumed to introduce this farce of a bill, which will not fix the situation.

Yes, the Bloc Québécois completely agrees that we should take the time to do things right and study this matter carefully in committee.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. It was very interesting.

Why does the member think the Liberals feel as though they can make seniors wait until May to fix their mistake? Why do the Liberals think they can make the poorest and most vulnerable of our seniors wait?

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Speaker, I have been wondering the same thing for a long time. The only answer I can come up with is that there is a lack of will.

The Liberals have a lack of will to help the most vulnerable, and seniors are the people who have been most affected from day one of the pandemic.

It is incredible to hear government members claim that these are administrative errors that cannot be fully fixed because of technological and IT constraints.

However, the government was certainly able to arrange to send cheques to these same seniors for two years in a row. Members can see where I am going with this, but one day after the election was called, the government was fully able to issue a cheque. Fixing the administrative error, however—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Mirabel.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, a society is judged by the way it treats those who built it.

If the motion as moved is adopted, low-income seniors will have gone an entire year without their most significant source of income. The Liberal government deserves to be harshly judged for that.

To receive the guaranteed income supplement, a person needs to have worked and to be retired. The people whose GIS payments have been cut since July 1, 2021, are vulnerable seniors who lost a spouse, who were unlucky in their career or who continue to work after age 65, 67 or 69. It is unacceptable.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend my colleagues from Berthier—Maskinongé, Beauport—Limoilou, Manicouagan, La Prairie, Jonquière, Terrebonne, Joliette and Montcalm. They are all members of the Bloc Québécois caucus who have teaching experience. We cannot have enough teachers in the House because the Liberals are slow to learn.

The chair is neutral, and she knows that repetition is a teaching tool. We will therefore repeat that the wording must be changed. In the motion, the date needs to go back to March so that our seniors can get their payments immediately in March. Some progress has been made, but the payments need to arrive as soon as possible, and that is not what we have before us.

We will likely be told that it is not possible to do this immediately, because there are obstacles. The Bloc Québécois sent two letters to the minister and asked countless questions in the House. Our finance critic met with the minister on April 19, 2020, not 2021, but 2020. Nothing has been done to this day.

Trying to work with the government feels a bit like a waltz. The music starts, you take the first few steps and then, after three or four turns, you realize you have just moved around in a circle. Here we are today, still trying to get the payment moved up to March. That is the problem.

I know that the Liberals will say that they want to fast-track the motion, that we need to move quickly because this is urgent. However, the date set out in the motion is this summer. I do not understand why the Liberals are in such a rush to take their time, or why they want to hurry up and wait. Why pass this motion right now if they do not want to change the date? I need someone to explain it to me in simple terms, because none of this makes sense.

The date is critical. When someone is deprived of their income, that is critical. Things can be done quickly. I know that the government can move quickly when it wants to. For example, just before the last election they got \$500 cheques sent out very quickly, without any problem. I therefore do not see why there would be a problem here.

I spoke in the House this week and asked for funding for health with no strings attached, funding for mental health and transfers. One of my colleagues across the way told me that I was out of touch with reality for asking the federal government for funding with no strings attached for programs that fall under provincial jurisdiction, Quebec jurisdiction.

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I am given to introspection, so I thought about it. I wondered why he told me that and whether I was off-base. After thinking about it, I realized this week that the members on the other side of the House are living in the Liberal fantasy world.

It seems like a great place to live. It is a world where inflation does not exist for seniors and grocery and housing prices have not gone up. It is a world where the people who receive the GIS do not need it. Basically, it is a world where there is no gravity, because gravity is what makes us keep both feet on the ground and makes us think about the real people who need that help right now.

● (1345)

For instance, a woman who is over 70 came to see me at my riding office in Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac. This woman closed her business last year. She earned very little and was unable to continue working, so she applied for the CERB. She was not given a choice as to the amount; it was a one-size-fits-all payment. Not long ago, she realized that her GIS would be slashed.

There is another woman, a 67-year-old from Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, whose GIS was cut off because she had earned a little money. She was not the only one to be cut off; her spouse was as well after he applied for the CERB.

We could talk about others, such as a 65-year-old woman from Mirabel who had earned a few dollars the previous years, was unable to continue working to make ends meet, applied for the CERB and now no longer receives the GIS. Those are the types of cases and people we are talking about.

Members on both sides of the House are getting to know me, and some must be thinking that the member for Mirabel has a flair for drama. However, I am simply repeating comments from officials with the Fédération de l'âge d'or du Québec, a Quebec seniors' advocacy group, who are describing this as a "tragedy" for the most vulnerable seniors. "Tragedy" is a direct quote, for that is the exact word they used.

People from the Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées, a Quebec association that advocates for the rights of retirees and pre-retirees, are saying the same thing. At a meeting I had with them, they identified this administrative error as a major problem. I want to take this opportunity to recognize Pierre Lynch and Lorraine Brunelle, who sat down with me to explain how this absurd error is having a daily impact on the budgets of those seniors who need it the most.

When people who have their GIS taken away call our constituency office, we help them. We call the CRA. The answer we get is that they knew it was going to be calculated this way when they applied for the CERB and they should have planned ahead.

I spend time with seniors. They are intelligent people. They are the ones who built Quebec, who built our society, who paid taxes their whole lives, who built the houses we live in. They are also the people who taught me and made me the person I am today. They did the same for my colleagues, and I have to admit that, in many cases, they produced good results.

These people are capable of figuring things out. However, when the program was introduced, nobody was able to figure out that it

would be calculated the way the government calculated CERB income to determine the GIS.

In teaching, there are rules. I am going to add this one. When we explain something to a whole lot of people but nobody understands, that is our fault.

When we create a program nobody understands, the fault lies with the government that created the program. It is a mistake, and the mistake needs to be fixed.

Our seniors are important. That cannot be overstated. Our seniors have suffered as much as anyone else. They are part of our society. They are active members of our society and our communities.

Recognizing that a mistake has been made is a sign of intelligence. In this case, one half of the mistake has been corrected. The government recognized that there was a miscalculation and that action had to be taken. However, time is of the essence. It is winter, seniors have bills to pay, and prices are going up. We must look after them and ensure that they start getting these payments in March.

● (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I was listening to the member, I was reminded of the issue regarding how Canada's population growth is taking place, in particular among our seniors. It was brought to my attention that in his previous life and during the election in particular, the member talked about the age one should be to collect OAS. I believe he advocated that we should be looking at age 67. I wonder if he could tell us why he thinks it should be 67 and the advantages of that, from his perspective.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, if the member was a sovereigntist like me, he would know that I commented extensively on the Quebec pension plan at the Caisse de dépôt et placement. I think he is getting mixed up. If he would like to cross over to this side of the House and support sovereignty, I invite him to do so.

In 2015, the members opposite boasted about reducing the retirement age from 67 to 65 years of age. Once the Liberals were elected and the time came to help seniors, they decided that people only become seniors once they turn 75. I think they should sell mirrors here, in the boutique.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his excellent and, as usual, very passionate speech. I have a simple question for him. My colleague proposed an amendment earlier about ensuring greater transparency.

Does my colleague agree with that amendment?

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Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, generally speaking, the policy is problematic in terms of transparency and understanding. It is very difficult for seniors and many other people to understand certain rules. We need to recognize that. As I said in my speech, when many intelligent people have a hard time understanding a rule, it could mean that the policy is not properly designed and needs more work. I think we should always keep that in mind.

That is an excellent question. I thank the hon. member.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, as my hon. colleague pointed out, we are talking about the most vulnerable citizens in the country. We are talking about retirees, people in their twilight years and people who make so little money that they qualify for the GIS, which is reserved for seniors at the lowest income level. These are people who still have to work to make ends meet.

The NDP was very proud of the fact that in the last Parliament, we made something like 16 separate improvements to the CERB and kept closing loopholes in the government's programs. I am reminded of 2008, after the economic collapse, that the government of the day made, I think, \$120 billion of credit available to the banks overnight.

Does my hon. colleague agree that the government has the resources and should have the ability to fix this problem to make sure that seniors who are hurt by this do not lose their GIS simply because of a flawed design in the CERB?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes, absolutely. Another member made that point earlier. It is always hard to get money from Ottawa, except for the banks. Certain government offices need to be more available to seniors and vulnerable people, rather than to Bay Street.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for standing up for seniors and emphasizing the urgency of the situation. I also like how he stressed the importance of communicating the changes in the program.

Can he elaborate on the importance of this, particularly for older people who might have limited internet access?

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Madam Speaker, we are talking about people with limited access to the Internet, but in general, I would say that it is important to take care of all seniors. As I said before, these people gave their all. They built our communities. They are active members of society. They are still involved. They deserve all the help they can get.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I speak to this motion, I want to take a moment to recognize a veteran in my riding. On November 22 of last year, at the age of 96, World War II veteran Carl Kolonsky passed away in Campbell River. He is survived by his sons Don and Darryl, his grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. I am sure that he is with his wife of 53 years, Elsie, who passed away in 2000.

The last time that I physically saw Carl, I was at the Campbell River legion in 2019 where we were observing Remembrance Day. I will always hold sacred the photo that he and I took as we were both so looking forward to participating in the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands in World War II, in Holland. I was particularly excited to accompany this tremendous veteran, who had such a spirit of kindness that was tangible to all who knew him. As we know, COVID-19 ended those dreams. Last year, Carl received letters and flowers from a Dutch city thanking him for his tremendous role and work.

Carl was well known in the community for his fighting spirit, which was demonstrated in his service in World War II, for which he was decorated. The loss of Carl has been felt profoundly in Campbell River and by those who loved him most. I thank him for his service, I send continued love to those who loved him the best, and I acknowledge the sorrow of their grief.

Today I am here to speak about seniors. In the spring of last year, the NDP began its persistent warning that the pandemic benefits calculation could have significant impacts on the poorest Canadians. In fact, multiple letters were sent out specifically on seniors and the guaranteed income supplement, otherwise known as GIS, which is a payment that some of the poorest seniors in this country receive. We knew that without thoughtful planning, the most vulnerable would pay, and they have. We have heard from seniors who have had their GIS clawed back, and from parents who have had their child tax benefit clawed back: a source of income specifically to lift children out of poverty.

One senior shared with my office that she had lost her job due to COVID, and that her office just shut down. Between her OAS, her GIS and the small income she was making, she was barely making ends meet. When she lost her job, she was terrified that she would not be able to find another job to fill that important gap, and that she would not be able to make ends meet. She did what so many other Canadians did who lost their jobs: She contacted both her MP's office and Service Canada. Both offices assured her that she was qualified for this funding. However, she was still worried, so she checked in again and was told that there would be no repercussions at all.

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In July, 2021, she found out that was simply not the case. She learned that the benefits that she had received made it impossible for her to receive her GIS, and now she is living on \$1,000 a month. This senior, living in the Northwest Territories, lived in her car for a month because she could not afford rent. It was a month when the temperature was below zero. I cannot even imagine being put in that position. Not only that, but like so many other seniors across this country, because she lost the GIS, she automatically lost the opportunity to get other territorial or provincial benefits.

We know that, across this country, GIS opens the doors for other provincial and territorial benefits. When seniors lost their GIS, they lost more than just that. This senior lost a further \$200 a month because she no longer qualified for the territorial program to compensate people for the higher cost of living they experience in the Northwest Territories. These are impacts that simply cannot be measured because they are so devastating in their impact.

We are here to debate this super motion on Bill C-12. It is a bill that the government promises will make all pandemic payments prior to June, 2022, exempt from taxable income for seniors, and will allow them to finally have their money returned. That sounds good, until it is understood that they have to wait until May.

• (1400)

Seniors have been struggling since July 2021. They were told in December, in the fiscal update, that the government would finally make it right. Then we read the fine print and found out that they would have to wait months and months until they saw that money.

I am listening to seniors. I have heard so many stories. They have shared them with me so bravely and so well. I wonder if the government is actually listening to the seniors who are living through this time and experiencing this devastation.

Let me tell members about another senior. He is a 71-year-old who was working. He applied for pandemic supports because he was no longer working due to the pandemic. Then his GIS was clawed back, which was hard enough in itself. Then, not long after, he was diagnosed with cancer. What is devastating about this is that he could not afford his medication. I do not think it is right. Any person in our country, a country that is profoundly proud of its public health care system, should be able to access the basic medication they need to stay alive and stay healthy. He could not afford the medication for his treatment, and he has completely lost hope. He does not know how he is going to deal with this. He cannot wait until May.

Perhaps one of the most terrible parts of this is that so many hard-working seniors who have committed their lives to this country are losing hope. They do not know who to rely on anymore when they are put into this circumstance and are unable to get the government to listen to them. They were assured by MP offices directly that if they applied for the benefit, they would be eligible and would be okay in the future. One senior told my office that neither her nor her husband would be getting the booster shot because they do not know what the point is. Living does not seem like a viable option in the circumstance they are currently living through. I do not believe that this couple can wait until May.

I want to be clear: This legislation will help. However, it will only help those who can make it until May. With no advance payments, seniors will continue to suffer for months, and so many seniors have already lost so very much. They have lost their homes. They are now living in their vehicles. They have lost their homes in a housing market that means when they finally find a new place to live, it will be at a much higher price. It means they will continue down the pathway of poverty, even with this remedy put in place. They have lost their health because they cannot afford to pay for the medication they need to keep them healthy and cannot afford to pay for food that will keep them healthy. Some of them have lost their lives because they did not have the resources to cover those basic necessities.

Not too long ago, it was brought to my attention that a senior had died and it was directly linked to the clawback of the GIS. After months of not being able to buy her type 2 diabetes medication or buy the healthy food that she requires to maintain her diet, because of the GIS clawback, she was brought into the ICU. Several days later, she succumbed to her health issues.

I have no idea what to say to the people who loved her most. I do not know what any member of the House could say to the people who loved her most. Because of something that was wrong in a process in a system in this place, people gave up everything. We cannot fix that. Perhaps the government has suggestions for me on how I could ever tell this family why this happened.

Early on in the pandemic, the NDP expressed multiple times that the most vulnerable Canadians would suffer. We looked at the policies and processes that were happening, and we knew there had to be some sort of stopgap to make sure that nobody fell through the cracks. Even though we talked about it, asked questions and moved motions in the House to protect people, the steps that needed to be taken were simply not taken.

I think many Canadians are asking themselves, as they look at these dire circumstances, why it takes so long. Why are we letting seniors wait? That is a question that really only the government can answer.

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• (1405)

What I believe we need to discuss in this place is why we see continuous lack of planning when we know that something is coming on the horizon that will impact the most vulnerable Canadians in our country. We also have to get into a place where we recognize that, generation after generation, our systems continue to punish the most poor and vulnerable Canadians in our country. We must consider this profoundly and, as a responsibility of all of us as members of Parliament, we have to ask ourselves why our systems punish the poorest. While debating this motion, seniors are going out into the world without medications, without food, without a roof over their heads, without the capacity to pay for the heat that they need to stay warm during a very cold winter, and there are so many more stories our office has heard.

I believe that as a nation we are failing. We are failing to have a very important discussion about the ever-eroding bar of dignity in this country. We are watching the middle class, working class, working poor and poorer move further into poverty every single day. At the same time, we are watching the ultrarich of this country grow and expand their incomes every single year.

This is exactly why I support my friend the member for Winnipeg Centre's Bill C-223, an important bill that would create a framework for a guaranteed livable basic income in Canada.

Research is showing us more and more every year that the ultra-wealthy are hoarding money. When we look at the increase of automation and we see how many seniors, persons living with disabilities, people with mental health issues, single moms and working people, every day, are not even having the right to dream in this country that they will one day reach the poverty line in Canada, we must acknowledge that there is something fundamentally wrong.

One senior sent me this message: "Our GIS has been cut off and the \$1,300 that we receive from the government is just not enough to keep shelter overhead. I feel weak and depressed, having no energy. I spend many sleepless nights crying. I never imagined my life would be like this. This is my last appeal to all. Please, I need help getting my medicine. Someone please get me my much-needed medication so I can continue to live."

This is happening in our country. How is it possible now that it is even too much to ask for the basic medication people need just to sustain themselves?

I want to remind all Canadians that the GIS helps top up people's incomes to just over \$19,000 a year if they are single and just over \$25,000 if they are in a partnership. While this is happening and these seniors and so many other Canadians are facing devastating poverty, some of the biggest businesses and corporations are seeing the best year they have seen in a decade. These corporations are using the 75% wage subsidy and their profits to pay out their stakeholders. Where is the government on this? Is it chasing after those corporations and saying that if they are doing the best year they have ever done in a decade, how about they pay back some of the Canadian taxpayer dollars that subsidized their business during this time?

Why are we not having a comprehensive discussion about that kind of fairness in this country? It seems reasonable to me and I am happy to have the discussion.

What does the government say as we are seeing all of these seniors have their GIS clawed back, the poorest seniors in our country? What does the government say when we see families who are begging for more money because they had their child tax benefit clawed back and they cannot afford to feed their children? I hear nothing but silence, maybe some crickets singing a song.

In my office, we receive calls, emails and letters from seniors and those who love them the most. They are desperate, they are scared and they are tired. I have spoken to many anti-poverty groups formally and informally. I have spoken with seniors organizations and I have heard the voices of many seniors.

I have stood up in the House alongside my NDP colleagues and the member for Elmwood—Transcona and told the stories of these seniors because I want their voices to be heard. This includes the senior who told us that she has \$70 at the end of each month after she pays for her basic necessities to cover the cost of food and medication.

• (1410)

There is also the senior who told me that her OAS only goes far enough to pay her rent and her utilities. At the end she has nothing left. She is living 100% off whatever the food bank provides for her. There is also the senior who wrote me that her niece bought her some food, but cannot help her buy her medication. She just needs her medicine. She told me she wonders if it would be better for her to simply die and no longer be a burden to her family.

We are in this place, and we are debating the lives of seniors as though the people who built our country, whatever their role, whatever their income bracket, do not matter. I believe they do matter. If the government does not want to listen to me, will it listen to the seniors who are crying out for help?

How about the group of seniors I heard from who told me that, when they heard the December economic statement update, they were excited? There was money coming. They arranged collaboratively to go to several banks. They went in carrying the economic update. I hope everybody has that picture of these seniors walking in with the economic update in their hands. They pointed to the line that said that they would be getting their money back, and they asked for a line of credit. It would help feed them and pay rent so they could stay in their homes.

Every single bank denied them. They were denied because the banks told them the economic update did not have a date or a promise of the amount that seniors would be paid. There was no certainty for the banks.

When I heard this story, I wondered why, in this country, seniors have to go into debt just to get the money they desperately need to survive and which the government has admitted it owes them.

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That leads me to another question. When will this one-time payment be, and how much will it be? It needs to be that full income for the year. I have to say, and I have said it before, it will not fix the wounds that have been loaded onto these seniors.

I also want to talk about the many seniors who have gone to these predatory lending organizations. I spoke to one who said he has thousands of dollars of interest from one of these organizations. This senior is going to get that money and all of it is going to go to that predatory lending institution. That is another problem we have to fix.

I really hope that the government not only listen to those seniors who are crying out, but also to the people who advocate for them. One advocate is Laura Tambllyn Watts of CanAge, who said about Bill C-12:

This bill takes an important step forward in protecting vulnerable seniors....

However, this does not yet address the harsh reality faced by low income seniors who have had their GIS clawed back. CanAge has consistently raised the alarm that waiting until May for a one-time payment does not help put a roof over their heads, food on their tables or medications in their cupboard.

There is also Campaign 2000, which has been urgently calling for an advance payment of at least \$2,500. Campaign 2000 has said that is pleased the minister has introduced Bill C-12, as this will surely give low-income seniors a sense of relief and security. However, they also say that it is of the utmost importance to address the current and urgent issue of their GIS payments that have already been clawed back for months, as seniors have been trying to find ways to make ends meet, and with the sudden loss of their GIS, the situation is getting more dire every day. Campaign 200 notes that the mental and physical health of seniors is deteriorating by the day, and in worse cases, they have heard of seniors losing their lives to suicide and illness.

In closing, I have no words to say to these seniors that will make this better. All I can hope for is that the government will finally take the much needed steps to get money in their bank accounts and to help them out if they have lost their low-income housing, so they are not put in a position, even with these resources, that they cannot afford to live because the rate of their rent is just far too high.

I would say to the government to listen to the advocacy groups and get this advance payment out immediately. There is no time to waste. Lives have already been lost, and there are so many lives that are on the line.

• (1415)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do appreciate the fact that the NDP is supporting the legislation, but where I sometimes fall offside with my New Democratic friends, is when they try to take the ground that they can do no wrong.

I have been a parliamentarian for over three decades. I would challenge the member to show to me a government in the last 40 years that has done more to support seniors than this government. I am not just talking about the federal government. As the member knows, provincial governments play a huge role also in housing and health care, which are two major issues for our seniors.

I would take our record in the last six years and contrast that to any other government. In Winnipeg North, hundreds have been lifted out of poverty. We have been there during the pandemic, and pre-pandemic, and we will continue to be there in the future. Could she tell me a government that has done more?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the member that the debate we are having today is actually not about him and the feelings of his conscience. It is about the seniors who have lost everything already.

At the end of the day, we have to be accountable to the people. I am not going to do some sort of chart of fairness, because seniors are dying. That is all I need to hear, and I will continue to advocate for them and fight for them. If the member wants to heckle me as I do that, I will happily let him do that because seniors matter more than me, and they certainly matter more than the government.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the situation is urgent, and I certainly agree with a lot of the statements that were made during the hon. member's comments. There was a lack of planning by the government, when it full well knew that this was anticipated to come, so it was a delay that could have been avoided.

Might the member agree that the need for a timely yet thorough debate is essential, and be supportive of my amendment not to fast-track it?

• (1420)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the continued discussion in here about how quickly we need to move for seniors. I definitely understand that the government at any point could have taken the steps necessary to prevent this in the long run. As we move forward, I hope all of us have a discussion about poverty, its impacts on communities and how long-standing they are. I will definitely review the member's motion and happily give her feedback later.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from North Island—Powell River for her speech.

She did a great job of explaining how the bill does not repair all of the harm that has been done to seniors. Members have mentioned the interest seniors had to pay, but their health deteriorated too. In the best case scenario, the government is fixing only a little of the damage that it has done.

Would it not have been a good idea, long before we got to this point, to increase old age security for people aged 65 and up?

Furthermore, had the government acted sooner to increase the amount of employment income seniors could earn without losing any of their GIS benefits, the situation would not be quite so serious.

Should we not have had this debate a long time ago?

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, as we move forward through these, I do hope we have continued conversations about how we make sure to support people in our country so they do not reach this bar of disparity and poverty. We are seeing too much of it across our country in people who are working jobs. I think we really have to look at what we are going to do, so that people have enough money to live on.

When it comes to seniors, I think this is a huge and broad discussion. We need to talk about raising the GIS, which I agree with. I agree we need to raise that bar of dignity, which means they can work and have more capacity. I think we have to look at how we tax people as they age, because we know that people are living a lot longer than they were before. There are a lot of changes we have to discuss, but at the core of it, I want to come back to the idea of a basic, livable and survivable income. We need to make sure people have that, and that this bar of dignity is high enough so that we do not have people in desperation.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to pay tribute to my colleague, the member for North Island—Powell River. Her compassion and dedication, not just for the seniors in her riding but all across Canada, came through so clearly in her speech, and I think seniors are so fortunate to have her in their corner. Learning about this issue, one of the things that struck me the most was the amount of time it has taken to get to this point, despite having our colleagues raise this issue from the very beginning, when it became evident.

I wonder if my colleague could speak to what that long delay says about the government's priorities. Why did it take so many months for us to get to the point we are at now?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I talked a lot in my speech about why the most vulnerable have to wait while the most wealthy in our country get off scot-free with anything they do. We need to have a really important discourse in this country. We know that, when we look at the disparity over the last 30 to 50 years, we see a vast and ever-growing expanse between everyday working people and the ultrarich: the people who make a tremendous amount of money. We are not having that discussion in this place.

Really, we have to leave it to the government to lead that pathway, and it is choosing not to. Its members do not want to make sure to tax people, who are making a significant amount of money, so that we can have those resources support the social network we desperately need. Right now we are seeing the cost of living go up dramatically. I think of my riding, and some of the small communities where they have seen the housing costs go up 50%, 60% or 70%. Everyday people who work in those communities are no longer able to afford that housing. We need to make action happen.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague, the NDP critic for seniors, raised many issues that seniors in my community of Vancouver East are experiencing. They cannot understand how it is possible that the Liberal government continues to ignore their pleas for help. The government knew the GIS cut was going to hurt seniors, that it was going to displace them and render them homeless and unable to survive.

With this bill, the government says it will do something, but it would not take effect until July. It will be too late for many seniors, and for some it already is too late.

I ask the member to please clarify for me exactly what the government can do immediately to help seniors now so they can stop suffering.

• (1425)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, it is incredibly important. It is frustrating to be in the House debating a motion that is already too late. Seniors have already lost their homes and are already struggling and unsure. One group said to me that a lot of seniors are borrowing money from loved ones, which is completely humbling as they are used to looking after themselves. They are borrowing money from churches. Those are the lucky ones. How about the people who are borrowing from those predatory lenders?

We are seeing something that is absolutely unprecedented and something I hope the government takes into consideration. Seniors in this country have lost everything because of this clawback. Seniors in this country have lost their lives directly linked to this clawback. That is the country we live in. We should not live in that.

Here we are debating and it is already too late. I can only say that I hope the government will listen to Campaign 2000 and get that advance payment out as quickly as possible. Let us see if we can save lives. Seniors need the money now. They cannot wait.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, we met with the minister about 21 months ago to fix the guaranteed income supplement problem.

Then the Liberal government decided to call an election. After the election, it decided not to recall Parliament, not to sit, essentially. Can my colleague explain that problem?

Why would the government have done that?

I am having a hard time understanding.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, a lot of Canadians are wondering why we had this election, especially when the NDP was committed to working with some concise guidelines with the government to continue the work that needed to be done. We knew so many vulnerable people had been challenged by the pandemic. We knew Canadians were exhausted and frustrated, so we wanted to provide that stability. The government chose to call an election instead of dealing with the urgent requirements they really should have been facing, which was seniors and poverty.

Government Orders

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on this late Friday. It is always an honour to rise in the House, even for only two minutes. I will need to find a Yiddish proverb by the end of my two minutes.

Again, I want to thank my constituents for sending me back here. I said that last year after we returned briefly for a session, but it truly is an honour. All of us should recognize, no matter how difficult it is for us outside of here with family and constituents unhappy with positions we sometimes take, what a great honour it is to serve the people of Canada and our great country.

We have returned to our hours of work. I now have to wake up at about 5 a.m. in order to ensure I can get ready for question period every day. I truly recognize that fact, so I want to thank my constituents.

This is an important bill. This is one of the top issues I hear about in my riding with emails and phone calls. People are always asking what we are going to do for seniors in this country, or they are seniors themselves and they remind me they helped build this

country and are looking to ensure the government meets its obligations toward them.

It has become harder. Let us recognize the fact that over the last several years it has become more difficult with the cost of living going up. Seniors are typically on a fixed income and do not have the means to make up the difference. This piece of legislation would be closing a legislative hole that was created by the government.

My time is up, so the Yiddish proverb for the week is actually not Yiddish. I wish the Speaker a very good weekend. To all those who helped us during this difficult week, I thank them for contributing to this great nation of ours.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The House now stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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

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